

Older Americans

Step 1 Read about older Americans' struggle for civil rights in Section 6 under the heading "Older Americans Promote Productive Aging." Then complete the Reading Notes for this group.

Step 2 Read the excerpt below.

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

- Copy one sentence from Maggie Kuhn's autobiography that more fully explains what changes older Americans were fighting for. Draw a line connecting this quotation to your "Changes Wanted" notes.
- Sketch and label at least one detail from the photograph of the protest that more fully shows what actions older Americans used to achieve change. Draw a line connecting this sketch to your "Changes Wanted" and/or your "How Achieved" notes.

In 1970, Maggie Kuhn and a group of retired friends founded the Consultation of Older and Younger Adults for Social Change to fight discrimination on the basis of age. The press nicknamed this group the Gray Panthers, comparing its direct action and sometimes controversial style to the Black Panthers. In this excerpt from her 1991 autobiography, Kuhn describes what she believes is the best way to achieve change and how the Gray Panthers fought for one such change.

Excerpt from *No Stone Unturned: The Life and Times of Maggie Kuhn*, by Maggie Kuhn

We didn't limit our consciousness-raising to the old. Many of our new members were young or middle-aged. The subject of age affects everyone. All of us are aging and most of us will be old someday. It is such a simple concept, and yet it is something that so many people do not grasp until they are old . . .

Go to the people at the top—that is my advice to anyone who wants to change the system, any system. Don't moan and groan with like-minded souls. Don't write letters or place a few phone calls and then sit back and wait. Leave safety behind. Put your body on the line. Stand before the people you fear and speak your mind—even if your voice shakes. When you least expect it, someone may actually listen to what you have to say. Well-aimed slingshots can topple giants . . .

Early on, the Gray Panthers believed the health system was in crisis—a crisis that affected all age groups. Concern over the "bottom line" had replaced the Hippocratic oath . . .

At the 123rd Annual AMA [American Medical Association] Convention in Chicago in 1974, we challenged the AMA with specific demands: mandatory geriatric courses in medical schools . . . improved home care, cooperation in lifting Medicare restrictions, and help developing alternatives to nursing homes. With nurses, medical students, . . . and some physicians from Kansas City . . . on the front steps of the hotel, we engaged in guerilla theater, with some of us dressed up like doctors and nurses trying to resuscitate a comatose AMA . . . The team tried oxygen, mouth-to-mouth resuscitation, and, finally, deep chest massage. Vital signs returned only after the teams removed big wads of paper money from the chest cavity.

Older Americans



Older Americans Promote Productive Aging



Older Americans also joined the civil rights struggle. In 1972, Maggie Kuhn and some fellow retirees in Philadelphia formed the **Gray Panthers**. This group spoke out against unfair treatment of older Americans. The Gray Panthers called this treatment **ageism**, or discrimination against people on the basis of age.

Other groups had formed earlier to advocate for older Americans. The largest was the American Association of Retired Persons, founded by Ethel Percy Andrus in 1958. Andrus formed AARP to help retirees get health insurance. At the time, many older Americans had no health coverage, either because it was too expensive or because private insurance companies would not insure them. They were considered too much of a risk because of

their age and potential health problems.

AARP lobbied for government health insurance. In 1965, Congress responded by establishing Medicare. This program provided hospital insurance for people ages 65 and over. It also helped pay prescription drug costs and other medical expenses for seniors.

Older workers also complained about discrimination in the workplace. To remedy this problem, Congress passed the Age Discrimination in Employment Act of 1967. This law made it illegal for employers to use age as a factor in hiring or promotion. In 1978, the Gray Panthers helped persuade Congress to push back the required retirement age from 65 to 70. Seniors could now work longer and continue to enjoy the benefits of employment.

Summary

The civil rights movement inspired many Americans to stand up for their rights. During the 1960s and 1970s, various groups sought equal treatment under the law and in society.

Women The National Organization for Women (NOW) and other feminist groups worked for women's rights. They wanted reforms to ensure greater equality and opportunity for women.

Latinos Various groups of Latinos struggled for their rights and identity in American society. The United Farm Workers (UFW) organized migrant farmworkers and helped increase their wages and benefits. The 1968 Bilingual Education Act required public schools to provide bilingual instruction.

American Indians The American Indian Movement (AIM) protested unfair treatment of American Indians. By the mid-1970s, some tribes had won payment for lost lands.

Asian Americans Asian American students asked for university programs in ethnic studies. The Japanese American Citizens League (JACL) sought compensation for internment during World War II.

Other groups Disabled Americans fought for equal access and won passage of the Americans with Disabilities Act. After the Stonewall riots, gay Americans gained greater visibility in their fight for equal rights. Older Americans countered ageism by working through such groups as the Gray Panthers.