

COMMENTARY

By LeRoy Chatfield

Topic: “*From the Jaws of Victory: The Triumph and Tragedy of Cesar Chavez and the Farm Worker Movement*” by Matt Garcia. University of California Press 2012.

(1)

I don't envy Professor Matt Garcia. The Cesar Chavez legend train left the station 20 years ago and is barreling a thousand miles down the track at 100 miles an hour and here stands Professor Garcia with his arms raised high: STOP! You don't understand! “Cesar Chavez possessed many valuable qualities that inspired hundreds of volunteers to dedicate their lives to the union and millions of people around the world to rally behind *la causa*” . . . but he was a fake! Read my book! Cesar Chavez was a tragic failure! Until now all that has been written about him is hagiographic, it is legend, not fact! Read my book!

Perhaps Professor Garcia is right, but you would never know it from reading his book, because Cesar Chavez is absent. Yes, he shows up in some detail during 1977 and 1978 but that's it! A few sentences about Cesar Chavez sprinkled here and there cover the period 1961 to 1975 and there are no sentences about Chavez from 1980 to 1993, the year of Chavez's death, because the book ends. How odd. Cesar Chavez and his farmworker movement continue for 13 years but Professor Garcia who seeks to debunk the Chavez legend decided not to include them.

What kind of a book is this? A man dedicates 31 years of his life to the service of impoverished and powerless farmworkers and 20 years later after his death, a professor sees fit to pass academic judgment in a book that deals in some detail with only 2 of those years, and in the process, manages to dismiss and demean the work of such respected authors as: Peter Matthiessen; John Gregory Dunne; Jacques Levy; Dick Meister & Anne Loftis; Ron Taylor; Susan Ferriss & Ricardo Sandoval; Randy Shaw; and many others when he writes: “Most historians writing about the union have celebrated its triumphs only and in the process canonized Chavez as a leader who could do no wrong.” And again: “. . . Neither the public nor those close to the

UFW have been well served by more than forty years of hagiography”. To drive home this point, Garcia singles out and admonishes Professor Mario T. Garcia, Professor of History and Chicano Studies at UCSB, who had the audacity to write in 2007 that Cesar Chavez was “one of the great figures in the history of the United States”. No one will be surprised to learn I heartily endorse and support the judgment of Professor Mario Garcia and I have assembled the primary source documentation to prove it. As any historian knows, most all saints throughout religious history have been venerated and canonized by the public acclamation of their followers and true believers, not by religious authorities, and certainly not, as Garcia suggests, by book authors or by university departments of Chicana/o Studies.

However, it turns out that Professor Mario Garcia was not only correct in his assessment of Chavez’s role in U.S. history, he was prescient. In October 2012 – many months after the publication of this book – President Barack Obama dedicated the Cesar Chavez Monument with these words:

“Today, La Paz joins a long line of national monuments -- stretching from the Statue of Liberty to the Grand Canyon -- monuments that tell the story of who we are as Americans. It's a story of natural wonders and modern marvels; of fierce battles and quiet progress. But it's also a story of people -- of determined, fearless, hopeful people who have always been willing to devote their lives to making this country a little more just and a little more free.

One of those people lies here, beneath a rose garden at the foot of a hill he used to climb to watch the sun rise. And so today we celebrate Cesar Chavez.”

Case closed.

(2)

I am compelled to ask: is *From the Jaws of Victory* a drive-by book written by a cable TV commentator looking to boost ratings or is it supposed to be the carefully measured and thoughtful work researched by an academic historian? My advanced age and old fashioned notions notwithstanding, do sweeping declarative and generalized statements written without nuance or foundation, which appear in

chapter after chapter in Professor Garcia's book really pass these days for academic scholarship or is this the controversial buzz an aspiring academic must create to sell his book?

Full disclosure is certainly in order. I was a close friend and colleague of Cesar Chavez from 1963 to 1973 and remained in close touch with him through 1975. In April 1993 I was invited by Helen Chavez to come to La Paz to assist the Chavez family with funeral preparations for their loved one. From 2004 through 2011, I created the Farmworker Movement Documentation Project, an online historical collection of primary documents and personal accounts about Cesar Chavez and his farmworker movement 1962-1993 – all presented in chronological order. (See: www.farmworkermovement.us) This Internet-based project contains more than 250 personal account essays; hundreds of hours of oral histories; 13,000+ photographs; dozens of full length videos; thousands of pages of personal archive material collected by farmworker movement volunteers; a complete archive of *El Malcriado* and *Food and Justice* (both official publications of the UFW); all NY Times articles about the United Farm Workers; all farmworker movement-related articles written by Dick Meister, Labor Editor of the San Francisco Chronicle; a Timeline (1960-1993), a Roster of more than 2,000 UFW volunteers and much, much more. According to the website tech, Jennifer Szabo, the Farmworker Movement Documentation Project website is the largest site dealing with one subject she has ever encountered. Ms. Szabo reports it takes 7 DVDs to back up the website; in other words: it is HUGE.

Setting aside for the moment any concerns you might have about the self-promotion in the previous paragraph, I raise the issue of the Documentation Project because Professor Garcia uses it to justify his conclusion that (1) Cesar Chavez was a tragic failure; and (2) as a defense against his critics who question why his book leaves out any mention and discussion of the striking farmworkers who started the now historic Delano Grape Strike. With respect to the first point: Professor Garcia has latched onto an 8-month listserv discussion – a tiny sliver of the entire project - I moderated and published on the website of the Farmworker Movement Documentation Project and has concluded that UFW volunteer participants in the discussion, or at least those mentioned prominently in his book, agreed that because of Chavez's actions in 1977 and 1978 he was a failure: he snatched defeat from the jaws of victory. I certainly agree the discussion was frank, candid, heated at times, wide ranging, sometimes

talking past one another, and even therapeutic, but I do not agree with the categorical conclusion drawn by Professor Garcia that his notion of “failure” was the outcome of this extensive discussion. It was not.

With respect to the second point: Professor Garcia characterizes the Documentation Project as an “English-language project, which attracted computer-savvy veterans to upload memoirs, documents, photos and to engage in discussion online.” In other words, the Documentation Project is a kind of Facebook-type social media site used for personal chit chat and sharing. Nothing could be further from the truth: the author is either misinformed or worse still, uninformed. This is not personal for me, I do not take offense at his mischaracterization of my seven years of documentation work, but I do object to his using the Documentation Project as an excuse for not being able to include any discussion and analysis about the striking farmworkers themselves and their relationship to Cesar Chavez and his farmworker movement – after all, these striking workers were the primary purpose of the movement in the first place. This might be unfair and too judgmental, but I now doubt whether Professor Garcia even knows who these farmworker strikers were or the critical role they played with Cesar Chavez and his farmworker movement. I am beginning to doubt if he even knows their names. Had the author been so inclined he could have easily accessed their oral histories and/or personal essays on the Documentation Project website and read/heard first-hand about the roles of such veterans of the Delano Strike as: Esther Uranday; Maria Saludado; Andy Imutan; Pete Velasco; Teofilo & Adelina Garcia; Jessie De La Cruz; Roberto Bustos; Gilbert Flores; Antonia Saludado; Joe Serda; Lupe Murguia; Jesus Marin Barrera; Marcos Munoz; Rudy Reyes; Alfredo Vasquez; Hope Lopez; Luis Valdez and a dozen others. If these were not enough - and had I been consulted - I could have directed Professor Garcia to the Farm Worker Oral History Project (1995) housed at California State University Northridge for even more primary farmworker oral histories, accounts I was unable to secure for the Documentation Project.

Professor Matt Garcia’s decision to forego any research about the Delano Strikers in favor of a few UFW volunteers who came to Delano or later to the Grape Boycott seems misplaced. How can one write about the leadership of Cesar Chavez in his movement to organize farmworkers into a union and not include the striking farmworkers? But why should I be surprised? I have already noted that aside from

1977 and 1978, Cesar Chavez himself is mostly absent from *From the Jaws of Victory*, and apparently does not even exist after 1981. Readers looking to answer the question “Who was Cesar Chavez?” or “Who were the Delano Grape Strikers?” will have to look elsewhere.

(3)

For reasons that are not clear to me – perhaps others can help me with this – Professor Garcia introduces the issue of Jewishness as a factor in the history of the farmworker movement.

“The company’s name originated from Schenley, Pennsylvania, where a Jewish businessman, Lewis Rosensteil produced and distributed medicinal whiskey during Prohibition.”

“Interharvest - a New York-based company managed by Jewish mogul Eli Black . . .”

“Steinberg, an entrepreneur who had invested in farmland after the arrival of federal water in 1948, stood outside a well-developed grower culture in the San Joaquin Valley. Although Marshall Ganz thought it more than a coincidence that Jewish owners of farms were often the first to settle disputes with the union . . .”

“As a Jewish boy growing up in Bakersfield, California, during the 1950s (Marshall) Ganz had developed a consciousness for civil rights in the South . . .”

“Larry Itliong publicly questioned Chavez’s reliance on what he derisively referred to as “the Anglo Brain Trust”, particularly the service of young white (and Jewish) volunteers such as Marshall Ganz and Jerry Cohen”.

“United Fruit’s president, Eli Black, the liberal Jewish mogul who would become famous for his 1975 suicide plunge from a Manhattan skyscraper . . .”

“It is worth noting that many of the key volunteers in the grape boycott network came from Jewish families . . .”

“ . . . Ganz and Brown cited their affinities with Jewish storeowners as levers for change in the Toronto markets.”

“When viewed in the wider context of the union’s history, we see the presence of Jews in important staff positions, such as Jerry Cohen and Sandy Nathan . . .”

I am uncomfortable. I have worked with these UFW volunteers – in fact, I know them personally - characterized by Professor Garcia as being Jewish – Marshall Ganz, Jerry Brown, Sandy Nathan, and Jerry Cohen (half-Jewish) but in the context of Cesar Chavez and his farmworker movement. I did not relate to them because of their Jewishness. During my tenure with the farmworker movement, I never participated in any executive or staff meeting or in any private discussion with Chavez himself where Jewishness was discussed or deemed to be relevant in any way. During the early strike years in Delano I was aware of two occasions where there was some disgruntled talk from a few striking farmworkers about the presence of so many Anglo volunteers in the movement. On each occasion, Chavez dispatched his cousin, Manuel Chavez, “to take care of it”. And he did. Striking farmworkers and union volunteers were held accountable for the contributions they made (or did not make), not for the fact they were Jewish or Catholic or black or white or brown – a grassroots union cannot afford to let such artificial and divisive distinctions go unchecked, and Chavez knew it!

I am quite surprised that readers of Professor Matt Garcia’s manuscript did not question whether such pointed and artificial characterizations as: “Jewish mogul”; “Jewish businessman”; “Jewish owners of farms” ; “Jewish storeowners” ; “Jewish boy” might be offensive, subject to misinterpretation and seem akin to racial profiling.

(4)

(Reverend) Jim Drake was a big broad-shouldered man who devoted 15 years of his life in service to the cause of farmworkers. He was unassuming, self-deprecating, never sought credit for his accomplishments and was a true believer. Measured in terms of his contributions to Cesar Chavez and his farmworker movement, Drake was a giant! Years before the Delano Grape Strike, Drake had created his own

farmworker union in Porterville, which was later merged with Chavez's union, the National Farm Workers Association. In the early years of the Strike, Drake served as Chavez's right hand, especially managing the flow of volunteers who flocked to Delano to become part of the movement. Throughout his tenure, Drake wore many hats and played a significant role but none more important than convincing Chavez to let him try his hand at ginning up a boycott against Schenley Liquors and the DiGiorgio Corporation. In December 1965 with the help of Mike Miller, the San Francisco Bay Area Coordinator of SNCC, who had developed a national network of student and civil rights activists and had access to SNCC's national newspaper, Drake's boycott idea was launched. Who could have foreseen? Four months later, Schenley Liquors recognized the union and negotiated a contract. Six months later, DiGiorgio agreed to permit secret ballot elections for their farmworkers to vote for a union, or no union.

In his book, Professor Garcia touches upon Drake's early boycott work then jumps forward a couple of years to dig into the meat of his book: UFW volunteer Jerry Brown's strategy and role in the development of the UFW's International Grape Boycott. Jim Drake recedes into the background and eventually disappears, but along with Jerry Brown, I show up in a prominent way in a policy-making role regarding the Grape Boycott. Without any doubt, I believed in the efficacy of the boycott – I knew the Delano Grape Strike could never be won with the picket lines – but out of respect for Drake's pioneering work, I think it is more accurate to substitute Drake's name for mine, at least with respect to the many policy and strategic boycott decisions that were made during this time.

What difference does it make? Certainly none to Jim Drake. When he was alive he never sought credit for his work, in fact he even downplayed his contribution, and now because he is deceased, he cares about it even less. But as a documentarian, it makes a difference to me. I care! During the course of my seven years of collecting, organizing and publishing primary documents about Cesar Chavez, I have come to realize and appreciate what a major player Jim Drake was in the farmworker movement and with a view to assist academics and others who might be interested, I have organized sections in the Farmworker Movement Documentation Project devoted solely to Jim Drake. It is my hope that someday Drake's contribution to

Cesar Chavez and the farmworkers will be the subject of a book or a dissertation. He was a fascinating person!

(5)

Professor Garcia writes: “Although I began this project with the zeal of a labor historian intent on telling the story of the United Farm Workers from the point of view of the volunteers, I became convinced that no accurate picture of the union during its heyday is possible without confronting the legacy of Cesar Chavez.”

I agree!

This is the legacy of Cesar Chavez I invite Professor Matt Garcia to confront:

1. (1962 – 1993) Cesar Chavez lived a 31-year life of voluntary poverty dedicated to seeking social justice for farmworkers. Chavez never enriched himself through his movement. When he died in 1993, he left behind his reading glasses, the clothes he was wearing, some underwear and socks in a drawer, a pair of shoes in the closet and the books in his office library. He had no money.
2. (1965-1993) Chavez demonstrated an unwavering commitment to nonviolence in the face of threats, intimidation, false arrests and imprisonment, and acts of violence perpetrated against him and his followers. In the course of the longest farm worker strike in U.S. history, not a single employer or family member or any company personnel or their families were injured. None of their homes or automobiles were vandalized or destroyed. Given the long history in our country of violence associated with the struggle of workers to organize unions this nonviolent commitment may be the most significant legacy of all, and yet another reason why Cesar Chavez is “one of the great figures in the history of the United States”.
3. (1965-1993) Chavez taught the lack of money may never be used by the poor as an excuse for not fighting for their rights. He said: “The rich have money

but not the time, the poor have time but not the money. Each must use the currency they have.”

4. Chavez published a farmworker movement newspaper, *El Malcriado*, from 1965 to 1975 and from 1984 to 1989. In addition, he published a farmworker movement magazine, *Food and Justice*, from 1984 to 1993. These publications served not only union members, field offices and boycott centers, but many thousands of UFW supporters throughout the U.S. and Canada.
5. (1965 – 1970) Chavez organized an international consumer boycott “Don’t Buy Grapes” with more than a 1,000 volunteers stationed in 37 major cities in the U.S., Canada and London, whose only mission in life was to convince supermarkets not to stock table grapes and to persuade customers not to shop in those markets who refused to honor the grape boycott. Boycott organizers in each major city created a coalition of labor, church, student, political, and civil rights groups to wage the boycott campaign against the large supermarket chain stores. Chavez toured all the targeted Boycott Cities drumming up public support for the boycott through media presentations, speeches, meetings with labor, church and political leaders, and participation in demonstrations and picket lines against supermarkets who sold grapes. He also met with boycott staff to encourage them and answer their questions about the farmworker movement.
6. (March 1966) Chavez taught his union members how to redress grievances and catapult their unknown plight onto the national stage by organizing a 300-mile quasi-religious march from Delano to the State Capitol Building in Sacramento using the themes: pilgrimage, penance, and revolution. The march was staged as a moving pageant complete with flags, religious symbols, placards and banners and at every stop for the night relied upon the hospitality of the local farm worker community for food and shelter. Every evening a rally was held that included a performance by the improv theatre group: El Teatro Campesino, followed by Luis Valdez proclaiming the “Plan of Delano” and ended with a speech by Cesar Chavez. Each day, more people joined the march and by the time it arrived in Sacramento, more than 10,000 people were present. In the early days of the March to Sacramento Chavez became a painful

symbol for the theme of “penance”. The blisters on his feet swelled to such a point he could not wear shoes but painfully shuffled along in slippers and used a cane to keep himself upright. Sometimes, he relied on others to walk along side and assist him. He was in a great deal of pain but refused to quit.

7. (April 1966) A few days before the march arrived in Sacramento, a large Delano grape grower – Schenley Liquors – called for a meeting with Cesar Chavez. After the meeting on the following day, Chavez reported that Schenley had recognized the union and would negotiate a union contract – the first in U.S. farm labor history.
8. (August 1966) Cesar Chavez and his United Farm Workers won the first secret ballot election in U.S. farm labor history at DiGiorgio Corporation. The ballot contained 3 choices: UFW, Teamsters or No Union. The stakes were very high: losing this election might have forever undermined the vision of Cesar Chavez that farmworkers should have the right to form their own union.
9. (1967) The National Farm Workers Service Center was founded by Cesar Chavez. Its purpose was to provide a wide range of social, medical and economic services for farmworkers. The NFWSC purchased 40 acres of land west of Delano to house its operation and that of the United Farm Workers union. The first building to be built was the Farm Worker Co-Op gas station, followed by a multi-purpose office building, the Rodrigo Terronez Memorial Clinic, and in 1974 a retirement center for Filipino farmworkers known as Paulo Agbayani Village.
10. (1967) The California Migrant Ministry started the Worker-Priest program to support Cesar Chavez and his farmworker movement. The program paired an ordained minister with a farmworker and their purpose was to work at non-union ranches and lay the groundwork for a union organizing campaign. They called themselves “submarines”. But as the UFW boycott expanded throughout the U.S., members of the program were individually assigned as needed to positions of boycott responsibility.

11. (February-March 1968) Cesar Chavez undertook a 25-day fast to recommit his movement to nonviolence – “Fast for Nonviolence”. During the course of the Fast, groups of farmworker delegations from throughout California, the Southwest and Northwest came to Delano to meet with Cesar Chavez. They pledged their support to the union and its commitment to nonviolence. Unwittingly, the Fast had created the opportunity for Chavez to organize hundreds of farmworker activists on the West Coast. The Fast ended with a Catholic Mass held at Delano Memorial Park, attended by more than 7,000 supporters, including New York Senator Robert F. Kennedy.

12. (May 1968) Cesar Chavez organized the first UFW political action in support of the California campaign “Kennedy for President”. Hundreds of UFW farmworker members and union volunteers were assigned to East Los Angeles for a GOTV campaign that dramatically enhanced Kennedy’s primary victory. Senator Kennedy was on his way to the hotel ballroom to thank the UFW farmworker campaign contingent when he was assassinated. Cesar Chavez served as one of the honorary pallbearers at Kennedy’s funeral at St. Patrick’s Cathedral in New York City. This UFW political action on behalf of Senator Kennedy would be the first time farmworkers had been organized to participate in electoral politics and this GOTV campaigning technique would be repeated in such future campaigns as: Humphrey for President, Art Torres for Assembly, Bradley for Governor, No on Proposition 22, Brown for Governor, Brown for President, Yes on 14, Dellums for Congress, Bobby Seale for Mayor, Jack O’Connell for Assembly and many others.

13. (1969) Cesar Chavez founded the Robert F. Kennedy Farm Worker Medical Plan, the first union health and welfare plan for farmworkers in U.S. labor history. The plan was funded by a 10-cents an hour contribution made by growers under union contract. The Plan was self-insured and placed its emphasis on preventative health care, outpatient care, and maternity benefits.

14. (1969) *The New Yorker* magazine published a two- issue *Profile of Cesar Chavez* written by three-time National Book Award-winning American novelist and non-fiction writer Peter Matthiessen. These articles served as the foundation for Matthiessen’s *Sal Si Puedes: Cesar Chavez and the New American Revolution*.

Random House 1969. Together with John Gregory Dunne's book: *Delano: The Story of the California Grape Strike* Farrar, Straus & Giroux 1967 these two books brought the story of Cesar Chavez and his farmworker movement to the attention of the literary set.

15. (1969) *Time Magazine* Cover. *Cesar Chavez: The Grapes of Wrath 1969 / Mexican-Americans On The March* - "La causa's magnetic champion and the country's most prominent Mexican-American leader is Cesar Estrada Chavez, 42, a onetime grape picker who combines a mystical mien with peasant earthiness. La causa is Chavez's whole life; for it, he has impoverished himself and endangered his health by fasting...." (Time Magazine)
16. (April 1970) End of the Coachella Valley Grape Strike. All major growers recognized the UFW union and negotiated a 3-year collective bargaining agreement.
17. (July 1970) End of the 5-year long Delano Grape Strike. 30 Delano area grape growers recognized the UFW union and signed a 3-year collective bargaining agreement.
18. (July 1970) The Western Conference of Teamsters signed sweetheart contracts with all major Salinas and Santa Maria Valley vegetable growers in order to prevent the UFW from organizing farmworkers in the vegetable industry.
19. (August 1970) Major Salinas Valley growers, Inter-Harvest, Freshpict, and Pic-N-Pac, recognized the UFW and negotiated contracts covering vegetable workers in Salinas and Santa Maria Valleys. These contracts were the first farmworker union contracts in the history of the California vegetable industry.
20. (December 1970) In early December, Cesar Chavez was ordered by a Monterey County Superior Court Judge to be jailed indefinitely in Salinas until he agreed to call off his national boycott against the Bud Antle Company, a major Salinas Valley grower. Chavez refused. "Boycott the hell out of them!" was his response as he was led off to jail. Farmworkers organized an around-the-clock vigil during Chavez's confinement. Ethel Kennedy and Coretta Scott

King were among his visitors. On December 23, the California Supreme Court ordered the Monterey County Superior Court to free Chavez pending a court hearing scheduled for February 1971.

21. (1970) Cesar Chavez established the Taller Grafico department and named Ruben Montoya as its director. Taller Grafico became an in-house full service graphic service that designed and produced flags, posters, banners, flyers, brochures, buttons, lapel pins, T-shirts, newspapers and all matter of farmworker movement paraphernalia needed to supply the needs of the UFW field offices, boycott centers and supporters.
22. (1971) With the assistance of Eddie Lewis, a Hollywood movie producer, the National Farm Workers Service Center purchased a former Kern County TB sanitarium in Keene CA, located 28 miles southeast of Bakersfield in the Tehachapi Mountains. The 200+ acre complex consisted of three hospital-type buildings containing TB wards and offices, assorted housing units for resident staff, a central kitchen and dining facility, various outbuildings used for storage and maintenance purposes, a swimming pool, and in one of the basements housed a morgue. Cesar Chavez renamed the facility Nuestra Señora Reina de la Paz – or La Paz , for short – and relocated the national headquarters of the United Farm Workers from Delano to La Paz. He envisioned the new location as a union education and retreat center for farmworkers and a place apart from local UFW field offices where the executive board and staff volunteers could set up shop in a live/work situation.
23. (1971) Federal officials notified the UFW they had uncovered a plot to assassinate Cesar Chavez. They said their investigation was ongoing but in the interim urged the UFW to take all appropriate measures to ensure Chavez's safety.
24. (1971) The new Rodrigo Terronez Memorial Clinic was dedicated at the UFW's Forty Acres in Delano. In all, Cesar Chavez established 8 full-service outpatient clinics for farmworkers: Delano, Calexico, Salinas, Sanger, Coachella, Mexicali, Tijuana and Florida. With the exception of the two in Mexico, the other UFW clinics were staffed by full-time volunteer doctors,

nurses, and local farmworkers. The flagship clinic in Delano also included a small maternity ward.

25. (1972) To ward off any efforts by the UFW to organize farmworkers, within an hour after its passage in the legislature, Arizona Governor Jack Williams signed legislation to outlaw farm worker strikes at harvest time and to make any boycott of Arizona produce illegal. In response, Cesar Chavez came to Phoenix, held a press conference denouncing the restrictive legislation, announced the beginning of a major UFW farmworker organizing campaign, and concluded the conference with the news that he would begin a prolonged fast at the Santa Rita Community Center, which was located in one of the Mexican-American barrios of Phoenix. Thus began the 24-day Arizona Fast – called “The Fast of Love” - and the year-long grassroots effort to recall Governor Jack Williams. The campaign registered more than 150,000 new Latino voters and collected 170,000 recall signatures, more than enough to force a recall election, but the state attorney general used the time-consuming court appeal process to prevent a recall election from being held. However, the original “No Se Puede” attitude of the Arizona Latino community became transformed and fired up into a spirited “Si Se Puede!” – and continues to the present day as they struggle with racial profiling and other forms of state-sponsored discrimination against Latinos.
26. (1972) California Agribusiness qualified a state initiative – Proposition 22 – for the November election that would outlaw harvest time strikes and make consumer boycotts illegal. The UFW fought back with a successful statewide registration campaign targeted to Mexican-American communities and having discovered that fraudulent signatures had been used to qualify the initiative worked with then Secretary of State Jerry Brown to bring felony indictments against the perpetrators. These indictments along with the creation of human billboarding to advertise “No On 22” and combined with a massive farmworker-sourced GOTV campaign easily defeated the grower-sponsored initiative.
27. (1972) Coca Cola recognized the UFW union and negotiated a contract for their citrus workers in Florida. Another “first” in U.S. labor history for the

farmworker movement outside of California. 90% of these citrus workers were African American.

28. (1972) The AFL-CIO granted a national charter to the United Farm Workers of America. What began a decade earlier as a very small rag-tag group of dedicated organizers was now a full-fledged International Union.
29. (1972) Cesar Chavez was awarded the first Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Peace Prize at the Omni Arena in Atlanta with 17,000 people in attendance. Coretta Scott King made the presentation and Ambassador Andrew Young introduced Chavez as “the rightful heir of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.”
30. (1973) Cesar Chavez purchased used Dodge Darts, mostly slant 6s, to create a fleet of cars at the La Paz headquarters to be used by organizers and staff volunteers. A full-service auto repair shop was created to repair, replace and overhaul as needed. Used diesel buses were also purchased in order to ferry farmworkers to and from La Paz for labor education classes - history, contract enforcement, negotiating contracts, etc. and to major political campaigns and boycott picket lines.
31. (1973) The UFW used the power of law to press their case for social justice for farmworkers: (a) The California State Supreme Court ruled the Teamster Union colluded with the Salinas Valley Growers and their sweetheart contracts were not valid; (b) Safeway Corporation sued the UFW claiming it had suffered 100 million dollars in losses because of the boycott; (c) The UFW filed a major anti-trust suit alleging collusion between the Teamsters Union and Vegetable Growers that prevented the UFW from exercising its lawful right to organize and represent farmworkers.
32. (1973) With the 3-year contract period over, the Table Grape Growers refused to sign new contracts with the UFW. A new grape strike commenced in the Coachella Valley and followed the grape harvest up the Central Valley to Fresno. The growers turned to the Teamster’s Union for sweetheart contracts and funded Teamster goons to foment violence against the UFW strikers. Grower-sponsored mayhem and police violence prevailed: 3500 strikers and

union supporters were arrested, 2 UFW strikers were killed and many others seriously injured. Because of the unchecked violence, Cesar Chavez called off the strike and ramped up the nationwide boycott effort – now against lettuce and grapes.

33. (1973) Cesar Chavez established the Juan de la Cruz Farm Workers Pension Plan to pay retirement benefits for eligible farmworkers. Another “first” in U.S. Labor History.
34. (September 1973) Now fully chartered by the AFL-CIO as an International Union, the United Farm Workers of America held their first union convention. Farmworker delegates elected by each union ranch committee came together to elect their union’s leaders and executive board. The constitution and by-laws were explained and ratified. Dozens of local, state, national and international issues of interest to the UFW were debated and formal resolutions were adopted. The keynote speaker for the first Convention was Senator Ted Kennedy. UFW Conventions were held every 2 years and by 1993, the year of Chavez’s death, Cesar Chavez had organized and presided over 10 such conventions. 1973 marked the first year that farmworkers in the U.S. had an official platform from which to speak with an organized and unified voice about the issues of the day.
35. (1974) Cesar and Helen Chavez were granted a private audience with Pope Paul VI and during the meeting the Pope praises Chavez for his “sustained effort to apply the principles of Christian social teaching . . .”
36. (1974) Cesar Chavez served as Master of Ceremonies for the opening of Agbayani Village at the UFW Forty Acres compound in Delano. The Village housed 60 retired Filipino farmworkers.
37. (1974) Former UFW volunteer, Art Torres, was elected to the California State Assembly. Torres was the first of many candidates who with the help and support of the UFW won seats in the California Legislature.

38. (1975) The Lou Harris poll results showed that more than 17 million people honored the UFW grape boycott.
39. (1975) The California Supreme Court outlawed the use of the short handled hoe (24 inches long) that had been the field tool of choice by growers for more than 40 years. "We hold that any hand tool which causes injury, immediate or cumulative, when used in the manner in which it was intended to be used may constitute an "unsafe hand tool" within the meaning of the regulation. If the short-handled hoe is so designed that it can be used by the worker only in a stooped posture that is dangerous to his health it could be found to be an "unsafe hand tool." We hold that any hand tool which causes injury, immediate or cumulative, when used in the manner in which it was intended to be used may constitute an "unsafe hand tool" within the meaning of the regulation. If the short-handled hoe is so designed that it can be used by the worker only in a stooped posture that is dangerous to his health it could be found to be an "unsafe hand tool." In 1968, Mo Jourdane, a young attorney with CRLA in the Salinas Valley filed the lawsuit on behalf of farmworkers that eventually led to the Supreme Court decision 7 years later.
40. (1975) Passage of California's Agricultural Labor Relations Act (ALRA) sponsored by Governor Jerry Brown. This California legislation protecting the rights of farmworkers was the first of its kind in U.S. labor history.

"PREAMBLE: It is hereby stated to be the policy of the State of California to encourage and protect the right of agricultural employees to full freedom of association, self organization, and designation of representatives of their own choosing, to negotiate the terms and conditions of their employment, and to be free from the interference, restraint, or coercion of employers of labor, or their agents, in the designation of such representatives or in self-organization or in other concerted activities for the purpose of collective bargaining or other mutual aid or protection. For this purpose this part is adopted to provide for collective-bargaining rights for agricultural employees."

Personal Note

I was present at the historical meeting in the Governor's Office with all the key players who signed onto this first-time-ever legislation. Attorneys representing the UFW, California Agribusiness and Department of Agriculture, key Senate and Assembly sponsors of the legislation, the Governor and his executive staff along with Cesar Chavez on the speaker phone who was in Canada promoting the UFW boycott.

I came away with three observations: (1) High-powered grower lobbyists were begging - or otherwise persuading - the Governor to convince Cesar Chavez to accept farm labor legislation written by the UFW attorneys; (2) It was the power of the boycott that brought California growers to this position: they needed a legal vehicle to bring the fight back to the rural farming areas of California and away from the urban centers throughout the United States and Canada. (3) Even though I knew in advance that Cesar Chavez would agree to support this legislation, I was stunned to hear his voice on the speaker phone agreeing to do so because throughout all the years I had known him, he steadfastly maintained that legislation was not the remedy for the social injustice visited upon farmworkers by the growers. (For my part, I still believe legislation is not the remedy.)

My observation about the power of the UFW boycott is not meant to slight or diminish the effectiveness of the strikers' picket lines or the marches and demonstrations that were everywhere or the various fasts that Chavez undertook. No, all of these actions were necessary in order to provide the foundation and rationale upon which a successful boycott could be built. However, I must emphasize the boycott was the one variable the growers could not control or contain.

41. (1975) After the ALRA was signed into law, Cesar Chavez undertook a 1000-mile march in California "to walk there and tell farmworkers about it." The first phase of the march began at the Tijuana Mexican border on July 5, 1975 and ended in Salinas. The second phase began at the State Capitol Building in Sacramento, stopped in Fresno for the UFW bi-annual convention, and then proceeded onto to Bakersfield and ended at the La Paz UFW headquarters sometime in the middle of September. The core group or marchers included:

George Nee, Henry Aguilar, Sylvia Castillo, Juan Panduro, Richard Ybarra, Paul Hernandez, Daniel Valles, Mike Ybarra, Marc Grossman, and of course, Cesar Chavez. As the march progressed more people joined and by the time it reached Salinas, it had grown to 8,000. During the course of the march, UFW rallies were held in the major farmworker barrios up and down the Central Valley explaining the newly-passed Agricultural Labor Relations Act.

42. (1975) Because of the new farm labor law, more than 50,000 farmworkers voted in secret ballot union elections during the California harvest of periods of 1975 and early 1976. The UFW won most of the elections during this period. “After five months of operation, the ALRB reported that by the end of January 1976 it received 604 election petitions, or an average 4 a day, and conducted 423 elections involving over 50,000 workers; objections were filed in 80 percent of the elections. The ALRB received 988 ULP charges in its first five months of operation, almost 7 a day, and issued 254 charges, or almost 2 a day. Beginning with Eugene Acosta et.al. (1 ALRB 1), the Board issued 27 decisions in its first year of operation. After failing to get a supplemental appropriation of \$3.8 million, the ALRB closed between April 3, 1976 and June 30, 1976.” – Philip Martin, *Labor Relations in California 1975-2000*
43. (1976) The UFW sponsored Proposition 14 in the General Election. This initiative would have required the Legislature to fund the ALRB and would have given union organizers greater access to meet with farmworkers on the grower’s property. The initiative was defeated 61% to 39%.
44. (1976) Cesar Chavez established the Martin Luther King Farm Workers Fund, which would provide farmworkers with education, health care, and social services.
45. (1977) The Teamsters Union and the UFW signed a jurisdictional pact. After 11 years of Teamster attempts to prevent the UFW from organizing farmworkers by signing sweetheart contracts and giving labor relations cover to the growers, the Teamsters agreed to withdraw from the fields. Some observers say the agreement was contingent on the UFW withdrawing its 1973 anti-trust lawsuit against the Teamsters.

46. (1977) Cesar Chavez provided money and training to the fledgling leaders of the United Domestic Workers in their first attempt to organize home care workers who like farm workers, were excluded from the protections of the the National Labor Relations Act. Today a million home care workers have been organized into unions and count Cesar Chavez as one of their founders.
47. (1977) Cesar Chavez established a statewide microwave telephone system that permitted his movement to make all telephone calls “local” anywhere within California. Only Southern Pacific Railroad had a telephone system of this kind.
48. (1979) The UFW struck the lettuce industry in Salinas Valley. 1,000 field workers walked out and 4,000 people marched in Salinas in support of the strike. Major lettuce growers signed union contracts to end the strike.
49. (1981) Cesar Chavez established a Law Apprenticeship Program as part of the UFW legal department. Instead of enrolling in law schools, participants would spend four years working under the direction of UFW attorneys and then take the California Bar exam to become licensed. During the 1980s a half-dozen UFW apprentice attorneys were admitted to the State Bar.
50. (1982) Cesar Chavez was given the Harvey Milk Award for his longtime support and leadership in advocating for Gay Rights.
51. (1983) Cesar Chavez launched Radio Campesina, a Spanish radio station programmed to serve the needs of Spanish speaking farmworkers. Today this radio network has an audience of 500,000 listeners.
52. (1984) Cesar Chavez established an in-house state-of-the-art direct mail program designed to promote the cause of farmworkers by asking shoppers to boycott targeted supermarkets in their area that sold non-union grapes or lettuce. The mail program was also designed to raise funds to support the work of the UFW.
53. (1986) The UFW produced a documentary film – Grapes of Wrath - about the dangers that highly toxic pesticides not only posed for farmworkers in the

fields but also for consumers who ate these grapes. National distribution of the film was achieved by using the existing UFW boycott network to provide free videos to all organizations who agreed to show it.

54. (1987) Cesar Chavez was one of the keynote speakers at the first display of the AIDS quilt on the National Mall in Washington D.C. as part of the National March on Washington for Lesbian and Gay Rights. Half a million visited the Quilt during that weekend.
55. (1988) Cesar Chavez completed a 36-day fast – Fast for Life. He wrote the fast was personal, an act of penance, a prayer for purification and strength, and a declaration of non-cooperation with supermarkets who promoted the sale of table grapes cultivated with highly toxic pesticides that harmed farmworkers and consumers.
56. (1993) Cesar Chavez died in his sleep on April 23, 1993. 40,000 people attended his funeral. Cardinal Roger Mahony spoke to the mourners: “Cesar was a special prophet for farmworkers”.
57. (1993) When Cesar Chavez founded his movement, there were fewer than 10 elected Latinos in the State of California. At the time of his death, there were 800 elected Latinos in the State. Speaking from the steps of the State Capitol to an audience of thousands, Sacramento Mayor Joe Serna explained that without the example and work of Cesar Chavez he would never have been able to run for elective office . . . and then overcome by emotion, he left the stage.

This is not an exhaustive legacy list by any means. Others who participated in the farmworker movement will certainly wish to add to it. If so, I would be pleased to publish their legacy list alongside my own.

Did Cesar Chavez accomplish all this acting alone? Of course not! There were dozens, hundreds, even thousands of strikers, staff and boycott volunteers, labor, church, civil rights and political supporters who worked with Chavez to create these farmworker movement milestones. At the same time, everyone who participated in the movement would agree that without Cesar Chavez’s vision, leadership and inspiration, none of this would have happened.

(6)

In conclusion, let me say this: The 31 years of Cesar Chavez and his farmworker movement occurred during one of the most volatile social upheavals in our nation's history and played a major role during that historic period. Unfortunately, Professor Matt Garcia's *From the Jaws of Victory* lacks the research, the scholarship, and the insight to do it justice.

I have no quarrel with Garcia's desire to debunk the legacy of Cesar Chavez – it's a free country after all - but this book doesn't even begin to scratch that surface.

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