

Name: _____

Date: _____

WORKSHEET

Chapter 16: The Postwar Period-1945-1980 Section 4: Civil Rights Movements

Interpreting: A Protest Song

Sit-ins and voter registration movements of the 1960s were usually accompanied by singing. Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr., said, "The freedom songs are playing a strong and vital role in our struggle. They give the people new courage and a sense of unity. I think they keep alive a faith...particularly in our most trying hours." The words of songs were usually changed to fit the situation. Tunes were often adapted from folk music or rhythm and blues familiar to the participants. One folksinger tried to write the words as he listened to the singing. A woman laughed, "Don't you know you can't write down freedom songs?" Another said, "Man, there are no words, you just make them up."

Directions: Below are some of the words from the 1960s version of a protest song that was originally sung in the 1940s. Read the lyrics and answer the questions that follow.

HALLELUJAH! I'M A-TRAVELIN'

Stand up and rejoice! A great day is here!
We're fighting Jim Crow
And the victory's near. [Chorus]

Chorus
Hallelujah, I'm a travelin'
Hallelujah, ain't it fine.
Hallelujah, I'm a-travelin'
Down freedom's main line.

In 1954 our Supreme Court said,
"Look a-here Mr. Jim Crow,
It's time you were dead." [Chorus]

I'm paying my fare on the Greyhound Bus line,
I'm riding the front seat
To Montgomery this time. [Chorus]

In Nashville, Tennessee, I can order a coke,
And the waitress at Woolworth's
Knows it's no joke. [Chorus]

In old Fayette County, set off and remote,
The polls are now open
For Negroes to vote. [Chorus]

I walked in Montgomery,
I sat in Tennessee,
And now I'm riding for equality. [Chorus]



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I'm travelin' to Mississippi
On the Greyhound Bus line,
Hallelujah, I'm riding
The front seat this time.

1. Why would protest leaders encourage their followers to "Stand up and rejoice"?

2. Who was Mr. Jim Crow, and why was it time he was dead?

3. Why was the front seat of the Greyhound bus significant?

4. What had happened at Woolworth's to cause it to be mentioned in the song?

5. What was happening in the mid-1960s that could have prompted the phrase, "I'm riding for equality"?

6. To what does "I walked in Montgomery" probably refer?

7. How could singing a song such as this one help the participants in a protest?

