

Civil Rights: In Our Own Words



By the Fall 2025 Language Arts/Social Studies Class

Editor's Note:

This book relates just a few of the many events from a multitude of civil rights movements in the 20th century. Some of these events give witness to the need for justice and reform, some of these events portray protests and resistance, and some of these events describe victories.

The authors of this book selected the event they chose to research and write about. These events have been presented in chronological order, per the request of the authors. In addition to providing a summary of their event, the authors have included a modern-day photograph or news story that is related to their event, which can be accessed by a QR code or hyperlink. In most cases, these current connections vividly show that there is still so much more work to be done with respect to civil rights for all people in the United States today. The authors have also included a personal response to their event and its modern connection in the modality of their choosing. Due to the personal nature of these writings, some authors have elected to use partial versions of their names or pseudonyms.

The authors and I hope that you will find this book informative, that it will encourage you to think critically about civil rights issues in our own times, and that it may even spur you to action so that others can write about you and your contribution to civil rights in the next century!

-Carolyn Markel

Women's Civil Rights

By Maria T.

What Happened:

Women's equity rights to vote started in 1878 but was officially made as Amendment 19th on August 26th, 1920. It was also called a celebration of women suffrage. It became a major victory for us and now women have rights to vote. But still there were many issues and lots of things going on like discrimination and inequality. We didn't have rights to join the army or play sports, and women mainly stayed at home. There was a second wave of feminist movement during 1960s and it lasted roughly through the 1980s. It had a key focus on reproductive rights such as contraception, abortion access, and also workplace equality, fighting against discrimination and advocating for equal pay, maternity leave and childcare. Additionally, they also brought up issues of domestic violence and sexual harassment. My thoughts as a woman are we are a voice and have every right to be heard.

Despite the progress in women's civil rights, equal pay remained a significant challenge. My mother was a single and divorced mother that left Puerto Rico and came into the United States of America in 1967 to live with her cousin. She worked in a tobacco factory and went through so much despair raising me and my sister alone that she had to apply for government benefits and child support. Meanwhile men got paid more just for being born male.

21st Century Connection:

Lilly Ledbetter started working at Goodyear in 1979 and in 1998 she found out she was being paid significantly less than her male counterparts. This led to her filling a lawsuit that contributed to the passing of the Lilly Ledbetter Fair Pay Act in 2009. It took almost a decade to get our voice heard. As women we will not be shut down or manipulated, we have a voice and if we don't speak up, how are we going to be heard? We are women with rights!

[Lilly Ledbetter Quote and Picture](#)



My Response:

Women Are a Voice (poem)

A voice to be heard
for equality and for rights.
We make a difference
and stand on our ground
for liberty and justice.



Greenwood: The Massacre America Tried to Forget

By Milagros Garcia

What Happened:

Let me tell you a little thing about history, something they do not tell you all about: the historical events that happened in the world like what happened in the Greenwood district of Tulsa, Oklahoma, what has come to be known as the Tulsa Race Massacre from May 30th, 1921 – June 1st, 1921. It started off a horrible Monday morning for Dick Rowland, a 19-year-old African American. Rowland walked into a Drexel building to use the restroom on the top floor because that was where the “colored” restroom was located. When he entered the elevator, a 17-year-old white woman named Sara Page was operating the elevator at the same time Rowland was entering. A simple misstep was all it took to ruin the district of Greenwood.

Rowland had stepped on Miss Page’s foot, causing a scream to emerge from her throat. He fled the scene seconds after the clerk heard Page scream. The next day a news outlet called the *Tulsa Tribune* released an article that was called “Nab Negro for Attacking Girl in Elevator.” Rowland was arrested the very same day the article was published, even though Page told the authorities that Mr. Rowland did not rape her. Even with Page trying to clear Rowland’s name, the rumors still spread like wildfire and the same news outlet released another article called “To Lynch Negro Tonight.” This article was only ever known through eyewitnesses, and the actual article was lost and never found.

That article led mobs to form in front of the courthouse. Mobs that started in the hundreds rapidly became thousands of people. White mobs were demanding the sheriff for Mr. Rowland to be handed over to them. Sheriff Willard McCullough refused to hand over Mr. Rowland. Therefore, the white mobs were not happy with the Sheriff’s choice. The Sheriff and his deputies barricaded the top floor where the jail was located in the courthouse; they turned off the elevators and had armed officers on top of the roof to protect Mr. Rowland from the angry white mob. White mobs demanded Mr. Rowland be lynched. At the same time, about 25 armed black men and World War I veterans also showed up to offer their assistance in protecting Mr. Rowland from the angry white mob, which the Sheriff denied. The Sheriff declined the help of the armed African Americans and the World War I veterans. When they tried getting back to Greenwood, they were met by a mob of white angry men and got into an altercation. An elderly white man walked up to a black man name O.B. Mann. This white man demanded that Mr. Mann hand over his pistol, which O.B. quickly refused to. This angered the white man more who then tried to disarm O.B himself. All this commotion caused the gun to be fired. This is when all hell broke loose. Both sides, white and African American, started shooting at each other. This outburst in front of the courthouse took the life of twelve people, ten of which being white while the other two were black.

After the African Americans finally made it back to their community in Greenwood, they thought they were safe. Little did they know the white mobs had not had enough of them. They gathered around Greenwood, waiting until the early morning on June 1st to start their attack. The white mobs started looting businesses where the community spent all their hard work building to try and make something of themselves. After the white mobs looted what they wanted, they started burning their town to the ground. 300 African Americans died at the hand of this angry white mob that were rioting in their once peaceful town. The white mob used incendiary devices like

turpentine balls, kerosene, nitroglycerin, or oil rags and allegedly also used planes to shoot at fleeing residents. The white mob finally relented after a brutal 18 hours of non-stop violence towards the people of Greenwood.

On Wednesday June 1st, 1921, Mr. Rowland was released from jail, but that did not make up for the town that was destroyed, that they had built themselves to live and have their own life and feel like people. Everything was gone, all 35 square blocks of schools, churches, houses, grocery stores, and more. All the labor spent into creating what they worked so hard for was just burned to pieces all because the white people did not get their way. The mob killed thirty-six people including white people, twenty-six of those victims were African American. Seven hundred to eight hundred people were injured during this riot, and they left up to ten thousand African Americans homeless, and six thousand ended up getting rounded up by the National Guard and held in temporary camps and convention halls for several days. The damage after the riot left everyone in shock. Two hundred fifteen buildings were looted, one thousand two hundred fifty-six were burned, and one thousand four hundred seventy buildings were looted and burned to the ground. All these damages cost them one million five hundred thousand to rebuild everything. The people of Tulsa never got justice for what happened to them. It took them to the end of 1922 to rebuild housing for everyone, so they had to deal with the harsh weather, and it was miserable for them. It took 49 years to rebuild Greenwood back to what it used to be, but despite what everyone went through, no one was being held accountable for the riots, deaths, lootings, and torching buildings that happened in Greenwood. After everything Mr. Rowland decided to pack up all his belongings and leave Tulsa Oklahoma and never look back, but even though Mr. Rowland left Greenwood, there were still three people that fought for justice. These people were Viola Ford Fletcher (who died at one hundred eleven years old in 2025), Hughes Van Ellis (who died at one hundred two years old in 2023), and Lessie Benningfield Randle (one hundred eleven years old and still alive). They fought until their last breath and continued to keep on fighting. Hughes Van Ellis once said, "Please do not let me leave this earth without justice." That is how you can tell that the people of Tulsa never gave up and fought until the very end. They will continue to always keep fighting no matter what.

[Background History: The Encyclopedia of Oklahoma History and Culture](#)



21st Century Connection:

From what I have gathered through the many articles I read and went through, I found some articles that relate to present day. From what has happened in the Greenwood, Oklahoma that day to one hundred years later, it shows that they haven't done much to bring justice from what happened that day. Instead of the city of Tulsa helping the survivors and families of survivors, they use their names to promote a museum they want to build to give "representation" of the events that took place those 3 horrifying days that the people of Tulsa went through back in the 1921.

[Article: US: Failed Justice 100 Years After Tulsa Race Massacre](#)



My Response:

*T*ulsa still feels the weight of what happened long ago
*U*nspoken stories drifting through the neighborhood at night
*L*ives were shattered yet the spirit of Greenwood didn't fade
*S*trength growing again where the flames once burned bright
*A*nd today the city walks forward carrying both the hurt and the hope

Thank you for your time and I hope you enjoy some history
-Milagros Garcia

The Murder of Emmett Till

By Betsabe N. O.

What Happened:

Emmett Till (1941-1955)

Born: July 25, 1941, Chicago, Illinois, United States

Died: August 28, 1955, Drew, Mississippi, United States

Emmett Till was a fourteen-year-old African American who was wrongfully murdered by two white men, as well as many others involved. This incident happened in a local store in Money, Mississippi in late August. Emmett and his cousins stopped at a local store to buy candy where they encountered a young woman named Carolyn Bryant. This woman testified that Emmett made advances towards her and made many crude comments. Simeon, Emmett's cousin, stated that Emmett whistled at the women after they both left the store. Later on, in interview from 2007, Bryant confessed that she made up her claims against him. Roy Bryant and J.W Milan, the killers of Emmett Till, were acquitted of his murders by an all-white jury in late September, 1955.

21st Century Connection:

The barn that Emmett Till died in has been purchased by the Emmett Till Interpretive Center, with a donation from Shonda Rhimes, and will be preserved as a memorial site. The barn will not be reopened until 2030 at the earliest, when it is slated to open as a public memorial site. The property was acquired in November 2025. The site is significant in American civil rights history, and will be a place of learning and remembrance.

[Article: The Barn Where Emmett Till Was Killed to Open as a Memorial Ahead of the 75th Anniversary of his Lynching](#)



My Response:

This I related to Emmett Till because it was a place that his life was taken and it was known as a dark place but now will be rebranded as a place of his memory to live in the future. Therefore, people will be educated on knowing what his story is about.



Montgomery Bus Boycott

By Maris B.

What Happened:

Imagine a time when sitting on a bus was determined by the color of your skin. That was the reality in Montgomery, Alabama. In 1955, Rosa Parks was a Black woman who bravely refused to give up her seat to a White person, and that single act sparked a powerful protest, the Montgomery bus boycott. For 381 days, the Black community, led by young and charismatic Martin Luther King Jr., walked miles, organized carpools, and showed incredible strength and unity. They were tired of being treated as second class citizens and decided to hit the bus company where it hurts, their pockets.

21st Century Connection:

This article highlights how BLM movement continues to use economic pressure and public awareness, similar to the Montgomery bus boycott to fight for civil rights and social change.

[Article: Black Lives Matter calls for month-long boycott of 'white companies'](#)



My Response:

Imagine a city where every bus ride is a reminder that you're considered less than someone else. That was Montgomery, Alabama. Before the boycott, it wasn't about a seat, it was about the daily life of being treated like a second-class citizen.



East Lost Angeles Walkouts

By Samantha G.

What Happened:

This event happened in 1968. The East Los Angeles walkouts were a powerful movement from Mexican-American students. In most schools it started being noticeable that 60% of students being Mexican-American were dropouts. In many schools, teachers prohibited the students from speaking Spanish. Many teachers also discouraged them to continue getting education. As a result of how they were getting treated, from March 1-8 about 15,000 students walked out of the classroom to protest. During those days, the Board said they couldn't grant their demands such as curriculum changes, bilingual education, and hiring Mexican-American administrators due to the lack of funding. During the walkouts, 13 of the organizers got arrested on felony conspiracy charges. Eventually 12 of the organizers were released except Sal Castro. Him not being released encouraged the people to stand together and represent Latinos and the right for all of them to get equal access to education.

21st Century Connection:

This event happened in February 4, 2025. This is related to the Los Angeles walkout because it also took place in Los Angeles, and it is another protest based on Mexican-Americans. In both events they are trying to make a movement in the Latino community.

[Article: Eastside Students Walk Out to Protest Trump's Immigration Policies](#)



My Response:

There have been many movements, many protests and much segregation towards Latinos for them to still not have everything they have fought for. Many actions have taken place since 1968 and even before that time to now 2025 and it is an ongoing cycle to have to protest for more equality.

The Occupation of Alcatraz Island

By Jacob H.

What Happened:

The Alcatraz Indian Occupation was a protest by alliances of Native American activists that lasted nineteen months. On November 20th, 1969, the occupation was led by Richard Oakes and multiple groups of Indian students to support their cause. Their causes being protested were the U.S. government's policies of the termination of federal recognition of tribes and policies of assimilation and wanting to reclaim the island as Native land. The U.S. government made multiple attempts to get the Native people to flee the island such as cutting off their utilities and food supplies to the island. In January 1971, there was a collision between two oil tankers in the entrance to the San Francisco Bay. The government blamed the collision on the lack of light from Alcatraz even though it was clear that was not the reason. In their eyes, this was enough reason to put the government in action to forcibly remove the remaining Native Americans on the island. On June 10th, 1971, armed federal marshals, FBI agents, and special forces police intruded the island and removed the last remaining fifteen people, which brought the occupation to an end. Even though it came to an end, they still left a huge impact. The occupation caused President Nixon to get rid of the policy of terminating federal recognition of tribes, and a policy of Indian self-determination became the official U.S. government policy. The Alcatraz Occupation is considered a success to this day.

21st Century Connection:

In the article, it explains how ICE agents are invading people's homes and personal spaces, which is similar to how the government invaded the island and removed the Native Americans.

[Article: How The Feds Used Propaganda to Frame Their 'War' On Chicago](#)



My Response:

Even though the two events are different situations, they have a fair amount of similarities. ICE agents have been doing multiple raids, invading people's properties, and their supporters wrote articles about them to justify themselves and fit their narrative, which is similar to how the government blamed the oil tanker collision on the Alcatraz Occupation to invade their island. Unironically, both events have to do with the land and human beings where they are from. The government during both of these events has taken people away from the land that originally doesn't belong to them (the government) and made it dehumanizing in both of these events.

The Women's Rights Strike for Equality

By Liz

What Happened:

The Women's Strike For Equality, was held on August 26th, 1970. It was a nationwide protest where thousands of women stopped their daily routines to go demand for equal rights. It was organized by the National Organization for Women (NOW). The strike took place in over 90 cities across the US, like New York City where a march of 50,000 women went down Fifth Avenue. It was triggered by the lack of progress in Women's Rights, 50 years after the 19th Amendment granted women the right to vote. Women were demanding equal rights in employment and education, free childcare & and reproductive rights. Marchers carried signs, chanted for fairness, & showed that women deserved the same opportunities and freedom as men. The event gained national attention and became an important moment in the women's rights movement, helping push the fight for gender equality forward.

21st Century Connection:

Many of the key issues from 1970, such as workplace, equality, reproductive rights & access to child care are still relevant and unresolved today, this photo shows women standing together for the same cause, demanding equal rights & opportunities.



My Response:

Women stand up, side by side
Voices loud and strong, nowhere to hide
Fighting so hard for equal rights
Turning darkness into light.

Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA)

By Brutal Caramelo

What Happened:

President Reagan signed an important law for all the country in November 1986. In the law, he introduced civil and criminal penalties to employers who hired undocumented migrants but too in an important addition offered legalization for all immigrants having permanent residence. The important law required qualified applicants who had continuously resided in the US since 1982 to apply within a one-year window from May 1987 to May 1988. They had to pay a fee and provide extensive documentation. Millions of Hispanics gained legal status through IRCA, having all the rights they could need for be living in USA, which many persons called American dream of the 1980s.



21st Century Connection:

This article is related to the 1986 IRCA because both talk about immigrants trying to get legal status. IRCA helped many Latinos get papers, and today Venezuelans are still having problems with their status. It shows the problem with immigration still continues.

[Article: Venezuelans in North Texas at risk of deportation as temporary protected status](#)



My Response:

Today the topic of immigration is a real discussion in the White House for many immigrants who come from Venezuela and many other countries. They are waiting for something signed that is similar to the 1986 order so that they can get a legal status. This topic is very important for many people right now.



