African Americans came home from the war, after all they had given their country, to face discrimination. Segregation laws in southern states kept black people in separate schools, separate neighborhoods, even separate parks. Reverend Martin Luther King Jr. fought these laws with nonviolent protest. The federal government passed the Civil Rights Act of 1964 to guarantee the rights of all citizens.

In California, segregation laws didn’t exist, but people were still treated unfairly. In 1963, the state passed a law making it illegal to refuse housing to a person based on race. The next year, citizens voted to overrule this law. In 1965, race riots broke out in Watts, a poor and overcrowded African American neighborhood outside Los Angeles.

Farm workers in California also faced unequal treatment. Cesar Chavez and Dolores Huerta, joined by a Filipino group, started the United Farm Workers (UFW). They wanted to gain better pay and working conditions for farm workers. In 1965, the workers went on strike against grape growers in Delano. People throughout California supported them by sending food and money to the strikers. Chavez called for a boycott of grapes, and millions of Americans refused to buy grapes or grape products. Growers started losing money. In 1970, they finally agreed to give the workers higher wages and better working conditions.

In the 1960s, many groups used nonviolent protest to gain civil rights. Hispanic high school students in East Los Angeles fought for and won reforms, including Mexican American studies as well as more Hispanic teachers and principals. Women used nonviolent protests to gain rights. California universities started women’s studies programs. More women were elected to national, state, and local government. American Indians took over Alcatraz Island near San Francisco to make people aware of their poor living conditions on reservations. They also wanted to turn the island into an educational center, but they were forced to leave.