

Activism in america essay



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

During the 1960s and 1970s the United States was experiencing a myriad of urban unrest. Three activist movements played distinct roles in humanity and its progress: the American Indian Movement, the African-American Movement, and the Mexican-American Movement. Each developed from inequalities and unjust treatment toward a particular group. By bringing an opposing position believers of a cause could protest for their deserved freedoms. Some of the goals, strategies, and methods used by these groups to obtain change in society were comparable while other methods were seen as radical.

In comparing and contrasting the origins, goals, strategies, and methods of these movements, one gains a better understanding of the struggles each dealt with and the accomplishments achieved. Each movement developed due to unfair and unequal treatment of the minorities involved. Economic issues such as low wages, poor working conditions, high unemployment and the lack of job security plagued them. They all needed better living conditions and better schools for education. In the 1950s and 1960s significant events occurred to bring about a new movement.

The Federal government was not treating the Indians fairly. The Indians were being displaced into unfamiliar territory. The American Indian Movement developed out of a need for a sense of being welcomed. Indians were being removed from their homeland.

Due to the passing of House Resolution 108 in 1953, land once held by the federal government for the Indians was now opening up for others. Indians were being forced into urban areas. Indians were the first group to

experience the postwar concern for racial integration. Not only did they have problems fitting in these areas, they experienced discrimination in areas of employment, housing, welfare services and ordinary daily life. They found themselves in territorial isolation living in low-income neighborhoods surrounded by other minorities and in homes that are overcrowded and filled with other Indian people both kin and non-kin.

Larger cities had centers to help the Indians adjust; however, their goals were not always compatible. The American Indian Movement was founded in July, 1968 in Minneapolis, Minnesota. It dealt with the problems the urbanized Indians were facing with adjusting. Indian urbanization is similar to urbanization the black people dealt with.

In the beginning some Indians met to try to prevent what they saw as discriminatory arrests of Indians in their south Minneapolis neighborhood. Eventually it became a national organization concerned with national issues of sovereignty, treaties, and ethnicity. The Indian founders and leaders of AIM sought to re-establish a sense of awareness in Indian identity and a pride in the Indian heritage and to facilitate adjustment to living with the dominant society. The African-American civil rights movement was a cry for equality. Blacks were treated unfairly, almost not as people.

Because of the harsh way of life for the African Americans, a movement was in dire need. Poor living conditions were common. They lived in run-down areas known as the ghetto. It was hard for blacks to get jobs.

A lot of skilled workers were unemployed. The lack of income they received made it almost impossible for them to support their families. Their kids were

getting a substandard education. They didn't have the same quality of educational materials the white schools had. In addition to poor housing, they had poor medical care. There was segregation in schools and on buses.

Blacks had to sit in the back of the bus, and if they refused they were possibly beaten. There was racial discrimination all over. Blacks had a lack of freedom. Rosa Parks sat in the front of the bus and refused to surrender her seat to a white person. She was arrested, and her arrest triggered a 381-day boycott of the bus system by blacks that was organized by a 26-year old Baptist minister the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr.

The boycott caused blacks to walk to destinations instead of taking the bus as a means of transportation. This boycott caused the bus system to make less profit. From the bus boycott emerged a leader, Reverend Martin Luther King Jr. Martin Luther King Jr. was born on January 15, 1929, in Atlanta, Georgia.

He grew up to be a true leader of the civil rights movement. From his childhood, he learned about the importance of family, church and the community. His parents were able to provide him with a broad education including an extensive college term where he earned a Ph. D.

He believed that all human beings regardless of race have a sacred intrinsic value. The Mexican-American movement was concerned with working conditions of the Mexican farm workers. Cesar Estrada Chavez was a leader of this movement. Cesar Estrada Chavez remained a central figure in a long-standing conflict between workers and growers. A quiet, self-effacing

man in his forties, Chavez had emerged in the 1950s and 1960s as a superb labor organizer and leader.

Two encounters helped his leadership evolve. One was with Father McDonnell who related stories of social justice and the Church's stand on farm labor. Another encounter was with Fred Ross, a labor organizer, who wanted Chavez to meet with him. Chavez kept refusing to meet him but finally agreed. Chavez was so impressed by Ross, he decided to work with him.

After this meeting, he was convinced that Mexican Americans had to organize if they were to gain more power in the United States. Economic conditions for Mexican migrant farm workers needed to get better. Equal wages and more job stability were asked for farm workers. They had poor living conditions. Just like the blacks, their living conditions were unfair. While traveling throughout interior California, Chavez found laborers living in tin or cardboard shacks and even caves.

They also needed to adjust the atmosphere in the workforce. There was still too much sexual harassment of women workers; high infant mortality; short life expectancy, and too many workers and their families living out in canyons and under trees. The goals of the movements were similar in that all were fighting for equal rights, improved conditions, and better treatment for their people. One of AIM's goals appears to be the fulfillment of Tecumseh's dream of the unity of all American Indians in fighting the oppression of the Whites and in the creation of a unified Indian nation. Because of their own first-hand experience with

problems of adjustment, ethnic alienation, and discrimination, AIM leaders developed an ideology stressing pride in the Indian heritage and one's identity as an Indian, the creation of a positive Indian image, and the values and behavior considered necessary for such persons. As their focus shifted to national and intertribal issues, their ideology encompassed the redevelopment of notions of Indian sovereignty, treaty violations, and a new concept of Indian nationalism or a supratribal Indian identity.

The African-American Movement had several goals. Martin Luther King, Jr. believed in a beloved community which he defined as a society in which all members related to each other with the attitude of agape, or unconditional love. He believed, Integration is the ultimate goal of our national community. Integration is the positive acceptance of desegregation and the welcomed participation of Negroes into the total range of human activities. His main goals gradually shifted from ending segregation to gaining black voting rights and political power, and finally to abolishing war and poverty.

His goals were always accomplished by non-violent means. A radical leader, different from King, was Malcolm X. Malcolm X was born Malcolm Little on May 19, 1925. He was an African American Islamic leader. He preached a total separation from white oppressors.

Like King, he wanted blacks to be equal. He had different ways of reaching equality. Malcolm X, had a goal of independence. He believed in black self-development and establishment of independent institutions controlled by blacks. In a speech given during Malcolm's Nation of Islam years

he said: When the black man in this country awakens, becomes intellectually mature and able to think for himself, you will then see that the only way he will become independent and recognized as a human being on the basis of equality with all other human beings, he has to have what they have and he has to be doing for himself what others are doing for themselves???

Eventually, he left that organization and gained a new perspective, one of interracial brotherhood. During his trip to Mecca he said, ??? In two weeks in the Holy Land, I saw all races, all colors,—blue-eyed blonds to black-skinned Africans??? in true brotherhood!.

.. No segregationists??? no liberals. He was shifting his beliefs and narrowing the gap between Martin Luther King and himself. Goals of the Mexican-American movement were ??? economic equality for the farmworkers.

For Chavez, this equality meant higher wages, more job stability, better living conditions, and the end of violent harassment, especially of strikers and women. ??? These goals arose out of Chavez working in farms. ??? Following the crops, living in labor camps, forced into segregation and inferior schools, and refused seats in ??? Anglo only??? sections of restaurants and movie houses, Chavez learned that the American dream was beyond the grasp of many poor Mexican Americans. The strategies and methods they used to obtain these goals were at times quite diverse. Some of the methods include boycotts, sit-in, sleep-ins, lock-outs, marches, hunger strikes, the legislative and judicial system and forming organizations. While Martin Luther King and Cesar Chavez believed in non-violent means, Malcolm X and the Indian movement believed in using violence when necessary.

All three movements had leaders who were willing to die for what they believed in. One of the methods used by American Indians to obtain their goals was the occupation of Federal lands. Among the many acts of activism conducted by American Indians, the occupation of Alcatraz Island is probably the most important, and has certainly been the most overlooked. ??? The 1969 occupation of Alcatraz Island was a famous take over spurred from college students who wanted courses that were relevant to their heritage. A young Mohawk Indian named Richard Oakes gathered with several other Indian students.

They began planning the occupation of Alcatraz Island as a symbol of Indian self-determination. Approximately fifty Indians, representing many different tribes, orchestrated the initial occupation; they chose the name Indians of All Tribes. This initial occupation lasted only two days and was met with no resistance from the government. Eleven days later, Oakes along with eighty students from UCLA and twenty Indian people set out to occupy the island again.

??? The Alcatraz occupation was multi-tribal and attracted attention, media coverage, and support on an international scale. ??? The Indians wanted the deed to the island, to establish an Indian University, a cultural center and a museum. The federal government took a position of waiting out the Indian occupation and did nothing. The Indian occupation lasted until June of 1971. ??? Following the removal of the Indians from the island in June 1971, some 50 other occupations took place across the country. Some received a considerable amount of press, some only little, but the important thing is Indian activism had attained a new level.

??? ??? The underlying goals of the Indians on Alcatraz Island were to awaken the American public to the reality of the plight of the first Americans and to assert the need for Indian self-determination. King had peaceful, non-violent ways of fighting for freedom. ??? King and other African American Leaders mostly ministers, founded the Atlanta based Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) to mount civil rights activities using mass non-violent actions and civil disobedience across the South. ??? He was an outspoken person and wanted to get his voice heard.

He used the media, such as television, to get his point across. He stood up for his beliefs, and it was taken to the point where he was arrested and put in jail. While in Birmingham, Alabama, he was imprisoned during a campaign for desegregation. While imprisoned, he wrote a letter in response to a statement in a local newspaper. Malcolm X advocated violent methods for civil rights for blacks.

??? Malcolm thought it suicidal for blacks to disarm themselves by forswearing use of physical force against a foe who showed no such compunction. ??? He believed in the saying ??? fight fire with fire. ??? He preached separation from whites. Malcolm joined the Nation of Islam (NOI).

He used television and radio to get his messages across by giving speeches and being interviewed. His attitude towards whites was unremittingly alienated, angry and hostile, sharply contrasting with that of King and the mainly nonviolent southern movement. ??? He believed in Black Nationalism. He preached and promoted violence: Every white man in America, when he looks into a black man's eyes, should fall to his knees and say ??? I'm

sorry-my kind has committed history's greatest crime against your kind; will you give me the chance to atone? But do you. .

. expect any white man to do that? No, you know better! And why won't he do it? Because he can't do it. The white man was created a devil, to bring chaos upon his earth. Martin Luther King Jr. and Malcolm X had some disputes along the way.

A partial list of their areas of major dispute includes: the goals of interracial integration versus black separatism, using only nonviolent means of struggle versus seeking freedom by any means necessary, and commitments to Christianity versus Islam. African Americans started bringing their cases to court to advocate change. One famous case made it all the way to the Supreme Court. The case, *Brown v.*

Board of Education, was about fighting segregated schools: The *Brown* case was initiated and organized by the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) leadership who recruited African American parents in Topeka for a class action suit against the local school board. Although school buses were provided for African American children, they were only allowed to attend designated public schools based on race. Ultimately, the NAACP sought to end the practice of separate but equal throughout every segment of society, including public transportation, dining facilities, public schools and all forms of public accommodation. The Mexican-American movement formed many organizations to further their causes.

Methods were organizations like the Community Service Organization, (CSO). Cesar Chavez worked with Fred Ross, a representative with the CSO. ??? CSO representatives would help register new voters, defend Mexican American civil rights, end discriminatory housing practices, and investigate allegations of police brutality??? Chavez worked with Ross in Jose California. Chavez felt ??? Mexican Americans must become more active in community affairs. ??? His organization notified the people to get involved.

The group was people who demanded change and a more profound life. The movement wanted to organize unions for Mexican American Farm Workers. Chavez??? s dreamt of a national organization for farm workers. He got enough followers that enabled him to start a group, the NFWA. In 1962, Chavez organized the National Farm Workers Association NFWA, also known as the Farm Workers Association FWA. By 1964 the FWA had more than a thousand members.

In 1965, the AWOC, Agricultural Workers Organizing Committee launched a strike in the Delano region of California where the richest growing grapes are grown. This organization wanted Chavez to have his Mexican American Farm Workers Organization join their strike. The members of his organization did vote to strike by a unanimous vote. The strike lasted for five years.

??? Chavez emerged as one of the country??? s best-known farm labor leader but also as the most-recognized Mexican American in the United States. ??? Chavez believed in nonviolence as a means of reaching goals similar to King. He said, ??? If someone commits violence against us, it is much better??? if we can??? not to react against the violence but to react in

such a way as to get closer to our goal. One nonviolent method during the Delano region strike was the use of a boycott. Unions during this time did not use boycotts as a method too often. By increasing public awareness about the strikes and boycotts, sales decreased California, sales dropped markedly.

Another strategy to unite farm workers was the use of a symbol such as a union flag. Chavez had his cousin Manuel Chavez design a flag. The design was a black eagle on a red and white background. ??? Manuel described that the flag, the black eagle represented the ??? plight of the workers???, white stood for hope and red stood for ??? the sacrifice that would be required of them.

??? ??? The union flag became an emblem of unity, hope, and strength for Chavez and his farmworkers. ??? Another method of using nonviolence is through marches. During the Delano strike, Chavez organized a march to the state capital in Sacramento California. Chavez was compared to Martin Luther King Jr. ??? In 1973, Chavez worked to establish a farm worker fund in King??? s name and to advocate nonviolent social change.

??? His political methods for change worked to push legislation through the state of California. The California Agricultural Labor Relation Act was formed to allow farm workers to vote in union elections. Other political methods include meeting with leaders in government. In 1968, he met with the democratic candidate for president, Robert Kennedy. Chavez organized hunger strikes in a way to get followers not to use violence. In 1993, he was fighting for what he believed in until his death on April 23, 1993, when ??? he ended the fast, went to bed exhausted, and died in his sleep.

??? Each movement had great leaders who were willing to tirelessly work to achieve their goals. The issues were similar in that all groups were treated unfairly and needed better living and working conditions. The leaders had their similarities and differences. Some believed in nonviolent methods while others believed violence was sometimes necessary. While not always agreeing on the best way to reach their goals, they all were willing to die for their causes. Most movements believed in similar methods such as boycotts, marches, and strikes to bring about change.

All faced struggles and setbacks, but in the end accomplished a great deal and changed the unrest in our society to make it better for everyone who lives here. Works Cited <http://www.cnn.com/2005/US/10/24/parks.obit/index.html>