

Handout #4

Handout #3 for Jigsaw Activity

Source: Fannie Lou Hamer, “We’re on Our Way”, Indianola, Mississippi, September, 1964. (Excerpted)

Thank you very much. Good evening, ladies and gentlemen. I am very glad to be here for the first time in Indianola, Mississippi, to speak in a mass meeting. . . . [I]t’s good to see people waking up to the fact— something that you should’ve been awoken years ago.

. . . [E]very church door in the state of Mississippi should be open for these meetings; but preachers have preached for years what he didn’t believe himself. And if he’s willing to trust God, if he’s willing to trust God, he won’t mind opening the church door. Because the first words of Jesus’s public ministry was: “The spirit of the Lord is upon me because he has anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim and bring relief to the captive.” And you know we are living in a captivated society today. And we know the things we doing is right. The thirty-seventh of Psalms said, “Fret not yourselves because of evildoers, neither be thy envious against the workers of iniquity for they shall be cut down like the green grass and wither away as the green herb. Delight yourselves in the Lord and verily thou shalt be filled.” And we are determined to be filled in Mississippi today.

Some of the white people will tell us, “Well, I just don’t believe in integration.” But he been integrating at night a long time! If he hadn’t been, it wouldn’t be as many light-skinned Negroes as it is in here. The seventeenth chapter of Acts and the twenty-sixth verse said: “Has made of one blood all nations.” So whether you black as a skillet or white as a sheet, we are made from the same blood and we are on our way! . . .

“Righteousness exalts a nation, but sin is a reproach to any people.” Sin is beginning to reproach America today and we want what is rightfully ours. And it’s no need of running and no need of saying, “Honey, I’m not going to get in the mess,” because if you were born in America with a black face, you were born in the mess.

Do you think, do you think anybody that would stand out in the dark to shoot me and to shoot other people, would you call that a brave person? It’s a shame before God that people will let hate not only destroy us, but it will destroy them. Because a house divided against itself cannot stand and today America is divided against itself because they don’t want us to have even the ballot here in Mississippi. If we had been treated right all these years, they wouldn’t be afraid for us to get the ballot. . . .

And I can tell you now how this happened. After I had been working for eight or ten months, I attended a voter educational workshop in Charleston, South Carolina. On the ninth of June in 1963, we was returning from the workshop. We arrived in Winona, Mississippi, about eleven o’clock. Four of the people got off of the bus to use the restaurant; two of the people got off of the bus to use the washroom. At this time, I was still on the bus. And I saw the four people rush out and I got off of the bus. And I said, “What’s wrong?”

And Miss Ponder, Southwide supervisor for the Southern Christian Leadership Conference said, "It was the chief of police and a state highway patrolman ordered us to come out." And I said, "This is Mississippi for you."

She said, "Well, I think I'll get the tag number and we can file it in our report." And I got back in the bus. One of the girls that had used the washroom got back on the bus and that left five on our outside. When I looked through the window, they was getting those people in the car. And I stepped off of the bus again. And somebody screamed from that car and said, "Get that one there," and a man said, "You are under arrest." When he opened the door, and as I started to get in, he kicked me and I was carried to the county jail...

I was led out of that cell and to another cell where they had two Negro prisoners. Three white men in that room and two Negroes. The state highway patrolman ordered the first Negro to take the blackjack; it was a long leather blackjack and it was loaded with something heavy. And they ordered me to lay down on my face on a bunk bed. And the first Negro beat me...

And the state highway patrolman told the second Negro to take the blackjack. And I asked at this time, I said, "How can you treat a human being like this?"

...That Tuesday when they had our trial, the same policemen that had participated in the beatings was on the jury seat, people. And I was charged with disorderly conduct and resisting arrest. And I want to say tonight, we can no longer ignore the fact, America is not the land of the free and the home of the brave. When just because people want to register and vote and be treated like human beings, Chaney, Schwerner, and Goodman is dead today. A house divided against itself cannot stand; America is divided against itself and without their considering us human beings, one day America will crumble. Because God is not pleased. God is not pleased at all the murdering, and all of the brutality, and all the killings for no reason at all. God is not pleased at the Negro children in the state of Mississippi suffering from malnutrition. God is not pleased because we have to go raggedy each day. God is not pleased because we have to go to the field and work from ten to eleven hours for three lousy dollars. . . .

"Righteousness exalts a nation, but sin is a reproach to any people. The beatitude[s] of the Bible, the fifth chapter of Matthew said: "Blessed are they that moan, for they shall be comforted." We have moaned a long time in Mississippi. And he [*Jesus*] said, "The meek shall inherit the earth." And there's no race in America that's no meeker than the Negro. We're the only race in America that has had babies sold from our breast, which was slavery time. And had mothers sold from their babes. And we're the only race in America that had one man had to march through a mob crew just to go to school, which was James H. Meredith. We don't have anything to be ashamed of. All we have to do is trust God and launch out into the deep. You can pray until you faint, but if you don't get up and try to do something, God is not going to put it in your lap.

We are not fighting against these people because we hate them, but we are fighting these people because we love them and we're the only thing can save them now. We are fighting to save these people from their hate and from all the things that would be so bad against them. We want them to see

the right way. Every night of my life that I lay down before I go to sleep, I pray for these people that despitefully use me. And Christ said, "The meek shall inherit the earth." And He said before one-tenth—one jot—of his word would fail, heaven and earth would pass away.¹ But His word would stand forever. And I believe tonight, that one day in Mississippi—if I have to die for this—we shall overcome...

We want people, we want people over us that's concerned about the people because we are human beings. Regardless of how they have abused us for all these years, we always cared what was going on. We have prayed and we have hoped for God to bring about a change. And now the time have come for people to stand up. And there's something real, real peculiar but still it's great: there used to be a time when you would hit a Negro—a white man would hit a Negro—the others would go and hide. But there's a new day now, when you hit a Negro, you likely to see a thousand there. Because God care. God care and we care. And we can no longer ignore the fact that we can't sit down and wait for things to change because as long as they can keep their feet on our neck, they will always do it. But it's time for us to stand up and be women and men. Because actually, I'm tired of being called "Aunty." I wondered in life what actually time would they allow for me to be a woman? Because until I was thirty-six I was a girl: "Girl this." And now I'm forty-six and it's "Aunty." But I want you to know tonight: I don't have one white niece or nephew. And if you don't want to call me Mrs. Hamer, just call me plain "Fannie" because I'm not your aunt. . . .

We want ours and we want ours now. I question sometime, actually, has any of these people that hate so—which is the white—read anything about the Constitution? Eighteen hundred and seventy, the Fifteenth Amendment was added on to the Constitution of the United States that gave every man a chance to vote for what he think to be the right way. And now this is '64 and they still trying to keep us away from the ballot. But we are determined today, we are determined that one day we'll have the power of the ballot. And the sooner you go to the courthouse, the sooner we'll have it. It's one thing, it's one thing I don't want you to say tonight after I finish—and it won't be long—I don't want to hear you say, "Honey, I'm behind you." Well, move, I don't want you back there. Because you could be two hundred miles behind. I want you to say, "I'm with you." And we'll go up this freedom road together.

Before I leave you, I would like to quote from an old hymn my mother used to sing: "Should earth against my soul engage, and fiery darts be hurled, when I can smile at Satan's rage and face this frowning world."-Thank you.