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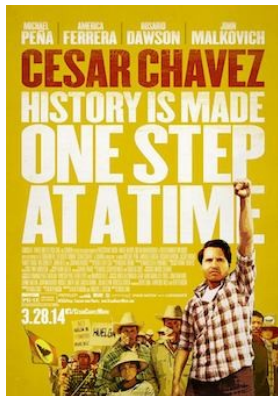
## Film Review: 'Cesar Chavez'

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A line of eager college students and community members lined up outside UCLA's James Bridges Theatre on March 7 for an advanced screening of "[Cesar Chavez](#)" directed by renowned Mexican actor Diego Luna. Organized by Professor Hector Calderon, sponsors included the Cesar Chavez Chicano Studies Department and the UCLA Chicano Studies Research Center.

It might be a bit surprising to hear that a Mexican director is the first to bring the life of the most recognized Mexican-American leader in the United States to the big screen. No, being Mexican and Mexican-American do not equate to the same experience, but Diego Luna's "Cesar Chavez" brings together a cast of talented familiar faces, including America Ferrera, Rosario Dawson, and Michael Peña for a powerful reason; to tell a story that has long been overdue.



Cesar Chavez, Canana Films

We've seen the likes of other influential social justice leaders such as Malcom X and Harvey Milk come to Hollywood and now the story of the leader who famously organized farmworkers with his slogan "Si, Se Puede" or "Yes, We Can" can be seen in theatres across the nation.

"Cesar Chavez" profiles Chavez and his role as the organizer of one of the biggest labor movements in American history. It depicts the unjust and inhumane working conditions many farmworkers faced in Delano, CA and in other agricultural cities throughout the state.

It is Chavez (Peña) along with his wife Helena (Ferrera), and Dolores Huerta (Dawson), the other co-founder of the United Farm Workers, who help a community of working class laborers fight for a higher wage and other basic working needs. The community of farmworkers organizes out of survival, as they cannot sustain their families under the harsh circumstances placed by wealthy farm owners.

The film has emotional scenes of boycotts and confrontations between the strikers and farm owners that bring intensity and empathy to the viewer. Not only do farm workers withstand verbal and physical abuse, but also conveyed is the difficulty of choice to protest particularly when farmworkers themselves have to put food on the table.

Scenes of the strikes on screen are contrasted with real news footage of the events—a stylistic technique that serves as a reminder that this isn't just a Hollywood movie. However, there is still some Hollywood magic. Many of the field scenes used in the film were actually shot in Mexico.

Although this is an emotionally heavy film, many of the characters provide comic relief as they interact with each other. Peña, who gets brownie points for actually resembling Chavez, is a jokester landing punch lines when least expected. Luna ultimately lets us in on the cultural lives of the Latino experience on the farmland.

Nested movements within the farm worker struggle also make an appearance including El Teatro Campesino, a theatre group that didactically informed farmworkers of the cause—a nice treat for Chicano/a theatre enthusiasts.

Luna not only does his research and produces a historic picture of the struggle for farmworkers' rights but he also delivers a more intimate portrait of the Mexican-American leader that you won't likely find in a history book. Weaved into this greater movement for justice is the personal challenges Chavez faced being a father to the movement and a father to his son, Fernando. Chavez struggles to connect with his teenage son who is not so involved in the politics of the time. This personal relationship gives an insight to the leader who at the end of the day was just a man with his own personal battles. At times it may be hard to remember that these leaders have a life of their own, Luna makes this central to the plot.

Although Luna captures the spirit of the movement, this film is more of a snap shot of Chavez's life. Luna does not give us all of Chavez—he does not dive into Chavez' complex politics on immigration. History buffs may also be disappointed not to see every detail of the UFW movement reflected. What Luna does is provide an overview of the farmworker struggle for those familiar with the movement and a well-crafted introduction for those not so familiar.

Luna is not adamant about "Cesar Chavez" being a story about representation. It is clear that there continues to be a lack of brown faces in Hollywood past the maid or gangster role. With his film, Luna has successfully brought a powerful side of the Latino community to the big screen and for that reason alone this film is a must see.

"Cesar Chavez" is now playing in theatres. Reach Contributing Writer Jenn Velez by [email](#). Follow [@jennvelez](#) on Twitter.