

Adios, Cesar Chavez ... and To Your Day, Too

04.02.26 | Linda J. Rosenthal, JD



“Just two weeks ago, cities around the country were finalizing plans for celebrations of Cesar Chavez Day” on March 31, 2026.

But in California and several other states this year – (just two days ago) – the sun rose and set instead on “Farmworkers Day.”

March 31st, the late Mr. Chavez’s birthday, is still an official state holiday with all government offices closed. But the previously scheduled memorials to the legendary California farm-labor activist and Mexican-American civil rights icon were cancelled abruptly.

Instead, the day became the commemoration of “a movement” rather than a man. And, simultaneously, public and philanthropic leaders have been busy jumpstarting the process of removing Mr. Chavez’s name and likeness from public and philanthropic spaces and places.

Bestowing public recognition and praise on worthy members of society is a lovely and quite common gesture. Sometimes, though, there are circumstances warranting termination of that honor. Occasionally, it’s members of the general public or stakeholders who lead the push.

However, that goal is rarely simple and direct. The process is generally slow, costly, and subject to various hurdles, challenges, and delays. It often requires a combination of internal investigations, community input, and [government] approval. Businesses, too, often voice objections because they will face mounting costs from changing addresses listed on business cards and websites. In many instances, there is agreement as to the need for the “renaming,” but difficulty in coming to a consensus about the selection of the new honoree.



What's notable about this Cesar Chavez news story – and worth a closer look; it's still early days – is not just the tawdry and disillusioning scandal about a larger-than-life figure. It's the lightning-speed erasure of his prominent place in the history and folklore of California and the United States. It's also the uncanny uniformity across many different jurisdictions of the designated replacement.

The Scandal Unfolds

It began with a dramatic headline on March 18, 2026. The *New York Times* ran a shocking article that exposed Cesar Chavez as a serial abuser of women and girls. In the “Me Too” era, this is – sadly – not a rare development.

What is unusual, though, is how quickly, the tide of public opinion about Mr. Chavez turned against him. The negative reaction to the news was immediate, broad-based, and unforgiving. By the next day, the fallout began and it ballooned quite spectacularly. See, for example: *California is renaming César Chávez's holiday. Now, cities are slowly erasing his name from streets* (March 19, 2026) Nadia Lathan and Nigel Duara, *Cal Matters* [“California lawmakers say they'll change the name of Cesar Chavez Holiday. Taking his name off of streets and buildings likely will take much longer” but they plan to do it.]

Within a week, the official effort to “expunge his legacy from public places” was accomplished. California's lawmakers had voted unanimously to change the March 31st state holiday to Farmworkers Day. Governor Gavin Newsom immediately (and privately with no fanfare) signed into law Assembly Bill 2156 which was effective immediately. See *César Chávez Day is no more. California lawmakers officially scrap the holiday name* (March 26, 2026) Nadia Lathan, *CalMatters*. See also *California Renames Cesar Chavez Holiday After Sex Abuse Revelations* (March 26, 2026) Laurel Rosenhall, *The New York Times*.

A Hero Dethroned

These were startling developments concerning one of the most consequential and admired figures in modern California history: indeed, in the larger story of the American labor movement. In Cesar Chavez's lifetime as well as after his death in 1993, his stature and influence as a hero was undeniable.

“Leaders up and down California, many of whom were personally inspired by his life's work, are grappling with multiple allegations of sexual assault by César Chávez.” See *California leaders lionized César Chávez. Now, they face a reckoning with his past* (March 18, 2026) Ryan Sabalow et al, *Cal Matters*.

For decades, the co-founder of the United Farm Workers had become “intertwined with state and national Democratic politics.” Joe Biden “had a bust of Chávez inside the White House.” Gavin Newsom told reporters that “a black-and-white photo of Chávez and his close ally Sen. Robert Kennedy is the first picture he sees in his house every morning.”

When the beloved and charismatic community leader passed away three decades ago, he was so lavishly honored and acknowledged by public officials and philanthropic leaders that his name and likeness are everywhere – still – in day-to-day life in California and around the nation.



There are “...dozens, if not hundreds, of public schools, boulevards, community centers and city plazas [that] bear his name...” See [A \(non-exhaustive\) list of places in California named after César Chávez](#) (March 19, 2026) Claire Morgan and Emily Zentner, *California Newsroom*. “He’s even part of California schools’ [official curriculum](#).”

Rapid-Fire “Denaming” and “Renaming”

As California’s elected officials and lawmakers “reel” from the Chavez scandal news, nevertheless, they “are [considering removing his iconography](#) from their cities by changing street names, libraries and monuments named after the labor rights leader.”

“From San Francisco to San Diego, local officials [already by March 19th, one day after the *NYT* headline] have said they would support [removing statues and renaming everything](#) from parks to libraries in Chavez’ name.”

Within 48 hours or so of the allegations, the San Diego Mayor, Todd Gloria, had “issued an executive order directing city agencies to remove references honoring Cesar Chavez from facilities, programs and assets.” He “also arranged to meet with the City Council President to amend the city municipal code to rename March 31 ... to ‘Farmworkers Day.’” See [San Diego to rename facilities named after Cesar Chavez](#) (March 20, 2026, 6:59 PDT) Chris Ponce, [fox5sandiego.com](#); see also [San Diego Unified to begin name-change process for Cesar Chavez Elementary School](#) (March 24, 2026) NBC 7 Staff, [nbcсандiego.com](#),

San Diego City Councilmember Vivian Moreno represents Barrio Logan, a tight-knit neighborhood located about a mile (as the crow flies) from my home-office perch in downtown San Diego. The residents and business owners have – until now – loudly and proudly revered and honored the labor-movement giant. Notable locations with his name or likeness, or both, include: Cesar Chavez Parkway, Cesar Chavez Park, Cesar Chavez Campus of the San Diego Community College District, and iconic murals depicting Chavez within Chicano Park.

Ms. Moreno recently talked with Scott Lewis, the editor-in-chief of the nonprofit and independent *Voice of San Diego*. She described her complicated feelings about the Chavez scandal: “I’ve gone through all the levels of grief, anger, everything and I think we need to rename” all of the spaces and places with Cesar Chavez’s name. It’s “perfectly fine to get rid of all references” to him “in her district before knowing what to rename them.” See [Map: César Chavez’s Name, Once an Honor, Now Carries a Stain Officials Want to Scrub](#) (March 23, 2026).

It seems from all of the news reporting that [the public are \(largely\) behind](#) these rapid-fire actions by community leaders. See [Communities rebrand César Chavez Day as abuse allegations taint his legacy](#) (March 31, 2026) Stephanie Sy et al, [pbs.org/newshour](#). The “UFW itself canceled its planned events, calling the allegations against Chavez shocking and indefensible.”

However, some “farmworker communities are reeling – especially in Central California, which became the cradle of the farm labor movement.” See: [In a town close to the farmworker movement, some struggle to process Chavez allegations](#) (March 31, 2026) Kerry Klein, [npr.org](#).

Conclusion



In stark contrast to this rapid-fire removal of anything and everything “Cesar Chavez,” there are many examples in the archives of the FPLG Blog of “denamings” and “renamings” of public and charitable property, programs, or events that are more typical of the reality of this process. That is to say, they include hurdles, delays, and complications. See, for instance:

- [*Trending: Nonprofits Tossing Out Unsavory Names*](#) (June 14, 2023) – Includes examples of proposed name changes of UC Berkeley; Hastings College of the Law; and Boalt Hall law school;
- [*More on Nonprofits Tossing Out Unsavory Names*](#) (June 19, 2023) – Includes example of bitter battle at Princeton University over the change of name of the Woodrow Wilson School of Public and International Affairs, and other situations.

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