

The Widening Struggle

Why and how did the civil rights movement expand?

Introduction



Dolores Huerta founded the United Farm Workers with César Chávez and other labor activists in the late 1960s. In her activist career, she became a powerful advocate for Latino, women, and workers' rights. Here, Huerta participates in a parade celebrating Mexican Independence Day in Los Angeles, California, 2010.

As a schoolteacher in the 1950s, Dolores Huerta taught farmworkers' children in California's San Joaquin Valley. From the valley herself, Huerta understood the hardships endured by farmworkers and their

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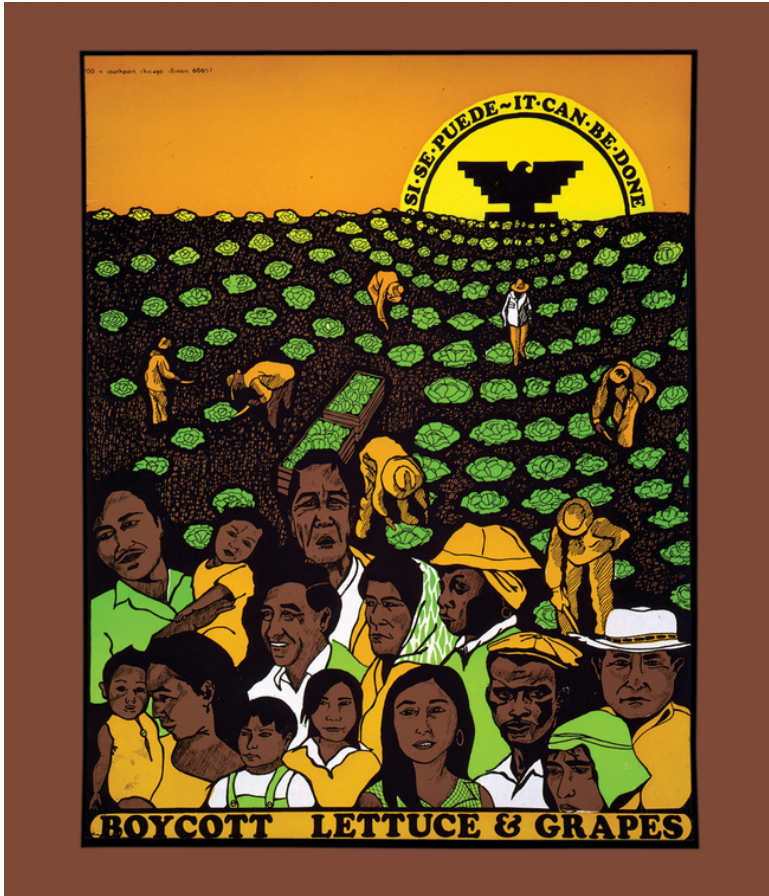
families. Although Huerta liked teaching, she wanted to do more to help farmworkers, so she decided to quit her teaching job. “I couldn’t stand seeing kids come to class hungry and needing shoes,” she explained later. “I thought I could do more by organizing farm workers than by trying to teach their hungry children.”

Together with farm labor organizer César Chávez, Huerta formed the National Farm Workers Association (NFWA), a small union for migrant farmworkers that at first seemed powerless compared to the giant corporations running San Joaquin Valley farming operations. But in 1966, the NFWA won a major victory by negotiating a collective bargaining agreement with the Schenley Wine Company. This agreement marked the first time a farmworkers’ union signed a contract with an agricultural corporation. Later that year, the NFWA merged with another group to become the **United Farm Workers** (UFW).

In the decades that followed, Huerta expanded her activist focus. Through her UFW work, she became an advocate for Latinos, eventually joining the struggle for women’s rights as well.

Numerous groups of Americans experienced discrimination in the 1950s and 1960s, some of which mounted campaigns for equal rights, including farmers. Meanwhile, the black civil rights movement grew in the South, inspiring many minority communities to persevere in their own struggles.

This lesson continues the story of the civil rights movement as it expanded to include more Americans. Following the example of African Americans, other groups—including women, Latinos, American Indians, and Asian Americans— fought for their rights. In addition, disabled, LGBT, and older Americans organized for equal treatment.



This poster from a United Farm Workers boycott in 1978 is part of a greater struggle for migrant workers' rights that occurred in the latter half of the 20th century.

1. Women Demand Equality

Like Dolores Huerta, many women who fought for civil rights and workers' rights later became women's rights activists. Over a century ago, women abolitionists in the 1830s and 1840s followed a similar path. In fighting to end slavery, they had come to recognize their own status as second-class citizens. These early women's rights advocates organized the 1848 Seneca Falls Convention, launching the women's suffrage movement. Likewise, women who were inspired by the black civil rights movement of the 1960s and 1970s forged the era's women's movement.

One Half of America Although women constitute half of the American population, many felt as though they were a minority in the 1960s since they were denied equal rights to men. Therefore, they

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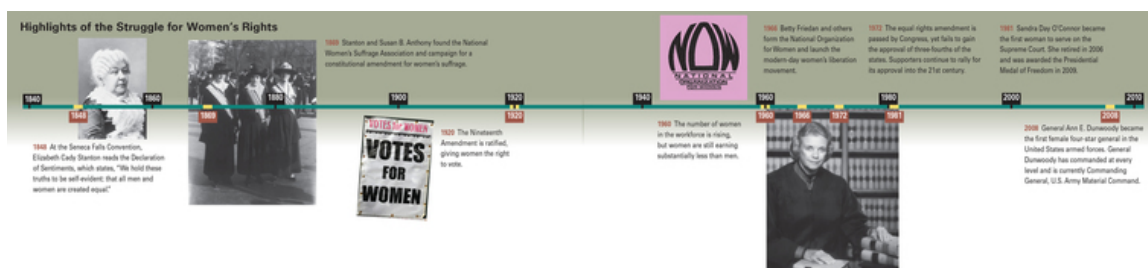
sought equal opportunity and increased rights during this period.

In 1963, author Betty Friedan exposed many middle-class women's dissatisfaction in her book *The Feminine Mystique*, describing women who led supposedly fulfilling lives through their marriage, home, and family, but who were ultimately discontent. As Friedan wrote, these housewives wanted something more from life:

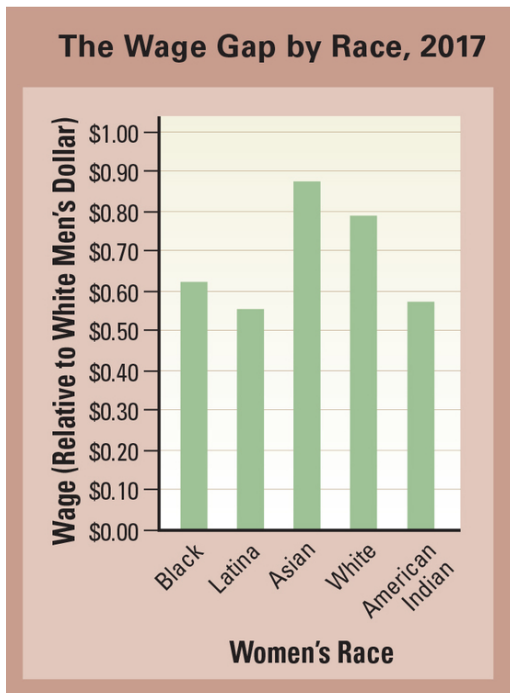
As she made the beds, shopped for groceries, matched slipcover material, ate peanut butter sandwiches with her children, chauffeured Cub Scouts and Brownies, lay beside her husband at night—she was afraid to ask even of herself the silent question—“Is this all?”

—Betty Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique*, 1963

Many middle-class women attended college, but few entered professions afterward. And while the number of women in the workforce was rising, most held what were considered “women’s jobs.” While men might work as lawyers, doctors, or business executives, women were secretaries or bank tellers. Because women held lower-status jobs, they earned less than men—in 1965, white women made about 60 cents for every dollar men earned. Women in higher positions were also paid less than their male colleagues. This gap still remains, and in 2017, white women earned on average 79 percent of men’s median annual earnings.



Thus, women’s struggle for equality in the workforce remains pressing — both the wage gap and the comparative dearth of women executives persists. The invisible barrier to women’s professional advancement is called the **glass ceiling**, a term that has also been applied to minorities.



The gender wage gap in the United States differs according to race. In 2017, Latina women earned an average of 54 cents for every dollar earned by white men. In comparison, Asian women earned an average of 87 cents per white male dollar.

Organizing for Action In the early 1960s, Congress passed two laws banning sex discrimination, but they effected little change. Although the Equal Pay Act of 1963 outlawed “wage differentials based on sex” in industries that produced goods for commerce, it only applied to jobs that were nearly identical. Since women and men generally did different types of work, the law did not impact women’s wages. The following Civil Rights Act of 1964 also prohibited discrimination based on sex. While the law set an important precedent, it created few immediate benefits for women.

To advance women’s rights, Betty Friedan and other activists formed the **National Organization for Women** (NOW) in 1966. This group of mostly middle-aged, middle-class women pledged “to bring women into full participation in the mainstream of American society.” NOW was similar to moderate civil rights movement organizations by focusing its

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efforts on legal reforms and workforce discrimination, demanding equal opportunity for women.

NOW organized the Women's Strike for Equality on August 26, 1970, marking the 50th anniversary of the Nineteenth Amendment's ratification, which granted women the right to vote. The strikers urged women to ignore their usual domestic tasks that day, using the slogan: "Don't iron while the strike is hot." More than 100,000 people around the country participated in the strike, including 50,000 women marchers in New York City alone, making it one of the largest actions for women's rights in American history.

A more radical branch of the women's movement arose in the late 1960s, consisting of younger women who had worked in the civil rights movement. These women coined the term **sexism** to describe oppression of women in the workplace and home and used the term **women's liberation** to describe their ultimate goal of emancipating women from customs and laws that kept them subordinate to men. Many of their ideas became part of the broader women's movement.

Despite the women's movement's growing prominence, many Americans opposed **feminism**, or the movement for women's equality. They believed that feminism threatened traditional values, undermined marriage, and weakened the American family. Instead, they argued that traditional roles afforded women respect in society, claiming feminists wanted to make women more like men.



Phyllis Schlafly was a key opposition leader to the Equal Rights Amendment. She argued that the ERA would devalue traditional roles for women and harm the American family. Some ERA opponents feared that women would have to serve in the military and assume other traditionally male roles.

Working for Equal Rights One of the women's movement's main goals was to secure passage of the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA) to the Constitution, which stated that "equality of rights under the law shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any state on account of sex." Although the amendment had been introduced in every session of Congress since 1923, it was not until 1972 that Congress passed the ERA, sending it to the states to be ratified.

At first, it seemed certain that three-fourths of the states would ratify the ERA, making it law. The amendment provoked a backlash, however, inciting Americans' fear that traditional women's roles of mother and homemaker were becoming devalued. Some also believed that the ERA would lead to women's obligatory military service. As a result, the ERA failed to meet the 1982 ratification deadline, falling 3 states short of the requisite 38 states.

Despite this setback, efforts for women's rights succeeded on many fronts, including education. Between 1969 and 1973, the number of women law students nearly quadrupled, while the number of women medical students almost doubled. By 1997, women comprised the majority of college students and earned the majority of master's degrees. Women's increased educational opportunities were supported

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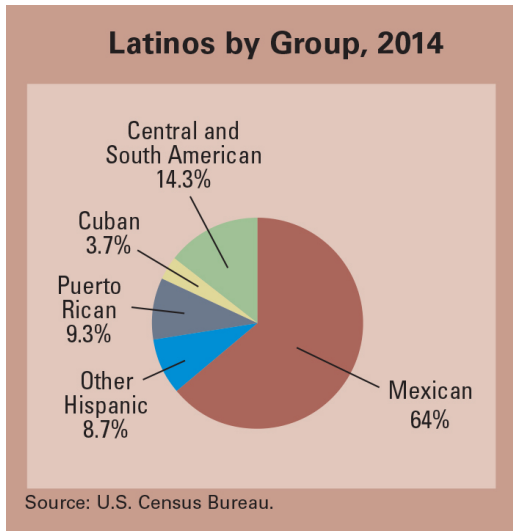
by federal legislation. The Title IX law of the Educational Amendments of 1972 prohibited discrimination on the basis of sex in any school program receiving federal funds, including school athletics.

The Fight over Birth Control and Abortion The struggle for women’s rights also centered on the issues of birth control and abortion. Many feminists believed that for women to control their own lives, they must be able to control when, or if, they had children.

The development of the birth control pill supported this goal tremendously. In 1960, the Food and Drug Administration approved the pill, and 5 million women were using it by 1965. By giving women greater control over their reproduction, the birth control pill impacted women’s lives, as well as society in general.

Some Americans disapproved of the pill, favoring abstinence as birth control and arguing that family-planning centers should not advise couples on other methods to avoid pregnancy. Nevertheless, the Supreme Court ruled in 1965 that married couples had a “right to privacy in marital relations,” including access to counseling on birth control and the pill.

Several years later, the Supreme Court extended this right of privacy to abortion. In 1973, the Court ruled in *Roe v. Wade* that the “right of privacy . . . is broad enough to encompass a woman’s decision whether or not to terminate her pregnancy.” While feminists considered the ruling a landmark advancement in the struggle for women’s civil rights, it was rather controversial. Opponents argued that life begins at conception and viewed abortion as murder, while supporters asserted that women have the right to control their bodies and that abortion should remain legal.



People of Mexican ancestry constitute the largest portion of the U.S. Latino population. In 2014, about two-thirds of all Latinos in the country were of Mexican descent. “Other Hispanic” refers mainly to people with roots in Spain or the Dominican Republic.

2. Latinos Organize to be Heard

In 1967, Rodolfo “Corky” Gonzales published the poem “Yo Soy Joaquin” (“I Am Joaquin”), which describes the difficulty of retaining a Mexican identity in American society. Part of the poem reads,

I am Joaquin . . .
lost in a world of confusion,
caught up in the whirl of a
gringo society, confused by the rules,
scorned by attitudes,
suppressed by manipulation,
and destroyed by modern society.

—Rodolfo “Corky” Gonzales, “I Am Joaquin,” 1967

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Gonzales' poem struck a chord for many Latinos, who viewed it as a cultural and political statement. The work became a rallying cry for Latino rights.

Gonzales was one of many Latino Americans who demanded equal rights in the 1960s. As the civil rights movement expanded around the country, Latinos also lent their voices to the struggle for equality.

Diverse People Speaking One Language Latino/a populations are diverse, encompassing Mexican Americans, Cubans, Puerto Ricans, and people of Central and South American origin. Some Latino Americans were born in the United States, while others migrated to the country. Hispanics, or "Spanish-speaking" people, also originate from Spain and the Dominican Republic. While not all Latino groups are Hispanic, many share similar cultural traits.

In the 1960s, Latinos also faced issues of discrimination. For one, they often experienced employment discrimination, as many had low-wage jobs with few benefits. Many Latinos also struggled with educational language barriers since most classes were taught in English.

Different Latino groups had their own distinct concerns and perspectives. In the mid-1960s, many Mexican Americans began to identify themselves as *Chicanos*, a previously insulting term. Young Mexican Americans reclaimed the name as an expression of cultural pride.

Cuban Americans significantly differed from Mexican Americans in the 1960s. Most Cuban Americans fled their homeland after the Cuban Revolution, so they were recent arrivals to the United States. The majority lived in Florida and were often better educated and more affluent than other Latino groups.

Puerto Rico is an American commonwealth, or an unincorporated territory of the United States, so Puerto Ricans were already U.S. citizens when they migrated to the mainland. However, they suffered some of the same injustices as other Latinos, so they sought better education and improved conditions in the cities where they lived. Puerto Ricans similarly wanted to end Latino discrimination.

Boycotting Grapes for Recognition The California farmworker struggle was one of the most notable Latino rights campaigns in the 1960s. César Chávez, a farmworker born in Arizona, was a principal leader in this effort to improve migrant workers' lives.



César Chávez was a central figure in the struggle for farmworkers' rights. Because he was raised in a family of migrant workers, Chávez understood farmworkers' plight. A skilled organizer and leader, Chávez headed the United Farm Workers for many years before his death in 1993.

Together with Dolores Huerta and other labor activists, Chávez helped found the United Farm Workers, a union mostly of Mexican American migrant workers. In 1965, the union—then known as the National Farm Workers Association—participated in a strike against grape growers. The strike, or “La Huelga,” lasted five years, during which time Chávez organized a national boycott of table grapes that garnered widespread support. In 1970, grape growers signed a historic contract that approved most of the workers' demands, including union recognition, higher wages, and expanded benefits.

Like Martin Luther King Jr., Chávez employed a strategy of nonviolence in his struggle for equal rights. Among other tactics, Chávez used hunger strikes as a political tool, fasting several times to bring attention to the plight of farmworkers and pressure employers to improve working conditions.

La Raza: A People United In the late 1960s, young Chicanos began to organize a political movement called La Raza Unida, or “The People

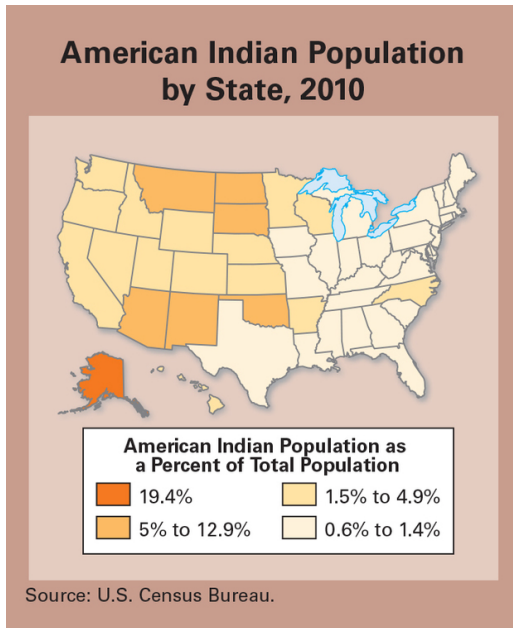
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United.” They used the term *la raza*, meaning “the people” or “the race,” to identify and connect with their ancient Mexican origins. They claimed that this heritage, particularly connection to the Aztec people, was a common bond among Chicanos. La Raza Unida became a political party in 1970, supporting several party candidates in state and local elections across the Southwest.

Bilingual education, or teaching in two languages, was a key issue of Chicano activism. In 1968, President Johnson signed the Bilingual Education Act, which legalized instruction in languages other than English. The courts later ruled that schools must address the needs of non-English speakers, including teaching in students’ native languages. However, Spanish-speaking students continued to face discrimination, and in 1968 and 1969, Chicano students throughout the Southwest boycotted classes to protest poor education in their schools.

The Brown Berets also fought for Chicano rights during this period. Founded in East Los Angeles, this group modeled itself after the Black Panthers, working to improve housing and employment for Chicanos as well as instill pride in Chicano culture.

As Mexican Americans fought for their civil rights, other Latino groups did as well. Gradually, Cuban Americans, Puerto Ricans, and other Latinos were afforded greater opportunity in American society.



According to the 2010 U.S. census, most American Indians, including Alaska Natives, live in the western United States. As this map shows, the number of native peoples in each state, as a percentage of state population, varies considerably. Note that Alaska Natives made up nearly one-seventh of that state's population in 2010.

3. American Indians Seek Justice

In 1968, 10 percent of the Minneapolis population was American Indian. However, American Indians comprised 70 percent of the prisoners in Minneapolis jails. Believing this imbalance reflected greater police harassment of American Indians, American Indian rights activists formed the **American Indian Movement** (AIM) to monitor police radios and respond to calls involving American Indians. AIM members

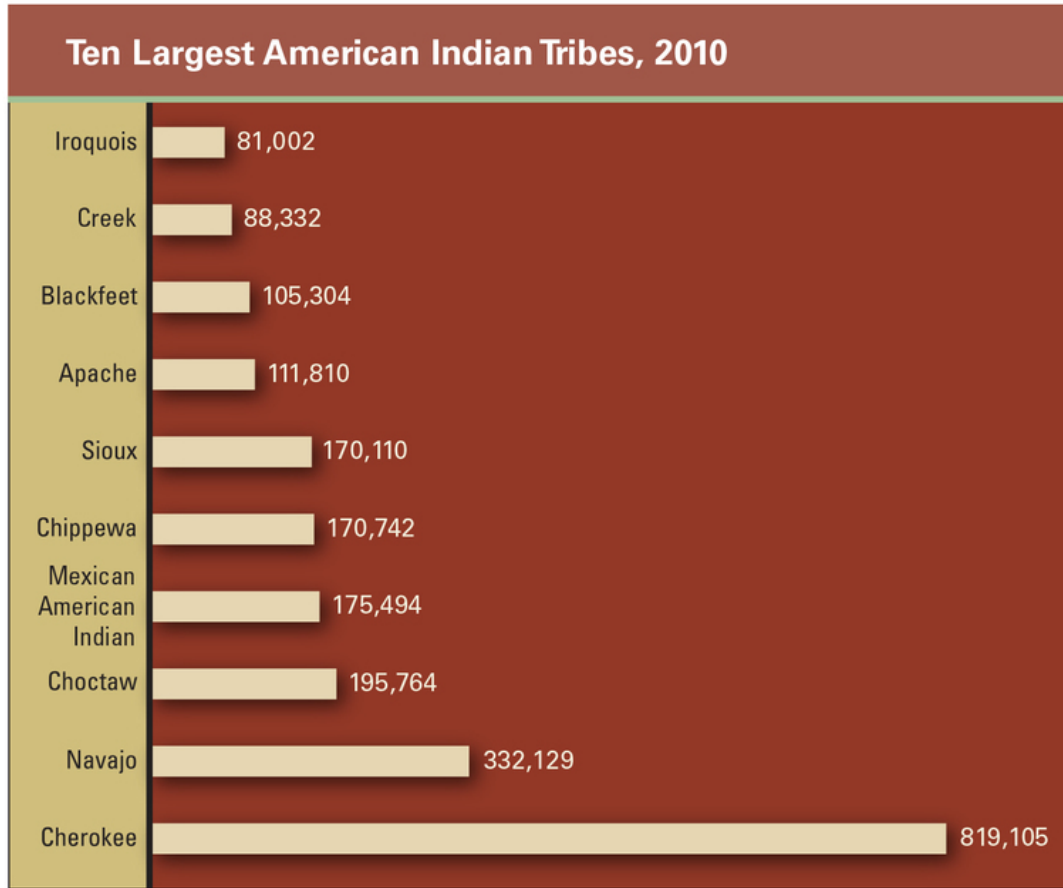
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often arrived at the scene before the police, preventing the unfounded arrests of numerous American Indians as a result. According to AIM, the number of Indians in Minneapolis jails decreased by 60 percent that year.

One People, Many Nations American Indians come from many tribes, often called nations. In the late 1960s, some American Indian activists asserted the commonality between these nations, as they shared an identity as native peoples. Even their differing customs and homes—some lived on reservations while others dispersed throughout society—could not erase their shared struggles.

Most American Indians lived in poverty, suffering greater economic hardship than any other ethnic group in the country. Their unemployment rate was 10 times higher than the national average and was especially high on reservations. Their average annual family income was \$1,000 less than it was for African Americans. Their life expectancy was also much lower than the national average.

The federal government attempted to aid American Indians, but with little success. In 1968, Congress passed the Indian Civil Rights Act, which was designed to ensure equality for American Indians. It guaranteed American Indians protection under the Constitution and recognized the authority of tribal laws. This law had little impact, however, since American Indians still lacked equal rights and opportunity in American society. At this time, many began to lose patience.



The 2010 census reported 5.2 million American Indians and Alaska Natives living in the United States, 1.7 percent of the total American population. This figure includes people with full and partial American Indian ancestry. These native peoples belong to many different tribes, or nations. This graph shows population figures for the 10 largest tribes in 2010.

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In November 1969, American Indians occupied Alcatraz Island in San Francisco Bay. They demanded ownership of the island and funding for an American Indian university and cultural center. Their occupation lasted until June 10, 1971.

Radicals Make the Cause Known On November 20, 1969, eighty-nine American Indians occupied the deserted prison on Alcatraz Island in San Francisco Bay. Self-titled the Indians of All Tribes, the group's Alcatraz Proclamation declared, "We . . . reclaim the land known as Alcatraz Island in the name of all American Indians by right of discovery." In addition to reclaiming land, the Indians of All Tribes demanded that the government fund cultural and educational centers.

The U.S. government rejected the group's demands, but the Indian rights movement, also known as Red Power, deemed the Alcatraz occupation a success. As one participant claimed, "We got back our worth, our pride, our dignity, our humanity." American Indians occupied Alcatraz for over a year and a half.

In 1972, AIM organized the Trail of Broken Treaties protest, during which a caravan of protesters traveled from the West Coast to Washington, D.C., to call attention to American Indian rights. Activists created a 20-point proposal to present to the government, which focused on restoring federal recognition of American Indian tribes and Indian control over reservations. It also sought protection for Indian cultures and religions.

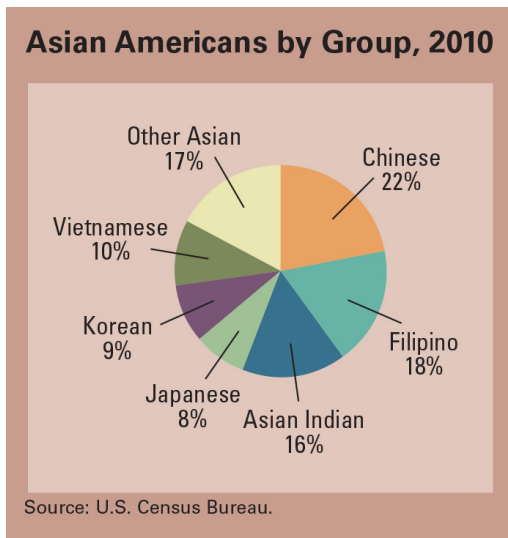
When the caravan arrived in Washington, some of the protesters occupied offices of the Bureau of Indian Affairs. The group agreed to leave after six days on the condition that no one be prosecuted and that the federal government respond to their proposal. After consideration, the Nixon administration rejected AIM's proposal.

Tensions increased in February 1973 when AIM protesters occupied the town of Wounded Knee on the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation in South Dakota, the site of an 1890 American Indian massacre. AIM demanded reform in reservation governing and also called on the U.S. government to honor American Indian treaties it had previously signed. The FBI stormed Wounded Knee after 70 days, killing two American Indians and severely injuring one federal marshal in the process.

In 1978, American Indian activists staged a five-month protest, called the Longest Walk, in order to bring attention to the many times American Indians had been forced from their land. The Longest Walk stretched from San Francisco to its final destination in Washington, D.C.

Courts and Legislation Bring Victories Groups like AIM failed to catalyze significant improvements in most American Indians' lives, but did generate national attention for American Indian rights and encourage some reforms. In 1975, Congress passed the Indian Self-Determination and Education Assistance Act. This law allocated increased federal funding for American Indian education, gave American Indians more control over reservations, and appointed more American Indians to jobs in the Bureau of Indian Affairs.

Indian tribes also won some legal victories. The government relinquished control of Blue Lake in New Mexico to the Taos Pueblo tribe, which considers the site sacred. Congress also passed the Alaska Native Land Claims Settlement Act in 1971, which returned 40 million acres of land to Alaska Natives. In 1980, Penobscot and Passamaquoddy Indians in Maine were awarded \$81.5 million in exchange for dropping claims to their land. They then used some of this money to buy back 300,000 acres. These victories instilled hope in American Indians for a better, more just future.



Traditionally, Chinese Americans have been the largest Asian group in the United States, indicated by this graph from 2010. Since the 1960s, an increasing number of immigrants from other Asian countries have moved to the United States. As a result, Asian Indians, Vietnamese, and other groups are part of a growing portion of the Asian American population in the United States.

4. Asian Americans Raise Their Voices

Asian Americans joined the broader movement for civil rights in the 1960s. Asian American activists, including Filipino farmworkers' union leader Larry Itliong, helped launch the California farmworkers' grape grower strike. Itliong and other Filipino activists also played a role in forming the United Farm Workers. These activists were part of a developing movement for Asian American rights in this period.

The “Model Minority” Asian Americans are diverse and have connections either by birth or by culture to countries in eastern and southern Asia. Asian groups with a longstanding history in the United States include Chinese, Japanese, Filipinos, and Koreans.

Starting in the 1870s, the U.S. government imposed limits on Asian immigration. When the Immigration Act of 1965 removed these limits, the number of Asian immigrants significantly increased. In recent decades, immigrants from countries like India, Vietnam, and Cambodia have added greater diversity to the Asian American population.

Many Asian Americans thrived in the United States between the 1960s and 1980s. They were sometimes referred to as the “model minority” since they were viewed as hard workers who amassed success without protest or demand. Some people pointed to Asian Americans’ prosperity as proof that ethnic differences were no barrier to success in American society. These claims and the “model minority” label angered other minorities, who sometimes felt that Asian Americans received favorable treatment.

The perceived success of Asian Americans was only partly true. Although 1980 data shows that many Asian Americans earned salaries higher than the national average, more than half of this population lived in three states: New York, California, and Hawaii. These states had a very high cost of living, or a measure that includes the price of food, housing, and other essentials, so people had to earn more to live there. Many Asian American households also had several adult wage earners, a fact that was reflected in higher family incomes.

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Although Asian Americans live throughout the United States, many are located in ethnic neighborhoods. New York City's Chinatown, pictured here, is the largest Chinese enclave in the Western Hemisphere. Since its founding, Chinatown has become home to other Asian groups, including Burmese, Filipinos, and Vietnamese.

Furthermore, although many Asian Americans attended college and entered professions, others did not. Many Asian immigrants had low-paying jobs, limited English language skills, and little education. Like other minorities, they faced discrimination because of their race.

College Students Unite to Be Heard Asian American students began to demand equal rights in the 1960s. On some college campuses, student activists organized a political movement to end racial oppression “through the power of a consolidated yellow people.” Their slogan became: “Yellow Power.”

In 1968 and 1969, Asian American students at San Francisco State

University and the University of California at Berkeley helped organize student strikes for increased minority participation in university affairs. They also called for academic programs focusing on ethnic and racial issues. At the time, minority perspectives were largely ignored by university curriculum.

Their efforts succeeded—in 1969, San Francisco State established the country’s first school of ethnic studies. Between 1968 and 1973, many other colleges and universities also founded Asian American studies programs.

These college programs impacted students like Helen Zia, a Chinese American, who recalled, “In college, I learned that I was an Asian American. I learned that I didn’t have to call myself Oriental like a rug. It was like a light bulb going off.” By learning about their heritage, Zia and many others gained a new understanding of their identity and rights in American society.

Fighting for Internment Reparations A critical struggle in the movement for Asian American rights focused on Japanese American internment during World War II. Executive Order 9066 forced many Japanese Americans into internment camps, which the Supreme Court’s 1944 ruling in *Korematsu v. United States* upheld. Thirty years later, many people began to demand reparations for this extreme injustice.

Inspired by the Black Power movement, young Japanese Americans in the 1970s spoke out against the discrimination their families had suffered. In 1978, a group in Seattle held the first Day of Remembrance, sharing family stories and discussing the hardships of internment. One organizer described the event as a “way to reclaim our past and make it our own.” The Day of Remembrance is now observed in other cities as well.

The **Japanese American Citizens League** (JACL), which was formed in 1929 to defend the rights of Japanese Americans, also sought legal reparations. In 1978, the League began to pursue compensation for suffering in the internment camps. Congress formally apologized for internment in 1988 and issued \$20,000 in reparations to each survivor. Although the sum was relatively small compared to individual losses, the government’s official response helped to remedy a historic wrong.



Starting in 1978, Japanese Americans sought reparations for their internment during World War II. Three key activists in this effort were Fred Korematsu, Minoru Yasui, and Gordon Hirabayashi (shown here, left to right). Each had challenged the internment policy in the courts during the 1940s. In 1988, the U.S. government issued an official apology, offering \$20,000 in reparations to each internment survivor.

5. More Groups Seek Civil Rights

In 1962, the University of California at Berkeley reluctantly admitted Ed Roberts as a student. Roberts had a severe **disability**, or an impairment that limited his daily activities. As a teenager, he had been paralyzed by polio and needed a respirator to breathe. California's vocational rehabilitation agency informed Roberts that he would be too disabled to work, but he surprised everyone by fulfilling his degree requirements and graduating from UC Berkeley.



Disability-rights activists began to demand equal rights and opportunity in the 1970s. To enact change, protestors blocked doorways and demonstrated at the Capitol building. The Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 instituted major disability reforms.

Roberts' work at UC Berkeley expanded disabled students' rights at the university. As a disability-rights activist, Roberts changed the way many Americans viewed people with disabilities, inspiring other disability activists around the country.

Many disabled Americans were inspired by the African American civil rights movement, as were other groups, including LGBT Americans and older Americans. Beginning in the 1960s, these groups forged their own struggles for equal rights.

Disabled Americans Demand Equal Access to Opportunities

Disabilities are both physical and mental—physical disabilities include blindness, deafness, and impaired movement, while mental disabilities include illnesses like bipolar disorder. According to the 2000 census, nearly 20 percent of Americans over the age of 5 have some form of disability. Although large in size, this group has often been subject to discrimination.

Deaf and blind Americans were the first disabled groups to fight for equal rights. Decades before the civil rights movement, they established organizations to provide education and other services to those who needed them. They had also asserted that blind and deaf people had a right to their own languages: Braille and American Sign Language.

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After graduating from UC Berkeley, Ed Roberts founded a program in the early 1970s to help physically disabled students attend the university. He and fellow activists urged the school to improve campus **accessibility**, making it easier for physically disabled people to access university facilities. Ramps and curb cuts, for example, improved campus accessibility for people in wheelchairs.

Congress passed the Rehabilitation Act in 1973, which some supporters likened to the 1964 Civil Rights Act. This law stated,

No otherwise qualified individual with a disability . . . shall, solely by reason of his or her disability, be excluded from the participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any program or activity receiving Federal financial assistance.

—Section 504, Rehabilitation Act of 1973

The law granted disabled people equal access to federally funded programs. However, it took four years for government officials to determine how to enforce the law. Their final decision in 1977 was prompted by protesters, many in wheelchairs, who overtook offices of the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare in Washington, D.C.

Equal access applied to disabled children as well. In 1975, Congress passed the Education for All Handicapped Children Act, which set a new standard for educating disabled children by mandating that these students be in “the least restrictive environment possible.” Wherever possible, students with disabilities were to be **mainstreamed**, or included in classrooms with nondisabled students.

The most important civil rights victory for disabled Americans came years later, when Congress passed the **Americans with Disabilities Act** (ADA) in 1990. The ADA called for better public access for people with disabilities, like including braille signs on elevators and increasing public transportation accessibility. The ADA also improved education for disabled children. Equal access to employment remains a problem, however, as 30 percent of people with disabilities are unemployed.



Throughout the country, LGBT activists hold gay pride marches each year to mark the anniversary of the Stonewall riots of 1969. Stonewall is considered the catalyst of the gay rights movement. The rainbow flag is a symbol of LGBT pride. Here, San Francisco's City Hall is lit up in support of the upcoming gay pride parade.

LGBT Americans Stand Up for Their Rights In the 1960s, the **LGBT** community, people who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender, also demanded equal rights. Police often harassed gay men and lesbians in public places, and employees could be fired for being LGBT. Many gays and lesbians felt they had to hide their sexual orientation to avoid discrimination.

A gay rights movement emerged in the late 1950s and early 1960s. By the late 1960s, gay rights activists in Philadelphia were organizing annual Fourth of July protests, in which professionally dressed gays and lesbians gathered at Independence Hall, where the Constitution was signed. Protestors explained their discrimination to visitors, discussing how LGBT Americans were not given certain rights that others took for granted.

The gay rights movement became highly visible during the **Stonewall riots**, which occurred on June 27, 1969, when New York City police raided the Stonewall Inn, a gay bar in the neighborhood of Greenwich Village. Homosexuality was outlawed in New York at the time, and police often conducted raids. That night, however, the patrons at Stonewall fought back, inciting riots that lasted for hours. Because the

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Stonewall riots publicly mark the beginning of the gay rights movement, annual LGBT pride events in cities take place around the world on the anniversary of that fateful night.

After Stonewall, more Americans began to join the gay rights movement. In March 1973, a group of parents with gay sons and daughters convened in New York. By 1980, the group—now known as Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays, or PFLAG—boasted members across the country.

In a landmark event in the history of LGBT rights, politician Harvey Milk became the first openly gay candidate elected to office in a major American city, securing a seat on the San Francisco board of supervisors in 1977. Eleven months following his election, Milk was assassinated by a former colleague.



The Gray Panthers fought age-based discrimination. Most of the Panthers, like cofounder Maggie Kuhn (shown here), were older Americans, but they believed many young people suffered from discrimination as well. Aided by the Panthers' efforts, Congress pushed the mandatory retirement age from 65 to 70 in 1978.

Older Americans Promote Productive Aging Older Americans also joined the civil rights struggle. In 1972, Maggie Kuhn and fellow Philadelphia retirees formed the **Gray Panthers**, a group that spoke out against unfair treatment of older Americans. The Gray Panthers called the discrimination against people on the basis of age **ageism**.

Other groups had been previously established to advocate for older Americans. The largest of these was called the American Association of Retired Persons (AARP), founded by Ethel Percy Andrus in 1958 to help retirees acquire health insurance. Many older Americans had no health coverage at the time, either because it was too expensive or because private insurance companies refused to insure them. Older people were

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considered too much of a risk for insurance companies due to their age and potential health problems.

AARP lobbied for government health insurance, and Congress subsequently established Medicare in 1965. This program provided hospital insurance for people ages 65 and over, and it helped pay prescription drug costs and other medical expenses for seniors.

Older workers also fought against discrimination in the workplace. To remedy this issue, Congress passed the Age Discrimination in Employment Act of 1967, prohibiting employers from using age as a hiring or promotion factor. In 1978, the Gray Panthers helped persuade Congress to defer the mandatory retirement age from 65 to 70 so that seniors could work and receive employment benefits for longer.

Summary

The civil rights movement inspired many Americans to stand up for their rights. During the 1960s and 1970s, various groups sought equal treatment under the law and in society.

Women The National Organization for Women (NOW) and other feminist groups fought for women's rights. They sought reforms to ensure greater equality and opportunity for women.

Latinos Various Latino groups struggled for their rights and identity in American society. The United Farm Workers (UFW) organized migrant farmworkers and helped secure increased wages and benefits. The 1968 Bilingual Education Act required public schools to provide bilingual instruction.

American Indians The American Indian Movement (AIM) protested unfair treatment of American Indians. By the mid-1970s, some tribes had won reparations for lost land.

Asian Americans Asian American students requested university programs in ethnic studies. The Japanese Americans Citizens League (JACL) sought compensation for internment during World War II.

Other groups Disabled Americans fought for equal access, obtaining passage of the Americans with Disabilities Act. After the Stonewall riots, LGBT Americans gained greater visibility in their fight for equal rights. Older Americans countered ageism by working through groups like the Gray Panthers.

The LGBT Rights Movement

Laying the Groundwork for the LGBT Rights Movement

Some of the first LGBT organizations emerged in the mid-20th century, laying the groundwork for the LGBT rights movement. These early LGBT organizations collectively were part of the homophile movement. In naming this movement, activists used the Greek word for “love” to combat the stereotype that LGBT men and women were obsessed with sex.

The Mattachine Society was founded in Los Angeles between 1950 and 1951 by Harry Hay, a Communist Party organizer. According to Hay, the name “Mattachine” came from a medieval French theater society that used their performances to protest the aristocracy. Mattachine players also wore masks, and Hay argued that homosexual men were also a “masked people, unknown and anonymous, who might become engaged in morale building and helping ourselves and others.” The purpose of Mattachine Society was to support gay men during a time when LGBT men and women were disapproved of by society and persecuted by their government. The society cultivated relationships with sociologists, psychologists, doctors, and legal experts, encouraging them to endorse the view that homosexuality was normal and harmless. The organization also published the magazine *ONE*, which sold more than 2,000 copies per month and attracted new members to the Mattachine Society.

In 1954, the Los Angeles Post Office refused to mail copies of *ONE* because it was “obscene, lewd, lascivious and filthy, and as such constituted non-mailable matter.” The Mattachine Society fought the Post Office’s decision in court, and the case came before the Supreme Court in 1958. In *ONE, Inc. v. Olesen*, the Supreme Court found that the *ONE* was allowed to mail its magazine through the U.S. Post Office under the First Amendment. *ONE, Inc. v. Olesen* was one of the first Supreme Court cases that addressed gay rights.

By the late 1950s, the Mattachine Society had chapters in many major cities, including Los Angeles, San Francisco, and New York. In 1957, Franklin Kameny lost his government job because of his homosexuality. After the Supreme Court dismissed his case, Kameny founded the Mattachine Society of Washington. While other chapters of the Mattachine Society limited their activity to supporting homosexual men and educating the public, the Mattachine Society of Washington focused on challenging the legislation and policies that discriminated

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against LGBT men and women.

The Mattachine Society also worked closely with another LGBT rights organization, the Daughters of Bilitis. Daughters of Bilitis was founded in San Francisco in 1955 by lesbian couple Phyllis Lyon and Del Martin. The organization began as a secret social club for lesbians, creating an opportunity for lesbians to meet each other and escape discrimination and hostility. By the end of the 1950s, Daughters of Bilitis had chapters across the United States and Australia. The organization became increasingly political rather than purely social and soon redefined its mission to focus on lesbian rights. Its publication, *The Ladder*, was one of the first lesbian magazines in the United States. Like the Mattachine Society, the Daughters of Bilitis encouraged its members to assimilate with society, hoping to demonstrate that lesbians were no different from ordinary women.

Throughout the late 1950s and early 1960s, unrest began to emerge within the LGBT community across the nation, especially among young transgender men and women. As the most visibly “different” members of the LGBT community, transgender men and women often faced the most severe discrimination. In 1959, LGBT men and women staged a small riot in Los Angeles to protest police harassment. In 1966, another riot broke out at Compton’s Cafeteria in San Francisco when police arrived to arrest any cross-dressing men. These increasingly violent expressions of dissatisfaction within the LGBT community laid the groundwork for the 1969 riots at Stonewall Inn that would unify the next generation of LGBT activists into a more coherent movement for LGBT rights.

The Stonewall Riots and the LGBT Rights Movement



The Stonewall Inn is a gay bar in Greenwich Village, a neighborhood in New York City. The night of June 28, 1969, a police bar raid sparked riots outside of the Stonewall Inn. The Stonewall Riots marked the beginning of the LGBT rights movement and inspired a new generation of activists in the LGBT community.

At the end of the 1960s, homosexuality was illegal in every state except for Illinois. The legal punishments for consensual same-sex relationships ranged in severity. In some states, homosexual men and women could be committed to mental institutions, where they endured horrific “treatments” for their homosexuality. LGBT men and women enjoyed little to no protection from discrimination under federal and state laws. By the late 1960s, New York had a large population of LGBT men and women, and the New York City neighborhood of Greenwich Village was the epicenter of LGBT culture. New York, however, was also considered the state that most aggressively targeted homosexuals and criminals.

Historians largely agree that the gay rights movement began in the United States in the early hours of June 28, 1969, when the New York City police raided the Stonewall Inn, a gay bar in Greenwich Village. The State of New York prohibited the solicitation of homosexual relations, and police officers frequently harassed the bars where young LGBT men and women would gather. On June 28, 1969, nine police officers arrested the employees of Stonewall Inn for selling liquor without a

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license and cleared the bar. The police also harassed the LGBT patrons of the bar, taking several into custody.

Usually, any LGBT people caught in the middle of a police raid would run away, hoping to protect their identities. After the Stonewall raid, however, the LGBT men and women who were in the bar did not run away. They began to harass and jeer at the police, throwing coins, bottles and stones. Outraged LGBT men and women trapped the police, who called for reinforcements, inside the bar. Eventually, the anger of the LGBT men and women at Stonewall Inn evolved into a riot of around 400 people that continued intermittently for five days. One participant in the riot explained,

We all had a collective feeling like we'd had enough . . . It wasn't anything tangible anybody said to anybody else, it was just kind of like everything over the years had come to a head on that one particular night in that one particular place . . . It was like the last straw. It was time to reclaim something that had always been taken from us . . .

The Stonewall Riots sparked the next generation of LGBT rights activists into action, transforming the conservative homophile movement into the gay liberation movement. The Mattachine Society gave way to increasingly radical organizations, such as the Gay Liberation Front (GLF) and Gay Activists Alliance (GAA). The Mattachine Society's methods for enacting change seemed too mild to the activists that had participated in and been inspired by the Stonewall Riots.

The Gay Liberation Front was the first organization to include the word "gay" in its name. While previous LGBT organizations used cryptic names to obscure their mission, such as "Mattachine" and "Bilitis," the new generation of activists freely used the word "gay." The GLF was significantly more militant and politically radical than the Mattachine Society. The organization's mission statement describes "a revolutionary group of men and women, formed with the realization that complete sexual liberation for all people cannot come about unless existing social institutions are abolished" and voices the GLF's support for "all the oppressed, the Vietnamese struggle, the third world, the blacks, the workers." The GLF was plagued by ideological disputes among members and lack of organizational structure that significantly impeded the organization's effectiveness. Before the GLF disbanded in 1972, many disillusioned members left the organization to join the Gay Activists Alliance.

Unlike the Gay Liberation Front, the Gay Activists Alliance focused

exclusively on gay and lesbian civil rights. The GAA had many political and legislative goals, and employed a variety of tactics to achieve those goals. One tactic was “zapping,” where an activist would interrupt a politician’s public events with protests or by asking the politicians questions about their views on LGBT rights. Zaps were designed to create a disruption that drew attention to the LGBT rights movement. The mayor of New York City and members of the city council were all zapped several times by GAA activists. The GAA also organized many political protests, and worked with other LGBT groups to organize the first Gay Pride march to commemorate the Stonewall Riots.

Between 1970 and 1974, the GAA fought for a gay rights bill in the New York City Council, laws to end police harassment, the repeal of the sodomy and solicitation laws that made homosexuality illegal, and protection against employment discrimination. The GAA closely monitored how LGBT communities were portrayed by the mainstream media and criticized unfair, negative representations of homosexuality. The GAA also founded one of the first LGBT community centers and sponsored dances and other events to raise awareness of LGBT issues.

Although the Gay Activists Alliance was an important organization in the early years of the LGBT rights movement, it was also heavily criticized by some members of the LGBT community. The organization did little to address the specific challenges faced by the transgender community. Furthermore, many lesbian women and LGBT men and women of color were unsatisfied that the organization’s leaders were white, gay men. Within the LGBT rights movement, lesbians faced sexism, and within the feminist movement, they faced discrimination for their sexual orientation. As a result, lesbian feminists created their own movement and organizations that fought against both sexism and anti-LGBT discrimination.

LGBT activists also encouraged LGBT men and women to “come out of the closet” and publicly reveal their sexual orientations to make a political statement. Activist and politician Harvey Milk gave a speech in San Francisco in which he explained that “we will not win our rights by staying quietly in our closets . . . We are coming out to fight the lies, the myths, the distortions. We are coming out to tell the truth about gays . . . You must come out.” Additionally, members of the GLF started a newspaper called *Come Out!* which featured a call to all LGBT men and women to “COME OUT FOR FREEDOM! COME OUT NOW! POWER TO THE PEOPLE! GAY POWER TO GAY PEOPLE! COME OUT OF THE CLOSET BEFORE THE DOOR IS NAILED SHUT!”

The earliest victories for the gay rights movement were achieved in the

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medical field. In 1973, the American Psychiatric Association (APA) officially abandoned its previous view of homosexuality as an illness. The APA removed homosexuality from its Diagnostic Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, undermining the theory that same-sex desire was the product of a diagnosable mental disorder. This decision was based on a growing body of research that suggested that homosexual individuals were perfectly capable of living healthy, well-adjusted lives and had no underlying personality or character flaws that distinguished them from heterosexual individuals.

Throughout the early 1970s, LGBT neighborhoods emerged in many cities, and these communities began to organize for change on the local level. By the middle of the decade, San Francisco, Seattle, Detroit, and many other cities and counties had enacted legislation that prohibited anti-LGBT discrimination. LGBT activists also successfully fought for the repeal of the sodomy and solicitation that criminalized homosexuality in many states. By 1979, 35 states had repealed their sodomy laws.

LGBT Activism in San Francisco



The California city of San Francisco has an important history of LGBT rights activism. Harvey Milk, one of the first openly gay men to hold elected office, was assassinated in his office in San Francisco's City Hall, pictured here.

One of the first important LGBT activists in California was José Sarria, who also went by the names Absolute Empress I, the Widow Norton, Empress José I, and the Nightingale of Montgomery Street. Sarria grew up in San Francisco. After serving in World War II, Sarria wanted to be a teacher but was unable to pursue that career because of discriminatory

policies and attitudes that kept LGBT men and women from teaching. Sarria eventually found work as a waiter at the Black Cat Café in San Francisco, where he began his career as a drag performer. Sarria incorporated humor and political satire into his performances, and his reputation transformed the Black Cat Café into an important fixture in the LGBT community.

Sarria began his activism by encouraging members of the LGBT community to fight back against police harassment. Sarria founded the League for Civil Education in 1960—which later changed its name to the Society for Individual Rights—to reform laws regarding homosexuality as well as educate and provide a community for its members. He also founded the Tavern Guild of San Francisco in 1962, an organization for the LGBT owners of gay bars in San Francisco.

In 1961, José Sarria ran for a seat on the San Francisco Board of Supervisors, making him the first openly gay man to seek elected office in the United States. Sarria came in ninth out of more than 30 candidates. Although he lost the election, Sarria’s campaign paved the way for the success of LGBT candidates in the future. Reflecting on the effects of his campaign, Sarria said, “From that day on, there’s never been a politician in San Francisco, not even a dogcatcher, that did not go and talk to the gay community.”

In 1965, Sarria founded the Imperial Court of San Francisco, now known as the International Court System. The International Court System is an association of charities that support the LGBT community. Today, the International Court System is one of the largest LGBT organizations in the world, with almost 70 chapters in the United States, Canada, and Mexico.

Harvey Milk was another important LGBT rights activist in San Francisco, California. Milk moved from New York to San Francisco in 1972 and opened a camera store on Castro Street, in San Francisco’s LGBT neighborhood. In response to the discrimination he faced as a gay business owner, Milk started the Castro Street Fair in 1974 to attract support for LGBT-run businesses.

By 1975, Milk was well established as a political leader in the Castro’s LGBT community. That year, Mayor George Moscone appointed Milk to the Board of Permit Appeals, and Milk became the first openly gay city commissioner in the United States.

In 1977, after many unsuccessful bids for elected office, Milk finally won election to the San Francisco Board of Supervisors. Sixteen years after

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José Sarria became the first openly gay candidate for the Board of Supervisors, Milk became the first openly gay supervisor and one of the first openly gay individuals to win an election. Milk's success was an important symbolic victory for the LGBT community and made headlines across the country.

Less than a year into his tenure on the Board of Supervisors, Harvey Milk and Mayor George Moscone were both assassinated by a former colleague. Milk had received regular death threats throughout his public life, and left a recording to be made public in the event of his death. In the recording, he says, "If a bullet should enter my brain, let that bullet destroy every closet door."

Harvey Milk's death inspired many LGBT men and women to take a more active role in the LGBT rights movement, including his close friend and fellow activist Cleve Jones. At the time of Milk's assassination, Jones was an intern at City Hall. Milk's death inspired Jones to dedicate his life to the LGBT rights movement.

One of the greatest challenges that LGBT community faced in the late 20th century was the outbreak and rapid spread of HIV/AIDS. AIDS is a deadly disease that compromises the immune system, transmitted through contact with infected blood or other bodily fluids. Although the AIDS epidemic affected thousands of Americans during the 1980s, the initial outbreak largely affected gay men. In 1982, Cleve Jones helped to start the San Francisco AIDS Foundation. In 1987, he created the NAMES Project AIDS Memorial Quilt to commemorate the victims of AIDS and to help others understand the magnitude of the disease's impact. Today, Jones lives in San Francisco and remains an active participant in the fight for LGBT rights.

Important Supreme Court Cases



The LGBT rights movement has been shaped by the outcomes of several important cases in the United States Supreme Court. Some decisions have hurt the LGBT community, such as *Boutilier v. INS* and *Bowers v. Hardwick*. Other decisions, such as *Lawrence v. Texas* and *Obergefell v. Hodges*, have secured important rights for LGBT men and women.

The LGBT rights movement has been shaped by numerous important Supreme Court decisions, beginning in 1958 with the case *ONE, Inc. v. Olesen*, mentioned above.

Another important Supreme Court decision that was made before the Stonewall Riots was in *Boutilier v. Immigration and Naturalization Services* in 1967. Clive Boutilier, a bisexual immigrant from Canada, had been living in the United States since 1955 when he applied for U.S. citizenship. INS deported Boutilier, arguing that he broke a U.S. law that barred “[a]liens afflicted with psychopathic personality, epilepsy, or a mental defect” from living in the United States. Although homosexuality was not explicitly mentioned in the law, some medical and psychiatric professionals believed that homosexuality was a type of “psychopathic personality.”

The Supreme Court upheld Boutilier’s deportation order 6–3, finding that Congress intended to exclude homosexual immigrants from entering the country by calling them psychopathic personalities. The Supreme Court did not challenge Congress’s right to exclude

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immigrants on the basis of sexual orientation, holding “that any acts of homosexuality suffice to deport the alien.”

In the years after the Stonewall Riots, some of the most important Supreme Court cases to the LGBT community addressed the constitutionality of the sodomy laws that made homosexuality illegal. In the 1986 case *Bowers v. Hardwick*, the Supreme Court upheld the conviction of Michael Hardwick for violating Georgia’s sodomy laws in a 5–4 decision. In his majority opinion, Justice Byron White argues that the Constitutional right to privacy established in previous cases such as *Griswold v. Connecticut* (1965), *Loving v. Virginia* (1967), and *Roe v. Wade* (1973) does not extend to homosexual intimacy. In a concurring opinion for *Bowers v. Hardwick*, Chief Justice Warren Burger writes, “there is no such thing as a fundamental right to commit homosexual sodomy . . . To hold that the act of homosexuality is somehow protected as a fundamental right would be to cast aside millennia of moral teaching.”

The Supreme Court did not reverse its decision to uphold the constitutionality of state sodomy laws until 2003, with the case *Lawrence v. Texas*. In this case, the Supreme Court found that sodomy laws violated the liberty and privacy rights protected by the Constitution. Justice Anthony Kennedy writes in the majority opinion:

The laws involved in Bowers and here . . . [touch] upon the most private human conduct, sexual behavior, and in the most private of places, the home. The statutes do seek to control a personal relationship that, whether or not entitled to formal recognition in the law, is within the liberty of persons to choose without being punished as criminals . . . [Adults] may choose to enter upon this relationship in the confines of their homes and their own private lives and still retain their dignity as free persons . . . The liberty protected by the Constitution allows homosexual persons the right to make this choice.

In a concurring opinion, Justice Sandra Day O’Connor argues that Texas’ sodomy law also denied LGBT men and women equal protection under the law, guaranteed by the Fourteenth Amendment. She notes:

The Texas statute makes homosexuals unequal in the eyes of the law by making particular conduct—and only that conduct—subject to criminal sanction . . . Texas’ sodomy law brands all homosexuals as criminals, thereby making it more difficult for homosexuals to be treated in the same

manner as everyone else.

The precedent set by the Court's decision in *Lawrence v. Texas* led some states to repeal other discriminatory laws. In 2004, the Idaho Supreme Court struck down a previous ruling that had barred homosexual individuals from being awarded child custody, arguing that the decision in *Lawrence v. Texas* had made homosexuality "a protected practice under the Due Process clause." Mere months after the ruling in *Lawrence v. Texas*, the Massachusetts Supreme Court ruled that same-sex marriage was a right protected by the Massachusetts Constitution, quoting Justice Kennedy's majority opinion in its decision.

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Some of the most recent victories for LGBT rights activists have been in the fight for marriage equality. Supreme Court cases *U.S. v. Windsor*, *Hollingsworth v. Perry*, and *Obergefell v. Hodges* were all important steps toward legalizing same-sex marriage.

More recently, the Supreme Court has influenced the LGBT rights movement with decisions that address the institution of marriage. The first case, *United States v. Windsor* (2013), was a challenge to Section 3 of the Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA), which defines marriage for the purposes of the federal government as between one man and one woman. The Supreme Court held that the institution of marriage was within the jurisdiction of the states, not Congress, and that Section 3 of DOMA impeded the states' prerogative to enact their own definitions of marriage. Moreover, the Court found that "[the] history of DOMA's enactment and its own text demonstrate that interference with the equal dignity of same-sex marriages, a dignity conferred by the States

in the exercise of their sovereign power, was more than an incidental effect of the federal statute.” Although this successful challenge to the constitutionality of DOMA was an important step for LGBT activists, the *United States v. Windsor* decision did not address the constitutionality of state laws that denied homosexual couples the right to marry.

That same day in 2013, the Supreme Court also ruled on *Hollingsworth v. Perry*, another case about the legality of same-sex marriage. In this case, the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals affirmed a previous California State Court decision that struck down Proposition 8 as a violation of the Fourteenth Amendment of the U.S. Constitution. Proposition 8, passed in 2008, amended the California Constitution to define marriage as between one man and one woman. The Ninth Circuit Court found that “Proposition 8 serves no purpose, and has no effect, other than to lessen the status and human dignity of gays and lesbians in California, and to officially reclassify their relationships and families as inferior to those of opposite-sex couples. The Constitution simply does not allow for ‘laws of this sort.’” When the case reached the Supreme Court, however, the Court found that the supporters of Proposition 8 did not have standing to appeal and could not consider the actual contents of the case. As a result, the Ninth Circuit Court’s decision stood and Proposition 8 was struck down, legalizing same-sex marriage in California. Although the decision in *Hollingsworth v. Perry* was an important victory for LGBT couples in California, the decision only applied to that state, not to the entire nation.

Another victory in the fight for same-sex marriage came in 2015, with the case *Obergefell v. Hodges*. In this case, the Supreme Court ruled that the state laws that define marriage as between one man and one woman violate the Fourteenth Amendment of the Constitution. The Court found that the right to marry is one of the liberties that states cannot deny any person “without due process of law.” Moreover, denying same-sex couples the right to marry deprives LGBT men and women “equal protection of the laws.” In the majority opinion, Justice Anthony Kennedy writes:

No union is more profound than marriage, for it embodies the highest ideals of love, fidelity, devotion, sacrifice, and family. In forming a marital union, two people become something greater than once they were. As some of the petitioners in these cases demonstrate, marriage embodies a love that may endure even past death. It would misunderstand these men and women to say they disrespect the idea of marriage. Their plea is that they do respect it, respect it so deeply that they seek to find its

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fulfillment for themselves. Their hope is not to be condemned to live in loneliness, excluded from one of civilization's oldest institutions. They ask for equal dignity in the eyes of the law. The Constitution grants them that right.

Sylvia Rivera and the Transgender Rights Movement

While the LGBT rights movement secured important rights for gay men and lesbians, transgender men and women have struggled to protect their rights as well. One of the most influential transgender rights activists was Sylvia Rivera. Sylvia Rivera was born Ray Rivera in New York City in 1951 to Puerto Rican and Venezuelan parents. Rivera was raised by her grandmother, who disapproved of her effeminate behavior. At around 10 years old, Rivera was homeless, living on the streets among a community of drag queens.

Rivera became an important figure in the LGBT rights movement with her participation in the Stonewall Riots. According to some accounts of that night, Rivera threw one of the first bottles at the police, and said, "I'm not missing a minute of this, it's the revolution." After the Stonewall Riots, she focused her activism on the people she believed the mainstream movement was leaving behind. Rivera was a very active member of the Gay Activists Alliance, but she often conflicted with the group over its treatment of transgender men and women. Rivera left the GAA when it began to exclude transgender issues from its political agenda.

One activist described Sylvia Rivera as "the Rosa Parks of the modern transgender movement." Rivera co-founded Street Transvestite Action Revolutionaries (STAR). The organization provided aid to homeless transgender youth. Through STAR, Rivera also established a shelter for homeless transgender women called STAR House. While Rivera is best known for her work for the transgender community, she also advocated for LGBT men and women of color and those affected by poverty. Although Rivera's activism was often interrupted by her struggles with addiction and homelessness, Rivera continued to be an important advocate for LGBT rights during the final five years of her life. She passed away in 2002 at the age of 50.

Like the mainstream LGBT rights movement, the fight for transgender rights has also been influenced by important court decisions. In the 2011 case *Glenn v. Brumby*, the Eleventh Circuit Court of Appeals found that the Equal Protection clause of the Fourteenth Amendment prohibits employers from firing transgender men and women on the basis of

their gender identities. In *Schroer v. Billington* (2008), another federal court found that Title VII of the Civil Rights Act prohibits employers from refusing to hire transgender men and women because of their gender nonconformity. In 2012, the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission prohibited discrimination against transgender men and women with its decision in *Macy v. Holder*.

César Chávez: Working for Change

César Chávez's childhood in California was shaped by the Great Depression. After many years of working in agriculture as a migrant laborer himself, Chávez dedicated his life to the fight for the rights of migrant farmworkers across the country. What challenges did migrant farmworkers face during the Great Depression?



César Chávez, a migrant farmworker who later worked to improve the lives of other farmworkers, grew up in California during the Great Depression. This sculpture to honor him is located in downtown Sacramento.

On a bright summer day in 1939, a car piled high with belongings pulled into a gas station near Gonzales, California. Squeezed inside among all of the bags and clothing was the Chávez family—Librado and Juana and their five children, who had been driving through California for two days, searching for farm work.

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The family had heard there were peas to be harvested in Atascadero, so they drove there, only to discover that the harvest had ended. Then someone told them about good picking about 90 miles north, in Gonzales—but when they arrived, Librado asked around town and learned there was no work available there either.

Now, as the disappointed Chávez family waited for gasoline at the station near Gonzales, a man approached them. The man understood that they were migrants in search of agricultural work just by the look of their overloaded car—everything they owned in the world, it seemed, was inside or on top of that car.

“Where are you going?” the man asked. “I know of a job.” He told them there was good pea picking near Half Moon Bay, another 100 miles to the north. He told the Chávezes that the work paid well, and promised that the family would be provided a house. Following the man's advice, the Chávez family departed for Half Moon Bay with high hopes.

Twelve-year-old César Chávez traveled with his family in that overloaded car towards Half Moon Bay. It was that summer in 1939, he later recalled, when his family's whole world was “turned upside down.”



Many migrant families lived in cars and tents. Like the Chávez family, they drove up and down California's roads in search of agricultural work harvesting crops.

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Until that summer, the Chávezes had lived and worked on their own ranch in Arizona. At the onset of the Great Depression, the family could no longer afford to pay their taxes and lost ownership of the ranch. Like so many others during this time, the Chávez family was forced to pack up their belongings and abandon their home for California. “We headed west,” Chávez later said. “It was our only hope.”

Upon their arrival in Half Moon Bay, the family's hope once again turned to disappointment. There were peas to be harvested, but not nearly enough for all the workers who, like the Chávez family, had migrated to Half Moon Bay for the picking. There was no house for the family, just a dilapidated shed with a dirt floor—and the pay was only half of what the man at the gas station had promised.

That man, it turned out, was a labor contractor whose job was to hire workers for the farm owners, often by cheating migrant workers. Like many other migrant workers, it would take the Chávez family a long time to realize that they could not trust most labor contractors.



Wherever they found work, the Chávez family spent their days like this woman, picking tomatoes and other crops, bent over under the blazing sun. Migrant work was difficult, and the pay was low. In the 1930s, a worker might earn only a few cents an hour.

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But right now, the Chávez family desperately needed money, so they all went into the fields and picked peas—even César's 5-year-old brother. The family moved slowly down the rows of peas, bent over under the blazing summer sun alongside the other migrant workers. At the end of the day, they waited in a long line for the peas to be sorted and weighed and to receive their pay. For their difficult labor under the hot California sun, the entire family made about seven cents an hour—a penny per person.

Two weeks later, the family packed their car and departed south for San José, where rumor had it there were cherries to pick.

From that summer on, the Chávez family followed the crops, working their way from San José and Sacramento in the north to the Imperial Valley in the south and back again. César climbed ladders to pick cherries, pitted apricots with a sharp blade, and gathered walnuts that his father shook out of the trees. Like other migrant farmworkers in California, Chávez picked grapes and tomatoes, cotton, and beans for mere pennies.

The places they lived, César remembered, “were dumps, shacks, or worse, places that had no water, often no electricity.” The living conditions within the labor camps set up for the agricultural workers were deplorable—filthy, crowded, and lacking plumbing and privacy. The toilets, César recalled, were “always horrible, so miserable you couldn't go there.”

While school was in session, César and his siblings worked in the fields after classes and on weekends. His mother sent the Chávez children to school every day, regardless of where they were living, the abundance of crops to harvest, or how desperately the family needed money. “I didn't learn,” she would tell them, “but you can learn, so you have to go.”

Chávez would later recall that, for him, school was “just a nightmare.” Other children harassed him for his Mexican accent, for wearing mismatched socks, and for having no coat to wear. When the family could not afford shoes, Chávez had to attend school barefoot. “They would never let me forget it,” he remembered.

Over the course of his migrant childhood, Chávez attended more than 30 different schools. After completing the eighth grade, Chávez abandoned his education for good and began to work in agriculture full time in order to help support his family.

Like that of any migrant worker, Chávez's life was shaped by the passing of the seasons. "The crops changed and we kept moving," he remembered. "There was a time for planting, and a time for thinning, and an endless variety of harvests up and down the state." Chávez eventually left agricultural work behind to become a labor organizer and fight for workers' rights.



As an adult, Chávez traveled the country to inform other migrant farmworkers of their rights.

Chávez understood the challenges of agricultural work, and he was familiar with the poverty that the migrants endured. Many were immigrants. He knew that the migrants were at the mercy of labor contractors who, he said, made a profit "by cheating the workers." Chávez vowed to reform this unjust system and improve the lives of farmworkers. He called this fight for justice *la causa*, or "the cause."

In Delano, California Filipino-American grape pickers started a strike, organized by Larry Itliong. Chávez and another organizer, Dolores Huerta, encouraged Latino grape pickers to join the strike. Chávez, Huerta, and Itliong formed a labor union called United Farm Workers (UFW). A labor union is an organization that tries to improve conditions

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for workers. The UFW held marches, strikes, and other protests to put pressure on farm owners to offer higher pay and improve working conditions. The Delano grape strike was successful, and the Delano farm owners agreed to higher pay for the grape pickers.

Chávez did not always achieve his goals, but he never stopped fighting for justice for migrant farmworkers. In honor of his life and work, California celebrates César Chávez Day on March 31, his birthday—a day for serving our communities and helping others. “It’s a lifetime job,” Chávez once said. “The work for social change and against social injustice is never ended.”