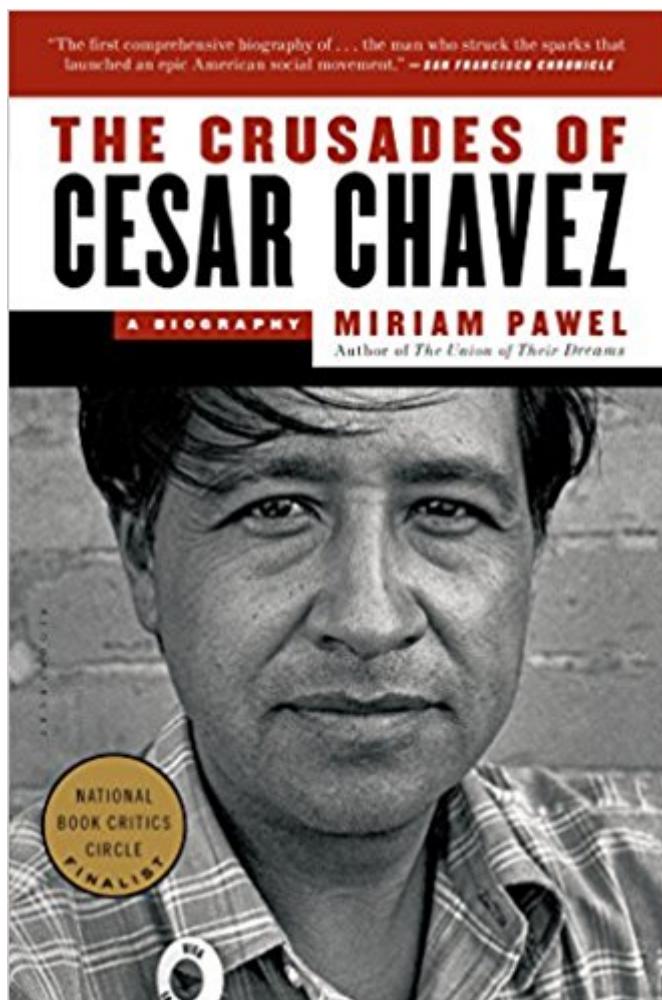


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The Crusades Of Cesar Chavez: A Biography



Synopsis

Cesar Chavez founded a labor union, launched a movement, and inspired a generation. He rose from migrant worker to icon, becoming one of the great leaders of the twentieth century. Two decades after his death, Chavez remains the most significant Latino figure in U.S. history. Yet his life story has been told only in hagiography--until now. In the first comprehensive biography of Chavez, Miriam Pawel offers a searching yet empathetic portrayal. Chavez emerges here as a visionary whose eyes were fixed on a horizon others often could not even see. He was a brilliant strategist who sometimes stumbled, and a streetwise organizer whose pragmatism was often at odds with his soaring dreams. Drawing on thousands of documents, hundreds of hours of audiotape, and scores of interviews, this superbly written life deepens our understanding of one of Chavez's most salient qualities: his profound humanity. Pawel traces Chavez's rise as he empowered the poor and disenfranchised and led farmworkers to historic victories over the agriculture industry. With compassion and compelling detail, she narrates the equally dramatic later years when Chavez's charismatic leadership devolved into a cult of personality, with heartbreaking consequences for his union. The Crusades of Cesar Chavez reveals how this unlikely American hero ignited one of the great social movements of our time--and left a legacy that resonates today, from California to the White House.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

This is Pawelâ™s second book on Chavez and the United Farm Workers. Her first book The Union

of Their Dreams: Power, Hope and Struggle in Cesar Chavezâ™s United Farm Worker Movement (2010) was a collective biography of seven UFW organizers. Chavez overshadowed the portrait of each. In this longer, more detailed narrative, focused exclusively on Chavez, it is his own shadows that come forward. Hagiography this is not. Pawel is a persistent, detail-oriented journalist and The Crusades of Cesar Chavez has raised the bar for all future tellings of his story and the story of the rise and fall of the United Farm Workers. For those schooled on textbook versions of the life of Cesar Chavez this is a disturbing nevertheless instructive read. In the past decade we have learned that Chavez was not as respected inside the Union as he was without. The farmworker movement could not have started without him, but it often succeeded in spite of him. He could be dictatorial, deceptive, and sometimes abusive. His fear, his paranoia, and the rigor of his idealism almost killed the movement he inspired. One of the major counterpoints of Pawelâ™s presentation is the increasing contrast between Chavez as public icon and Chavez as private neurotic. Chavez is not a sympathetic character in this book and that is perhaps both a strength and a weakness. Pawelâ™s extensive use of UFW board meeting minutes and tape recording transcripts of those meetings creates a strong organizational lens. This contributes to accuracy but also keeps Chavez at a distance. We are constantly examining a complicated man solely through the eyes of others. We hear only a little of Chavezâ™s private voice, his private thoughts. His Catholic faith remains in the background. His commitment to nonviolence barely examined.

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