

NORMAN ROCKWELL MUSEUM

Four Freedoms Curriculum Resource

Cesar Chavez

Wrath of Grapes Speech (excerpt)

May 1986

(approx 7 minutes)

I am speaking to you about our Wrath of Grapes Boycott.

Because I believe our greatest court, the court of last resort, is the American people. And I believe that once you have taken a few moments to hear this message you will concur in this verdict along with a million other North Americans who are already committed to the largest grape boycott in history.

The worth of humans is involved here.

I see us as one family. We cannot turn our backs on each other and our future. We farm workers are closest to food production. We were the first to recognize the serious health hazards of agriculture pesticides to both consumers and ourselves.

Twenty years ago over 17 million Americans united in a grape boycott campaign that transformed the simple act of refusing to buy grapes into a powerful and effective force against poverty and injustice. Through the combined strengths of a national boycott, California farm workers won many of the same rights as other workers--the right to organize and negotiate with growers.

But we also won a critical battle for all Americans. Our first contracts banned the use of DDT, DDE, Dieldrin on crops, years before the federal government acted.

Twenty years later, our contracts still seek to limit the spread of poison in our food and fields, but we need your help once again if we are to succeed.

Consumers must be alerted now that no one can actually define or measure so called safe exposure to residual poison that accumulates in the human body as environments differ and each person's tolerance is unique.

What might be safe statistically for the average healthy 40 year old male, might irreparably harm an elderly consumer, a child, or the baby of a pregnant mother.

What we do know absolutely is that human lives are worth more than grapes and that innocent looking grapes on the table may disguise poisonous residues hidden deep inside where washing cannot reach.

And a new study shows pesticides used in growing may be responsible for the illness of over 300,000 of the nation's 4 million farm workers.

Statistics and new articles do not relate the real cost, the human anguish that originates from poisons on our food. They do not tell the tragedies I personally learn of daily.

How can I explain these chemicals to 3 year old Amalia Larios who will never walk, born with a spinal defect due to pesticide exposure of her mother.

What statistics are important to Adrian Espinoza 7 years old and dying of cancer with 8 other children--whose only source of water was polluted with pesticides.

What headlines can justify the loss of irrigator Manuel Anaya's right hand, amputated due to recurrent infection from powerful herbicides added to the water he worked with in the fields.

How do we comfort the mother of maimed and stillborn infants, the parents who watch their teenage children sicken or die.

What report can be cited at the hospital beds I visit, at growing numbers of wakes I attend.

What court will hear the case of 32 year old Juan Chaboya, murdered by deadly chemicals in the freshly sprayed fields outside San Diego. His dead body dumped by the growers 45 miles away at a Tijuana clinic. What excuse for justice will we offer his 4 children and his widow if we do nothing.

Now is the time for all of us to stand as a family and demand a response in the name of decency. Too much is at stake. This is a battle that none of us can afford to lose because it is a fight for the future of America. It is a fight we can win and it is a fight that everyone can join.

My friends, the wrath of grapes is a plague born of selfish men that is indiscriminately and undeniably poisoning us all. Our only protection is to boycott the grapes and our

only weapon is the truth. If we unite we can only triumph for ourselves, for our children and for their children.

We look forward to hearing from you soon.