

Nearly a decade after his passing, dozens of communities across the country have honored my father by naming streets, schools, parks and other public places after him. His birthday is an official holiday in five states.

Yet most people don't remember how controversial my father was when he was alive or how much he shunned the very honors that have been bestowed upon him.

He was not a great orator. He had dark Indian features and straight black hair--before it turned grey. He was short and soft-spoken, and he was easy to lose in a crowd if you didn't know who he was.

My father used to say that the organizer's job is to help ordinary people do extraordinary things. He'd say that everyone in the movement has an important contribution to make, whether it's cooking in the strike kitchen or arguing in court--and it's the organizer's job to help them make that contribution.

He also had great faith in the decency of Americans, what he called "our court of last resort." He believed that if farm workers could offer a simple, nonviolent appeal for justice, the American people would respond.

Maybe that's why he succeeded where others failed for 100 years--by challenging and overcoming the awesome power of California's richest industry.

By doing so, perhaps unwittingly, he also taught millions of Latinos and other Americans from all walks of life who never worked on a farm about the meaning of commitment and sacrifice for a cause larger than yourself. Millions of Americans can trace their social and political activism to this small brown man who never owned a house, didn't own a car and never made more than \$6,000 a year.

Even in death, my father still evokes strong feelings among friend and foe alike. Yet at a time when it seems too few people are inclined to risk their careers--much less their lives--on behalf of principle, the life of Cesar Chavez stands out with even greater moral force.

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