

CESAR CHAVEZ, "NOMINATION ADDRESS FOR GOVERNOR JERRY BROWN,"  
DEMOCRATIC NATIONAL CONVENTION  
(14 JULY 1976)

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**Abstract:** Cesar Chavez's speech nominating Jerry Brown for president violated many of the expectations of convention speeches. Rather than presenting a partisan political address, Chavez called upon the nation to work to improve the lives of the poor and downtrodden. Chavez reiterated the themes he often used in speaking to farm workers and their supporters instead of appealing to the politicians in his audience.

**Key Words:** Cesar Chavez, Jerry Brown, nomination speeches, Democratic National Convention, Jacques Levy, political campaigns

Cesar Chavez's speech nominating Jerry Brown for president came during an election campaign that was unique in the history of American politics. The Watergate scandal had led to the resignation of President Richard Nixon in August of 1974. Nixon was succeeded by Vice-President Gerald Ford. Soon after he assumed office, Ford, in a controversial act, pardoned Nixon. The pardon freed Nixon from any potential charges of criminal activity related to the Watergate affair. While Ford had been warmly received when he became president, he lost much of the public's support after Nixon's pardon. Ford had been appointed to the office in October of 1973 after Vice-President Spiro Agnew was forced to resign.<sup>1</sup> Ford, therefore, had become the only president who had achieved the office without first being elected President or Vice-President. In 1976, Ford ran for election and was challenged by Democrats and individuals within his own party.

Because of the Watergate scandal and the controversy surrounding the Vietnam War, many people in the country had become frustrated by the dishonesty and corruption in Washington, D.C. Consequently, they turned to politicians who did not have ties to the nation's capital. That public perception greatly helped the long shot candidacy of the little-known governor of Georgia, Jimmy Carter.

The Democratic Party had also revised its nominating process by creating more primaries and caucuses in individual states.<sup>2</sup> Carter understood that the new rules forced candidates to change the way they ran for president. He was the first to recognize the importance of starting his campaign early and to focus on winning the first primaries. Carter did well in the Iowa caucus, the first major contest, and his success created a momentum that led to victories in other states.<sup>3</sup>

As the Carter campaign amassed delegates, many liberals were concerned that he was too conservative, so they started an "ABC" movement (Anybody but Carter). Jerry Brown and

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Last Updated: February 2012

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*Voices of Democracy*, ISSN #1932-9539. Available at <http://www.voicesofdemocracy.umd.edu/>.

Idaho Senator Frank Church entered the campaign and won several primaries, but they had started too late to gather the delegate votes needed to win the nomination. Carter had enough delegates to easily win the nomination on the first ballot. He then chose Senator Walter Mondale of Minnesota as his running mate.

Ford faced a difficult situation at the Republican convention. He was challenged by Ronald Reagan, the former governor of California and a favorite of the conservative wing of the party. Ford defeated Reagan on the first ballot and chose Senator Robert Dole of Kansas as his running mate. Carter defeated Ford in the general election and became the 39<sup>th</sup> president of the United States.

Even though Jerry Brown was unsuccessful in his attempt to receive the Democratic nomination for president, he attempted to provide an alternative to Jimmy Carter. Brown also used his campaign as a vehicle to present his message to the public. He decided to use the Democratic National Convention as a stage to continue presenting that message to the American public.

Brown chose Cesar Chavez as the individual best able to present his message to the public. Chavez delivered a speech that violated the expectations of a convention speech but reflected his beliefs that politicians should work to improve the lives of the poor and downtrodden in the country. In order to provide insight into Chavez's message, this essay will present brief overviews of the lives of Cesar Chavez and Jerry Brown, explain the beliefs that they shared, detail the expectations of convention nominating speeches, and provide an analysis of Chavez's speech preparation and of the speech that he delivered at the convention. That speech was not a typical nominating speech, but it provided insights into Chavez's beliefs and the changes he hoped would come in the lives of the poor and downtrodden in the country.

### *Governor Jerry Brown*

Edmund Gerald "Jerry" Brown, Jr. was born on April 7, 1938, the son of Edmund G. "Pat" Brown, a prominent Democratic politician who served as governor of California from 1959 to 1967. Brown attended Catholic schools and studied at Santa Clara University before entering a Jesuit seminary in 1958. He planned to become a priest but left the seminary before completing his training. He enrolled at the University of California, Berkeley where he earned a B. A. in Classics in 1961. After graduation Brown entered Yale Law School where he received his law degree in 1964. Brown then worked as a law clerk and studied in Mexico and Latin America.

After his studies, Brown practiced law in Los Angeles and organized groups that supported migrant workers and opposed the war in Vietnam. In 1969 he was elected to the Board of Trustees of the Los Angeles Community College System, then became the Secretary of State in 1970. While in that office he sued major corporations for violating campaign finance laws, enforced laws requiring members of the legislature to disclose sources of campaign laws, and played a significant role in drafting and passing the California Fair Political Practices Act. Those actions brought him significant public attention and helped in his campaign for governor in 1974. He served as governor until 1982.<sup>4</sup>

As governor, Brown worked to limit state spending and broke tradition by living in a modest apartment rather than the governor's mansion. He had a strong interest in environmental issues, worked to repeal tax breaks received by oil companies, and appointed more women and minorities to office than any previous governor.

Brown entered the race for the 1976 Democratic presidential nomination late in the campaign. During the campaign he argued that the country was living beyond its means and that people had to accept an era of limits on expenditures and other aspects of life. He did well in several primaries, but Governor Carter had built up too much of a delegate lead. Brown won 300 delegate votes at the convention that was held in New York City's Madison Square Garden, placing third behind Carter and Congressman Morris Udall of Arizona. Even though Brown was never expected to receive the nomination, because he did win delegates during the primary process, he opted to have his name placed in nomination so that he would have an opportunity to present his message to the country.

When it was time to deliver that message to the convention and the nation, Brown chose someone who shared his ideas and his hopes to introduce him—that person was Cesar Chavez. Although Chavez was a national figure, his speech was barely mentioned in reports about the convention. The *New York Times* briefly mentioned the speech: "Mr. Brown's name was advanced by Cesar Chavez, the charismatic leader of the United Farm Workers (UFW)."<sup>5</sup> The *Congressional Quarterly Weekly Report* described the speech: "The governor's name was placed in nomination by Cesar Chavez, leader of the United Farm Workers, but Chavez used his time to argue for social justice and equal rights, mentioning Brown's name only once and leaving out any discussion of his views or his record."<sup>6</sup> Brown's nomination was seconded by Yvonne Braithwaite Burke, who described him as "a spokesman for the underprivileged."<sup>7</sup> The nomination was also seconded by Governor Edwin Edwards of Louisiana, a person whose values were certainly different from Brown's but he had helped Brown win the primary in Louisiana so his appearance was a reward for his previous support.<sup>8</sup>

### *Chavez's Relationship with Jerry Brown*

Chavez was a natural choice to nominate Brown because he was a long-time friend and supporter. He was a highly respected individual who agreed with Brown's goals of improving the lives of the downtrodden, and he was a deeply religious individual who shared Brown's belief in the power of spirituality to create change in society. They also shared many beliefs about how to improve American society. Brown reinforced many of the same themes that Chavez used in his nomination speech at a farm worker rally during the 1976 election:

We're going to build America not on guilt, not . . . by dividing people, but by giving people an opportunity, an opportunity that millions of people don't have right now. That's an opportunity for a decent job, and to go as far as their talent and energy and their commitment will allow them. That's all I ask. Give me that chance to go to Washington, and I'll take you there with me in spirit.<sup>9</sup>

Chavez and the United Farm Workers had a history of being active in Democratic politics. In 1968, he and other UFW leaders played a major role in helping Robert Kennedy win

the California primary by energizing a large number of Latino voters. Chavez would have been a delegate to the Democratic National Convention if Kennedy had not been killed. Brown hoped that Chavez would energize liberals and Mexican-Americans as he had done in 1968.

Chavez first met Jerry Brown in 1968:

As a former seminarian and student of Eastern cultures, Brown felt that he had found a soul mate in Chavez, whose reading list included works on Asian religions and philosophies. The younger Brown had even introduced the farmworkers movement to Hollywood's liberal glitterati: actors, singers and film moguls who proved invaluable to future UFW causes.<sup>10</sup>

He was an active supporter and one that Chavez felt he could turn to when the union needed help.

Chavez had become politically active after a vicious fight with growers, the Teamster Union, and the Nixon administration in 1973. When UFW contracts expired in that year, grape growers signed highly favorable contracts with the Teamsters Union, even though the Teamsters had agreed not to organize field workers.<sup>11</sup> The UFW and its members went on strike and picketed the fields. The Teamsters and the growers pressured local legal authorities and police to crush the strike and hired a group of labor goons to physically harass the workers. There was a significant amount of violence that resulted in the deaths of two union members.

Chavez was emotionally crushed by the deaths. He called off picketing and decided that he needed to change his tactics. As he said, "No matter how successful boycotts might be, or how much the public might support the cause, the UFW needed a special set of laws covering farmworkers and agribusiness soon—or there would be no end to the violence and the unfettered power of the ranchers."<sup>12</sup>

The UFW felt that it had a friend in Sacramento when Brown replaced the union's long time opponent, Ronald Reagan, in 1974. As Chavez said, "I think Governor Brown is very different than most politicians. He knows that changes have to be made. He is looking for the areas where they should be made, and for ways of bringing about meaningful changes, not just cosmetic ones."<sup>13</sup> The union had openly supported Brown, and farm workers campaigned for him. Once elected, Brown appointed union supporters to major positions in his administration, but he also seemed to distance himself from the union when he announced that he was going to introduce a "fair" labor bill that would probably upset both the union and the growers. Chavez decided that he had to do something dramatic to force Brown to support a bill that would be favorable to the UFW. He publicly challenged Brown during a massive rally in Modesto: "I pointed in the direction of Sacramento and said that we liked Governor Brown, but we liked the farm workers more . . . maybe we would have to go to Sacramento."<sup>14</sup>

The governor was unhappy with the comment but he eventually supported the union's position after a dramatic march publicizing the union's ongoing battle with the Gallo winery. The march went from San Francisco to Gallo's headquarters in Modesto. San Francisco was chosen as the starting point because many people in the city supported the UFW. The city would also attract the attention of the media. The march was an enormous success and the press coverage made it clear to Gallo and other growers that the UFW was a potent political

force. It also gave Brown the signal that he could politically support a bill granting rights to workers.<sup>15</sup>

After intense negotiations among representatives of the United Farm Workers, Teamsters Union, growers, and members of the legislature, Brown was able to pass the Agricultural Labor Relations Act (ALRA). Both sides in the negotiations were impressed with Brown's knowledge of the issues and his role in getting the bill passed. The ALRA included a section creating the Agricultural Labor Relations Board (ALRB) to implement its proposals, including the supervision of union elections. Brown stated that "this bill sets a model for the whole country as to the manner of resolving farm labor disputes through law."<sup>16</sup>

The union was successful in many elections but faced significant obstacles because the ALRB did not function effectively. The union's opponents in the legislature insured that the ALRB was never adequately funded and therefore could not certify elections or investigate complaints growing out of questionable actions by growers during elections. In reaction, Chavez initiated Proposition 14 in 1976, an initiative that would permanently fund the ALRB.<sup>17</sup> Even though Governor Brown and others supported the initiative, the opponents of the proposition successfully defeated it. Chavez lost faith in the political process and returned to traditional union tactics like picketing and the boycott, especially after Brown left the governor's office in 1982 and was replaced by George Deukmejian, a strong supporter of the growers.<sup>18</sup>

### *Cesar Chavez as Orator*

Cesar Estrada Chavez was born on March 31, 1927 near Yuma, Arizona.<sup>19</sup> Chavez spent his early years on the family farm. His father, Librado, ran several businesses including an auto-repair shop and a poolroom near Yuma. During the Great Depression of the 1930s, the family was unable to pay its taxes, so they were forced to leave the farm and become migrant workers. The loss of the family's land frustrated Chavez, and events in his life as a migrant inspired him to protest against injustice to farm workers.<sup>20</sup>

The Chavez family had a difficult time as migrants but eventually learned to do what was necessary for survival. The Chavezes frequently faced racial discrimination. Cesar Chavez and his siblings often attended racially segregated schools where Anglo teachers treated them harshly. The racism extended beyond the classroom. Chavez remembers being forced to sit in segregated sections in movie theaters and being denied service in restaurants. During those years, Chavez received little formal education. He quit school after the eighth grade to work full time in the fields to help support his family.

Although he did not receive a formal education, Chavez's mother taught her children traditional knowledge contained in dichos (proverbs and sayings), consejos (advice), and cuentos (stories) that often carried a moral lesson. That knowledge covered a wide range of subjects, some telling of miracles, other promoting obedience and honesty. The sayings and stories, which were an integral part of the Mexican-American culture, later appeared in his speeches and writings. He used them to teach all audiences and especially to instruct and identify with his Mexican-American audiences.

His years as a migrant worker introduced Chavez to the value of unionism. His father and uncle often joined labor organizations, but the unions were ineffective in fighting the

power of growers. Chavez joined the National Agricultural Workers Union (NAWU) when he was nineteen. Although the NAWU was unsuccessful, Chavez believed that the experience was the beginning of his career as an organizer.

Chavez tried to escape from migrant life by joining the Navy in 1944. He was unhappy in the military and was disappointed by the discrimination against African-Americans and Mexican-Americans. He had hoped to learn skills that would lead to a better job in civilian life, but he was forced to return to migrant labor when discharged in 1946.<sup>21</sup>

In 1948 Chavez married Helen Fabela. They worked as migrants, tried sharecropping, and eventually moved to Crescent City in northern California where Chavez found work with a lumber company. His family did not like northern California weather, so they settled in San Jose where Chavez found jobs in a lumber mill and fruit orchards. Chavez found his life's cause and work during those years in San Jose.<sup>22</sup>

In 1952 Chavez was living in a barrio called *Sal Si Puedes* (get out if you can), a section of the city "dirtier and uglier than the others."<sup>23</sup> Later he would change this negative image into a positive one for his workers' movement, "*Si, se puede*" ("Yes, we can"). In that year Chavez met two men who changed his life: Father Donald McDonnell and Fred Ross. Father McDonnell, a Roman Catholic priest, taught Chavez about social justice and labor movements among farm workers, including the teachings of *Rerum Novarum*, Pope Leo XIII's encyclical outlining the church's support for workers who protested oppressive conditions. Through McDonnell, Chavez was introduced to ideas that would become central to his personal philosophy, and he met activists for social justice who inspired his crusade for farm workers.<sup>24</sup>

While Father McDonnell gave Chavez an intellectual and moral basis for organizing, Fred Ross taught him how to be an effective organizer. Ross was an experienced grass-roots organizer for the Community Services Organization (CSO), a group working to improve the lives of Mexican-Americans. Ross was recruiting leaders in the community, and he heard that Chavez had the abilities to be a leader. Ross tried to set up a meeting with Chavez but was rebuffed. Chavez suspected that Ross was an Anglo outsider with questionable motives. Eventually Chavez met Ross and was extremely impressed with him.

Chavez began his work as an unpaid organizer for the CSO. One of his first projects signed up 4,000 Mexican-American voters and helped Mexican-Americans gain citizenship papers. After his early successes, he was hired as a full-time organizer, working initially in Oakland and then in the San Joaquin Valley. He quickly improved his skills as an organizer. He developed techniques for making contacts with people, convincing them to become active in the CSO, and then keeping them energized once they had committed. He especially sought those who could work independently. Organizing demanded hard work and follow-through, he discovered, for "if you go around preaching, telling people that things can be done, they begin to deposit their problems with you and expect you to do something for them."<sup>25</sup>

A major part of his program to become a better organizer was based on self-education that supplemented his meager formal education. He read about the lives of great leaders in world history, such as St. Thomas Aquinas and St. Paul, Mexican-American history, and biographies of labor leaders like John L. Lewis, Eugene V. Debs, and the leaders of the Knights of Labor. He was particularly drawn to the writings of Mohandas Gandhi and his tactics of nonviolence. The image of the poor and frail Gandhi challenging and defeating the rich and powerful British must have been inspirational to a young Mexican-American who dreamed of

challenging entrenched agricultural interests in the United States. His extensive reading provided him with insights on leadership, as well as ideas and topics that would surface in his discourse throughout his career.

A second major element in his self-improvement plan required him to develop his understanding of, and skills in, public address. He realized that he could not achieve his goals unless he spoke effectively. Chavez painstakingly analyzed and improved his manner, methods, and style of public speaking. In "The Organizer's Tale," an article that he wrote during the Delano strike of 1965, Chavez discussed his experiences as an organizer in Oakland during the 1950s, recalling how after each house meeting and presentation he would "lie awake going over the whole thing, playing the [mental] tape back, trying to see why people laughed at one point, or why they were for one thing and against another."<sup>26</sup>

Shortly after Chavez began speaking to farm workers, he discovered an effective approach: "When you're trying to recruit a farm worker, you have to paint a little picture, and then you have to color the picture in."<sup>27</sup> In an interview in 1981, Chavez made it clear that he did not enjoy speaking: "I don't like public speaking. Not at all. I still get butterflies in my stomach. It's terrible." But like many speakers, he felt better when the speech was finished: "Once it's over I say 'Oh, thank God, it's over. I can rest now.' I'm still like that, and I've done a million of them."<sup>28</sup>

Chavez believed that the United Farm Workers was more than a union. It was a social movement that worked to improve the lives of workers. Chavez had to convince workers that they were powerful agents for change. In order to achieve this goal, he had to change their personal image—he had to create new people. He achieved that goal through the power of his speaking.

Chavez believed that he had a moral cause to end injustice. He believed that he would inevitably win and that he could achieve victory through speeches. He gave thousands of speeches in fields, on university campuses, in political settings, and at rallies. His speeches were carefully organized and full of facts and moral considerations. He preferred to have notes but he also spoke in an impromptu manner. During most of his career he spoke from notes on cards, but as he and his movement became more successful, he worked with speechwriters. Before a speech, he would ask local individuals what issues were important to the audience and he adjusted his message to those issues.

Chavez was not a fiery speaker like many of the contemporary Chicano speakers. He spoke in a calm manner, as though he were carrying on a conversation. He always kept his message brief. Even though he was quiet and soft-spoken, Chavez had a kind of charisma that had a powerful effect on audience members. Chavez was a farm worker, so he easily identified with his audience. He looked, dressed, and acted like a farm worker. That allowed him to easily identify with them. He was also able to identify with mainly Anglo audiences on university campuses and other settings where the audience members were sympathetic to issues of social injustice.

Chavez could speak to workers in both English and Spanish. When speaking in both languages he gave signposts telling the audience when he was switching from one language to another. His speeches were generally translated into Spanish because his audience was often composed mostly of Spanish speakers.

As Chavez rose to leadership positions in the CSO, he gained vital experiences in improving the lives of poor people, but his strongest desire was to organize farm workers into a union. CSO leaders resisted. In frustration, he resigned in 1962. He moved to the Central Valley community of Delano to begin organizing workers. He chose Delano because it was central to the agricultural region of the state and because he had family in the community who could support him in his cause. He faced a tremendous challenge. The workers were powerless migrants who would have to challenge and then defeat the powerful agricultural interests in California. In spite of this enormous challenge, Chavez was able to create the first successful farm workers union in the history of the United States, the United Farm Workers (UFW).

### *Presidential Nomination Speeches*

Studies of nomination speeches provide useful insights for the analysis of Chavez's speech. Robert N. Bostrom argued that "of all the convention speeches, probably the most interesting and least understood is the nominating speech." He proposed that the speech is "almost universally condemned as useless, bombastic and meaningless by speech critics and political scientists alike." Bostrom rejected the view that the speech had no function, arguing that it is a traditional part of conventions that is "efficient and democratic," and that "politicians find the nominating speech useful" because it details the candidate's ideas to a national audience and asks for support from members of the audience. Other reasons given for the importance of the speech include "payment of a political debt, rewarding a loyal party worker, bringing a candidate for another office into the public eye, seeking attention for the speaker, arousing enthusiasm in the delegates, and stating a minority point of view."<sup>29</sup> Bostrom referred to it as "a vestigial remnant of a bygone era" but one that still could be used successfully to build the image of a candidate or the person giving the speech.<sup>30</sup>

Nomination speeches were not an integral part of presidential conventions until 1876. Before then, there "were only brief announcements or none at all."<sup>31</sup> Scholars argue that since 1876, the speeches had taken on a ritualistic aspect and had not changed substantially.<sup>32</sup> Bostrom says that the "most interesting of the purposes" of a nomination speech "is the expression of a minority point of view."<sup>33</sup> He used the example of speeches by southern politicians at Democratic National Conventions that attacked the party's stance on civil rights. In many respects, Chavez's speech to the 1976 convention could be placed in this category because it spoke of a variety of issues that were not raised by other speakers and stated a position that was definitely in the minority.

In his discussion of Hubert Humphrey's 1968 acceptance address, Robert O. Norvold described convention speaking as "political ritual" designed to elicit more of a physical rather than an intellectual response from an audience, through an "almost rhythmical, pattern of statement-response between the speaker and auditors, by a verbal content which appeals to the mass rather than any limited faction, and by an implied or explicit credo which is absolute in its rightness and denies the validity of all others."<sup>34</sup> Chavez violated this ritualistic formula in many ways.

Bostrom agreed with Norvold that the speeches had ritualistic aspects in their organization, language, and content. The speeches were often structured in a manner where the candidate's name was only mentioned at the conclusion of the speech. This organizational



pattern became accepted because of the lengthy floor demonstrations that traditionally followed the speech. Although demonstrations have been eliminated in recent conventions, speakers still withhold the candidate's name until the end as a means of heightening interest in the speech. Chavez met this part of the ritual, but his mention of Brown was not intended to bring the audience to its feet for a rousing demonstration. Instead, it represented a simple statement of the need for a leader like Jerry Brown, a leader who would improve the lives of the downtrodden and oppressed, a leader with the same values and goals as Cesar Chavez.

The language in the nomination speech tends to be extravagant because of the "two-valuedness" in which "the party virtues are extolled and the opposition is excoriated with lusty accepted exaggeration."<sup>35</sup> The speeches tend to include words like "honesty," "ability," and "courage," *almost* as if eulogizing the candidate.<sup>36</sup> Chavez's language did not meet this expectation because it was not a partisan political speech.

Television and other mass media have redefined the role of all convention speeches, including the nomination speech. The speeches "allowed a new generation of performers to show off their abilities (or kill their careers)" and allowed more diverse constituencies to address the convention and elevate star performers to the role as speaker.<sup>37</sup>

Some nomination speeches have been historically significant and played major roles in the outcome of conventions and even elections. Scholars point to Robert G. Ingersoll's nomination of James G. Blaine in 1876, James A. Garfield's speech nominating John Sherman in 1880, Franklin D. Roosevelt's "Happy Warrior" speech nominating Al Smith in 1924, and two speeches nominating Adlai Stevenson: John F. Kennedy in 1956 and Eugene J. McCarthy in 1960. In some cases, the nominator was so successful that he was able to receive the nomination, even though he was not expected to win. Henry Z. Scheele points to Warren G. Harding's nomination in 1920 as the result of a successful nomination speech.<sup>38</sup>

These studies suggest the power of nomination speeches to promote a candidate or to build a personal image. This study does not focus on a speech that was, in these senses, successful. Rather, it examines an address that could be judged a failure because it elicited little or no media response, backed a candidate with little chance of winning the nomination, and did not promote the speaker's own prospects for elected office. But those may not be the best criteria to use in judging the speech. Chavez believed in the power of words and the judgment of the audience. He believed that the speaker should deliver his message and that eventually the audience would respond. Throughout his career, Chavez doggedly continued to speak, and this speech was significant in advancing his goal of changing America through the power of language. This speech might best be studied as a part of Chavez's lifelong crusade to improve the lives of all Americans rather than an attempt to inspire one particular audience to take a specific action.

### *Chavez's Nomination Speech*

Chavez's nomination speech is intriguing because it violated many of the expectations of the audience and the occasion. Rather than speaking about the accomplishments of the Democratic Party in general or Jerry Brown in particular, Chavez used the occasion to discuss the needs of the poor and the oppressed throughout the country: the farm workers, the unemployed, those who were ill and were not receiving adequate medical care, the neglected

elderly, and children who were not being educated. In addition, Chavez used the occasion to talk about the need for better housing and mass transportation, as well as the harm done by narcotics, environmental degradation, and decaying cities.

Jerry Brown's name was only mentioned once in the speech. Chavez concluded the speech by stating his belief that the nation needed a leader who understood the problems of poor people and would work to solve them. Most nomination speeches build to the conclusion where the candidate's name is mentioned, but Chavez's conclusion was not dramatic nor did it build excitement about the candidate and his candidacy.

We need a leader that understands these problems. We need a leader to challenge, we need a leader to lead by example, to sacrifice. We need a leader who is not afraid to ask questions. We need a leader.

And brothers and sisters, this is why we place in nomination the name of Governor Edmund G. Brown Jr. for President of the United States of America (3).<sup>39</sup>

If this brief section were removed, the speech could have been delivered in virtually any setting, and Chavez used many of the same ideas in other speeches.

The length of the nomination speech reflected Chavez's belief that speeches should be brief. The printed text was two and a half pages long with 25 short paragraphs. The language was simple and unadorned, a trait found in virtually all of his speeches. The language had a simple beauty that was achieved through the use of parallel structure and antithesis—again, traits found in many of Chavez's speeches. The speech was also typical in that Chavez did not place himself at the center of the speech. Rather, he spoke as a representative of the United Farm Workers and of the poor and disadvantaged. He used "We" to show that he was representing such individuals through his attendance at the convention: "We bring you greetings from California, greetings from the men, women and children who toil in the fields to bring our daily food to our tables" (2).

The speech represented a celebration of people's power and the potential they had for significant achievements if only given an opportunity. He did not call for the government to provide handouts to people or to create jobs, but rather to foster a climate that made it possible for people to reach their goals, maximize their abilities, and to find a meaningful and rewarding job.

He began with a greeting in Spanish to those who could speak Spanish: "Buenos noches. A todos mis hermanos de habla Espanol" (1). He then balanced that opening with the greeting in English that he would give to any audience, particularly a labor audience: "Brothers and sisters" (1).

In two brief paragraphs he set the mood for his message and introduced the main subject of the speech. He emphasized that people and the country needed a *purpose*, a word that appeared often in the text.

There's a great task to be done in this nation. First we have to set a goal. We have to give people a sense of purpose.

There's a great deal to do. We need to construct rather than destroy.  
We need to inspire hope in the people for the future (3-4).

He detailed why people were lacking a purpose: "Right now we have millions of people unable to find work," and he added that this "inability to find work destroys the spirit" (5). He argued further that many men and women "who have energy and ideas" cannot find work but "all they get are handouts" (5). He strongly rejected the idea that handouts help people: "Handouts! Imagine how stifling that can be to the spirit. Or they get make-work, busy-work. This is just as bad. It makes people feel of no purpose. It makes people feel useless" (6-7).

Chavez rejected the idea that technology could lift people's spirits because it often led to drudgery and "turns human beings into robots" who "find no purpose in their daily work." He then punctuated his point: "Imagine how crippling that can be" (8). The UFW had fought against technological innovations in agriculture because they would lead to a reduction of jobs, so it is not surprising that he detailed the negative effects of technology.

He turned from the negative to the positive, talking about how people are "unique because they are creative." If people are not allowed to be creative, "we destroy the individual's spirit." Rather than destroying people's spirit, society should "Let them be creative at their place of work" (9). Creativity would not only "enrich their lives" but all of society would benefit because "this type of work is the cornerstone of human dignity." People with dignity were important, he stressed, "because people are important, working with people—even sacrificing a little bit for them—brings much meaning to one's life" (9-10).

Chavez illustrated his point by giving the delegates an idea of what could be accomplished: "There is so much meaningful work to be done! And so many people unemployed" (11)! He detailed the kind of work that needed to be done: caring for people "who are bedridden with sores on their backs because there's no one to turn them;" helping older people "who are abandoned, who need a cup of water, who need a warm meal, but they have no one to give them help;" working with children who had to be cared for, educated, "and given a purpose and love;" providing housing, rebuilding cities, expanding mass transit, and "providing decent health care for everyone in America;" ending the use of narcotics; and "working to restore and preserve the sacredness of land, water and air." He pointedly concluded this section with his personal definition of patriotism: "For patriotism is not protecting the land of our fathers, but preserving the land for our children" (12-17).

The next section of the speech is intriguing because it paraphrased a well known folk song. It also illustrated how Chavez was not totally tied to his notes. Often he would revise his notes right up until the moment he spoke and would liberally make changes in the wording as he spoke. In his speaking notes, this section was outlined as follows:

But we know that unless  
We feel that street is our street  
That river is our river  
And this land is our land  
And not until we also own our Govt. [Government]

In the actual speech he said:

But we know that only when we feel that that street is our street, when we feel that that river is our river, and when we know that this land is our land, only then will we take care of them, and only then will we be able to deal with those problems (18).

The last third of the speech text contained two paragraphs that reflected the essence of his message to the delegates:

People are the best answer to solving their (own) problems. Until our government hears the voices of those with problems, all the people, we will never be able to solve those problems and more and more people will be turned off.

Not until we feel truly that government, this government, is our government—not until we feel truly that it's our government—will we be able to have that as an instrument to be able to meet the problems and give power to the people (19-20).

He then proposed that California provide a model for government actions that help people:

We have an example. For years and years millions of dollars were dumped into farmworker problems in California and never solved anything until we were able to get a governor in California who listened to us and gave farm workers an instrument—collective bargaining—so the workers can begin to deal with their own problems. Not until then did we start making headway (21).

Chavez thus concluded by proposing that the example in California "can be applied across this land" (22). He then referred specifically to Jerry Brown as the leader who could work for all poor people in America, and he placed Brown's name in nomination (23-25).

#### *Chavez's Notes for the Nomination Speech*

Chavez asked his biographer, Jacques Levy, to accompany him to the convention and help him prepare the speech.<sup>40</sup> Chavez and Levy met with Governor Brown the night before the speech was scheduled and decided on the issues that should be included in the text. Levy and Chavez prepared talking points and wrote them on twenty-four note cards like those Chavez typically used when he spoke.<sup>41</sup> An examination of the speech that Chavez had prepared provides further insight into the speech that he actually delivered and also elaborates on the issues that mattered the most in his fight for social justice.

The facilities at the convention were badly designed for a speaker to gain access to the podium. Chavez had to walk down a flight of stairs, go down a hall that went under the podium, and then up another flight of stairs at the back of the podium. Apparently the area was not well lit, so Chavez stumbled and dropped the cards. Unfortunately, the cards were not numbered and he did not have time to make sure they were in the proper order, so he simply picked them up and delivered the speech from the cards in that order. After the speech he

threw them into the trash at the hotel, but Levy asked for permission to retrieve them. Levy then numbered the cards in the order they were used in the speech. The cards are now housed in the Jacques Levy Papers in the Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library at Yale University.

Levy was a newspaper reporter, so he was adept at taking notes and writing clearly. His papers contain two notebooks that were devoted mainly to the preparation of the speech. They contained notes that Levy may have taken while Chavez and Brown were discussing ideas for the speech, some tentative speech outlines, and a nearly complete draft of a potential speech.<sup>42</sup> The notebooks clearly showed the evolution of Chavez's ideas and the speech outline.

By 1976, Chavez was an experienced speaker who had delivered literally hundreds of speeches to a variety of audiences. Like many experienced speakers, he used his notes as a guideline, but he also developed a series of stock statements and ideas. During each period in his career, Chavez seemed to speak on a general set of themes. Those themes changed over time. His speech to the Democratic National Convention was really a snapshot of the issues that were important to Chavez in 1976. Other speeches by Chavez during this period would contain the same ideas and often the same wording.<sup>43</sup> Once Chavez dropped his cards and got them out of order, he may have chosen to rely on tried and true language rather than attempt to make sense of the cards.

He also felt that it was crucial to speak to an audience in an extemporaneous manner and not read to them. He strongly believed that reading a speech to workers was an insult to them. He carefully analyzed his audience and occasion, but he was spontaneous as he spoke. The cards would contain brief notes a sentence or two long. He would then elaborate on the ideas on the cards. In many cases, he simply ignored his notes. Here are some examples of the kinds of brief passages that were written on cards for this speech:

We need to give workers a voice.  
Let them be creative at the work.

And for all those years we were saying what we needed. But our Govt [Government] would not hear us.

But when government responded to what we knew we needed—Legislation to provide for collective bargaining for farm wss [workers]

We began to solve our own problems  
Without a dime handed out to a single f/w [farmworker]

At times his notes served as a reminder to him to say or do a certain thing:

[Say] Something about workers input to end drudgery

Give voice  
Use imagination

### Transition intro—ownership

There are times when he ignored the ideas on the notes. For example, on consecutive cards prepared for the nomination speech, he had written:

Strive to represent those who won't vote  
Because frustration leads non-violence to violence  
Not afraid to challenge powerful private economic institutions.

Even though he prepared those notes and they seemed to be comments fitting for the audience and occasion, he did not use them.

At times the cards contained either one short sentence or just a word or two. For example, three cards in a row contained the following brief references:

Men, women, children who harvest crops  
Women's rights  
Minorities rights

These brief notes provided Chavez with ideas. As an experienced speaker, he was able to speak with feeling to the audience and to elaborate on the ideas suggested by the notes. Because many of the beliefs had been expressed in other speeches and because the ideas were such a crucial part of his beliefs, it was easy for Chavez to use those phrases as arguments and to fill them out as he spoke in an extemporaneous manner to the audience.

Levy's notebooks offer a great deal of insight into Chavez's ideas and speech development. By reading the notebooks, one can see the stages through which the speech evolved: the brainstorming of ideas between Chavez and Brown, the evolution of outlines, the writing out of key phrases, and even an attempt to write the text of the speech. In many respects, the notebooks are interesting because they provide a catalog of the ideas that Chavez chose not to use in his speech. Unfortunately, it is not clear why certain messages were chosen and others were not.

Interestingly, the first item in the notebooks was a nearly complete speech text. It's almost as though Levy tried to write a text of the speech before he and Chavez met with Governor Brown. The draft shows that Levy and Chavez were aware of the traditional expectations and forms of a nomination speech. That potential text began in a more traditional manner for a convention nomination speech:

Sisters and Brothers  
I bring you greetings from the men, women, and children who toil in the fields & harvest the food you eat. I bring you greetings from the richest of the rich in spirit but the poorest of the poor in worldly possessions.  
For the first time in the history of this country they have the opportunity to place in nomination a candidate for President of the United States.

The text then outlines how farm workers have been denied the basic rights of other workers: the right to organize, the right to vote in secret ballot elections for a union of their choice, and the right to collective bargaining (denied in every state but California). Then, unlike the final speech, the message praised Jerry Brown, though it did not use his name, for his actions, again reflecting the conventions of a nomination speech. It was more of a partisan political message:

But the man I place in nomination has ended that.

For our governor understands that frustration and despair breed violence while hope and opportunity lead to peace & progress.

He understands how the inability to find a job destroys the spirit & how welfare bureaucrats shed individuals of their self respect.

He knows that work is a cornerstone to man's dignity. And there is much meaningful work to be done.

Although the appeal for meaningful work appeared in the actual speech, references to Brown and his accomplishments disappeared and Chavez and the workers became the voice asserting the need for jobs. There was also no mention of welfare or violence in his convention address.

The message praised Brown for his efforts in solving unemployment in inner cities, working to protect and improve the environment, striving to improve the lives of children, working for decent health care for everyone, opposing "squandering our resources on military hardware" that add nothing to the nation's security, trusting people to do what is best for society and themselves, and providing a meaningful life for all people. The incomplete draft message ended with this thought:

Violence & violent weapons cannot bring peace. Fear is not a basis for building a peaceful world.

Peace can only be preserved on a foundation of justice & opportunity, on a base of sacrifice & helping others.

This would not have been the conclusion of the speech, but the draft raised some intriguing questions. It is interesting to note that Chavez did not use many of the ideas in the proposed text, even though that version of the speech would have better met the expectations of the audience and occasion.

Another phrase offered an excellent overview of the union's view of Brown:

We judge people by what they've done and Governor Brown's record has shown his commitment. A man's acts reveal what he is. We've experienced Brown's real commitment through his actions and that's why we nominate him.

Many of the ideas in the notes were core beliefs that were stated in Chavez's speeches throughout his career. It was surprising that these ideas did not appear in the convention speech.

### Conclusion

Cesar Chavez's speech nominating Jerry Brown reflected his belief in the power of public address to create change in society by informing and educating people. Chavez believed that the job of a speaker was to make people understand problems—to educate them. Once the public understood problems, they would then take action to solve them. He spoke often in an attempt to spread his ideas on how to improve the lives of the poor and oppressed. His message was remarkably consistent on all occasions. The fact that his speech in nominating Jerry Brown violated the expectations of the audience and occasion would have been of little concern to Chavez. His goal was to create change in society, and he was provided a major venue in which to deliver his message. The message he presented was vintage Cesar Chavez.

Richard J. Jensen and John C. Hammerback state that Chavez's ceremonial addresses "present Chavez's humane vision of the world." The speeches "give the reader unique insight into Chavez and his ideas, embodying what was most crucial to him and to the union, offering an image of Chavez at the most vulnerable times of his life, at times when he was most open to feeling and expressing his emotions."<sup>44</sup>

Chavez's speech nominating Jerry Brown captured his humanity, his attempt to convince the Democratic Party and, indeed, all citizens of the United States, that they should be concerned about the downtrodden and that they should work to improve the lives of all Americans. His message called upon politicians and the government to facilitate the ability for people to make their own decisions and to become a vital, positive force in society. The speech may have not succeeded in convincing delegates to the Democratic National Convention to nominate Jerry Brown, but it provided one of those rare moments when political leaders were presented with a clear message asking them to come together in the aid of all of humanity.

Chavez did not expect his audience to make the changes he asked on the basis on one speech. But the speech was a major opportunity to speak to politically powerful people who could help create change. Chavez felt that it was inevitable that those leaders would unite with other groups in society to change American society. Unfortunately, those changes did not come about in Chavez's lifetime and are still being discussed today.

The farmworkers had a powerful advocate in the Governor of California. Chavez hoped that the rest of the country would follow Brown's lead. The workers appreciated Brown's support and the opportunity to use his support as a potential vehicle to convince others. In Levy's notebook there is the following salutation: "To Governor Brown who opened a door so long kept locked and gave farmworkers a voice(?) in their own destiny."<sup>45</sup> It is not clear where the salutation would be used, but it offered a summary of Chavez's view—that the role of government and politicians was to open doors and give people a voice. Only then will they truly become humans who can live up to their potential. It certainly was a worthwhile goal and a message that is still powerful today.

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*Notes*

1 Agnew had been charged with extortion, tax fraud, bribery, and conspiracy during the time he held political office in Maryland and during his years as vice-president. His resignation was part of a plea bargain to avoid jail.

2 The rules had been changed after protests at the conventions in 1964, 1968, and 1972.

3 For more information on the Carter campaign, see: Jules Witcover, *Marathon: The Pursuit of the Presidency 1972-1976* (New York: Viking Press, 1977); and Martin Schram, *Running for President, 1976: The Carter Campaign* (New York: Stein and Day, 1977).

4 Brown made two more unsuccessful attempts for the Democratic nomination in 1980 and 1992. He also ran unsuccessfully for the U.S. Senate in 1982. In 1988 he was chosen Chairman of the California Democratic Party. He served as Mayor of Oakland (1999-2007) and Attorney General of California (2007-2011) before being re-elected Governor of California in 2010.

5 "Carter Wins Democratic Nomination for President at Convention by Wide Margin," *New York Times*, July 15, 1976, 24.

6 "Harmonious Democrats Rally Behind Carter," *Congressional Quarterly Weekly Report* 34 (July 17, 1976): 3.

7 "Harmonious Democrats Rally Behind Carter," 3. Burke was the first African-American woman from the west coast to serve in Congress (1973-1980). She was a member of the California State Assembly (1967-1973), a member of the Board of Regents of the University of California, and a Los Angeles County Supervisor (1992-2008).

8 Edwards endorsed Brown after Carter had enough electoral votes to be assured of the nomination. As a southern governor he did not want to openly oppose another southern governor. Edwards was elected to several terms as governor of Louisiana. Throughout his career, he was accused of questionable and often illegal practices. In 2001 he was convicted and sentenced to ten years in prison for racketeering, extortion, money laundering, mail fraud, and wire fraud.

9 Jerry Brown, "Cesar Chavez Stories," ARC 11, ABC News, Reel 203, p. 2. Transcripts of archival footage (ARC) were furnished to the author and John C. Hammerback from materials collected for a documentary on Chavez's life, "The Fight in the Fields: Cesar Chavez and the Farmworkers Movement." The film's producers, Rick Tejada-Flores and Rey Telles, transcribed tapes and provided photocopies of the transcriptions.

10 Susan Ferriss and Ricardo Sandoval, *The Fight in the Fields: Cesar Chavez and the Farmworkers Movement* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & Company, 1997), 193-194.

11 There were other groups involved, including the Nixon administration, who encouraged the Teamsters to eliminate the UFW.

12 Ferriss and Sandoval, *The Fight in the Fields*, 189.

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13 Chavez quoted in Jacques E. Levy, *Cesar Chavez: Autobiography of La Causa* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1975), 528.

14 Chavez, quoted in Levy, *Cesar Chavez*, 528.

15 Ferriss and Sandoval, *The Fight in the Fields*, 194-195.

16 Edmund G. Brown, Jr., quoted in Levy, *Cesar Chavez*, 534.

17 For Chavez's justification for the proposition, see Cesar Chavez, "Chavez: Farm Worker Initiative Is Needed to Guard Against Abuses," *Los Angeles Times*, April 8, 1976, 5-6.

18 Ferriss and Sandoval, *The Fight in the Fields*, 203-209.

19 For a more detailed discussion of Chavez's life, see: John C. Hammerback and Richard J. Jensen, *The Rhetorical Career of Cesar Chavez* (College Station: Texas A&M Press, 1998), 11-23.

20 Chavez, quoted in Ronald Taylor, *Chavez and the Farm Workers* (Boston, MD: Beacon Press, 1975), 64.

21 Even though Chavez did not have a distinguished career in the Navy, the Navy has decided to name a ship after him to honor his accomplishments. The vessel was one of fourteen Lewis and Clark-Class cargo ships. The Navy named the ships after individuals who made positive contributions to the United States and the world.

22 Ferriss and Sandoval, *The Fight in the Fields*, 34; and Richard Griswold del Castillo and Richard Garcia, *Cesar Chavez: A Triumph of Spirit* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1995), 19-21.

23 Chavez, quoted in Levy, *Cesar Chavez*, 50.

24 Chavez, quoted in Cletus E. Daniel, "Cesar Chavez and the Unionization of California Farm Workers," *Labor Leaders in America*, eds. Melvyn Dubofsky and Warren Van Tine (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1987), 358.

25 Chavez, "Cesar Chavez Interview," Detroit 1980, ARC 2:48.

26 Cesar Chavez, "The Organizer's Tale," *Chicano: The Evolution of a People*, eds. Renato Rosaldo, Robert A. Calvert, and Gustav Seligmann (Minneapolis, MN: Winston Press, 1973), 298.

27 Chavez, "The Organizer's Tale," 298.

28 Nancy Padilla, transcript of an interview with Cesar Chavez, Albuquerque, NM, Dec. 7, 1981, p. 2.

29 Robert N. Bostrom, "Convention Nominating Speeches: A Product of Many Influences," *Central States Speech Journal* 11 (1960): 195.

30 Robert N. Bostrom, "'I Give You a Man'—Kennedy's Speech for Adlai Stevenson," *Speech Monographs* 35 (1968): 129.

31 Henry L. Stoddard, *It Costs To Be President* (New York: Harper & Brothers, Publishers, 1938), 320.

32 Bostrom, "Convention Nominating Speeches," 194.

33 Bostrom, "Convention Nominating Speeches," 195.

34 Robert O. Norvold, "Rhetoric as Ritual: Hubert H. Humphrey's Acceptance Address at the 1968 Democratic National Convention," *Today's Speech* 18 (1970): 34.

35 Norvold, "Rhetoric as Ritual," 34.

36 Bostrom, "Convention Nominating Speeches," 194-195.

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37 Larry David Smith and Dan Nimmo, *Cordial Concurrence: Orchestrating National Party Conventions in the Telepolitical Age* (New York: Praeger, 1991), 40-41. A prime example of a nomination speech that seemed to injure a politician's career was Bill Clinton's nomination of Michael Dukakis at the Democratic Convention in 1988. Clinton discussed the speech and reactions to it in *My Life* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2004), 339-344.

38 Henry Z. Scheele, "The Nomination of Wendell Willkie," *Today's Speech* 16 (1968): 45.

39 All of the remaining passages from Chavez's July 14, 1971 speech before the Democratic National Convention are cited with reference to paragraph numbers on the text of the speech that accompanies the essay.

40 Levy wrote one of the earliest biographies, *Cesar Chavez*.

41 Personal interview with Jacques Levy, August 12, 1999. For in-depth studies of Chavez's rhetoric the reader should consult the writings of John C. Hammerback and Richard J. Jensen. Those writings include: John C. Hammerback and Richard J. Jensen, *The Rhetorical Career of Cesar Chavez*; Richard J. Jensen and John C. Hammerback, *The Words of Cesar Chavez* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2002); John C. Hammerback, "The Rhetorical Worlds of Cesar Chavez and Reies Tijerina," *Western Journal of Speech Communication* 44 (1980), 166-176; John C. Hammerback and Richard J. Jensen, "Ethnic Heritage as Rhetorical Legacy: The Plan of Delano," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 80 (1994), 53-70; Richard J. Jensen, Thomas R. Burkholder, and John C. Hammerback, "Martyrs for a Just Cause: The Eulogies of Cesar Chavez," *Western Journal of Communication* 67 (2003), 335-356; and John C. Hammerback, Richard J. Jensen, and Jose Angel Gutierrez, "Teaching the Truth: The Righteous Rhetoric of Cesar Chavez," in *A War of Words: Chicano Protest in the 1960s and 1970s* (Westport, CT: Greenwood, 1985), 33-52.

42 Copies of the note cards and notebooks are in possession of the author.

43 The author has a copy of notes in Chavez's handwriting for an undated speech that is virtually identical in its organization and much of its language. The speech does not have the introduction or the conclusion for the speech nominating Brown. It is impossible to tell if the speech was delivered before or after the convention, but it illustrates that Chavez used many of the same ideas in more than one speech. The original is in the United Farm Workers Papers in the Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs at Wayne State University.

44 Jensen and Hammerback, *The Words of Cesar Chavez*, 166.

45 Jacques E. Levy, Notebook #88, 1976. See Jacques E. Levy Papers, Beinecke Library, Yale University, New Haven, Connecticut. The author is in possession of a copy. It is not clear where this quote was meant to be used but it summarized Chavez's views toward Brown at this time.