

## Featured Artifact: Cesar Chavez Union Jacket

Era 9: Postwar United States (1945 to early 1970s)

<http://historyexplorer.americanhistory.si.edu/resource/?key=728>



**Look at the artifact presented to you. In a few sentences, respond to the following questions:**

**Describe:** Objectively describe the artifact. What do you think it is made of? What does it look like? Does it look old or new? Is it intact, or is it damaged in some way?

**Analyze:** When, where or how do you think this item was used? What kind of person may have created or used this item? What significance do you think the object held, either for the creator or the user? Do you see words or images on the artifact that connect it to others (besides the creator and user)?

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**Share your conclusions with a partner, then discuss the following:**

**Evaluate :** Justify why you came to those conclusions about the artifact. What further questions do you have about the object? Of those questions, which could you solve by observing the object in person and which would you need to solve with research?

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### Background Information

Cesar Chavez inspired a nation to seek justice for the poorest of America's laborers. A migrant worker since childhood, Cesar Chavez pledged his life to improving the lives of his fellow workers, rather than escape the stark conditions of farm labor. Inspired by the tireless conviction of Mahatma Gandhi and Martin Luther King Jr., Chavez dedicated himself to the principles of self-sacrifice and nonviolent resistance.

For decades the attempts of reformers and labor leaders to organize farm workers in America had met with failure. It was not until Cesar Chavez began organizing the predominately Latino-Californian migrant farm workers in 1962 that the first effective union was established. As founder and president of the United Farm Workers, he brought the plight of farm laborers to national consciousness. Through community organizing, strikes, marches, boycotts, and fasts, this small, dedicated union began to win better working conditions for the most downtrodden of American workers. The union continues to fight an uphill battle to provide farm workers with the benefits most Americans believe working people are entitled: a safe work place and a decent wage.

Shortly after his death in 1993, his wife, Helen Chavez, donated his black nylon union jacket to the National Museum of American History.

**After reading and considering the background information, compose a response to the following:**

**Analyze:** Address the following object-specific questions:

- What contemporary social issues do you think Chavez would take issue with if he were alive today?
- Why specifically is Chavez's jacket a particularly important symbol of his cause?

**Synthesize:** What does this object tell us about the era in which it was created, or the American experience as a whole? How would you describe the social, economic, or political climate of America during this time? What connections can you make between this object and other things that you have seen, read, or experienced?

**Analyze:** Address the following era-specific essential questions:

- How did the postwar era change the political, social, and economic climate of the United States?