

Cesar Chavez Essay Contest:

How has Cesar Chavez influenced your life and what impact will his work have on your future?

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Nervous; I stood up and examined the classroom before me to see my white peers staring back at me. It was 2010 and my third grade teacher asked me to stand as a part of a demonstration in order to portray what our classroom would be like if it were not for integration. Moving to a predominantly white southern community as a young Puerto Rican girl forced me to be aware of my presence. It meant questioning what others saw when they saw me. This was enhanced by not seeing my Latina likeness in anyone else; I was “other.” Biased and stereotypical paradigms of Latino Americans perpetuated throughout pop culture distorted the perception of my multifaceted, and beautiful ethnicity. Our narratives always consisted of violence, exploitation, and plight but never any of aspiration and ambition. However, coming to learn about Cesar Chavez provided me with a singular glimpse of representation. His contributions provided a foundation for more opportunities, voices to be heard and journeys to be told.

Cesar embodies an uncommon yet transformational and everlasting legacy he left for individuals around the world. I aspire to reflect his commitment to leading campaigns against racial and economic inequities within my own public service trajectory. In my second year at Agnes Scott, I began the process for my research study that seeks to understand perceived academic resilience and stress among Deferred Action for Childhood Arrival recipients. The following year I organized *Voting For Your Voz*, a National Voter Registration Day event to encourage my local Latino community to take part in our democratic process. The focus on Latin American populations led me to reflect on the significance of these issues in my own life, the role of my Puerto Rican heritage within myself, and how I will uplift my own community that grapples with the impacts of inequitable policy. One step I’ve made from this introspection is becoming a recipient of the Obama-Chesky Voyagers Scholarship. Through this opportunity, I am partnering with a Puerto Rican non-profit organization that addresses the displacement of Puerto Rican communities through disaster relief and affordable housing. As a result of this

partnership, I will take part in restoring a school in addition to facilitating skill-builder opportunities that will be executed as a part of this development, for the local community to engage with the school. I have a role in combating an overlooked issue that displaces my community, my family, and Puerto Rican youth to come.

This work has required a degree of discipline that has led me to sacrifice comfort. However, I reflect on Cesar's selflessness when he resigned from the security of a job that provided a consistent source of income to found the National Farm Workers Association, with nothing but his family and what little money they had. This shared dedication has taught me the weight behind *si se puede* and motivates me to continue the fight for the changes that my elders sacrificed for.