

## INFLUENTIAL AMERICANS – MLK AND CESAR CHAVEZ

Brady Kondek

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If you look back on civil rights history, Martin Luther King Jr. and Cesar Chavez are two names you will definitely see brought up numerous times. Martin Luther King Jr. was well-known for his activism in African American equality, while Cesar Chavez was well-known for his activism in Latino American equality. Martin Luther King Jr. did things including organizing many marches such as marches from Selma to Montgomery, led the Montgomery Bus Boycott, and led the March on Washington. Cesar Chavez was a co-founder of the United Farm Workers Association, responsible for getting the first health benefits for all farmworkers and their families, and also responsible for getting the first union contracts requiring rest periods, clean drinking water, hand washing stations, and protective clothing against pesticide exposure for all the farmworkers. Martin Luther King Jr. and Cesar Chavez are two of the most influential figures in civil rights history in the United States, with Martin Luther King Jr. advocating for African American equality and Cesar Chavez for Latino American equality.

When it comes to looking at important figures in U.S. civil rights history, Martin Luther King Jr. is almost always the first person people think of. He became the most visible spokesperson and leader in the Civil Rights Movement from 1955 until his assassination in 1968.<sup>1</sup> You may remember the Montgomery Bus Boycott, in which Rosa Parks refused to give up her bus seat to a white man. That was led by Dr. King. What about the marches from Selma to Montgomery? He organized and led a bunch of those as well. He was a part of marches that promoted blacks' right to vote, desegregation, labor rights, and other basic civil rights, which made him a prominent figure in the Civil Rights Movement.<sup>1</sup> His most well-known march was the March on Washington, in which he delivered his famous "I Have a Dream Speech."

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<sup>1</sup> "Martin Luther King Jr." Wikipedia. Wikimedia Foundation. Accessed January 19, 2021. [en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Martin\\_Luther\\_King\\_Jr](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Martin_Luther_King_Jr).

President Kennedy had been watching the speech on television and sent an invitation to King and other marchers to the White House to meet with him.<sup>1</sup> Without Dr. King, equality for African Americans would have either been so much harder to achieve or could not have even been achieved.

Cesar Chavez is not as well-known as Martin Luther King Jr., but still had a significant influence on the Civil Rights Movement. He advocated for Latino American equality. He was a co-founder of the National Farm Workers Association, which eventually became the United Farm Workers union. The UFW seeks to empower migrant farmworkers and improve their wages and working conditions. It also works to promote nonviolence and to educate members on political and social issues.<sup>2</sup> He was also responsible for getting the first union contracts requiring rest periods, clean drinking water, hand washing stations, and protective clothing against pesticide exposure for all the farmworkers.<sup>3</sup> Chavez sent workers across the country to convince supermarkets to boycott California grapes when California fruit and vegetable companies refused to recognize the UFWOC as the bargaining agent for the farmworkers.<sup>4</sup> He helped Latino Americans gain the equality they wanted, just as African Americans had gotten.

Martin Luther King Jr. and Cesar Chavez are two of the most well-known figures who played a vital role within the Civil Rights Movement. They both helped gain equality for people who were not being granted the equality given to them in the Declaration of Independence. They

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<sup>2</sup> "United Farm Workers." Encyclopedia Britannica. Encyclopedia Britannica. Accessed January 19, 2021. [www.britannica.com/topic/United-Farm-Workers](http://www.britannica.com/topic/United-Farm-Workers).

<sup>3</sup> "Accomplishments - Cesar Chavez 2013." Cesar Chavez 2013. Accessed January 19, 2021. [sites.google.com/site/cesarchavezwp2013mp/home/accomplishments](https://sites.google.com/site/cesarchavezwp2013mp/home/accomplishments).

<sup>4</sup> Lesson 24 Notes

fought hard by leading marches, boycotts, and giving speeches. Through all of their hard work, these people gained the equality they wanted and changed history forever.

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