

Latinos

Step 1 Read about Latinos' struggle for civil rights in Section 3, and complete the Reading Notes for this group.

Step 2 Play the song "El Picket Sign" as you read along with the lyrics in English below.

Step 3 Complete your Station Notes for this group by doing the following:

- Copy a portion of the lyrics to "El Picket Sign" that explains what actions the UFW used to achieve change. Draw a line connecting the lyrics to your "How Achieved" notes.
- Sketch and label at least one detail from the photograph of Cesar Chavez that shows what actions he used to achieve change. Draw a line connecting this sketch to your "How Achieved" notes.

In the early 1960s, Cesar Chavez and the United Farm Workers began mobilizing migrant farm laborers, particularly Mexicans and Mexican Americans, to protest the low wages, unsafe working conditions, and long hours typical in migrant farmwork. As in the African American civil rights movement, music was an important part of UFW's nonviolent protests. One of the more popular songs heard during the strike against grape growers, or "La Huelga," was "El Picket Sign."

The Picket Sign

From Texas to California / Farm workers are struggling.

The ranchers, crying and crying / The strike has made them spineless!

Refrain

The picket sign, the picket sign, / I carry it all day.

The picket sign, the picket sign, / With me all my life.

We've spent most of the year / Fighting this strike.

One rancher already died, / And another turned into a coward.

A cousin of mine / Was irrigating the ditches.

One day with Pagarulo, / Another day with Zananaviches

Pagarulo and Zananaviches were grape growers the UFW was boycotting.

They tell me I am mean, / A loudmouth, and rabble-rouser.

But Juárez was my uncle / And Zapata was my father-in-law.

Benito Juárez was a reform-minded president of Mexico in the mid-1800s. Emiliano Zapata was a Mexican revolutionary leader in the early 1900s.

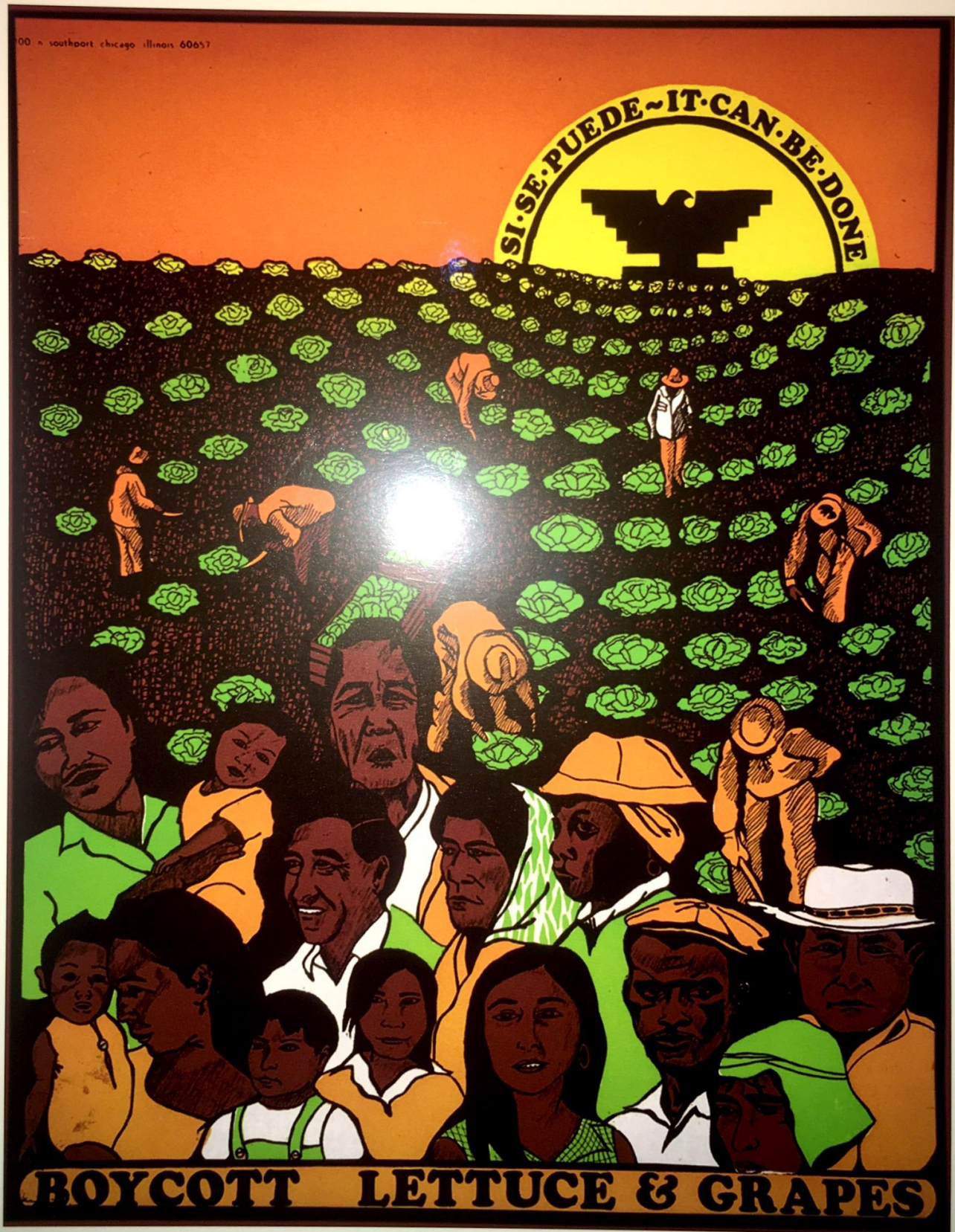
And now I go around organizing / The people in all the fields.

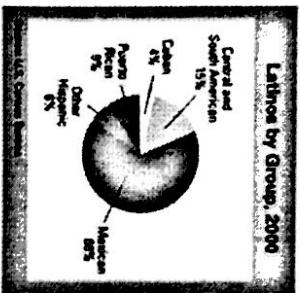
And many people are still eating / Only tortillas with *chiles*.

There are many who do not understand / Even though it is explained to them.

The strike is good for everyone, / But some act like idiots.

Latinos





Latinos Organize to be Heard

In 1967, Rodolfo "Corky" Gonzales published a poem called "Yo Soy Joaquin" ("I Am Joaquin"). The poem describes the difficulty of retaining a Mexican identity while living 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

For many Latinos, the poem struck a chord. They saw it as a cultural and political statement, and it became a rallying cry for Latino rights. Gonzales was one of many Spanish-speaking Americans who cried out for 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

Latinos, or Hispanics, are a diverse group. They include Mexican Americans, Cubans, Puerto Ricans, and people with origins in Central and South America. Some were born in the United States while others migrated here. Despite their different backgrounds, however, most share some similar cultural traits, including the Spanish language.

In the 1960s, Latinos also faced similar issues. For example, they often experienced employment discrimination. Many had low-wage jobs with few benefits. Many also struggled with language problems in school, where most classes were taught in English.

At the same time, the various Latino groups had their own distinct concerns and perspectives. In the mid-1960s, many Mexican Americans began to identify themselves as *Chicanos*. This term had originally been used as an insult, but young Mexican Americans embraced the name as an expression of pride in their culture.

Cuban Americans in the 1960s differed in many ways from Mexican Americans. Most lived in Florida, and they tended to be better educated and more affluent than other Latino groups. Most had fled their homeland after the Cuban Revolution and were recent arrivals in the United States.

Puerto Ricans were already U.S. citizens when they came to the mainland because Puerto Rico is an American commonwealth, an unincorporated territory of the United States. However, they suffered some of the same injustices as other Spanish speakers. They sought better education and improved conditions in the cities where they lived. They also wanted to end discrimination.

Boycotting Grapes for Recognition

One of the most notable campaigns for Latino rights in the 1960s was the farmworker struggle in California. Cesar Chavez, a farmworker born in Arizona, was one of the principal leaders of this effort to improve the lives of migrant workers.



Chavez helped found the United Farm Workers, along with Dolores Huerta and other labor activists. The union was made up mostly of Mexican American migrant workers. In 1965, the union—then known as the National Farm Workers Association—joined a strike against grape growers. The strike, or "La Huelga," lasted five years. During this time, Chavez organized a national boycott of table grapes that won widespread support. Finally, in 1970, grape growers agreed to a historic contract that granted most of the workers' demands, including union recognition and higher wages and benefits.

Like Martin Luther King Jr., Chavez relied on nonviolence in the struggle for equal rights. Among other tactics, he used hunger strikes as a political tool. He fasted several times over the years to draw attention to the plight of farmworkers and to pressure employers to improve working conditions.

La Raza: A People United

In the late 1960s, young Chicanos also began to organize a political movement called *La Raza Unida*, or "The People United." They used the term *la raza*, meaning "the people" or "the race," to identify themselves and connect with their roots in ancient Mexico. They claimed this heritage, particularly their links to the Aztec people, as a common bond among Chicanos. *La Raza Unida* became a political party in 1970 and ran candidates in state and local elections across the Southwest.

A key issue for Chicano activists was bilingual education, or teaching in two languages. In 1968, President Johnson signed the Bilingual Education Act, legalizing 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. Spanish-speaking students continued to face discrimination, though. In 1968 and 1969, Chicano students throughout the Southwest boycotted classes to protest poor education in their schools.

During this time, the Brown Berets also fought for Chicano rights. Founded in East Los Angeles, this group modeled itself on the Black Panthers. It worked to improve housing and employment and instill pride in Chicano culture.

As Mexican Americans fought for civil rights, so, too, did other groups of Latinos. Gradually, Cuban Americans, Puerto Ricans, and other Latinos began to find greater opportunity in American society.