

# Cesar Chavez, Minuteman

The UFW leader was no friend to illegal immigration—until he became an ethnic figurehead.

By Steve Sailer

IN CALIFORNIA, only three birthdays are official state holidays: Jesus Christ's, Martin Luther King's, and Cesar Chavez's. Beatification as a secular saint, though, isn't always good for the soul. A recent four-part exposé by reporter Miriam Pawel in the *Los Angeles Times* revealed how the labor leader turned revered ethnic icon descended into paranoia, megalomania, and general crack-pottery in the 15 years before his death in 1993.

Today, his United Farm Workers functions less as a union—it represents only 2 percent of the California agricultural workforce—than as a lucrative Latino-pride fundraising machine providing sinecures for a dozen Chavez relatives. Pawel writes, "Chavez's heirs run a web of tax-exempt organizations that exploit his legacy and invoke the harsh lives of farm workers to raise millions of dollars in public and private money. The money does little to improve the lives of California farm workers, who still struggle with the most basic health and housing needs and try to get by on seasonal, minimum-wage jobs."

From 1965 to 1981, the UFW succeeded in raising wages significantly for stoop laborers in California. Since then, their pay has fallen, and they've lost most of the fringe benefits they had won. Today, most make less than \$10,000 per year. Hundreds were discovered near Salinas living in caves, a mass indignity that even that town's most famous son,

John Steinbeck, barely anticipated in *The Grapes of Wrath*.

Unfortunately, in focusing on gossip about the personal foibles of Chavez and his successors, the *LA Times* series completely ignored the politically incorrect paradox of who was most responsible for wiping out the gains Mexican-American farm workers had achieved through strikes and consumer boycotts: illegal immigrants from Mexico.

Tectonic shifts in demographics made possible both the rise of the UFW after Congress ended the *bracero* guest-worker program in 1964 and the union's fall following the explosion in illegal immigration.

Chavez was a more interesting figure than either the plaster idol worshipped in the public schools or the celebrity control-freak denigrated in the *LA Times*. Chavez embodied both the old class politics and the new identity politics. Out of this duality grew the fundamental conflict of his life. What was more important, *la causa* or *la raza*? The UFW union or the Mexican race? This irresolvable contradiction culminated in the terrible ironies of his tragic later years and the uselessness of the UFW ever since.

During his prime, Chavez, a third-generation American citizen from Yuma, Arizona and Navy veteran, was an American labor leader fighting against the importation of strikebreakers from Mexico. But as power and praise went

to his head, his image morphed into that of a Mexican mestizo racial emblem, the patron saint of the *reconquista* of *Alta California* by *la raza*.

In 2006, we automatically assume that America's self-appointed Latino leaders—the politicians, campaign consultants, media mouthpieces, and identity-politics warriors—favor ever more immigration. Their influence and income flow from their claim to represent vast numbers of Hispanics, so the more warm bodies they can get across the border, the larger will be the ethnic quotas upon which their careers are based. But the union leader who is honestly battling for the welfare of his members—as opposed to the boss merely attempting to maximize the number of dues-paying workers—wants less competition for them.

Chavez's essential problem was straight out of Econ 101, the law of supply and demand. He needed to limit the supply of labor in order to drive up wages. Just as American Federation of Labor founder Samuel Gompers, himself a Jewish immigrant, was one of the most influential voices calling for the successful immigration-restriction law of 1924, Chavez, during his effectual years, was a ferocious opponent of illegal immigration.

His success stemmed from the long-term decline in the farm labor supply. According to agricultural economist Philip L. Martin of the University of

California, Davis, migrant farm workers in the U.S. numbered 2 million in the 1920s. Eisenhower cracked down on Mexican illegal immigrants, shipping one million home in 1954 alone. The famous 1960 “Harvest of Shame” documentary by CBS newsman Edward R. Murrow inspired liberal Democrats in Congress to abolish the *bracero* guest-worker program in 1964. The supply of migrant workers dropped to about 200,000, most of them American citizens, making unionization and better contracts feasible—as long as what Marx called “the reserve army of the unemployed” could be bottled up south of the border. The next year, Chavez began his storied organizing campaign.

Growers fought back by busing the reserve army up from Mexico. In 1979, Chavez bitterly testified to Congress:

... when the farm workers strike and their strike is successful, the employers go to Mexico and have unlimited, unrestricted use of illegal alien strikebreakers to break the strike. And, for over 30 years, the Immigration and Naturalization Service has looked the other way and assisted in the strikebreaking. I do not remember one single instance in 30 years where the Immigration service has removed strikebreakers. ... The employers use professional smugglers to recruit and transport human contraband across the Mexican border for the specific act of strikebreaking...

In 1969, Chavez led a march to the Mexican border to protest illegal immigration. Joining him were Sen. Walter Mondale and Martin Luther King’s successor as head of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, Ralph Abernathy.

The UFW picketed INS offices to demand closure of the border. Chavez also finked on illegal alien scabs to *la*

*migra*. Columnist Ruben Navarrette Jr. reported in the *Arizona Republic*, “Cesar Chavez, a labor leader intent on protecting union membership, was as effective a surrogate for the INS as ever existed. Indeed, Chavez and the United Farm Workers Union he headed routinely reported, to the INS, for deportation, suspected illegal immigrants who served as strikebreakers or refused to unionize.”

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Like today’s Minutemen, UFW staffers under the command of Chavez’s brother Manuel patrolled the Arizona-Mexico border to keep out illegal aliens. Unlike the well-behaved Minutemen, however, Chavez’s boys sometimes beat up intruders.

Successful unionization typically leads to management investing in mechanization, which reduces the number of jobs. United Mine Workers boss John L. Lewis proclaimed that he intended to force underground coalminers’ wages up so high that his union would shrink. If his members were paid enough today, they could afford to educate their kids to earn a less dangerous living by the time the bosses had figured out how to do without most of them.

During the 1970s, a similarly benign outcome appeared inevitable for American stoop laborers. The inflated piecework rates paid UFW members impelled simple productivity improvements such as light aluminum ladders for fruit tree pickers, to be followed, it was expected, by mechanization. In Ventura County, the average output of lemon pickers during the UFW’s reign rose from 3.4 boxes per hour in 1965 to 8.4 boxes by

1978. A few more decades of high pay, it appeared, would eventually turn these literally backbreaking jobs into merely a painful memory.

Then the 1982 Mexican economic collapse sent a flood of illegal immigrants north. Growers that had signed generous contracts with the UFW got out of the business and were replaced by new firms that relied upon subcontractors for cheap workers, no questions asked

about their documents. Automation efforts slowed.

The rotten pay and conditions suffered by today’s workers—three laborers died of heat stroke last summer—are a matter of supply and demand. The government can pass regulations, but if there are enough jobseekers on the spot to undercut their fellow workers, laws hardly matter.

Economist Martin has noted, “We have essentially privatized the immigration policy of this country, and left it in the hands of California’s growers.” The benefit to the consumer is minor. Martin notes that about 7 percent of the price paid by shoppers for strawberries goes to the pickers. In return, the public picks up the tab for the workers’ medical care and their children’s schooling. A National Academy of Sciences commission estimated in 1997 that an immigrant without a high-school degree ultimately costs America \$100,000 more than he contributes.

In the 1980s, the UFW declined into irrelevance as it ascended into the pantheon of political correctness. Losing interest in the gritty work of organizing, the aging Chavez began to back mass

immigration as he became a symbol of Latino identity politics.

Chavez's ambivalence about immigration is also widespread among the Latino-American electorate. A 2002 survey by the Pew Hispanic Center found that 48 percent of Latino registered voters felt there were "too many" immigrants in the U.S. today, while only 7 percent thought there were "too few." This shouldn't be startling since Hispanics suffer mass immigration's most direct consequences: lowered wages, stressed schools, and that annoying third cousin from Hermosillo who shows up uninvited and wants to sleep on the couch until he gets himself established in a few years.

Yet when the Pew interviewers immediately rephrased the question in ethnocentric terms to read, "Thinking about *Latin American* immigrants who come to work in the United States," suddenly only 21 percent of Latino voters wanted to "reduce the number" and 36 percent wished to "allow more." Thus, Hispanic activists can easily arouse for their own profit understandable but irrational racial chauvinism.

The emergence of a truly *Latino-American* leader like the young Chavez, one more interested in the economic advancement of his own American ethnic group than in identity politics, would be good for American Hispanics, good for other Americans, and good for Mexico as well. As former Mexican Foreign Minister Jorge G. Castaneda has admitted, the mostly unfenced border allows Mexico's largely white ruling class to bleed off the discontented poor rather than make the fundamental reforms necessary to fix that dysfunctional country. Yet any of that is unlikely as long as the truth about Chavez is so little known. ■

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**Britain, which is already the most photographed country in the world due to an extensive system of security cameras, is about to go one step farther.**

The proposed Automatic Number Plate Recognition system will rely on the numerous cameras that are already in place on Britain's roadways supplemented by new ones where coverage is considered to be inadequate. The objective is to record all cars on all roads, amounting to 50 million transits per day, reading the license plates and storing the information for two years. As the plates are read, they will automatically be checked against a central database for possible criminal or terrorist connections. Some see the move as particularly Orwellian, but Prime Minister Tony Blair describes it as an essential tool to combat terrorism. Blair is also attempting to introduce biometric ID cards for the British public, a move that is being strongly resisted in the House of Lords.



**Is there a new water-gate brewing?** The CIA has initiated an internal investigation of the agency's third-ranking official, Executive Director Kyle Dustin Foggo, known as Dusty, over charges that he had business connections to corrupt former California Congressman Randy "Duke" Cunningham. Investigators are looking into allegations that Foggo, who was an administrative officer involved in procurement, may have given contracts to suppliers with whom he and his political cronies had financial or personal interests. It is reported that he recently gave the lucrative contract to supply water to CIA facilities in Iraq to businessman Brent Wilkes, a conspirator associate of Cunningham. It is also alleged that Foggo obtained his position in the first place through the urging of Cunningham, who is a close friend of CIA Director Porter Goss. Wilkes and Foggo are former college roommates who are so close that they have named their sons after each other. Foggo has worked at the CIA since 1982. During his time in the agency, he was responsible for the awarding of numerous no-bid noncompetitive contracts for supplies and services.



**An Italian judge has formally asked the United States to permit questioning of 22 named CIA officers**

who are wanted in connection with the kidnapping and rendition of the Egyptian cleric Abu Omar from a Milan street in February 2003, but the government of Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi is unlikely to support the request. The CIA operation, which is particularly embarrassing to all parties involved because it was run with the connivance of the Italian intelligence service SISMI, was poorly managed and marked by incompetence. Most of the CIA officers were carrying passports with false names, but at least four have been identified by their true names through phone records because they could not resist the urge to call their families. In one case, a female officer who was traveling on a false passport produced a frequent flyer card in her true name at her hotel so that she could receive mileage credit. Abu Omar was rendered to Egypt where he was allegedly tortured. The CIA chief from Milan reportedly flew to Cairo to assist in the interrogation.

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