

# Not Passive Victims: A Look at Latino/a Student Movements During the Late 20<sup>th</sup> Century at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign

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## Introduction

The second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century has had no shortage of civil and political rights movements. The African-American Civil Rights Movement (50s-60s), Second Wave Feminism Movement (60s), and the Vietnam War Protests (70s), are a few of the movements that have helped shape the American culture and bring much needed change. These memorable movements are associated with certain ethnic/racial groups or based on gender; the African-American and female community take the forefront during this era, and it is typically easy to see the progression of these communities through the latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century and how they have fought for the equality. While these dominant groups have taken the spotlight and the movements are vivid parts of the American history, there are some communities that may not be as widely acknowledged and studied for their valiant strides and powerful messages of equality for all. Since the efforts may only make up a small portion of the larger movements, or are overshadowed by the other movements altogether, some may see groups, such as Latinos/as as passive onlookers. By the definitions of Civil Rights and Movements, these efforts, while not as widely known, are key parts of the overall civil rights movements. These efforts were powerful and not only helped shape the lives of those within the community, but also those around them, defining the culture in which we live today. Other movements may dominate the era, but it is a cumulative effort of all communities and movements to achieve the larger goal of equality.

“Mexican Americans were actively seeking educational justice...their struggle, however, went largely unnoticed by most “Americans” in the United States.”

-Donato & Lazerson, 2000, p. 8



1980: Latino Students at the University of Illinois Protest (in front of the Administration Building)

## Purpose/Rationale/Method

University campuses around the country mirrored the movements happening around the world. The University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign is no exception, and has been the setting for historical landmarks in time, ones which have spoken to our current campus climate. Latino/a students at this University were not bystanders to these movements sweeping through the nation. The campus was equally taken over by these larger historical events, and students on campus were fighting for rights both within and outside the University.

The purpose of this historical research is to look at how Latino/a students on the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign campus were involved in the well-known movements/protests (including civil rights) during the late 20<sup>th</sup> Century, as well as movements and protests that this community organized. Historical research was collected from the campus archives. The study is aimed to understand how Latino/a students on campus were proactively involved during this tumultuous era.

## Conclusion/Recommendations

Latino/a students at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign have been actively seeking civil and social rights, especially during the late 20<sup>th</sup> Century. Despite other groups that may have been more visible or more studied during this era, Latino/a students were proactive in their efforts and made great strides for all students.

The movements Latino/a students set into motion on this campus helped define the campus climate and environment everyone experiences today. Looking into the past will help provide guidance to current movements that are taking place and provide a backdrop to current struggles. The fight for civil and social justices is important, and all communities should work together to achieve this common goal. Efforts made by all communities in the past should be equally studied as they provide keys to the present and the future. Researching outside one's discipline or one's community is important since it provides unique perspectives.

“In the university environment, the civil rights movement encountered a more comfortable environment in which to conduct its work.”

-Rosales, 1996, p.xvi



“In 1992 Latino/a students and supporters occupied the Office of Minority Student Affairs and the Administration Building. The students called for, among other things, a new director of La Casa Cultural Latina and greater funding and autonomy for the cultural center, circa 1992.”

<http://www.library.illinois.edu/archives/slc/researchguides/timeline/decades/1990.php>

## Timeline

- **1940-**  
The Mexican American Civil Rights Movement
- **1950-**  
Civil Rights Movement
- **1964-**  
Vietnam War Protests
- **1960-**  
The Chicano Movement *El Movimiento* is an extension of the movement that began in the 1940s: struggle to obtain civil rights and cultivate cultural pride  
Boricua Movements
- **1968**  
Project 500 was the first extensive effort by U of I to offer equal educational opportunities for all of the residents of Illinois. In 1968, 565 newly admitted African American and Latino students entered the student body.
- **1974**  
La Casa Cultural Latina founded
- **1980**  
Latino students protest in front of the administration building
- **1992**  
Latino students and their supporters occupied Office of Minority Student Affairs & Administration Building. The students called for a new director of La Casa and greater funding and autonomy for the cultural center.
- **2006-Today**  
Continued protests on college campuses and throughout the country for equal rights and access as well as debates on immigration laws (including H.R. 4437). RSOs such as La Colectiva, Orgullo de Latino America, LCASO, and others help bring awareness to the UIUC campus.

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