

Latino, Native Americans, and Women's Rights

Latinos

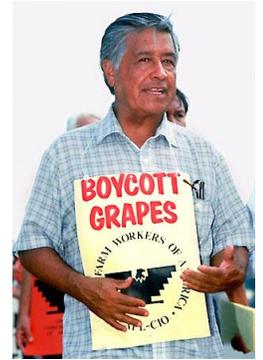
Latinos, or Americans of Latin American descent, are a large and diverse group. During the 1960s, the Latino population in the United States grew from 3 million to more than 9 million. Today the Latino population includes, people from several different areas, primarily Mexico, Puerto Rico, Cuba, the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

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

Thousands of Latinos working on California's fruit and vegetable farms did backbreaking work for little pay and few benefits. Cesar Chavez believed that farm workers had to unionize, that their strength would come from bargaining as a group. In 1962, Chavez established the United Farm Workers Organizing Committee.

In 1965, Cesar Chavez led a strike on behalf of the migrant farm workers in California. Chavez used the strategies of Martin Luther King to reach his goals of higher pay and better working conditions. In addition to the strike, he organized the United Farm Workers Union and enacted a nationwide boycott of grapes to support his cause. Responding to the mistreatment of union membership in the fields, Chavez commenced a three-week hunger strike (in which he lost 35 pounds) to receive national attention. When the grape growers recognized his union in 1970, his deeds were vindicated.

Latinos also organized politically during the 1960s. Texan Jose Angel Gutierrez 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.



Native Americans

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 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.

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.

As politics became more radicalized, a Red Power Movement emerged in Native American communities. In urban Native American ghettos across the Midwest, the American Indian Movement (AIM) took shape. Members of AIM were tired of working through a system they believed was the primary reason many Native Americans lived in dire poverty. 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. They chose attention-grabbing stunts as the means to draw attention to their cause.

In 1969, members of AIM seized Alcatraz Island, an abandoned federal prison, in San Francisco Bay. Reclaiming the island as Native American land, the occupiers demanded that an Indian university and cultural center be established on the site. The federal government rejected these demands and played a waiting game. For 18 months the occupation forces held firm. In June 1971 the movement ended when police removed the few remaining occupiers.

In 1972, the AIM leaders organized the "Trail of Broken Treaties" march on Washington, D.C. to protest the U.S. government 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.

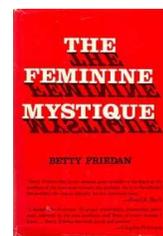
A year later, AIM led nearly 200 Sioux to the tiny village of Wounded Knee, South Dakota, where the U.S. cavalry had massacred a Sioux village in 1890. In protest, they seized the town, taking hostages. The 71 day confrontation ended with a government promise to reexamine Native American Treaties.

Congress did make some reforms. In the 1970s, Congress passed the Indian Education Act and the Indian Self-Determination and Education Assistance Acts. These laws gave tribes greater control over their own affairs and over their children's education.



The Women's Movement

"Motherhood is bliss." "Your first priority is to care for your husband and children." "Homemaking can be exciting and fulfilling." Throughout the 1950s, educated middle-class women heard advice like this from the time they were born until they reached adulthood. The new suburban lifestyle prompted many women to leave college early and pursue the "cult of the housewife." Magazines such as *Ladies Home Journal* and television shows such as "Father Knows Best" reinforced this idyllic image.



But not every woman wanted to wear pearls and bring her husband his pipe and slippers when he came home from work. Some women wanted careers of their own. The theory behind the women's movement of the 1960s was feminism, the belief that women should have economic, political, and social equality with men.

In 1963, Betty Friedan published a book called *The Feminine Mystique* that identified "the problem that has no name." Amid all the demands to prepare breakfast, to drive their children to activities, and to entertain guests, Friedan had the courage to ask: "Is this all there is?" "Is this really all a woman is capable of doing?" In short, the problem was that many women did not like the traditional role society prescribed for them.

Friedan's book struck a nerve. Within three years of the publication of her book, a new feminist movement was born, the likes of which had been absent since the suffrage movement.

NOW

In 1966, Friedan, and others formed an activist group called the National Organization for Women. NOW was dedicated to the "full participation of women in mainstream American society." They demanded equal pay for equal work and pressured the government to support and enforce legislation that prohibited gender discrimination. When Congress debated that landmark Civil Rights Act of 1964, which prohibited discrimination in employment on account of race, conservative Congressmen added gender to the bill, thinking that the inclusion of women would kill the act. When this strategy backfired and the measure was signed into law, groups such as NOW became dedicated to its enforcement.

In 1968, radical women demonstrated outside the Miss America Pageant outside Atlantic City by crowning a live sheep. "Freedom Trash Cans" were built where women could throw all symbols of female oppression including false eyelashes, hair curlers, bras, girdles, and high-heeled shoes. The media labeled them bra burners, although no bras were actually burned.

The word "sexism" entered the American vocabulary, as women became categorized as a target group for discrimination. Single and married women adopted the title Ms. as an alternative to *Miss* or *Mrs.* to avoid changing their identities based upon their relationships with men.

The Equal Right Amendment

"Equality of rights under the law shall not be abridged by the United States or by any State on account of sex." This simple sentence comprised Section 1 of the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA), which was first proposed in Congress by the National Women's Party in 1923. Feminists of the late 1960s and early 1970s saw ratification of the amendment as the only clear-cut way to eliminate all legal gender-based discrimination in the United States.

Amending the Constitution is a two-step process. First, the Congress must propose the amendment by a two-thirds majority in both the House and Senate. After proposal, it must be ratified by three-fourths of the state legislatures. Organizations like the National Organization of Women (NOW) began a hard push for the ERA in 1970.

Leaders such as Gloria Steinem addressed the legislature and provided argument after argument in support of the ERA. The House approved the measure in 1970, and the Senate did likewise in 1972. The fight was then



taken to the states. ERA-supporters had the early momentum. Public opinion polls showed strong favorable support. Thirty of the necessary thirty-eight states ratified the amendment by 1973.

But then the tide turned. From nowhere came a highly organized, determined opposition that suggested that ratification of the ERA would lead to the complete unraveling of traditional American society.

The leader of the Stop-Era Campaign was a career woman named Phyllis Schlafly.

Despite her law degree, Schlafly glorified the traditional roles of American women. She heckled feminists by opening her speaking engagements with quips like "I'd like to thank my husband for letting me be here tonight." Schlafly argued that the ERA would bring many undesirable changes to American women.

Protective laws like sexual assault and alimony would be swept away. The tendency for the mother to receive child custody in a divorce case would be eliminated. The all-male military draft would become immediately unconstitutional. Those opposed to the ERA even suggested that single-sex restrooms would be banished by future courts.

Stop-ERA advocates baked apple pies for the Illinois legislature while they debated the amendment. They hung "Don't draft me" signs on baby girls. The strategy worked. After 1973, the number of ratifying states slowed to a trickle. By 1982, the year of expiration, only 35 states had voted in favor of the ERA — three states shy of the necessary total.

Feminist groups maintained that a serious blow was struck toward the idea of gender equity in the United States. They also saw women divided against other women. Despite early gains by the feminist movement, the rise in social conservatism led Americans of both genders to draw limits on a constitutionally mandated equality between the sexes.

Phyllis Schlafly was perhaps the most visible opponent of the Equal Rights Amendment. Her "Stop ERA" campaign hinged on the belief that the ERA would eliminate laws designed to protect women and led to the eventual defeat of the amendment.