

Clinton awards Chavez highest civilian honor

By Herbert A. Sample
Bee Washington Bureau

WASHINGTON — Cesar Chavez, the champion of farm workers whose union has experienced a resurgence since his death last year, was awarded the nation's highest civilian honor Monday.

President Clinton, lamenting Chavez's passing 14 months ago, presented the Presidential Medal of Freedom to Chavez's widow, Helen, in an East Room ceremony.

"He was for his own people a Moses figure," Clinton said. "The farm workers who labored in the fields and yearned for respect and self-sufficiency pinned their hopes on this remarkable man who, with faith and discipline, with soft-spoken humility and amazing inner strength, led a very courageous life."

The medal — awarded for public or private work on behalf of the

Please see MEDAL, back page, A10

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Medal: UFW undergoing 'rejuvenation'

Continued from page A1

national interests of the United States, world peace, or cultural and social endeavors — was presented to eight others as well, including former Rep. Barbara Jordan of Texas, syndicated political cartoonist Herbert Block and House Republican leader Bob Michel of Illinois.

Chavez, a World War II veteran and community organizer, founded the United Farm Workers in 1962. Thus began a lengthy and sometimes popularly supported effort to improve the pay and working conditions of farm workers, most of them in California.

The union won many victories and Chavez became a cause celebre for many Democratic Party and liberal activists even as he was loathed by many Republicans and farmers.

Chavez, a follower of the nonviolent tactics of Mohandas Gandhi and Martin Luther King Jr., was famous for hunger strikes as well as his calls for boycotts of California table grapes in the mid-1960s and in the 1980s, which remain in effect today.

He was also the chief sponsor of 1975 legislation that granted farm workers the right to organize into unions and established the state Agricultural Labor Relations Board to enforce the law.

But the 1980s were difficult for the union as it lost organizing elections and could count few friends among successive governors, who appointed members of the ALRB whom the union accused of trying to throttle its efforts.

Since Chavez's death at the age of 66, however, the union has refocused its attention on field organizing, said Chavez's son-in-law, Arturo Rodriguez, the current UFW president.

"Since that time, we've seen a sense of rejuvenation, you might say, of the movement, a sense of recommitment on people's parts," said Rodriguez, 45. He cited victories in six recent organizing elections — some by large margins that surprised farmers.

Farmers' representatives were reluctant to talk about Chavez's award, but Bruce Obbink, president of the California Table Grape Commission, acknowledged that Chavez was responsible for improving the union rights of the state's farm workers.

"If it were not for Cesar Chavez, there would not be an Agricultural Labor Relations Act, and that is the act that encourages the unionization of farm workers," Obbink said. "It is his act, he got it implemented. . . . No one can take that away from him."

Looking on as Clinton presented the medal to Helen Chavez was Sen. Edward Kennedy, D-Mass., the brother of the late Robert Kennedy, who during

THE LOCAL ANGLE

Emotional tribute by Serna

President Clinton was not alone in honoring Cesar Chavez on Monday. Sacramento Mayor Joe Serna Jr. also got into the act, by hosting a luncheon paying tribute to the late labor leader.

In an emotional speech, Serna said he was proud that Sacramento had become the nation's first major city to create a paid municipal holiday on Chavez's birthday.

"I have spent most of my career around well-educated, successful people," Serna said, citing his years as a local politician and professor at California State University, Sacramento. "Yet the truly important lessons in life that I learned . . . came from a man who didn't have a college degree."

"His formal education ended after the eighth grade. He didn't own a house or a car. . . . At no time did his annual 'salary' exceed \$5,000."

"His name was Cesar Chavez. And if it wasn't for him, I wouldn't be mayor of Sacramento today. I came from the United Farm Workers. Cesar and his union are my roots."

"Cesar's greatest monument . . . is to be found in the courage to work for change that he sowed in his own people and millions of Americans."

About 40 guests, including Police Chief Arturo Venegas Jr. and Councilman Sam Pannell, attended the luncheon at El Novillero Restaurant.

— Edgar Sanchez

his 1968 presidential campaign called Cesar Chavez "one of the heroic figures of our times."

Kennedy was there for a second reason. His brother-in-law, Robert Sargent Shriver, also received a Medal of Freedom for his work on behalf of the Peace Corps, Head Start, Foster Grandparents, the Job Corps and many other programs. Shriver's daughter, Maria, and his son-in-law, Arnold Schwarzenegger, also were on hand for the ceremony.

Jordan, the first African American elected to the Texas state Senate and the first African American woman elected to Congress from the Deep South, "has been the most outspoken moral voice of the American political system" for 20 years, Clinton said.



THE WHITE HOUSE

Monday, August 8, 1994

The Recipients

HERBERT BLOCK

CESAR E. CHAVEZ
(Posthumously)

ARTHUR FLEMMING

JAMES GRANT

DOROTHY IRENE HEIGHT

BARBARA JORDAN

JOSEPH LANE KIRKLAND

ROBERT H. MICHEL

ROBERT SARGENT SHRIVER

*Medal of Freedom Citation
to*

HERBERT BLOCK

Combining humor, satire, and an incisive wit, Herbert Block, better known by his pen name Herblock, has endowed editorial pages with his skilled artistry for nearly half a century. His political cartoons continue to enliven the minds and tweak the sensibilities of millions of Americans. Usually selecting his targets from among the powerful of Washington, every President since Herbert Hoover has known the sting of Herblock's pen. He instills in our Nation's leaders a dose of humility, reminding all of us that public service is a privilege.

Medal of Freedom Citation
to

CESAR E. CHAVEZ
(Posthumously)

With few material possessions, but guided by his parents' steady example, his Catholic faith, the lessons of Gandhi, and an unshakable belief in justice, Cesar Chavez brought about much needed change in our country. An agricultural worker himself since childhood, he possessed a deep personal understanding of the plight of migrant workers, and he labored all his years to lift their lives. As the leader of United Farm Workers of America, he faced formidable, often violent opposition with dignity and nonviolence. And he was victorious. Cesar Chavez left our world better than he found it, and his legacy inspires us still.

Medal of Freedom Citation
to

ARTHUR FLEMMING

The highest attributes of Government service are clearly evident in the brilliant career of Arthur Flemming. Serving every President from Franklin Roosevelt to Ronald Reagan, he is a proven resource of astute intelligence and steadfast loyalty. On the first two Hoover Commissions, he strove to renew and reinvigorate established principles of governmental power and responsibility. From his role as Secretary of Health, Education, and Welfare to his landmark efforts as Chairman of the Commission on Civil Rights, he consistently challenged the status quo. He not only sought health care reform, but he also summoned our Nation to uphold its promise of equality. Arthur Flemming has selflessly labored for decades to make American Government more effective and efficient. A grateful Nation thanks him.

Medal of Freedom Citation
to

JAMES GRANT

Recognizing that our children are our most important resource and most profound responsibility, James Grant has devoted his life to making the world a better place for its youth. He has proven to be a compassionate and visionary executive director at UNICEF, teaching us the disastrous effects of poverty, population growth, and environmental degradation upon the vulnerable and dispossessed children of our world. Under his leadership, UNICEF has fought to reduce disease, malnutrition, disability, and illiteracy on a global scale. His wise stewardship has pointed the way toward a future in which these adversities may no longer threaten our children. James Grant continues to create hope and opportunity where there was once only despair, earning our eternal gratitude and ensuring a brighter tomorrow for our world.

Medal of Freedom Citation
to

DOROTHY IRENE HEIGHT

Dorothy Height has spent a lifetime providing leadership in the struggle to make the promise of equality a reality for people around the world. Beginning as a civil rights advocate in the 1930s, she soon gained prominence through her tireless efforts to promote interracial schooling, to register and educate voters, and to increase the visibility and status of women in our society. She has labored to provide hope for inner-city children and their families, and she can claim responsibility for many of the advances made by women and African Americans over the course of this century. For helping our Nation to more accurately reflect the noble principles on which it was founded, we honor Dorothy Height.

Medal of Freedom Citation
to

BARBARA JORDAN

Teaching by deed, as well as by word, Barbara Jordan has dramatically articulated an enduring standard of morality in American politics. Guided by an unshakable faith in the Constitution, she insists that it is the sacred duty of those who hold power to govern ethically and preserve the rule of law. As the first African American woman elected to the Texas State Senate, her conspicuous abilities led her to the United States Congress, where her brilliant oratory and meticulous judgment earned her lasting respect. She continues her life's work as teacher, explaining and analyzing complex issues of moral responsibility in politics and imbuing the leaders of tomorrow with the ability to follow her formidable lead.

Medal of Freedom Citation
to

JOSEPH LANE KIRKLAND

Lane Kirkland is a hero of the modern labor movement—a man who has spent his life forging solidarity among the men and women whose sweat and toil have built our world. Ever resolute in his quest to enhance opportunities for working people, he has tirelessly worked to strengthen democracy and to further the cause of human rights. During the Cold War, his vital assistance to the Solidarity movement in Poland spurred the forces of freedom toward victory in Eastern Europe, just as his guidance here at home helped to renew and fortify the American economy. As a people, we are indebted to Lane Kirkland for his talented leadership efforts as an advocate for unity and social justice.

Medal of Freedom Citation
to

ROBERT H. MICHEL

Demonstrating loyal devotion to our country, Bob Michel has worked ceaselessly to move our Nation forward. After valiant Army service during World War II, he chose to serve his community and country in the Congress, earning the trust of his constituents, election after election for nearly four decades. Raising his voice, sometimes in song, but always in the spirit of creative compromise and cooperation, he has won the enduring respect of his colleagues on Capitol Hill and of the nine Presidents with whom he has served. He retires as House Minority Leader, leaving a history of legislative victories that often broke gridlock in times of crisis. America thanks him for demonstrating the highest standards of public service, putting the interests of the Nation ahead of his own.

Medal of Freedom Citation
to

ROBERT SARGENT SHRIVER

Robert Sargent Shriver has not only shared, but shaped, the action and passion of his times. It was Sarge Shriver's energy, persuasion, and leadership that made the goals of the Peace Corps attainable—that living reminder that the essence of American power is not might of arms, but constancy of ideals and perseverance of effort. That so much endures with his indelible stamp both stuns and invigorates: Head Start, VISTA, Foster Grandparents, Legal Services, the Job Corps, and more. He released a torrent of creative energy—from Special Olympic athletes to Head Start students to National Service pioneers. "Serve, serve, serve," Sargent Shriver told Americans, "because in the end, it will be the servants who save us all." His service has been our legacy of hope.

THE PRESIDENTIAL MEDAL OF FREEDOM

The Presidential Medal of Freedom is the highest civilian award of our Government. It is awarded by the President of the United States to those persons whom he deems to have made especially meritorious contributions to the security or national interests of the United States, to world peace, or to cultural or other significant public or private endeavors. The Medal may be awarded to citizens of other nations and may be awarded posthumously.



THE WHITE HOUSE

JUL 26 1994

Mr. Arturo F. Rodriguez

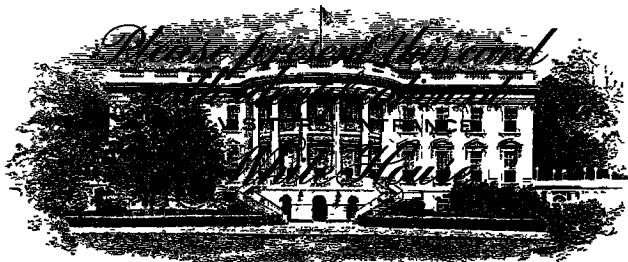


*The President and Mrs. Clinton
request the pleasure of your company
at a ceremony to be held at
The White House
on Monday, August 8, 1994
at four-thirty o'clock*

Reception to follow

*On the occasion
of the presentation of
The Presidential Medal of Freedom*

*Please respond to
The Social Secretary
The White House
at your earliest convenience
giving date of birth and social security number
(202) 456-6340*



NOT TRANSFERABLE