

# Latinos and Native Americans Seek Equality

## MAIN IDEA

Latinos and Native Americans confronted injustices in the 1960s.

## WHY IT MATTERS NOW

Campaigns for civil rights and economic justice won better representation and opportunity for Latinos and Native Americans.

## Terms & Names

- César Chávez
- United Farm Workers Organizing Committee
- La Raza Unida
- American Indian Movement (AIM)

## One American's Story

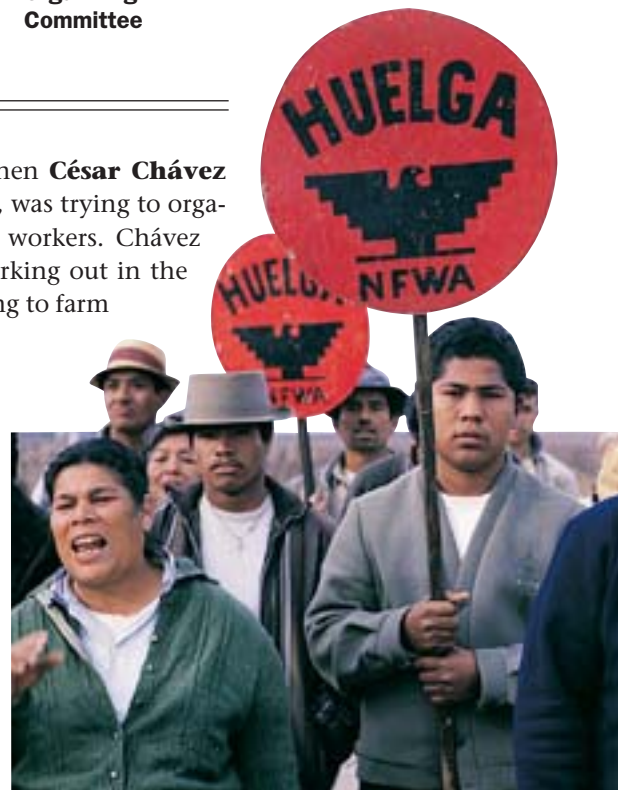
Jessie Lopez de la Cruz's life changed one night in 1962, when **César Chávez** came to her home. Chávez, a Mexican-American farm worker, was trying to organize a union for California's mostly Spanish-speaking farm workers. Chávez said, "The women have to be involved. They're the ones working out in the fields with their husbands." Soon Jessie was in the fields, talking to farm workers about the union.

### A PERSONAL VOICE JESSIE LOPEZ DE LA CRUZ

"Wherever I went to speak . . . I told them about . . . how we had no benefits, no minimum wage, nothing out in the fields—no restrooms, nothing. . . . I said, 'Well! Do you think we should be putting up with this in this modern age? . . . We can stand up! We can talk back! . . . This country is very rich, and we want a share of the money those growers make [off] our sweat and our work by exploiting us and our children!'"

—quoted in *Moving the Mountain: Women Working for Social Change*

The efforts of Jessie Lopez de la Cruz were just part of a larger rights movement during the turbulent and revolutionary 1960s. As African Americans were fighting for civil rights, Latinos and Native Americans rose up to assert their own rights and improve their lives.



▲ Carrying signs that say "Strike" (*huelga*), Mexican-American farm workers protest poor working conditions.

## The Latino Presence Grows

Latinos, or Americans of Latin American descent, are a large and diverse group. During the 1960s, the Latino population in the United States grew from 3 million to more than 9 million. Today the Latino population includes people from several different areas, primarily Mexico, Puerto Rico, Cuba, the Dominican Republic, Central America, and South America. Each of these groups has its own history, its



◀ In the 1920s, thousands of Mexican people came to the U.S. and settled in *barrios*. Shown here, Hispanic men gather in a park in California.

own pattern of settlement in the United States, and its own set of economic, social, cultural, and political concerns.

**LATINOS OF VARIED ORIGINS** Mexican Americans, the largest Latino group, have lived mostly in the Southwest and California. This group includes descendants of the nearly 100,000 Mexicans who had lived in territories ceded by Mexico to the United States in 1848. Another million or so Mexicans came to the United States in the 1910s, following Mexico's revolution. Still others came as *braceros*, or temporary laborers, during the 1940s and 1950s. In the 1960s close to half a million Mexicans immigrated, most in search of better paying jobs.

Puerto Ricans began immigrating to the United States after the U.S. occupation of Puerto Rico in 1898. As of 1960, almost 900,000 Puerto Ricans were living in the continental United States, including almost half a million on New York City's West Side.

Large Cuban communities also formed in New York City and in Miami and New Jersey. This is because hundreds of thousands of Cubans, many of whom were academics and professionals, fled to the United States in 1959 to escape Fidel Castro's Communist rule. In addition, tens of thousands of Salvadorans, Guatemalans, Nicaraguans, and Colombians immigrated to the United States after the 1960s to escape civil war and chronic poverty.

Wherever they had settled, during the 1960s many Latinos encountered ethnic prejudice and discrimination in jobs and housing. Most lived in segregated *barrios*, or Spanish-speaking neighborhoods. The Latino jobless rate was nearly 50 percent higher than that of whites, as was the percentage of Latino families living in poverty. **A**

## Latinos Fight for Change

As the presence of Latinos in the United States grew, so too did their demand for greater representation and better treatment. During the 1960s, Latinos demanded not only equal opportunity, but also a respect for their culture and heritage.

### MAIN IDEA

#### Identifying Problems

**A** What problems did different groups of Latino immigrants share?

### HISTORICAL SPOTLIGHT

#### DESPERATE JOURNEYS

In the 1960s and 1970s, thousands of poor Mexicans illegally crossed the 2,000-mile border between the United States and Mexico each year. The journey these illegal aliens undertook was often made more difficult by "coyotes," guides who charged large amounts of money to help them cross the border, but who often didn't deliver on their promises.

Illegal immigrants' problems didn't end when they entered the United States, where they were denied many social services, including unemployment insurance and food stamps. In addition, the Immigration and Naturalization Service urged businesses to refrain from hiring them. As a result, some owners stopped employing people with Latino names, including legal immigrants.



*“To us, the boycott of grapes was the most near-perfect of nonviolent struggles.”*

CÉSAR CHÁVEZ

**THE FARM WORKER MOVEMENT** As Jessie Lopez de la Cruz explained, thousands working on California’s fruit and vegetable farms did backbreaking work for little pay and few benefits. César Chávez believed that farm workers had to unionize, that their strength would come from bargaining as a group. In 1962, Chávez and Dolores Huerta established the National Farm Workers Association. Four years later, this group merged with a Filipino agricultural union (also founded by Huerta) to form the **United Farm Workers Organizing Committee** (UFWOC).

Chávez and his fellow organizers insisted that California’s large fruit and vegetable companies accept their union as the bargaining agent for the farm workers. In 1965, when California’s grape growers refused to recognize the union, Chávez launched a nationwide boycott of the companies’ grapes. Chávez, like Martin Luther King, Jr., believed in using nonviolence to reach his goal. The union sent farm workers across the country to convince supermarkets and shoppers not to buy California grapes. Chávez then went on a three-week fast in which he lost 35 pounds. He ended his fast by attending Mass with Senator Robert F. Kennedy. The efforts of the farm workers eventually paid off. In 1970, Huerta negotiated a contract between the grape growers and the UFWOC. Union workers would finally be guaranteed higher wages and other benefits long denied them. **B**

Contract between the grape growers and the UFWOC. Union workers would finally be guaranteed higher wages and other benefits long denied them. **B**

**CULTURAL PRIDE** The activities of the California farm workers helped to inspire other Latino “brown power” movements across the country. In New York, members of the Puerto Rican population began to demand that schools offer Spanish-speaking children classes taught in their own language as well as programs about their culture. In 1968, Congress enacted the Bilingual Education Act, which provided funds for schools to develop bilingual and cultural heritage programs for non-English-speaking children.

Young Mexican Americans started to call themselves Chicanos or Chicanas—a shortened version of “Mexicanos” that expressed pride in their ethnic heritage. A Chicano community action group called the Brown Berets formed under the leadership of David Sanchez. In 1968, the Brown Berets organized walkouts in East Los Angeles high schools. About 15,000 Chicano students walked out of class demanding smaller classes, more Chicano teachers and administrators, and programs designed to reduce the high Latino dropout rate. Militant Mexican-American students also won the establishment of Chicano studies programs at colleges and universities.

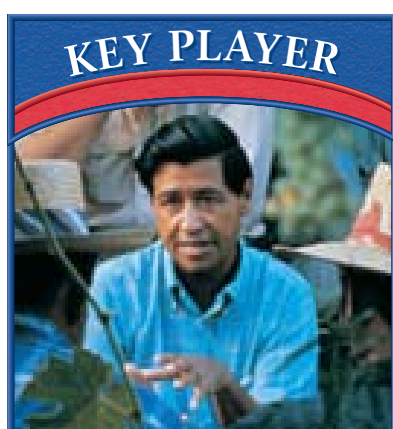
**POLITICAL POWER** Latinos also began organizing politically during the 1960s. Some worked within the two-party system. For example, the Mexican American Political Association (MAPA) helped elect Los Angeles politician Edward Roybal to the House of Representatives. During the 1960s, eight Hispanic Americans served in the House, and one Hispanic senator was elected—Joseph Montoya of New Mexico.

Others, like Texan José Angel Gutiérrez, sought to create an independent Latino political movement. In 1970, he established **La Raza Unida** (Mexican-Americans United). In the 1970s, La Raza Unida ran Latino candidates in five states and won races for mayor, as well as positions on school boards and city councils.

#### MAIN IDEA

#### Analyzing Effects

**B** What impact did the grape boycott have?



#### CÉSAR CHÁVEZ 1927–1993

César Chávez spoke from experience when he said, “Many things in farm labor are terrible.”

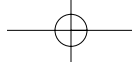
As a teenager, Chávez moved with his family from farm to farm, picking such crops as grapes, apricots, and olives. “The worst crop was the olives,” Chávez recalled. “The olives are so small you can never fill the bucket.”

The seeds of protest grew early in Chávez. As a teenager, he once went to see a movie, only to find that the theater was segregated—whites on one side of the aisle and Mexicans on the other side. “I really hadn’t thought much about what I was going to do, but I had to do something,” Chávez recalled. The future union leader sat down in the whites-only section and stayed there until the police arrived and arrested him.

#### Background

Prior to 1960, 32 Hispanics had been elected to Congress, beginning with Joseph Hernandez in 1822.





Still other Latinos took on a more confrontational tone. In 1963, one-time evangelical preacher Reies Tijerina founded the Alianza Federal de Mercedes (Federal Alliance of Land Grants) to help reclaim U.S. land taken from Mexican landholders in the 19th century. He and his followers raided the Rio Arriba County Courthouse in Tierra Amarilla, New Mexico, in order to force authorities to recognize the plight of New Mexican small farmers. They were later arrested.

## Native Americans Struggle for Equality

### Vocabulary

**homogeneous:**  
uniform or similar  
throughout

As are Latinos, Native Americans are sometimes viewed as a single homogeneous group, despite the hundreds of distinct Native American tribes and nations in the United States. One thing that these diverse tribes and nations have shared is a mostly bleak existence in the United States and a lack of autonomy, or ability to control and govern their own lives. Through the years, many Native Americans have clung to their heritage, refusing to assimilate, or blend, into mainstream society. Native American nationalist Vine Deloria, Jr., expressed the view that mainstream society was nothing more than “ice cream bars and heart trouble and . . . getting up at six o’clock in the morning to mow your lawn in the suburbs.”

### NATIVE AMERICANS SEEK GREATER AUTONOMY

Despite their cultural diversity, Native Americans as a group have been the poorest of Americans and have suffered from the highest unemployment rate. They have also been more likely than any other group to suffer from tuberculosis and alcoholism. Although the Native American population rose during the 1960s, the death rate among Native American infants was nearly twice the national average, while life expectancy was several years less than for other Americans.

In 1954, the Eisenhower administration enacted a “termination” policy to deal with these problems, but it did not respect Native American culture. Native Americans were relocated from isolated reservations into mainstream urban American life. The plan failed miserably. Most who moved to the cities remained desperately poor.

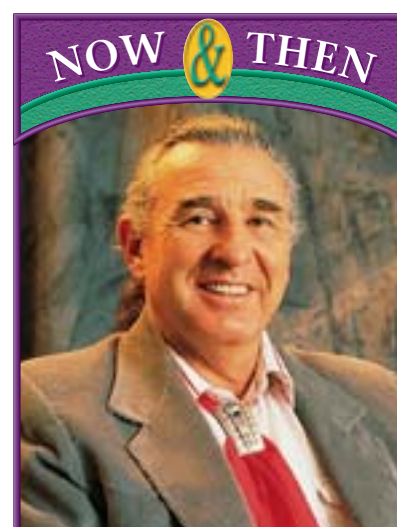
In 1961, representatives from 61 Native American groups met in Chicago and drafted the Declaration of Indian Purpose, which stressed the determination of Native Americans to “choose our own way of life.” The declaration called for an end to the termination program in favor of new policies designed to create economic opportunities for Native Americans on their reservations. In 1968, President Lyndon Johnson established the National Council on Indian Opportunity to “ensure that programs reflect the needs and desires of the Indian people.”

**VOICES OF PROTEST** Many young Native Americans were dissatisfied with the slow pace of reform. Their discontent fueled the growth of the **American Indian Movement (AIM)**, an often militant Native American rights organization. While AIM began in 1968 largely as a self-defense group against police brutality, it soon branched out to include protecting the rights of large Native American populations in northern and western states.

### MAIN IDEA

#### Analyzing Motives

**C** Why did Native Americans resist assimilation?



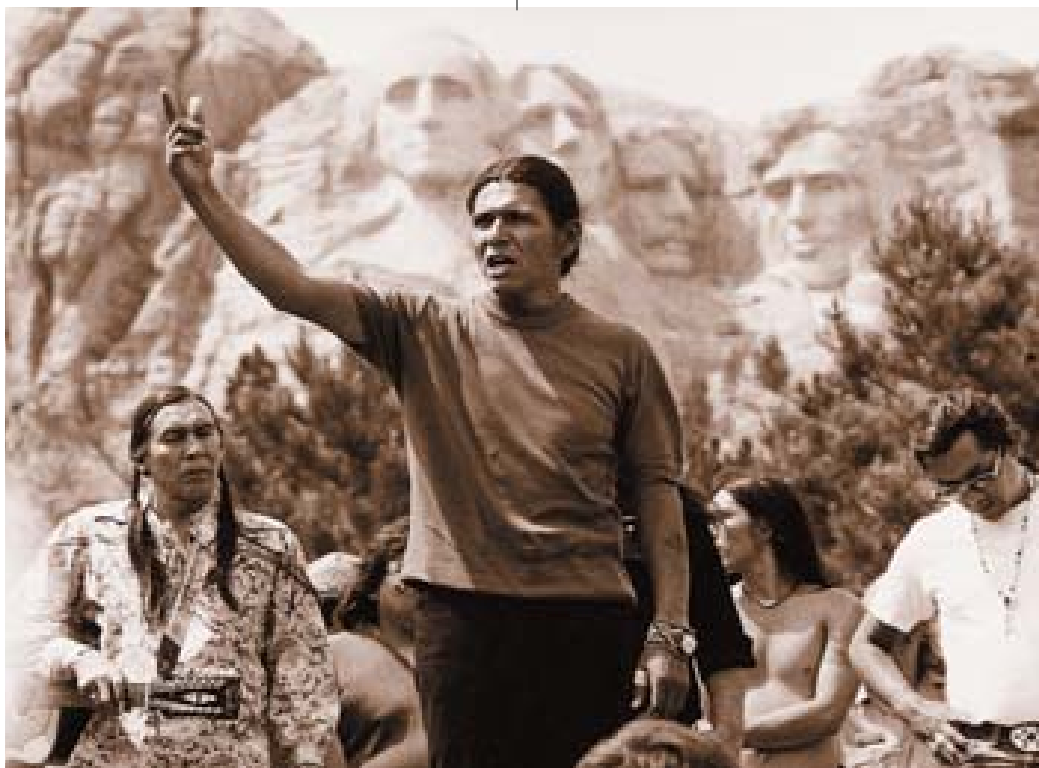
**BEN NIGHTHORSE  
CAMPBELL**

Whereas many Native Americans rejected assimilation, Ben Nighthorse Campbell has chosen to work within the system to improve the lives of Native Americans. Campbell’s father was a North Cheyenne, and his great-grandfather, Black Horse, fought in the 1876 Battle of the Little Bighorn—in which the Cheyenne and the Sioux defeated Lieutenant Colonel George Custer.

In 1992, Campbell was elected to the U.S. Senate from Colorado, marking the first time since 1929 that a Native American had been elected to the Senate. Campbell stated that while his new job covered the entire nation, the needs of Native Americans would always remain a high priority.



AIM leader Dennis Banks speaks at the foot of Mount Rushmore, in South Dakota, during a 1970s rally.



For some, this new activism meant demanding that Native American lands, burial grounds, and fishing and timber rights be restored. Others wanted a new respect for their culture. Mary Crow Dog, a Lakota Sioux, described AIM's impact.

#### A PERSONAL VOICE MARY CROW DOG

“My first encounter with AIM was at a pow-wow held in 1971. . . . One man, a Chippewa, stood up and made a speech. I had never heard anybody talk like that. He spoke about genocide and sovereignty, about tribal leaders selling out. . . . He had himself wrapped up in an upside-down American flag, telling us that every star in this flag represented a state stolen from the Indians. . . . Some people wept. An old man turned to me and said, ‘These are the words I always wanted to speak, but had kept shut up within me.’”

—Lakota Women

*“If the government doesn’t start living up to its obligations, armed resistance . . . will have to become a regular thing.”*

CHIPPEWA PROTESTER

**CONFRONTING THE GOVERNMENT** In its early years, AIM, as well as other groups, actively—and sometimes violently—confronted the government. In 1972, AIM leader Russell Means organized the “Trail of Broken Treaties” march in Washington, D.C., to protest the U.S. government’s treaty violations throughout history. Native Americans from across the country joined the march. They sought the restoration of 110 million acres of land. They also pushed for the abolition of the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA), which many believed was corrupt. The marchers temporarily occupied the BIA building, destroyed records, and caused \$2 million in property damage.

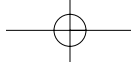
A year later, AIM led nearly 200 Sioux to the tiny village of Wounded Knee, South Dakota, where the U.S. cavalry had massacred a Sioux village in 1890. In protest against both tribal leadership and federal policies, the Sioux seized the town, taking hostages. After tense negotiations with the FBI and a shootout that left two Native Americans dead and others wounded, the confrontation ended with a government promise to reexamine Native American treaty rights. **D**

**NATIVE AMERICAN VICTORIES** Congress and the federal courts did make some reforms on behalf of Native Americans. In 1972, Congress passed the Indian Education Act. In 1975, it passed the Indian Self-Determination and Education

#### MAIN IDEA

#### Summarizing

**D** What tactics did AIM use in its attempts to gain reforms?



## Native American Legal Victories

**1970**

Taos of New Mexico regain possession of Blue Lake as well as surrounding forestland.

**1971**

Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act gives Alaskan natives 44 million acres and more than \$962 million.

**1979**

Maine Implementing Act provides \$81.5 million for native tribes, including Penobscot and Passamaquoddy, to buy back land.

**1980**

U.S. awards Sioux \$106 million for illegally taken land in South Dakota.

**1988**

U.S. awards Puyallup tribe \$162 million for land claims in Washington.

Assistance Act. These laws gave tribes greater control over their own affairs and over their children's education.

Armed with copies of old land treaties that the U.S. government had broken, Native Americans went to federal court and regained some of their rights to land. In 1970, the Taos of New Mexico regained possession of their sacred Blue Lake, as well as a portion of its surrounding forestland. Land claims by natives of Alaska resulted in the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act of 1971. This act gave more than 40 million acres to native peoples and paid out more than \$962 million in cash. Throughout the 1970s and 1980s, Native Americans won settlements that provided legal recognition of their tribal lands as well as financial compensation.

While the 1960s and the early 1970s saw a wave of activism from the nation's minority groups, another group of Americans also pushed for changes. Women, while not a minority group, were in many ways treated like second-class citizens, and many joined together to demand equal treatment in society.



### ASSESSMENT

**1. TERMS & NAMES** For each term or name, write a sentence explaining its significance.

•César Chávez

•United Farm Workers Organizing Committee

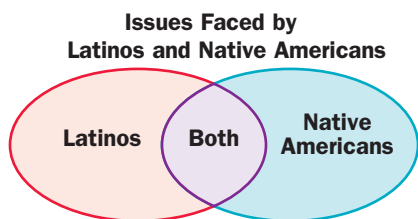
•La Raza Unida

•American Indian Movement (AIM)

### MAIN IDEA

#### 2. TAKING NOTES

Create a Venn diagram like the one below to show the broad similarities between the issues faced by Latinos and Native Americans during the 1960s, as well as the unique concerns of the two groups.



Which group do you think had more to gain by fighting for what they wanted?

### CRITICAL THINKING

#### 3. EVALUATING

How would you judge whether an activist organization was effective? List criteria you would use, and justify your criteria. **Think About:**

- UFWOC, MAPA, and La Raza Unida
- AIM
- the leaders and activities of these organizations

#### 4. ANALYZING EFFECTS

In what ways did the Latino campaign for economic and social equality affect non-Latino Americans?

#### 5. ANALYZING PRIMARY SOURCES

Vine Deloria, Jr., said,

**“When you get far enough away from the reservation, you can see it’s the urban man who has no identity.”**

What do you think he meant by this?