

CDE NOTE: the articles provided here were submitted as HTML files. The graphics were not accessible and were removed. The text of the articles is included below the comment.

From: Frank Chavez <

Sent: Tuesday, January 19, 2021 7:10 PM

To: Ethnic Studies

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Cesar Chavez UFW

Reading through the material I believe that you are omitting historical data that shows the true colors of Cesar Chavez and Dolores Huerta. I am a former farm laborer that was working during the growth of the UFW. I was a migrant worker from Texas and I was an 18 year old foreman working in Santa Clara County California. I witnessed attacks on local workers because they refused to join the union. No self respecting farm worker wanted to work for an hourly wage much less join a union. I also supervised 100 braceros for ninety days and they were there because there was a shortage of farm laborers. There has always been undocumented farm workers and they came here to work. They fled their countries because they couldn't get a job unless they joined a Union. Here they had a choice to work independent of a Union. The Bracero program was started because Americans didn't want to work in the farms. They would not work at all. That is also the reason workers were migrating from Arizona, New Mexico and other southern states. Cesar was an outright racist and you should also include that in your ethnic studies. Other wise your teaching will be biased, something that will do more harm to the cultural. Most latinos fee their countries because they are discriminated by their own race. I have attached some articles with historical data.

Respectfully,

Frank Chavez

Past Farm Worker

Past School Board Trustee Alum Rock School District

Vietnam Veteran 68-69

November 14, 2019

History: Cesar Chavez's History of Anti-Mexican Sentiment.

Cesar Chavez is probably best remembered as an incredible labor and civil rights leader. Along with the United Farm Workers; the union he helped found, he organized in innovative ways to lead a farm worker strike and grape boycott that brought California's agriculture kings to their knees.

During a massive farm worker strike that first started in 1965, farmers sought to bring in undocumented laborers from Mexico. Those laborers, who were strikebreakers, were often called "illegals" and "wetbacks" by strike supporters including by Cesar Chavez himself. Chavez himself was not an immigrant; his mother was brought to the United States as a newborn, and his father was born in Arizona. As someone who was born in the United States and saw the world as an American and not a Mexican, it was easy and convenient to see those "illegals" who's only desire was to provide for their families as inferior and a nuisance.

Every city has a public library, a school, a park, or a boulevard with his name on it. Murals of Chavez are also extremely common. March 31st is actually now Cesar Chavez Day in California, meant to honor and remember his legacy. Chavez is the only Mexican American "hero" we were taught about in school, we were taught to celebrate and appreciate his achievements and sacrifices. Not knowing any better and thirsting for a leader or a hero to represent us, we ate it all up.

In 2014 Cesar Chavez the movie was released by Panteleon and Lions Gate Films. It was directed and produced by Mexican heavyweights Diego Luna and Gael Garcia Bernal. It starred big names such as Michael Peña, America Ferrera, and Rosario Dawson. I was actually pretty excited to go support it. I asked my dad if he would like to go see the movie with us and I was met with an angered response. *"Que voy a andar yo viendo una pelicula de ese cabron!?, Pinche racista! Ese cabron le echaba la migra a la raza, no se porque le andan haciendo peliculas!"* I was confused, I thought my dad was a supporter of Cesar Chavez since he had been a farm worker when he first emigrated to the United States in the 70's. The word "racista" paired up with the Cesar Chavez name did not make any sense. There was clearly something I didn't know. We asked my father in law if he would like to go see the Cesar Chavez movie with us and his response was almost identical to my dad's. So I did some research a few years ago and this is the most complete research that I found.

The ugly truth is that Cesar Chavez was, in fact, deeply hostile toward "wetbacks," as he (and many others of his time) called them. He was relentless in his efforts to halt immigration from Mexico and was active in pursuing the deportation of those already here. Chavez claimed that undocumented workers were driving down wages, and crucially, being used as strikebreakers.

Mexican immigrants were routinely used to break strikes; their desperate situation often led them to take whatever work they could get, even if it meant clashing with the UFW's goals.

What's disturbing about Chavez and the union's actions is how firm and unwilling they were to consider that the issue was more complicated. Some Chicano@ organizations and leaders cautioned Chavez that alienating undocumented workers was a disastrous mistake. Others complained that Chavez was making enemies of people who in fact were allies in this class and social struggle. Chavez's liberal allies and Chicano@ activists didn't agree with his tactics. But Chavez clung stubbornly to his beliefs, breaking ties with affiliated groups who wouldn't go along. His stubbornness resulted in fall outs, with some UFW field offices "refusing to cooperate" in tracking the undocumented workers. It is believed that Chavez's opposition to undocumented immigrants was a key factor in the 1970s decline of the UFW's power.

*This is a repost of an article first published on March 31, 2013 in the blog **End 1492** by its author, Pakal Hatuey and taken from the thinkmexican tumblr page.*

We should take the time to take a close look at the organizing tactics and language used by Chavez and the UFW in the 1960's and 1970's to see if we really want to celebrate his legacy. In studying their newspaper El Malcriado from 1965 to 1972 we will see that the UFW, to a certain extent, had a working relationship with border patrol. That was because the UFW wanted border patrol to deport the Mexican migrant farm worker who crossed their picket lines. Another tactic used by the UFW, though not mentioned in El Malcriado was their 'wetline' tactic. This was a tactic where the UFW would go down to the U.S. and Mexican border to camp out and to notify border patrol where ever they had seen our people crossing the border "illegally". In regards to the language used in El Malcriado, we see that woven into their articles is the racist term "wetback" (wb) and "illegal immigrants" to describe the Mexican migrants who were brought in some cases by the farm owners to do the work of the strikers. It is definitely shocking and upsetting to see some of the UFW's leadership embrace racist stereotypes like "wetback" to describe our people. Some of this information might be common knowledge to academics, but to the majority of us Mexicans, Central Americans and beyond, these facts are brand new and extremely disturbing.

In the June 15th, 1968 volume II, number 8 page 16 of the El Malcriado newspaper there is an article titled "Union Vice President Speaks out : The Union and the Green Carder." The Vice president was a "documented" Mexican named Julio Hernandez who was asked questions on the stand the UFW had against the Mexican migrant worker who crossed the picket line. One question that he is asked is "Why is the Union cooperating with the Immigration authorities to get Mexican citizens into trouble?" Hernandez responds, "The Immigration authorities have a responsibility to see that the regulations are enforced. Since there are reported to be many illegal green card and wetback scabs working for Giumarra (vineyards), we are cooperating with the authorities to have these illegal workers removed from the fields." We can see that Hernandez as vice president of the UFW freely uses the derogatory term of "wetback" to describe our people. He further is pushing for border patrol to carry out their "responsibility" to deport the Mexican migrant and which in this case was a strikebreaker.

Another article from El Malcriado titled “Attention! Important Notice” written in May 15, 1968, before the interview with Julio Hernandez, it becomes apparent that the UFW had already began to take the names down of strike breakers to submit them to border patrol. In the article it stated that “Every day UFW is submitting lists of green card strikebreakers to the Immigration Service. The Union is keeping close tabs on every scab and on each man who is investigated to see that justice is done. If a man with a green card visa is working at Giumarra and he wishes to keep his green card and avoid deportation, he need only quit Giumarra and find other employment.” The article also mentions the names of more than forty Mexican migrant workers who were going to be deported thanks to the UFW.

This article shows how the UFW was cheering for border patrol to do their job, and how the UFW would assist by reporting “on the enforcement of this new rule.”

With the help of UFW co-founder Dolores Huerta, Chavez launched the *"Illegals Campaign"*. Chavez had sent out a memorandum to all UFW entities announcing the beginning of a massive campaign to get the recent flood of illegals out of California. Chavez states, "We consider this campaign to be even more important than the strike, second only to the boycott. If we can get the illegals out of California, we will win the strike overnight...we expect all Union entities to cooperate to make it successful." And so the campaign against “illegals” began in places like the San Joaquin Valley where “field offices tracked down illegals where they worked and lived” informing local INS (La Migra) officials. By “mid-July the union reported to the INS the addresses of more than 300 illegals in Arvin-Lamont, more than 500 in Delano, and more than 1,200 in Porterville. By mid-September, the Selma field office had reported 2,641 illegal aliens to the Fresno Border Patrol office, which, the union volunteers complained, resulted in the arrest and removal of only 195 people.

To most academics the actions of Chavez and the UFW is common knowledge. George Mariscal is a historian who documents the working relationship that Chavez and the UFW had with border patrol in his book *Brown-Eyed Children of the Sun*. He notes that the organizing tactics of the UFW were in opposition to the Chicano movement because the UFW advocated for strict immigration controls and a closed border policy

We should keep in mind what Epifanio Camacho, a former UFW member said. Camacho stated “By 1973, Chavez had established what came to be known publicly as the ‘Wet Line’ in the area of Yuma, Arizona. It consisted of a number of army tents along the border with a group of men in each tent. Chavez’s cousin, Manuel Chavez, was in charge of assisting the immigration agents in detaining whoever tried to cross the border into the U.S. illegally. **If men like Chavez are the leaders defending the workers, what do we need enemies for?**”(p. 46-47 in “The Autobiography of a Communist: Communists Are Made, Not Born”). Camacho could not be more correct in his description of Chavez and by extension the UFW. Bardacke also touches on the *“wet line”* and mentions that the “county, state, and federal officials gave the UFW a free hand in this wilderness. No judge’s order put any limit on what the union’s night patrol might do

to people it caught, nor did Mexican authorities in the cities of San Luis, Sonora, or Mexicali provided any protection to those who tried to cross illegally. If you got picked up by the UFW, you were on your own.” (p. 495). What this meant was that if you were caught by UFW members trying to cross the border you would more than likely be brutally beat and robbed of your possessions.

Picture of Epifanio Camacho

What has been shared with you is information that is not common knowledge amongst most people outside of the institutions of the university. In reading *El Malcriado*, articles like “The Wetback Game”, “Wetbacks Flood California”, or “La Migra Shapes up... We Hope”, the reader can feel as if they are reading a newspaper belonging to a neo-Nazi or Minutemen organization. It is scary, extremely offensive and unacceptable when we realize that these articles were written by a newspaper that represented an organization that was supposed to be non-violent. Chavez and the UFW’s leadership approved and exercised tactics that only terrorized our communities by relying and pressuring immigration to deport Mexican migrants. The UFW can be respected for going to the border to speak with their brothers and sisters, and convincing them to not cross their picket lines and to honor their demands. But the UFW crossed a bigger line when they called on and submitted names and addresses to border patrol of migrants to be deported. And on top of that for their leadership to use “wetback” to describe Mexican migrants and to have articles in *El Malcriado* with that word included, shows that white supremacists come in brown skin as well.

Below are two articles that include the racist term “wetback” in its titles:

El Malcriado

El Malcriado, Friday November 15, 1968, Volume II, Number 18.

This article below has the word “wetback” being used in the text.

El Malcriado, Friday November 15, 1968, Volume II, Number 18.

In this article below Cesar Chavez is quoted how as a youth his family was terrified by “La

Migra” but then goes on to admit how the UFW has given the names of “illegal strikebreakers” to Border Patrol. And is disappointed with border patrol for not taking action.

Below is the article where UFW vice president Julio Hernandez was interviewed by El Malcriado, where he uses the word "wetback" to describe our migrant workers. I have also typed out the article so you can read it all.

El Malcriado: The Voice of the Farm Worker

Saturday, June 15, 1968 Volume II, Number 8.

“Union Vice President Speaks Out: The Union and the Green Carder”

El Malcriado has received many questions from farm workers who want to know exactly what is the union’s policy toward “Green Card” worker, Mexican citizens working in this country with form 1-151 permits. El Malcriado presented some of these questions to UFWOC Vice President Julio Hernandez, who is a citizen of Mexico and works in the United States under a green card permit. Here are some of his observations.

Question: Is the United Farm Workers Union opposed to Mexican citizens working in the United States under a “Green Card” permit?

Hernandez: No, definately not. What the Union opposes is scabbing. There is a federal regulation which prohibits the importation of foreign workers for strike-breaking purposes.

I have a green card myself. and so do nearly half of our members. We welcome green card workers who come to work in California as honorable men, but when they come to break our strike, we have no choice but to do everything we can to get them out of Giumarra’s fields and the fields of other struck growers.

Question: Why is the Union cooperating with the Immigration authorities to get Mexican citizens into trouble?

Hernandez: The Immigration authorities have a responsibility to see that the regulations are enforced. Since there are reported to be many illegal green card and wetback scabs working for Giumarra, we are cooperating with the authorities to have these illegal workers removed from the fields.

Question: What happens to green card workers who continue to work for Giumarra?

Hernandez: After we have explained our cause and the laws to the workers, a few will continue to be scabs because of their own personal greed or other reasons. We consider all farm workers, Anglo, Negro, Filipino, Mexican, to be our brothers. But a scab is a scab, regardless of his race or citizenship. The names of scabs will be turned over to the Department of Labor. We do not like to take this action against someone who should be our brother, but a man who breaks the strike has betrayed his brothers and all farm workers. He has declared war on us, and we must defend ourselves, our families, and our jobs.

Question: How does the Union help green carders?

Hernandez: Well, the most obvious way is through better wages, such as we have won at Schenely, DiGiorgio, and the other ranches where we have contracts. There are many green carders working there.

The Union helps Mexican citizens with immigration problems and helps them arrange to bring their families to this country. We help them on legal problems; we have notary publics to serve them; and we help them get driver licences. We provide assistance with tax returns and other paperwork. These and all the other benefits of Union membership are available to green carders on the same basis as any other members. We do not oppose immigration. We oppose scabbing.

Actually, the Union is the best friend the green carder has in this country. I think all green carders should join the Union. And all green carders working in Kern and Tulare Counties should come into the Union offices at 102 Albany (or 10913 Main St.) and find out how the Union can help you, and where it is legal to work.”

End interview.

I ended up asking my dad to tell me more about his experience with the UFW. He went on to tell me that in the 1970's when he first emigrated to the United States the UFW would bully and harass undocumented workers. In some cases when the workers pushed back they were assaulted and beat up by a gang of UFW representatives. They would call the cops and La Migra on Mexican workers as well. As my dad explained, he wasn't too sure or too concerned about the beef or drama the UFW had with the farmers (the employers), all he knew is that he was being offered a job and all he wanted to do was work, but it is exactly *that* what drove the UFW crazy. I asked my father in law to tell me more about his experience with the UFW and again, his experience mirrored that of my dad's.

Chavez was what you would call a typical nativist bigot, right-wing militia member, Trump supporter by today's standards and not the saint portrayed in children's stories about him.

Just to reiterate: this isn't about questioning Chávez's work as an organizer and leader for the farm workers in California. Those contributions are real and can't be disputed. It is all of the dirty tactics and terrorizing of vulnerable immigrants that for some, puts his legacy into question.

Sources:

Stern, R. (2014, March 28) *Cesar Chavez's Rabid Opposition to Illegal Immigration Not Covered In New Movie*. Retrieved From: <https://www.phoenixnewtimes.com/news/cesar-chavezs-rabid-opposition-to-illegal-immigration-not-covered-in-new-movie-6643666>.

Valladares, F. (2018, March 18) *A Flawed Hero*. Retrieved From: <https://medium.com/22westmag/a-flawed-hero-547cfea556bf>.

Bogado, A. (2014, February 14) *Yes, Cesar Chavez Called Strikebreakers Wetbacks*. Retrieved From: <https://www.colorlines.com/articles/yes-cesar-chavez-called-strikebreakers-wetbacks>.

Navarrete Jr, R. (2018, March 29) *Trumps Beliefs Often Mirror Cesar Chavez's*. Retrieved From: <https://www.sacbee.com/opinion/op-ed/article207379324.html>.

Bobadilla, E. (2014, June 13) *Chavez, The UFW and the "Wetback" Problem*. Retrieved From: <https://humanrights.fhi.duke.edu/chavez-the-ufw-and-the-wetback-problem/>

January 20, 2021

Photo by Motecuzoma P. Sanchez

The Ugly Side of La Causa: Examining The Racist Tactics of Cesar Chavez And The UFW

[Motecuzoma P. Sanchez](#)

March 31, 2020

UFW in Sacramento, 2016.

I was introduced to the work and story of [Cesar Chavez](#) as a young person. He is viewed and presented as a hero—if not a saint—by people in the community. Cesar Chavez did accomplish amazing things in his lifetime. During the height of the United Farm Worker union's (UFW) influence he organized thousands of agricultural workers, shaped legislation, and brought the plight of poor, mostly Mexican-American field laborers into the national spotlight. It is why the Chicano Movement idolizes Chavez. The older I got and the more I learned about his work, the more I questioned this icon. His divisive tactics are often swept under the rug and forgotten. Chavez and his colleagues used derogatory Mexican stereotypes, public defamation and even violence against Mexican immigrants. To learn from his example you must acknowledge, examine, and be critical of these strategies as well.

Chavez Encounters Braceros

Chavez first worked as an organizer for the Community Service Organization (CSO). While there one of his actions was to pressure companies to stop using *braceros*—Mexicans who came through a US-Mexico federal work program during World War II— and instead hire unemployed Mexican-American citizens.

After resigning from the CSO, Chavez founded the National Farm Workers Association with his wife Helen and Dolores Huerta to organize farm workers into a union. They faced stark, and sometimes violent, opposition from agricultural growers and the Anglo dominated Teamsters union. Together with Filipino-American farm workers, they formed the UFW using strikes to overcome stalled labor negotiations. Chavez believed the biggest obstacle to successful strikes was the growers' strategy of hiring undocumented workers and legal Mexican immigrants. These workers accepted poor working conditions and low wages that the UFW were fighting to improve.

Braceros first arrived in my hometown of Stockton, California in 1942. The program brought an influx of Mexican workers into the Central Valley and Southwestern United States. Soon

unscrupulous opportunists like billionaire [Alex Spanos](#) realized they could undermine the programs legalities by directly importing undocumented workers from Mexico to work their fields. This is the situation Chavez and the UFW encountered.

Wet Lines and Race as a Scare Tactic

Strike breakers in the labor movement are called “scabs.” However, Chavez and Huerta went beyond that term. They racialized it, referring to Mexican immigrant workers as “wetbacks.” Their use of the slur happened in private as well as being openly employed in public discourse. In televised interviews like one on [KQED](#) in 1972, Chavez nonchalantly and regularly referred to workers from Mexico as “wetbacks.” This racial slur was originated by Anglo Americans in the 1940’s. It alludes to the stereotype that all Mexican immigrants swim the Rio Grande River to enter the United States.

Chavez marches to the state capitol in Sacramento are legendary. However, people forget or don’t know about the other marches. The UFW regularly set up “wet lines” at the US-Mexican border. They acted like modern day anti-immigration militias trying to keep Mexicans away from the U.S. “We had a ‘wet line;’ it cost us a lot of money, and we stopped a lot of illegals,” Chavez told the [New York Times](#) in 1979. On one occasion Chavez’s own cousin physically attacked immigrants at a demonstration. “They’d catch any ‘wet’ coming through and beat the hell out of them said the Sheriff of Yuma, Arizona in the same article. He also alleged that the UFW had ‘bombed the houses and burned the cars’ of potential strike-breaking aliens and bribed Mexican officials not to interfere with the ‘wet line.’

When questioned about the violence Chavez said he was unaware of it and after speaking to those present, “I didn’t find anything that made me feel anything wrong had happened.” Not exactly the condemnation you would expect from someone who predicated their Causa on non-violence.

Chavez’s hard line on undocumented Mexican immigrants was a persistent issue throughout the 1970’s with other Chicano activists and groups according to his biographer Miriam Pawel. “He seized on immigrants as the latest explanation for why the union could not win a strike,” she wrote in her book *The Crusades of Cesar Chavez*. Chavez even went so far as to launch an “[Illegals Campaign](#)” and allowed the UFW to report individuals to the Immigration and Naturalization Service. He routinely criticized President Nixon for allowing “wets” into the country and testified in Congress that not enough was being done to keep undocumented immigrants out. “If there were no illegals being used to break our strikes, we could win those strikes overnight and then be in a position to improve the living and working conditions of all farm workers,” he [wrote](#) to the San Francisco Examiner in 1972.

A Herculean Task

I personally understand the urgent need to help workers. I am a former union organizer and business agent. The odds that Chavez and the UFW would win their strikes were slim. Lax laws benefited the politically and economically powerful agricultural industry. Few people cared about Mexicans (legal or not), Filipinos, or other poor workers doing the back-breaking work of feeding America. Growers definitely played dirty, even utilizing the Teamsters to stifle their efforts. Organizing and winning farm contracts and advancing their working conditions was a Herculean task at best. Chavez knew this. Everyone supporting their movement did too. But it is unacceptable to dehumanize and antagonize others. People were upset with these tactics then and still are today. The term dehumanized not only immigrant workers but also the same workforce and members the UFW represented.

This critique is not about revising history. It is about examining the truth and looking at the actual events of a leader's success, and missteps, to learn from them. Propagating vitriol while using terminology like "la Causa" and Mexican religious symbolism is wrong. Chavez and Huerta [knew better](#). They made a choice. They did not publicly dehumanize the greedy growers or corrupt Teamsters that colluded to keep workers oppressed. Instead they attacked the weakest link: other exploited Mexican. As a citizen of Mexican descent I could never support that in any generation.

This is also not a call to demonize Chavez. What he accomplished improved the lives of untold numbers and benefited generations. Chavez's tactics, personality, and leadership activated many. He gave a voice to the invisible. Those same traits also alienated those closest to him such as Larry Itliong, the often-overlooked Filipino labor leader also from Stockton who initiated the Delano strike that led to the creation of the UFW. The UFW under Chavez's leadership reached great heights but also dwindled in membership. Today it is just a shell of its former self.

It is still fighting, however. When legislation passed in 2016 to provide farm workers, regardless of union membership, overtime pay it was a historic moment. I was there as a Chicano activist and a business agent for the Teamsters. I helped UFW organizers lobby for this law. I understood the historical significance on more than one level.

Cesar Chavez deserves his place in history. As do the many who worked to accomplish the historical gains the UFW made. He is not here to explain his racialized tactics. However, Dolores Huerta is. She owes it to his legacy to acknowledge and learn from those errors for present and future generations.

I do, and always will, observe Cesar Chavez Day. I show gratitude for the often unseen and overlooked contributions of those who Chavez represented and fought for and what they provided myself and the world. The fight is not over.