



Foundation Document Overview

César E. Chávez National Monument

California



Contact Information

For more information about the *César E. Chávez National Monument Foundation Document*, contact: cech_superintendent@nps.gov or (661) 823-6134 or write to: Superintendent, César E. Chávez National Monument, 29700 Woodford-Tehachapi Road, Keene, CA 93531

Purpose



**CÉSAR E. CHÁVEZ
NATIONAL MONUMENT**
*and its partners preserve,
interpret, and commemorate the
collective struggles and
achievements of the farm worker
movement, associated historic resources,
and the life and legacy
of César E. Chávez for the benefit of
present and future generations.*

Cover Photo: The signing of the first contract between the United Farm Workers Organizing Committee and a grape grower (Guimarra Company), ending the five year Delano grape strike. Photo by Chris Sanchez.

Above Photo: Farm workers in Indio, California, demonstrate in support of a ban of five dangerous pesticides that threaten the health of themselves and their children. Sign reads: "Abajo con las pesticidas" ("Down with pesticides"), Circa 1980s.

All historic photos courtesy of Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University.

Significance

Significance statements express why César E. Chávez National Monument resources and values are important enough to merit national park unit designation. Statements of significance describe why an area is important within a global, national, regional, and systemwide context. These statements are linked to the purpose of the park unit, and are supported by data, research, and consensus. Significance statements describe the distinctive nature of the park and inform management decisions, focusing efforts on preserving and protecting the most important resources and values of the park unit.

- César E. Chávez National Monument provides superlative opportunities to tell the story of the farm worker movement, a key social movement in the 20th century that empowered a generation of farm workers, taught them to organize, and developed a new generation of leaders. The movement demonstrated that ordinary people can do extraordinary things in the face of seemingly insurmountable obstacles and continues to inspire millions of people who never worked in the fields.
- One of the most important Latino leaders in the United States during the 20th century, César E. Chávez became a prominent figure in US history through leadership in the farm worker, civil rights, environmental, and Chicano movements. His experiences with hard work, poverty, and racial discrimination, and his religious faith and sense of justice, resonate with many Americans.
- Through bold yet sometimes fragile alliances, diverse leadership, community organizing, and innovative tactics, César E. Chávez and the farm worker movement brought international attention to farm workers' struggles and achieved substantial gains in basic human rights, dignity, equality, and opportunity.
- The United Farm Workers of America, the nation's first enduring agricultural labor union, formed from a burgeoning farm worker social movement and an unprecedented coalition between Mexican and Filipino American farm workers. The UFW achieved the passage of the California Agricultural Labor Relations Act of 1975, the first law in the continental United States recognizing farm workers' collective bargaining rights.

Significance

- César E. Chávez and other members of the farm worker movement drew on spirituality and religious traditions to strengthen and substantiate the movement, and in doing so they shaped broader discussions of ecumenical cooperation, social justice, and politics within faith communities in California and other parts of the United States.
- Nuestra Señora Reina de La Paz has served not only as the long-term farm worker movement headquarters, but also as a place of refuge, organizing, and community for farm workers, families, movement leaders, and volunteers as they worked to gain rights for farm workers and provide a national voice for the poor and disenfranchised. César E. Chávez lived at La Paz for more than 20 years and chose it as his final resting place before his death in 1993.



César Chávez and his “Huelga” car during the Delano Grape Strike, Tulare County, California, ca. 1965.

Fundamental Resources and Values

Fundamental resources and values are those features, systems, processes, experiences, stories, scenes, sounds, smells, or other attributes determined to merit primary consideration during planning and management processes because they are essential to achieving the purpose of the park and maintaining its significance.

- **Archives and Collections:** The documents, photographs, artifacts, oral histories, and other records and items associated with the farm worker movement provide important insight, information, and documentation of the history of the movement.
- **Cultural Landscape and Historic District:** The historic buildings, landscapes, and features associated with the national historic landmark; memorials; and other structures and sites within the monument where important events took place (e.g., administration building). Additionally, the natural setting contributes to the sense of peace, tranquility, respite, and refuge that residents and visitors value at La Paz.
- **Knowledge and Understanding of the Values Embodied by the Movement:** Visitors to La Paz have the opportunity to learn about the core values that supported the farm worker movement including service, sacrifice, volunteerism, nonviolence, leadership development, environmentalism, community-building, inclusiveness, and cooperation. Visitors can explore the ways in which the community at La Paz strove to embody these values.
- **Richly Layered Stories:** Stories associated with the farm worker movement, including the perspectives of the full range of participants in the movement and stories told at other sites, illustrate its complex activities and history and far-reaching impacts and involvements.
- **Collaboration:** The farm worker movement extends far beyond La Paz. Collaboration with other sites, collections, and individuals is essential to telling the full story and preserving the full set of resources.

Other Important Resources and Values

César E. Chávez National Monument contains other resources and values that may not be fundamental to the purpose and significance of the park, but are important to consider in management and planning decisions. These are referred to as other important resources and values.

- **Human History at La Paz:** The site at La Paz played host to many groups and activities prior to the farm worker movement, including American Indians, a quarry, and a tuberculosis sanitarium. Archeological resources, buildings, documents, and other resources help tell the story of these previous inhabitants.



Interpretive Themes

Interpretive themes are often described as the key stories or concepts that visitors should understand after visiting a park—they define the most important ideas or concepts communicated to visitors about a park unit. Themes are derived from, and should reflect, park purpose, significance, resources, and values. The set of interpretive themes is complete when it provides the structure necessary for park staff to develop opportunities for visitors to explore and relate to all park significance statements and fundamental and other important resources and values.

Power through Coalitions and Numbers: The campaign for better working conditions and treatment of farm workers gained momentum through bold tactics and coalitions to form an enduring agricultural labor union.

Potential topics to explore within this theme:

- The union was a response to the hardships, racism, and unjust systems affecting farm workers.
- The union forged sometimes unlikely coalitions that bridged social divisions, forming lasting links between farm workers, labor leaders, civil rights advocates, religious organizations, and consumers.
- The union built momentum through increased numbers, demonstrating the power of collective action even for the disenfranchised.
- The union was committed to nonviolence, drawing on the teachings of Mahatma Gandhi and Martin Luther King, Jr.
- The union used tactics such as boycotts, strikes, and marches to raise the profile and impact of the farm worker movement, and also influenced other important labor boycotts and activism.



Dolores Huerta and Larry Itliong, c. 1970s.

Interpretive Themes

More Than a Union, a Movement to Transform

Society: Harsh conditions and discrimination, both in the fields and at home in local communities, created grave hardships for farm workers; addressing these injustices necessitated a broader social movement which continues to change society and improve lives today.

Potential topics to explore within this theme:

- Farm labor is brutal, exhausting work, requiring considerable amounts of skill, dexterity, efficiency, and stamina. Farm workers also had to contend with summertime heat, a lack of drinking water, exposure to pesticides, poor sanitation facilities and housing, low wages, moving to follow crop seasons, and frequent work shortages.
- Government regulations and subsidies worked to the advantage of the largest agricultural growers, creating conditions ripe for the use and abuse of immigrant and migrant labor.
- Farm workers confronted abuses and discrimination not just at the workplace but in the communities where they lived, including: substandard housing; lack of educational opportunities and health care; and limited access to civic and political participation.
- Many of the harsh conditions and discriminations persist today, and organizations continue to fight for improvements.
- The farm worker movement was born in an era of civil rights awakening and community organizing. The farm worker movement collaborated with, learned from, and provided lessons to numerous other movements and activists.
- The movement went beyond typical workplace union organizing to confront injustices and unjust systems in society, including the oppression and exploitation of women, people of color, and people with low incomes.
- By integrating union organizing with community organizing, the movement was able to achieve successes never before seen in the history of US farm labor organizing.

- The efforts of the farm worker movement continue to inspire people to improve lives through community service and to seek transformational change in society through hard work, leadership, and nonviolence.

“Sí Se Puede!” Attitude: The slogan “Sí se puede!” (“Yes we can”) fueled the farm worker movement, motivating ordinary people and inspiring millions who never worked in the fields to take action.

Potential topics to explore within this theme:

- The farm worker movement is associated with a range of character-defining attitudes ranging from self-determination and empowerment to service, sacrifice, and concern for the collective good.
- Defying decades of oppression and exploitation, the farm worker movement provided opportunities, belief in themselves, and hope for farm workers, many of whom were people of color, women, and low income, to reach for a better life through training and leadership roles. The movement developed and depended on a new generation of diverse and charismatic leaders, including Chicanos, Filipino Americans, and women. Dolores Huerta, Larry Itliong, and Gilbert Padilla were among the recognized leaders who emerged, as well as countless lesser-known leaders such as Helen Chavez, Peter Velasco, and Jessie De La Cruz.
- The movement was driven by ordinary people achieving extraordinary things, inspiring millions of workers, college students, homemakers, youth, and disenfranchised groups to achieve their dreams and take action to improve their own communities.
- The movement brought public attention to the cause and inspired urban activists and nationally prominent leaders to help fight for the rights of farm workers.
- Patience and perseverance was required to sustain the movement in the face of failures, complexity, disagreements, mistakes, and nuances that surfaced over time.

Interpretive Themes (continued)



A Unique and Enduring Legacy: César E. Chávez was a multifaceted man and leader whose background and core values resonate with many Americans.

Potential topics to explore within this theme:

- The early life of César Chávez reflects the struggles and experiences of many Latino Americans, and his extraordinary personal story continues to resonate with people today.
- César Chávez led the movement with vision and fortitude in the face of struggles and criticisms, and his role in the perceived successes and failures of the movement continues to undergo scrutiny today.
- The movement reflects and embodies César Chávez's passion for nonviolence, his strong Catholic and spiritual beliefs, and his commitment to a life of community, service, and sacrifice, and his work continues to inspire new generations to continue the pursuit of social justice.
- César Chávez influenced multiple movements (labor, civil rights, Chicano, environmental, etc.) and the impact of his legacy lives on in the form of affordable housing, community centers, Latino art and theater, and organizations dedicated to his memory and impact on US history.

Home as Refuge: Nuestra Señora Reina de La Paz served as the home and refuge for César Chávez and the community that came together to support the farm labor movement.

Potential topics to explore within this theme:

- César's modest home at La Paz is where he lived, worked, and raised his family for more than 20 years.
- La Paz is a peaceful refuge for work and creativity, a place where César planned his campaigns, recharged his batteries, experimented with community and gardening, and recovered his center.
- The peaceful La Paz landscape, with its mountains, trails, and cultivated gardens, was reminiscent of the rural nature of many farm workers' homelands. At the same time, it is a stark contrast to the hot, flat fields of the agricultural valleys where many farm workers worked and lived.
- La Paz supported a diverse community of farm workers, families, movement leaders, and volunteers committed to a larger purpose and service to others.
- As the headquarters of the farm worker movement, La Paz served as an education center where future movement leaders were trained and as a place where movement leaders strategized their next campaigns.

Description



Description (continued)

On October 8, 2012, President Barack Obama designated the César E. Chávez National Monument to commemorate the life and work of César Estrada Chávez, interpret the struggles and achievements of the broader farm worker movement throughout the United States, and protect historic resources. Located in Keene, California, in the Tehachapi Mountains between the Central Valley of California and the Mojave Desert, the monument includes the property known as Nuestra Señora Reina de la Paz (Our Lady Queen of Peace) (La Paz). La Paz was designated a national historic landmark by the Secretary of the Interior on October 8, 2012, the same day that the César E. Chávez National Monument was established.

César E. Chávez is recognized for his achievements as the charismatic leader of the farm labor movement and the United Farm Workers of America (UFW), the first enduring agricultural labor union in the United States. The most important Latino leader in the U.S. during the 20th century, Chávez emerged as a civil rights leader among Latinos during the 1950s. Chávez also assumed major roles in the broader labor movement, the Chicano movement, and the environmental movement.

Migrant farm workers' living and working conditions throughout the first half of the 20th century were brutal and riddled with injustices. Abuses both in the fields and in communities created the need for a broader social movement with an emphasis on community organizing. With the support of diverse participants, sympathizers, and consumers across the country, the farm worker movement achieved unprecedented successes. The movement's efforts increased farm workers' wages above the poverty line, replaced a discriminatory and corrupt labor-contracting system with job rights that established seniority, anti-discrimination protections, and grievance procedures, banned the short-handled hoe, funded health care and pension plans for farm laborers, established state mandated clean drinking water and restroom facilities in the fields, regulated use of pesticides in the fields, and established a fund for community services.

In 1970, the National Farm Workers Service Center, Inc., acquired the La Paz property for use as the UFW and farm worker movement national headquarters. At La Paz, the UFW grew from its early roots as a union for farm workers to become a voice for the poor and disenfranchised. La Paz has remained in continuous use by the UFW and affiliated organizations since the 1970s, and contains the memorial garden where César E. Chávez is buried.

The César E. Chávez National Monument at La Paz encompasses 107 acres of rolling hills, rock outcrops, oak woodland, and oak savanna. Significant historic resources within the monument include 27 buildings and numerous landscape features associated with the national historic landmark. These structures include the Chávez residence, the dormitory, the cafeteria, the administration building, and the north unit, now known as the Villa La Paz Conference and Education Center. Also included within the boundary are the visitor center and Chávez Memorial Garden.

The National Park Service owns and manages 1.9 acres of the monument and retains a conservation easement over another 8.6 acres of the site for resource protection and access to other historically significant buildings, structures, and associated landscapes located adjacent to the NPS lands. The remaining 96.5+ acres are privately held lands owned and managed by the National Chavez Center. The monument is managed collaboratively by the National Park Service and the National Chavez Center (NCC). The United Farm Workers continues to use La Paz for its national headquarters.

The areas that are currently open to visitors include a visitor center and a memorial garden in which César Chávez is buried. The monument is a new national park area "in progress," with services and programs that are still under development. This new monument will recognize through its interpretive programming the contributions to the farm worker movement of many people, cultures and organizations. In the coming years, the National Park Service will provide more visitor opportunities, exhibits, and programs to fully communicate the significance of the farm worker movement. This foundation document will aid the National Park Service and its partners, providing the underlying guidance for future management.