



Name: _____ Class: _____

The Chicano Movement

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The Chicano Movement of the 1960s was a social movement in the United States. Activists worked to end the discrimination towards and mistreatment of Mexican American citizens. As you read, take notes on the causes of the Chicano Movement and how it affected the lives of Mexican Americans.

- [1] In the 1950s, the word “Chicano” was an insulting name for children of Mexican immigrant parents living in the United States. People from the U.S. used it because they did not think Chicanos were “American enough;” people from Mexico also used it because they did not believe Chicanos were “Mexican enough” anymore. After several decades of being mistreated and called names, Mexican Americans decided to embrace the term “Chicano” as a symbol of ethnic pride. The name was then given to the growing Mexican American civil rights movement of the 1960s: the Chicano Movement.



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The Chicano Movement had many goals, some of which varied by location. Overall, the movement aimed to end discrimination and negative stereotypes against Mexican Americans, and it sought to expand workers’ rights, voting rights, educational equality, and land usage. The movement mainly took place in Southwestern states — such as Texas, New Mexico, and California — and the roots of the struggle ran deep.

Roots of the Movement

It is possible to trace the movement all the way back to the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo in 1848, which redrew the official line between Mexico and the United States. People who had considered themselves Mexican now lived on the American side, and the treaty promised they would be full U.S. citizens with full civil rights. However, over the decades, Mexican Americans, especially those working in agriculture,¹ didn't see that promise was fulfilled. They were never treated fairly by white U.S. citizens, and often, especially during times of economic hardship like the Great Depression,² they were actively removed from jobs and sometimes sent “back” to Mexico — even though they had lived in the U.S. for generations. In the 1960s, inspired by the success of the African American Civil Rights Movement³ in the South, Chicanos began actively fighting for equality. The Chicano Movement expanded and covered many different issues, but it mostly focused on four: land ownership, workers’ rights, and educational and political equality.

1. the practice of farming
2. The Great Depression (1929-1939) was the worst period of financial hardship in the history of the United States and caused widespread poverty.

Reclaiming Land and Identity

In the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo in 1848, the U.S. promised to let the people who owned land in the area keep their property, but in the end they did not keep their promise. Mexican Americans in the area had their land taken away.

- [5] Chicano activists worked to reclaim their lands in Southwestern states. However, they were unsuccessful, so they began promoting the idea of sacred, ancestral⁴ lands. They popularized the notion of Aztlán, an area in northern Mexico and southern United States, thought to be the origin land for the Mexican people. Even if they could not officially own the land, Chicanos saw Aztlán as a symbol of their heritage and their identity as Mexican Americans.

Farmworkers' Rights

Many Mexican Americans worked as migrant farmworkers who traveled from farm to farm harvesting different crops according to the season. Migrant farmworkers were some of the worst treated workers in the country, and their children rarely got to stay in school for more than a few years. In the 1960s, the Chicano Movement hoped to win more protections for these migrant families.

They decided to organize groups of workers that were large enough to stand up to farm owners and demand more rights. Two of the most influential reformers were Dolores Huerta and Cesar Chavez; together they founded the National Farm Workers Association (NFWA). The NFWA organized boycotts⁵ against fruit-growers who refused to give rights to their workers, and they worked with the government to give migrant workers greater legal protections. The government agreed to some of the NFWA's demands and instituted some new laws, including higher wages and more secure employment contracts. Unions like the NFWA still fight for Mexican American workers' rights today.

Equality in Education

A California court case in 1947 decided it was illegal to segregate schools between white children and Mexican American children, but there were still great inequalities within schools. Firstly, many Chicano children could only stay at the same school for a few months at a time because their parents were migrant farm workers. Secondly, even when they could stay, many had not grown up speaking English, and their parents still spoke little or no English, so it was hard for them to keep up in the classroom. Instead, they fell further behind; only about one quarter of Chicano students at this time graduated from high school. Thirdly, schools in poorer areas, which sometimes had a higher percentage of Chicano students, received less funding than schools in rich, whiter areas. Students began to realize how all these factors kept Mexican American youths from achieving and left many of them having to eventually take on the same cheap labor jobs their parents had.

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3. The African-American Civil Rights Movement (1954-1968) was a social movement in the southeastern United States that worked to end discrimination and gain equality for African-American people.
 4. **Ancestral** (*adjective*): inherited from past generations
 5. **Boycott** (*noun*): an act of refusing to use, buy, or deal with a person, organization, or country as a form of protest

High school and university students organized to form the group Movimiento Estudiantil Chicano de Aztlán (MEChA).⁶ They walked out of classes on school campuses and negotiated with school administrators and political leaders for education reform. They also called for more Mexican American history to be taught in classrooms, and they wanted more Mexican American teachers.

Political Involvement

- [10] None of the changes they worked for were made overnight, but some change came eventually. More importantly, MEChA made many Chicanos see that they could get involved with politics and important social issues. It eventually led to the formation of the Raza Unida Party, a political party focused on the needs of Chicanos across the nation.

The Chicano Movement is less well known than the Civil Rights Movement, which happened in the South around the same time, but it was just as important in establishing civil rights for an oppressed group of people. Although the movement mainly focused on land ownership, workers' rights, and education reform, it promoted equality for Chicanos in many different ways. For example, in the early 1970s there was a whole group of women dedicated to making sure healthcare forms were available in Spanish as well as in English. The movement accomplished many of its goals over several decades, and it is still working today to promote fairer treatment of Mexican Americans in schools, jobs, and even in entertainment. Perhaps most importantly, the Chicano Movement proved to Mexican Americans that they could have just as much of a voice in society and politics as anyone else.

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Text-Dependent Questions

Directions: For the following questions, choose the best answer or respond in complete sentences.

1. PART A: Which statement best expresses the central idea of the article?
 - A. The Chicano Movement was well-intentioned but failed to have any lasting impact.
 - B. The Chicano Movement negatively impacted the progress of the African American Civil Rights Movement.
 - C. The Chicano Movement successfully gained rights for Mexican Americans and paved the way for future progress.
 - D. While the Chicano Movement did help migrant workers, it failed to address the needs of students who were being treated unfairly.

2. PART B: Which quote best expresses the central idea in the answer to Part A?
 - A. "In the 1960s, inspired by the success of the African American Civil Rights Movement in the South, Chicanos began actively fighting for equality." (Paragraph 3)
 - B. "The government agreed to some of the NFWA's demands and instituted some new laws, including higher wages and more secure employment contracts." (Paragraph 7)
 - C. "Students began to realize how all these factors kept Mexican American youths from achieving and left many of them having to eventually take on the same cheap labor jobs their parents had." (Paragraph 8)
 - D. "The movement accomplished many of its goals over several decades, and it is still working today to promote fairer treatment of Mexican Americans in schools, jobs, and even in entertainment." (Paragraph 11)

3. PART A: Which statement best describes the experiences Mexican Americans had before the Chicano Movement?
 - A. Mexican Americans were encouraged to integrate in the United States.
 - B. Mexican Americans revolted against the U.S. government because they wanted to return to Mexico.
 - C. Mexican Americans were completely ignored by the United States government.
 - D. Mexican Americans were subject to unfair and harsh treatment by other Americans.

4. PART B: Which detail from the text provides evidence for the answer to Part A?
 - A. "They were never treated fairly by white U.S. citizens, and often, especially during times of economic hardship like the Great Depression, they were actively removed from jobs and sometimes sent 'back' to Mexico" (Paragraph 3)
 - B. "Chicano activists worked to reclaim their lands in Southwestern states." (Paragraph 5)
 - C. "The NFWA organized boycotts against fruit-growers who refused to give rights to their workers, and they worked with the government to give migrant workers greater legal protections." (Paragraph 7)
 - D. "They also called for more Mexican American history to be taught in classrooms, and they wanted more Mexican American teachers." (Paragraph 9)

5. How does the first paragraph contribute to the development of ideas in the text?

Discussion Questions

Directions: *Brainstorm your answers to the following questions in the space provided. Be prepared to share your original ideas in a class discussion.*

1. What are the effects of prejudice? How were the challenges faced by Mexican Americans a result of prejudice?
2. In the context of the text, how has America changed over time? How has America's treatment of Mexican Americans changed? Has it changed dramatically? Cite evidence from the text, your own experience, and other literature, art, or history in your answer.
3. In your opinion, why is the Chicano Movement less well known than the African American Civil Rights Movement in the U.S.? What factors led to this difference?
4. In the context of this text, how do people create change? What actions led to the successes of the Chicano Movement?