

## ABSTRACT

*This preliminary literature search addresses diversity within the volunteer sector. Cultures were defined relative to identifiable immigration patterns, so this article focuses on countries of origin and ethnicity. Information was gathered primarily from secondary sources for one paper in a doctoral level independent study, "History of Volunteerism in America." The limitations are clearly acknowledged, but this beginning effort is intended to serve as a starting place and a strong challenge for all leaders in the volunteer sector to understand and celebrate the rich histories in our diverse populations. The author presents a graphic representation of multicultural histories of American volunteerism.*

# Multicultural Perspectives in the History of American Volunteerism

Judy Rauner

## INTRODUCTION

The history of volunteerism in the United States parallels our history as a segregated nation. Volunteerism is often perceived as a white Anglo-Saxon tradition, yet volunteerism is also a tradition for people of color.

Gaps exist in this exploration of multicultural volunteerism, in part because the primary resources are mainly histories of volunteerism, not the histories of specific cultures. Traditions of volunteer involvement in the African-American, American Indian, Asian-American, and Latin American cultures are introduced in this paper. Volunteer efforts influenced change within each of these cultures.

## AFRICAN-AMERICANS

The earliest volunteer involvement of African-Americans spanned the levels of freedom that existed between northern blacks and southern slaves. Slaves helped one another in quiet and cooperative ways. Before the Civil War, free blacks bought black slaves and allowed them to work themselves free. Both free and enslaved blacks offered shelter, protection

and employment in the Underground Railroad. Leadership emerged in 1831, when Nat Turner led 70 slaves in a march on the county seat and helped the abolitionists organize and develop new coalitions. Harriet Tubman also inspired many other volunteers by going South 19 times and rescuing more than 300 slaves.

Urban free blacks were able to organize and establish mutual aid associations, library companies, and literary societies for self-improvement. One example was the Baltimore Young Men's Mental Improvement Society for the Discussion of Moral and Philosophical Questions of All Kinds, which was established in the mid-1850s.

After the Civil War began, black women volunteered to sew and otherwise to aid the Union troops. Black soldiers volunteered for the Union Army at an astonishing rate. By the end of the war, 85% of eligible blacks signed on, accounting for nearly one-tenth of the northern army (Ward, 1990, p. 252). Black spokespeople were able to influence public opinion, including the 1864 action of New Orleans blacks who submitted a suffrage petition to Washington.

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The Civil War ended in 1864 and, within one year, 366 societies and auxiliaries were established for Negro education. These groups sent an estimated 1,300 teachers to the South. By 1869, there were 10,000 teachers, half of whom were northern and southern blacks (Ellis & Noyes, 1990, p. 123). Just as quickly as the schools had grown, however, the enrollment dropped. Southern whites were opposed to the teaching of political thought that accompanied the reading and writing.

The first scholarly research of black volunteer participation was done by W.E.B. DuBois in the black wards of Philadelphia between 1890 and 1910. Black churches provided one structure for volunteer participation and 71% of those who were surveyed identified their involvement in church activities. Findings suggested high rates of participation by blacks at every socioeconomic level (Davis, 1977, p. 36). Black Americans became "increasingly vocal after the turn of the century as they sought to equalize their position as citizens" (Ellis & Noyes, 1990, p. 174).

Black fraternities and sororities were founded on college campuses in the early 1900s under the common principles of service, scholarship and commitment. College-educated blacks formed the Niagara Movement in a call for human brotherhood and an end to discrimination. This organization laid the groundwork for the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), which was created in 1909 and specifically addressed the needs of city blacks.

Sojourner Truth was a leader within the women's suffrage movement who protested the wording of the Fourteenth Amendment. The limitation to only male citizens excluded the free blacks' right to vote. Southern suffragists were hostile to participation of black women and local suffrage groups generally did not welcome black participation. Consequently, organizations of black women emerged in numerous cities and a state-level association was established which included seven states. The ballot was seen by black women as both defense against sexual exploitation and guarantor of economic rights. When a demand was made that the

national Woman's Party protest the denial of voting rights to black women in Southern states, suffrage leader Alice Paul said this was a race issue and not a woman's issue. Black women's leadership clearly emerged during the suffrage movement.

The 1930s brought the beginnings of interracial cooperation for women along with an emergence of black consciousness. Black and white women struggled within the Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA) Council for Interracial Cooperation (CIC), but there was little achievement on such issues as education, working conditions, child welfare, segregation, suffrage and lynching. Jessie Daniel Ames led the creation of the Association of Southern Women for the Prevention of Lynching (ASWPL). Concurrently, the Back-to-Africa movement and Father Divine's Peace Movement began when black neighborhoods held mass meetings and developed the black citizens' consciousness about their problems.

The first black Union, the Brotherhood of Sleeping-Car Porters, surfaced within the next decade. After World War II, black women were reluctant to return to lower wages and demeaning personal domestic work, and reacted to this economic disparity by moving into advocacy positions. The tradition of activism within the black church and the new black pride that was taught in schools set the stage for Rosa Parks, who quietly boarded a bus in Montgomery, Alabama in 1955. She sat in the white section and was arrested. The Local Women's Political Council, a black counterpart of the League of Women Voters, and the NAACP then initiated a bus boycott in protest of her arrest. The new black activism of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) grew out of the boycott and as much as 95% of the black population participated. At the same time the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) was formed as an outgrowth of the Chicago Committee on Racial Equality, initially established in 1942 by James Farmer. Sit-ins and selective patronage campaigns, which were based on a "don't buy where you can't work" (Ellis & Noyes, 1990, p. 252) premise, were strong. Student involvement included the Northern Stu-

dent Movement and the Student Non-violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC).

After the 1957 Civil Rights Act, get-out-the-vote campaigns were still needed because white supremacy advocates maintained discrimination at the polls. Highly visible campaigns included the March on Washington for Freedom, the 1963 Jobs in August, and the Mississippi summer project of 1964. Black Muslims and other black nationalists in the "black power" movement made black women scapegoats, accusing them of "robbing their men of their manhood" (Evans, 1989, p. 297). Self-help projects, such as Operation Bootstrap in Los Angeles, were developed.

Then in the early 1970s, black women utilized a long history of strength and assertiveness to strongly support the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA). Individual women who demonstrated leadership ranged from Shirley Chisholme, who with little support launched a 1972 presidential campaign, to Bertha Gilkey, who organized the renovation of her housing project.

More recent studies of volunteer participation suggest that blacks volunteered less than whites in political arenas and within dominant community organizations. The greatest participation remained within the churches. The 1974 Department of Labor study on volunteer involvement supported earlier findings that black participation was lower: 9.4% for blacks, 16.9% by whites. The conclusions reached by Davis were that the black volunteer participation research was inconclusive, contradictory, and not based on clear theoretical frameworks (1977, p. 40). He stated in summary that blacks as volunteers were not adequately understood.

## ASIAN-AMERICANS

Asians immigrated to the United States during different time periods: the Chinese largely between 1850 and 1882, the Japanese from 1880 to 1924, the Filipinos in the 1920s and after 1965, and Southeast Asians since 1975 (*Encyclopedia of Social Work*, 1977, p. 953). All immigrant groups established mutual assistance organizations soon after their arrival to this country.

In 1878, Chinese immigrants formed the Six Companies, a benevolent association

that represented immigrants to both the American government and to the emperor in China. Benevolent associations continued to become cultural centers for new Chinese immigrants wherever they settled, with the Consolidated Benevolent Association unifying them under an umbrella organization. While local groups kept autonomy, common goals were shared to maintain the Chinese language, ethnicity, and values. Then in 1932, the New York Chinese American Voting League was formed. This organization offered a framework for other new organizations that fought discrimination.

The next major thrust of Chinese-American volunteerism was the formation of organizations which were ethnic parallels to mainstream organizations. By 1921, five Chinese Young Men's Christian Associations (YMCA), three YWCAs, scouting and youth groups had been formed. An Anti-Opium League was also formed to support Chinese addicts who were overcoming their drug habits.

The Japanese Association reached its prime in the 1920s and '30s, when translators were provided and newcomers were connected to services and to Japanese values. Conservative values regarding acculturation were maintained with the advice, "Don't become too American too quickly" (Ellis & Noyes, p. 211). The Japanese also formed networks of service agencies, scout groups, and athletic leagues. The Japanese-American Citizen's League (JACL) offered mutual aid to deal with issues of discrimination and prejudice. The JACL was seen as cooperating with the United States Government during the period of World War II detention camps, which made the group lose influence.

The diversity of countries represented by more recently arrived Asian immigrants prompted federations and coalitions to be formed. This helped Asian-Americans to "pool resources, coordinate their efforts, and provide technical assistance to local groups in program development" (*Encyclopedia of Social Work*, 1977, p. 956). Multipurpose service centers and community organizations specifically for Asian-Americans offered a wide range of services for youth, seniors, and families to

address health, economic, and legal needs. These organizations gave volunteers many opportunities to become involved in helping one another.

## LATIN-AMERICANS

The earliest Spanish-speaking people in what is now the United States lived in the Southwestern region which initially belonged to Spain and then to Mexico. After the 1848 Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, both English and Spanish were designated as official languages of the area, but those who spoke only Spanish became second-class citizens. Mutual aid organizations formed by Mexican-Americans included the 1894 Alianza Hispano Americana, where "Chicanos volunteered to help one another, learn English, find jobs, and still preserve their Mexican cultural ties" (Ellis & Noyes, 1990, p. 153). Kinship and extended families provided support systems which maintained the traditional informal voluntary response to meeting needs.

The early waves of Mexican immigration occurred during the Mexican Revolution in 1911 to 1931, then again after World War II (*Encyclopedia of Social Work*, 1977). Orden Hijos de America, founded in 1921 in San Antonio, worked to end prejudice, achieve legal equality, acquire political representation and educational opportunities. Then in 1929, Latino groups consolidated through the League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC) (*Ibid*, p. 210). Mexican-Americans became more politically aware after World War II when Chicano veterans returned to America.

Labor unrest precipitated another surge of active volunteer involvement. New Mexico miners went on strike in 1950, and women took over the picket line when an injunction stopped male pickets. "Women, whose leadership skills had been honed invisibly in churches and on front porches, stepped forward" (Evans, 1989, p. 257). The farm workers' union then attracted Chicana workers like Jesse Lopez de la Cruz, who joined Cesar Chavez as a volunteer organizer. The farm workers movement first focused on civil rights and strengthening the Mexican-American community, and then on workplace issues.

Credit unions and consumer cooperatives were established; counseling and advocacy services were offered. When United Farm Workers organized a strike against California grape growers and marched to Sacramento, "Chicanas experienced continuing resistance to activism" (Evans, 1989, p. 272), but a few women emerged as leaders in *la causa*.

Self-help organizations and Community Development Corporations (CDCs) generated significant opportunities for volunteering that simulated extended family support systems. Local organizations were formed in order to deal with specific issues and then joined together to create coalitions such as the San Diego County Chicano Federation. Regional coalitions affiliated with the National Council of La Raza, where national policy influence occurs. The CDCs were committed to creating change in the Chicano barrios, to encourage economic growth and generally to improve the barrios.

During the mid-60s, student activist groups emerged in the southwest. La Raza Unida was formed as a political party and was particularly strong in Texas. The national Chicana Businesswomen's Association was also established, but Latin American women were not significantly involved in the feminist movement. Evans pointed out that "Hispanic women, most of whom were Catholic, found it difficult to become involved in a movement that made abortion a central issue" (1989, p. 298).

Hispanics began to be recognized as the fastest growing population in the United States in the early 1980s and efforts accelerated to involve them in organizations originally dominated by Caucasians. Loretta Nestor founded the first all-Spanish-speaking Red Cross Volunteer Group and wrote about the United Way's Hispanic Leadership Development Program, which was designed to strengthen relations between Hispanic organizations and the philanthropic sectors (1984, p. 25).

## AMERICAN INDIANS

When American Indians were moved to reservations, food was shared and self-help was a "way of life." This total commitment to each other within a tribe was

not, however, extended to other tribes. Racial unity was not recognized until the 20th Century.

Periods of war prompted American Indians to work actively for justice, for other oppressed people and for themselves. During pre-Civil War times, runaway slaves were given shelter and protection. This was documented between 1784 and 1786 by fugitive recovery clauses in treaties between the colonies and tribes (Ellis & Noyes, 1990, p. 86). The Indian veterans of World War I pressed for study of American Indian conditions. They were supported by other citizen groups who taught the Indians advocacy. Pueblos sent delegations to many American cities to explain their issues, and in 1926, Washington authorized a study of Indian conditions.

After the 1934 Indian Reorganization Act, volunteers organized powwows and other celebrations of traditional culture that had previously been barred. These events became fundraisers for American Indian causes, including education and land preservation. During the 1940s, Indian women gained leadership, training and experience through the YWCA and Women's Clubs. The New Deal gave them greater access to formal education. Federal policy moved from suppression of the Indian culture toward encouraging tribal autonomy after the Indian Reorganization Act (IRA). Women utilized these new rights and skills by developing voluntary civic activities, such as clubs and Parent Teacher Associations.

## CONCLUSION

Four commonalities emerged during this review of literature. First, strong family and spiritual traditions supported people helping one another within tribes, in slave quarters, and among newly arrived immigrants. The early stages of self-help offered within all the cultures discussed here were based on strong family, church, or tribal ties. Self-help continued in the contemporary renewal of ghettos, with the difference being that new community loyalties had to be established.

The second commonality is that ethnically diverse groups established associations and organizations parallel to the

dominant population. Tocqueville, who in the mid-1800s wrote that "Americans of all ages, all conditions, and all dispositions constantly form associations," (Heffner, 1984, p. 198), identified a pattern that included more than just the dominant society. People of color established mutual aid associations, such as the Chinese Benevolent Associations and the Urban Free Blacks, that were similar to the dominant culture associations. Mainstream voluntary organizations generally excluded people of color until this century, and parallel organizations were established, including Japanese scout troops, Chinese YMCAs, black fraternities and sororities, the Chicana Businesswomen's Association, and Native American Parent Teacher Organizations.

Third, minority involvement in military action stimulated advocacy for human rights. After minority groups served in the military, they returned to civilian life with new skills and expectations that could be utilized to advocate for greater dignity and civil rights. The blacks after the Civil War, the Native Americans after World War I, and the Mexican Americans after World War II advocated for jobs, human rights, and stronger voices in the community. The Japanese disenfranchisement during World War II prompted a successful quest for reparations through the legal system.

Throughout history, cultural groups have sought improved economic opportunity and justice through volunteer efforts. The fourth commonality within cultural groups addresses the socioeconomic divisions and ethnic cultural traditions that impacted volunteer participation. The involvement of African-Americans took quite different routes, depending upon their free or slave status, Northern or Southern location, urban or rural setting. The grass roots revolts and advocacy of blacks in the 1960s, of American Indians in the 1930s, and Mexican-American farm workers advocacy of the 1950s have similarities. The college-educated urban blacks, the Asian-American and Latino business leadership groups replicated mainstream dominant culture organiza-

*(cont. on page 8)*

	1620	1700	1800	1860	1865
<b>African Americans</b>		Slaves helping one another	Mutual Aid Associations and Literary Societies	Slaves and free blacks help with Underground Railroad	Teachers are sent to the South by Societies and Auxiliaries to teach ex-slaves
<b>American Indians</b>			Mutual help among tribal members		Sheltered runaway slaves
<b>Asian Americans</b>				1850 Chinese Benevolent Associations established	1880 Japanese
<b>European Americans</b>	Cooperative Ventures	Individualized systems of helping	Clubs and Fraternal Orders established 1780s Sunday School "Resolves to Abstain" (boycotts) 1775-Citizens Aid War Effort	German Irish 1820 Lyceum Movement Mutual Benefits	English Age of Associations Underground Railroad Cooperative Fundraising Red Cross and other organizations
<b>Latin Americans</b>				1848 South West Annexed Mutual Aid Organizations	Union Organizations

\*This chart is intended to provide a limited historical context.  
 ----- Immigration

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**Figure 1**  
**Multicultural Histories of American Volunteerism**

	1900	1920	1940	1960	1980	1990
<b>African Americans</b>	African ----- First Scholarly research on black participation W.E.B. Dubois Churches the structure for volunteerism Black sororities/fraternities	Interracial Cooperation for women on YWCA Council for Interracial Cooperation (CIC)		African ----- "Get out the vote" campaigns CORE (Congress of Racial Equality) Rosa Parks initiates bus boycotts Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC)		
<b>American Indians</b>		Delegations to cities & to Washington, D.C. Powwows used as fundraiser or education & land preservation	Women volunteer: civic organizations, clubs, PTS's			
<b>Asian Americans</b>	----- Japanese	----- Filipinos Ethnic parallels of mainstream organizations (YMCA, scouting)		Chinese Voting League Japanese Citizen's League	1975----- Multipurpose service centers	----- SE Asians
<b>European Americans</b>	Italian ----- Soviet ----- National Association of Societies for Organizing Charity (62 societies) General Federation of Women's Clubs	Suffrage Movement Voluntary Health Organizations	Depression Era relief	Move toward inclusiveness Association of Volunteer Bureaus (became Association for Volunteer Administration)	Vietnam War Protests VOLUNTEER: The National Center	Points of Light Foundation Independent Sector
<b>Latin Americans</b>	1911----- Mexican Orden Hijos de America founded	1931 League of United Latin American Citizens	Farm labor movement	Self help organizations Community Development Corps Student Activist Groups	----- Mexican, Central & S. American La Raza Unida	

tions. Connections to economic status influenced how people volunteered in all cultures, just as economics influenced the dominant culture volunteerism.

Important issues relating to multicultural volunteerism need to be addressed in much greater depth, including the exploration of how socioeconomic positions influence patterns of volunteering. The developments in the volunteer sector during the past few decades were not covered in this literature search, and during the past two decades significant new developments have taken place in the nonprofit sector. National conferences offer workshops and keynote addresses which focus on our population diversity. Traditional organizations and dominant culture leadership are encouraging more inclusive involvement and strong efforts are being made to encourage diversity within volunteer programs.

During this same period of time, the composition of ethnic groups changed significantly. The Asian population now includes Vietnamese, Laotian, Hmong, Cambodian, and Pacific Islanders. Mexican-Americans had been the predominate Latino population and now there are more Central and South Americans. Caribbean Islands immigration brought both Latino and black immigrants. These immigrants and those from throughout the world don't necessarily bring the same traditions of volunteerism with them.

This paper does not address contemporary volunteer involvement of diverse cultures. Recent Gallup Surveys on volunteering stated that 52% of American adults engaged in volunteer activity in 1981 and 55% in 1983. Of these volunteers, 41% in 1981 and 39% in 1983 were non-white (Allen, 1984, p. 22). The latest Gallup surveys did break out specific racial groups. Blacks showed a marked increase in volunteering from 20% in 1987 to 38% in 1989.

The traditional image of an American volunteer evokes, for many, an image which represents the dominant Caucasian culture. Both the history of American volunteering and contemporary studies must reflect multicultural perspectives. A recent survey on research needs in the field of volunteerism called for further history

research (Ellis, 1985, p. 12). Better historical understanding of multicultural volunteerism could increase the appreciation that people in the nonprofit sector have about the diversity within our volunteer heritage.

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