

CESAR'S LAST FAST



GRADES 8-12 CLASSROOM GUIDE

USING
THIS GUIDE ▶

DISCUSSION
QUESTIONS & ▶

MEDIA LITERACY
RESOURCES ▶

SUPPLEMENTAL
RESOURCES ▶

ARTICLES AND
REVIEWS ▶

ABOUT
THE FILM ▶

POST-VIEWING
ACTIVITIES

TEACHING THE FILM:

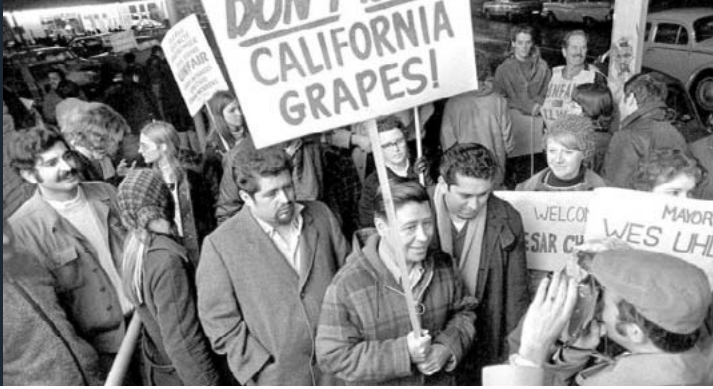
Cesar's Last Fast is a documentary film about the personal and spiritual dedication of legendary farm workers rights activist, Cesar Chavez. A class screening of the film may complement a US history, social studies or ethnic studies curriculum. Taught in conjunction with this guide, the film will empower students to think critically about the ongoing fight for the humane treatment of farm workers in California, and the meaning of sustained activism, both personally and politically. Discussion questions and supplemental materials facilitate further research into related topics such as the relationship between religion and activism, the Latino struggle for civil rights in California, and the role of the media in facilitating social and political change.

All SFFS Youth Education materials are developed in alignment with California educational standards for media literacy. SFFS Youth Education welcomes feedback and questions on all printed study materials.

Please direct all comments and queries to Keith Zwölfer, Youth Education Manager:

San Francisco Film Society Youth Education
39 Mesa Street, Suite 110 · The Presidio San Francisco, CA 94129-1025
kzwolfer@sffs.org
415.561.5040

SAN FRANCISCO
FILM SOCIETY



CLASSROOM GUIDE

ABOUT THE FILM
USING THIS GUIDE
DISCUSSION QUESTIONS & POST-VIEWING ACTIVITIES
STANDARDS ALIGNMENT
MEDIA LITERACY RESOURCES
SUPPLEMENTAL RESOURCES
ARTICLES AND REVIEWS

USING THIS GUIDE

This study guide is intended to flexibly support educators in preparing for and following up on a class screening of **Cesar's Last Fast**. Support

materials are intended to facilitate group discussion, individual and collaborative creative exercise, subject-based learning and access to resources for further investigation of material. Educators are encouraged to adapt and abridge the content as necessary to meet their unique learning objectives and circumstances.

ABOUT THE FILM

Cesar's Last Fast is a feature documentary about the private sacrifice and spiritual conviction behind Cesar Chavez's struggle for the humane treatment of America's farm workers. A panorama of Mexican American and American history, civil rights, non-violent protest tactics, the environment, labor struggles, Catholic and indigenous religious practices, this important film gives students unprecedented insight into Chavez's life and the historic farmworker movement. Featuring never before seen footage of Chavez's 1988 "Fast for Life," a 36-day act of self-imposed penance, **Cesar's Last Fast** give viewers a detailed and intimate account of Chavez' response to the resistance he faced in his all-consuming quest to stop growers from spraying pesticide on farm workers. The day-to-day realities of this water-only fast comprise the film's dramatic arc, through which the filmmakers interweave the historic events that defined the life mission of America's most inspiring Latino leader.

Richard Ray Perez (USA, 2014)
136 minutes, English, Grades 8-12

Recommended Subject Areas:

- Art/Media
- American History
- Social Studies
- Ethnic Studies

Key concepts / buzzwords:

- Activism
- Agriculture
- California
- Catholicism
- Cesar Chavez
- Civil Rights
- Labor
- Pesticides
- Racism
- Religion
- Unions



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

PRE-VIEWING TOPICS AND DISCUSSION:

Cesar's Last Fast will have a greater impact on students if they are already familiar with Cesar Chavez and his legacy. You may want to assign a brief biographic [reading](#) about Cesar Chavez, or hold a discussion that draws on knowledge students have acquired in previous classes.

Questions to consider:

- Who is Cesar Chavez and what is his legacy?
- What impact did Cesar Chavez have on the lives of farm workers in California?
- What do you think Cesar Chavez was like as a person?

You may wish to revisit these questions after students have watched the film.

POST-VIEWING DISCUSSION:

Character and Story

- 1) Who was Cesar Chavez?
 - What was his childhood like?
 - What inspired him to become an activist?
 - What impact did Cesar Chavez's work have on the lives of those around him?
 - Why did Cesar choose to fast?
- 2) Describe the people that you encountered in this film.
 - Who were the farm workers?
 - Who were the people advocating for workers' rights?
 - How did the workers and activists describe the experience of the protest and their struggle for better treatment?

WHY DID CESAR CHOOSE TO FAST?

- What risks did the workers face when they decided to take on their bosses and ask for higher wages and better treatment?
- 3) How did Cesar's family respond to his decision to fast?
 - Do you think it was difficult for Cesar's family to watch him sacrifice himself?
 - When a parent is deeply committed to a cause, what are the effects felt by his or her children and family?
 - How would you feel if your parents were involved in a project that was sometimes more important than your family?
 - Do you think Cesar's family was proud of his work?
 - What are the positive effects of having a family member who is deeply committed to something?
 - 4) Who were the landowners and bosses of the farms?
 - What was their perspective on the farming business?
 - Why did they treat the workers as they did?
 - Why did they see Cesar as a threat?

Context

- 1) What is a union?
 - Why was unionization important for these workers?
 - Why was the formation of the United Farm Workers (UFW) such a great victory?
 - What strategies did the workers use before and after the formation of the union to advocate for fair treatment?
 - Who were the Teamsters and how did they undermine the gains achieved by the UFW?
- 3) What role did racism and discrimination play in the struggle between workers and their bosses?



- What was the National Labor Relations Act of 1935? Why did it exclude farm workers and domestics?
- What is the relationship between race, poverty and immigration in the history of farm work in the United States?
- What connections do you see between the movement for the civil rights of African Americans in the deep south and the struggle for the fair treatment of farm workers in California?

3) What did fasting mean to Cesar Chavez?

- Why did he choose to fast instead of engaging in another form of protest?
- What are the religious connotations and implications of a fast?
- What role did Catholicism, Native American religion, and spirituality play in Cesar's activism?

4) What is the relationship in this film between the Catholic Church and the struggle for worker's rights?

- In what specific instances did the Catholic religion add power to the movement for worker's rights?
- Does the connection between the Church and the workers' struggle remind you of any other social justice movements?
- Why are churches and religious groups powerful allies in social justice work?
- Do you think that other community organizations would provide as strong a support system? Why or why not?

5) Why was Cesar Chavez concerned about the use of pesticides in the fields?

- What is it like for workers in the fields when they are sprayed with pesticides?
- Why do we use pesticides? Are there alternatives?
- What effect does pesticide use have on the communities who live near the farms?
- How do pesticides affect the environment and the

health of the land?

- How can we be responsible consumers and avoid produce that is picked in inhumane and dangerous conditions?

Style and Message/Reading the Film for Media Literacy

1) How did the filmmakers show the passage of time in **Cesar's Last Fast**?

- The film stretches across several decades. What signifiers indicated where you were in the story?
- How did the filmmakers weave together the past, present, and future of the farm workers' movement?

2) **Cesar's Last Fast** relies heavily on archival footage, or film and video footage that was shot long before this film project started.

- What challenges do you think filmmakers face when they use footage that was shot a long time ago?
- How did these filmmakers connect the archival footage into a coherent story? What technical and narrative techniques hold this film together?

3) How did this film make you feel?

- Were you moved by the story of Cesar Chavez and the United Farm Workers?
- Do you support their movement after watching this film?
- What is the legacy of Cesar Chavez's activism?
- What conditions do fruit pickers work under today?
- What remains to be done in the long struggle to get fair and humane treatment for farm workers?
- How do you think the filmmakers want you to respond to this film?



POST-VIEWING ACTIVITIES:

1) Research the produce that you consume, and create a short report, diagram, or film to illustrate where it comes from.

Look on the packaging of fruits or vegetables from the grocery store to find the name of a farm or a company. Look up that farm or company online to determine its location. See if you can get additional information about how many workers are at the farm, what kinds of pesticides they use on their crops, and how much fruit and vegetables they produce.

You might also ask a vendor at your local farmer's market about where the produce comes from and what is the experience of workers in the field.

Document your process with written notes, a short article, an illustration, or even an animated film (fruits and maps make great animation subjects!).

2) Journaling Activity: Reflect on the film.

Why is it important to watch films and tell stories about American history?

What did you learn from watching *Cesar's Last Fast*?

What can you do as a young person living in California to help improve the conditions of farm workers?

3) Research the history of unions in the United States.

When were unions first formed and what was their purpose?

How did the role and the meaning of a union evolve throughout American history?

What do unions advocate for today and whom do they represent?

Which industries do unions historically and currently represent?

What are the greatest achievements of unions and what have been some of their failures?

Create a historical timeline of the achievements and failures of unions in various industries throughout the

20th and 21st centuries.

4) Compare a narrative and a documentary film.

Watch the 2014 narrative film *Cesar Chavez* and compare its structure, message and content to the documentary *Cesar's Last Fast*.

How do the films differ? How are they similar?

How do you think the goals and intentions of the filmmakers differ? Compare and contrast their approaches to telling Cesar's story.

What differences do you notice between the documentary and narrative formats? What are the strengths of each form?

Write a review that compares the content, style and message of the two films.

WHY IS IT
IMPORTANT TO
WATCH FILMS
AND TELL STORIES
ABOUT AMERICAN
HISTORY?



California Media Literacy Standards Addressed In This Lesson:

- **Grade 8:** Standard 1.9 Interpret and evaluate the various ways in which visual image makers (e.g., graphic artists, illustrators, news photographers) communicate information and affect impressions and opinions.
- **Grades 9 & 10:** Standard 1.14 Identify the aesthetic effects of a media presentation and evaluate the techniques used to create them (e.g., compare Shakespeare’s Henry V with Kenneth Branagh’s 1990 film version).
- **Grades 9 & 10:** Standard 1.2 Compare and contrast the ways in which media genres (e.g., televised news, news magazines, documentaries, online information) cover the same event.
- **Grades 11 & 12:** Standard 1.1 Recognize strategies used by the media to inform, persuade, entertain, and transmit culture (e.g., advertisements; perpetuation of stereotypes; use of visual representations, special effects, language); Standard 1.3 Interpret and evaluate the various ways in which events are presented and information is communicated by visual image makers (e.g., graphic artists, documentary filmmakers, illustrators, news photographers).

For more information about media literacy standards in your state, visit:

- MediaLiteracy.com: resources for advancing media education, United States Standards for media literacy education. <http://www.medialiteracy.com/standards.htm>
- Frank W Baker’s guide to State Standards Which Include Elements of Media Literacy. http://frankwbaker.com/state_lit.htm

Common Core Standards Addressed In This Lesson:

This lesson addresses the English and Language Arts standards for Reading Informational Texts grades 8-12. Additional specific standard applications are listed below:

- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.11-12.2 Determine two or more themes or central ideas of a text and analyze their development over the course of the text, including how they interact and build on one another to produce a complex account; provide an objective summary of the text.
- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.11-12.3 Analyze the impact of the author’s choices regarding how to develop and relate elements of a story or drama (e.g., where a story is set, how the action is ordered, how the characters are introduced and developed).
- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.11-12.3 Analyze a complex set of ideas or sequence of events and explain how specific individuals, ideas, or events interact and develop over the course of the text.



MEDIA LITERACY RESOURCES

SCREENING WITH MEANING

We live in a world where technology mediates a large portion of human interaction and the exchange of information. Every projected image, every word published on a page or a website, and every sound from a speaker reaches its audience through the medium, through the language of the device. The ability to parse the vast array of media messages is an essential skill for young people, particularly in a mainstream commercial culture that targets youth as a vulnerable, impressionable segment of the American marketplace. Most students already have a keen understanding of the languages different media use and the techniques they employ to inspire particular emotions or reactions, but they often lack the skill or awareness to fully deconstruct the messages they continuously receive.

Analysis of a media message—or any piece of mass media content—can best be accomplished by first identifying its principal characteristics:

- (1) Medium: the physical means by which it is contained and/or delivered
- (2) Author: the person(s) responsible for its creation and dissemination
- (3) Content: the information, emotions, values or ideas it conveys
- (4) Audience: the target audience to whom it is delivered
- (5) Purpose: the objectives of its authors and the effects of its dissemination.

Students who can readily identify these five core characteristics will be equipped to understand the incentives at work behind media messages, as well as their potential consequences. Media literacy education empowers students to become responsible consumers, active citizens and critical thinkers.

CORE CONCEPTS OF MEDIA ANALYSIS

MEDIUM	<p>All Media Is Constructed.</p> <p>How is the message delivered and in what format? What technologies are used to present the message? What visual and auditory elements are used? What expectations do you bring to the content, given its medium and format?</p>
AUTHOR	<p>All Media Is Constructed by Someone.</p> <p>Who is delivering the message? Who originally constructed the message? What expectations do you have of the content, given its author(s)?</p>
CONTENT	<p>All Media Is A Language.</p> <p>What is the subject of the media message? What information, values, emotions or ideas are conveyed by the media content? What tools does the author employ to engage the viewer and evoke a response? To what extent did the content meet your expectations, given the format/author?</p>
AUDIENCE	<p>All Media Messages Reach an Audience.</p> <p>Who receives the message? For whom is the message intended? What is the public reaction to the media content and/or its message? What is your reaction to the media content and/or its message? How might others perceive this message differently? Why?</p>
PURPOSE	<p>All Media Messages Are Constructed for a Reason.</p> <p>Why was the message constructed? Who benefits from dissemination of the message? How? To what extent does the message achieve its purpose? What effect does the message have on the audience it reaches, if any?</p>



THE NON-FICTION FILM WHAT IS A DOCUMENTARY?

A documentary is a film whose goal is to capture truth, fact or reality as seen through the lens of the camera. But there are many kinds of documentaries, and not everyone's idea of truth is the same. The Scottish filmmaker John Grierson coined the term "documentary" in 1926 to describe American filmmaker Robert Flaherty's romanticized culture studies, but nonfiction filmmaking dates back to the earliest motion picture reels.

The definition of documentary expanded as filmmakers experimented with technology and the goals of nonfiction. Avant-garde documentarians, like Dziga Vertov in the 1920s, believed that the mechanical eye of the camera gave a truer image of reality than the human eye and pointed his lens at newly industrialized cities. Leni Reifenstahl's propaganda films from Nazi Germany used the nonfiction form to convey a political message, a slanted truth. The international cinema vérité or observational movements of the 1960s attempted to remove authorship from the documentary. The observational filmmaker hovered like a "fly on the wall" watching the world without commentary. Modern documentaries often seek to raise awareness about a social, environmental or political issue, guiding their audiences toward civic participation and activism.

While watching a documentary, it is important to remember the core concepts of media analysis: who made the film, for what audience and why? The nonfiction format can be deceptively subjective, as all filmmaking involves an inherent selection process: in the images that are shot, the music and narration that accompanies them and, most significantly, the way in which they are all edited together. Media literacy means always analyzing a documentary for its message and authorial intent.

A BRIEF TIMELINE OF THE DOCUMENTARY

1895 The Lumiere brothers developed the first motion picture film reels, capturing brief, unedited clips of life around them called "actualities" (e.g., *Train Arriving at the Station*)

1900-1920 Travelogue or "Scenic" films became popular, showcasing exoticised images from around the globe.

1926 John Grierson coined the term "documentary" to describe Robert Flaherty's romantic nonfiction film, *Moana*.

1929 Dziga Vertov, with the Soviet Kino-Pravda movement, released the experimental nonfiction film, *Man With a Movie Camera*.

1935 Leni Reifenstahl released *Triumph of the Will*, the infamous propaganda film that chronicled the 1934 Nazi Party Congress.

1939 John Grierson collaborated with the Canadian government to form the National Film Board of Canada, with the initial goal of creating Allied propaganda in support of the war.

1960s The cinema vérité movement began in Europe, shortly followed by "direct cinema" in the U.S. Portable cameras and sync sound allowed filmmakers to capture intimate footage with minimal intervention.

1968 The Argentine film, *La Hora de los Hornos (The Hour of the Furnaces)* opened the door to the activist cinema of the 1970s, which used film as a tool to counter capitalist and neo-colonial politics in Latin America.

1988 The US Congress mandated that the US government support the creation of independent non-commercial media, and the Independent Television Service (ITVS) was founded.

2000s The widespread use of digital cameras and editing software made the documentary medium vastly more affordable to independent and amateur filmmakers. Video sharing sites such as YouTube and Vimeo allowed amateur filmmakers to broadcast their work.

PRESENT DAY The term "documentary" has come to encompass a wide range of nonfiction cinema. Contemporary filmmakers continue to push the boundaries of truth in film and to explore new avenues and applications for the medium.



THE MAKING OF A DOCUMENTARY

Idea, Issue, Story.

Even though they are nonfiction films, most modern documentaries structure their content around a traditional story arc, with a beginning, middle and end, as well as characters, and a conclusion, theme or thesis to impart to the audience. Documentary filmmakers begin their projects with an idea or an issue that they wish to explore more deeply. Through research and planning, they develop a comprehensive plan before they begin shooting.

The Production Process.

To capture candid moments on film, modern documentary makers often leave the camera running, collecting far more footage than the final film requires. They may do this during interviews or in observational-style encounters with their subjects. To get increased access and an observational aesthetic, documentary makers often use handheld cameras and natural light, rather than staging a more formal filming environment.

Post-Production and the Documentary.

Because a documentary film relies upon candid footage, a large part of the film's construction occurs in the editing room, where you work with what you've captured. A documentary editor will sift through long interviews just to find a few phrases that will summarize the film's message. To emphasize important points and build the story, some documentaries use a voiceover,

an interview or a scripted narrative that brings candid footage together into a coherent statement. An original score can work alongside the voiceover to unify the footage and shape the mood of the film. Audiences often underestimate the power of sound to generate an emotional response. Many documentaries also use charts, graphs and historical footage to add context and emphasize key points.

Distribution.

Once a film is completed, the filmmaker needs to help it find its audience. Many documentaries are made independently on small budgets, but what's the point of all your work if no one hears your message? Some documentaries will be released in theaters around the country or get programmed on public or cable TV channels, but most documentary filmmakers will start by submitting their work to film festivals, in hopes of attracting distributors for the theater and television markets. Filmmakers may also make their films available online and use social media to reach their target audience.



SUPPLEMENTAL RESOURCES

The Film's Official Website:

<http://cesarslastfast.com/>

Biographical Information About Cesar Chavez:

Cesar Chavez on the UFW home page: http://www.ufw.org/_page.php?menu=research&inc=history/07.html

CA Department of Education bio on Cesar Chavez: http://chavez.cde.ca.gov/ModelCurriculum/Teachers/Lessons/Resources/Biographies/K-2_Bio.aspx

Cesar Chavez Foundation: http://chavezfoundation.org/_page.php?code=001001000000000&page_ttl>About+Cesar&kind=1

Cesar Chavez on PBS: <https://www.pbs.org/itvs/fightfields/cesarchavez.html>

Labor Unions in the United States:

History.com: Labor: <http://www.history.com/topics/labor>

Library of Congress lesson plan about labor unions: <http://www.loc.gov/teachers/classroommaterials/lessons/labor/>

PBS lesson plan: Labor Unions today: http://www.pbs.org/newshour/extra/lessons_plans/negotiation-labormangement-simulation/

Teaching Tolerance Labor Matters lesson plan: <http://www.tolerance.org/lesson/labor-matters>

2 minute animated video about what is a union: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ubIWY7nGdU>

TeachingHistory.org lesson about labor unions in cotton mills: <http://teachinghistory.org/teaching-materials/lesson-plan-reviews/25683>

Agriculture in California:

Wikipedia: CA Labor Relations Act: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/California_Agricultural_Labor_Relations_Act

CA Pesticide Act sparks protest: <http://latimesblogs.latimes.com/greenspace/2011/06/pesticides-california-invasive-species-jerry-brown.html>

Agriculture Relations Board, CA: <http://www.alrb.ca.gov/>



REVIEWS

New York Times Movie Review

By ANDY WEBSTER
 APRIL 17, 2014

"I think I know what my mission is," says the labor leader Cesar Chavez in "Cesar's Last Fast." "Righting the wrongs that were committed against workers for 100 years." Chavez (1927-1993), a founder of what became the United Farm Workers union, faced brutal odds, as this compelling documentary demonstrates.

The film frames the life of Chavez around the 36-day water-only fast he underwent in 1988 to bring attention to the impact of grape and lettuce growers' pesticides on farmworkers and their children (cancer, birth defects, he and others claimed). He saw his fast as penance for not having done enough for such laborers in the San Joaquin Valley in California. But Chavez, a tireless, charismatic organizer, had done plenty: leading striking grape workers on a protest march from Delano to Sacramento in 1966; orchestrating boycotts to raise workers' wages in the early 1970s; and, with help from Jerry Brown, California's governor at the time, pushing through the California Agricultural Labor Relations Act in 1975.

To its credit, the film doesn't ignore the factionalism that hobbled his movement; Chavez's messianic tendencies (there were other fasts, in 1968, 1970 and 1972); and his misguided espousal of the group therapy techniques of Synanon, a drug rehabilitation program that later evolved into a notorious cult.

A press secretary for Chavez, Lorena Parlee, who died in 2006, shot much of the intimate footage here; images of him as a withering bed-ridden 61-year-old are

devastating. A haggard Chavez resumed his crusade afterward, only to die five years later. Farmworkers continue to struggle.

Variety

Richard Ray Perez and Lorena Parlee co-direct a solidly inspiring portrait of the late agricultural workers' champion.

Dennis Harvey

They may be well-worn documentary subjects, but Cesar Chavez's life and works prove inspiring once again in solid docu "Cesar's Last Fast." This long-in-the-works portrait of the late agricultural workers' champion cuts between a recap of his overall career and a more detailed chronicle of the 36-day protest fast he undertook in 1988. Credited to Richard Ray Perez and co-director Lorena Parlee (who died in 2006), the film should be an attractive prospect for select broadcasters and educational outlets. Participant Media picked up U.S. distribution rights at Sundance.

At the age of 61, Chavez commenced this water-only fast (not his first) to draw attention to the dangers of pesticides to field workers and their families. Growers at the time cited lack of definitive proof that the chemicals used on crops resulted in illness or death, but the occurrence of "cancer clusters" precisely where they were used most heavily suggested that medical science would establish that link as fact soon enough.

Scenes from the attendant vigil, most of which Chavez spent bedridden in an increasingly weakened state, periodically pepper the film's overview of his high-profile activism until that point. Pic traces his



journey from migrant-farmworker family roots to his initial organizing of laborers in the early 1960s, the first widespread strikes a few years later, his breakthrough negotiating successes, his spearheading of grape and lettuce boycotts, etc.

The advocacy of his United Farm Workers union (co-founded with Dolores Huerta, a major interviewee here) was badly needed. Only agricultural and domestic workers had been specifically excluded from the 1935 National Labor Relations Act, making the two areas that made the most use of racial minorities the least regulated by law. Even more disenfranchised among the two by frequent language barriers and migratory/temporary employment, field workers performed grueling physical tasks for long hours at dirt-poor pay, often with primitive housing and no benefits whatsoever.

With local police and judges usually on the owners' side, protests were sometimes brutally (even murderously) suppressed, necessitating media exposure as a key tactic to getting the UFW's constituencies a fair hearing. When hard-won contracts expired, growers brought in armed guards, scab workers and Teamsters to disadvantage strikers trying to renew their terms. While Chavez and Co. won many battles over the years, agri-worker exploitation and mistreatment remains a huge U.S. issue, further complicated by the public hostility toward undocumented immigrants.

Pic touches only briefly on some of the personal controversies that swirled around Chavez later on, notably a period of devotion to the group therapy/religious cult Synanon that made many loyal followers question his judgment. Still, he remained a formidable figure, making his 1988 fast a national news event. After a point, doctors strongly urged him to stop before incurring permanent health damage. (He died of natural causes five years later.)

There's a strong narrative drive to the film's assembly, which tells the parallel stories primarily through a wealth of archival footage; new interviews with family members and colleagues fill in any gaps. While not necessarily the definitive cinematic account of Chavez's life or the UFW movement, "Cesar's Last Fast" provides a well-crafted, sometimes stirring encapsulation.