



**HANDS
OFF!**

Song & Chant Sheet

***Titles of Songs are hyperlinked to audio / video of songs**

**** This song + chant sheet also note in which setting a song will work best: March, Rally, Vigil, Sit In...**

*Songs compiled by the Kairos Center's Songs in the Key of Resistance
(SKOR) Project*


KAIROS CENTER
FOR RELIGIONS, RIGHTS & SOCIAL JUSTICE

Neighbor Neighbor Can't You See (call and response) *March*

The version of this song originated in 2014, when organizer Avery Book heard an adaptation of the military cadence “What The Army Has Done To Me” at a Movement for Black Lives action in Vermont – “mama, mama can’t you see/what the system’s done to me”. At this action he encountered an army veteran who heard in this adaptation a connection between the state violence he saw in war, and the state-sanctioned police brutality directed at marginalized communities. Reflecting on the movement for universal healthcare in Vermont, Book began to see politicians who deny citizens a right to adequate healthcare also as perpetrators of state violence. The song was then further adapted at an action taken to pressure Vermont’s governor to fulfill a campaign promise to bring universal healthcare to the state, at which point the lyric was changed to “neighbor, neighbor can’t you see”, reflecting solidarity across movements and communities who suffer the results of political negligence and state-sanctioned violence.

Neighbor neighbor can’t you see

Democracy is what we need (2)

Oh oh oh oh oh, this power grab has got to go (2)

Healthcare is a human right

That's why today we stand and fight (2x)

Oh oh oh oh oh, healthcare cuts have got to go (2x)

Neighbor neighbor can’t you see

Social security’s what we need

Oh oh oh oh oh, these billionaires have got to go (2x)

Education is a right

That’s why today we stand and fight (2x)

Oh oh oh oh oh, privatization’s got to go (2x)

Neighbor neighbor can’t you see

Medicaid is what we need

Oh oh oh oh oh, these cuts have got to go (2x)

Ain’t no way we’re backing down

We’re rising up the time is now (2x)

Rich Man’s House

Rally

By Minka Wiltz and the Economic Human Rights Choir of the New Freedom Bus Tour

Rich Man’s House Oral History Video

Rich Man’s House is a powerful song that was birthed by poor and homeless families of the Kensington Welfare Rights Union during the New Freedom Bus Tour in 1998. It is a song that lifts up the power of the 140 million poor and low income people in this country who are organizing to take back what is ours. This song has been sung at state capitals, eviction defense actions, mass meetings, bus tours and in homeless encampments to lift up our dignity and humanity as poor and dispossessed people in a cruelly unjust society. As the leaders of the New Freedom Bus Tour learned, the struggles they were facing in Kensington and the injustices that they were organizing to end were connected to the struggles that other poor and dispossessed people across the United States. Rich Man’s House became a symbol for the capitalist system that has become all too comfortable with the death of our people at the hands of poverty, systemic racism, militarism and ecological devastation. The song became a declaration that we would no longer allow this death dealing system to “walk all over me.” We sing this song today to demand that our lives and our dignity be the guiding priority of our work to build the world our people need and deserve.

I went down to the rich man's house

And I took back what he stole from me

Took back my dignity

Took back my humanity (2x)

And now it's under my feet (where?)

Under my feet (where?)

Under my feet (where?)

Under my feet

Ain't gonna let no system walk all over me

Went down to the ICE office

Went down to the DOGE office

Went down to Congress

Went down to the White House...

Rise Up (call and response)

By Charon Hribar and Jose Vasquez

March or Rally

“Rise Up” is a song written in the wake of growing uprisings around the United States in 2016 responding to the unjust killings of black people (Michael Brown, Eric Garner, Freddy Gray, Alton Sterling, Philando Castile and others) by police; the militarized response to protests against the Dakota Access Pipeline on the Standing Rock Sioux Reservation; the government’s intentional disregard that led to the water crisis in Flint, MI; as well as worsening economic conditions experienced by the 140 million poor and low income people in this country. Charon Hribar and Jose Vasquez wrote this song as a mantra that could be used by grassroots leaders who were coming together to organize for the launch of a new Poor People’s Campaign in December 2017. The song was first shared at a national gathering of grassroots movement leaders, artists, cultural workers, and media makers in Baltimore, MD in August 2016. Drawing on a long-standing tradition of call and response music, “Rise Up” is a call to unite as poor and dispossessed people to put an end to the violence, hatred, and greed enacted against our people.

Rise up we’re gonna rise up

Rise up we’re gonna rise up

We ain’t gonna let nobody turn us around

Because the people united will stand our ground

Rise up we’re gonna rise up

Rise up we’re gonna rise up

The powers that be can’t keep us down

We’re gonna rise up and turn the world around

Rise up come on and rise up

Rise up come on and rise up

The people are ready so follow our lead

We’ll put an end to the violence, the hatred and greed

Rise up we’re gonna rise up

Rise up we’re gonna rise up

Rise up (4x)

Mean Things

By John L. Handcox, Adapted by Avery Book and Charon Hribar

Rally

Also known as “Strange Things”, this song has many variations, most notably by the legendary union organizer, poet and folk singer John Handcox. As an African American member of the Southern Tenant Farmer Union, Handcox defied Jim Crow laws during the 1930s at great personal risk by organizing across racial lines, using his music and poetry to bring workers together around shared grievances and aspirations for a better life. His music was eventually picked up by Alan Lomax and Pete Seeger in the 1960s, although the songwriter virtually vanished from the historical record after WWII until finally re-emerging in the 1980s. He would go on to perform songs like “Mean Things” for a new generation of labor activists until his death in 1992 at the age of 88. In this adaptation by Avery Book, the lyrics encompass the “mean things” that marginalize poor communities in the 21st century such as corporate greed that deprives people of a living wage, lack of health care, and housing. But there is also cause for optimism as the last chorus reminds us, “when the dispossessed unite/the end of poverty is in sight/there are good things happening in this land.”

There are mean things happening in this land (2x)

But the movement’s going on, and the movement’s growing strong

There are mean things happening in this land

There are mean things happening in this land (2x)

Call and response: Oh those corporate profits soar, as the poor pay more and more

There are mean things happening in this land

....there go the wealthy billionaires, debt and suffering everywhere...

...healthcare cuts are on the rise, the sick and poor are left to die...

... to serve the Wall Street bottom line, our health and bodies on the line...

...Democracy it is our right and we won't give up the fight...

They'll be good things happening in this land (2x)

When the dispossessed unite the end of poverty is in sight

They'll be good things happening in this land

What Do We Want Right Here Today (call and response)

March or Rally

By Charon Hribar, Kairos Center for Religions, Rights, and Social Justice

What do we want right here today

Health care for our people

We'll march until we get our way

Healthcare for our people

What do we want - healthcare

When do we want it - now

Justice for our people / What do we want - justice

Justice for our planet / What do we want - justice

Protect the land and water

What do we want - protect our future

Housing for all people / What do we want - housing

Public education / What do we want - education

Protect our democracy

What do we want - protect democracy

Hands Off (call and response)

March

By Joel and Carrie

Hands off (Hands off)

Our democracy

Hands off (Hands off)

Our dignity

Hands off (Hands off)

Our beloved community

**Ain't Gonna Let Nobody
*March or Rally***

This song, adapted from the spiritual “Don’t Let Nobody Turn You Around”, was first introduced by Reverend Ralph Abernathy to organizers of the Albany Movement at Mount Zion Baptist Church in 1962. The song was quickly taken up and used by activists willing to face arrest, and worse, in order to bring about the desegregation of bus and train stations, as well as other public facilities in Albany, GA. As an example of the song’s significance as an adaptable freedom song, lyrics originally included references to the now-historical adversaries to integration in Albany like Captain Pritchett, Mayor Kelly, and the town legislature’s injunction on public protest (“ain’t gonna let no injunction turn me around...”). The song has since been updated by the Poor People’s Campaign as a way to face down the powerful few who act as obstacles to the many who strive for justice and equality for all.

Ain't gonna let nobody turn me 'round,

Turn me round, turn me 'round.

Ain't gonna let nobody, turn me 'round.

I'm gonna keep on a walkin', keep on a talkin',

Marching up to freedom land

Ain't gonna let voter suppression

Ain't gonna let racism turn me 'round

Ain't gonna let no poverty

Ain't gonna let no war economy

Ain't gonna let no Congress



Organize Organize Organize

Adapted by Charon Hribar, Kairos Center for Religions,
Rights, and Social Justice

Rally

(Chorus)

Organize organize organize

Organize organize organize

Organize organize organize

Organize organize organize

(call and response verses)

Cause we want justice for our people

Living wages and equality (repeat)

(Chorus)

(So we gotta) Organize organize organize

Organize organize organize

Organize organize organize

Organize organize organize

(additional verses)

Cause we want peace for our children

Free education and the right to dream (repeat)

Cause we want justice for our people

We want clean water and air we can breathe (repeat)

Cause we want justice for our people

The right to housing and our dignity (repeat)

Cause we want justice for our people

And you only get what you're organized to take (repeat)

We Are the Movement

By the Peace Poets

March

We are the Movement

Liberation Moving

For Every Single Human

We have come to Win!

No One is Getting Left Behind (This Time)

By Joshua Blaine

Rally, Vigil, or Sit In

Josh wrote this song in 2022 as part of a We Cry Justice artists collective project and was inspired by Dan Jones' chapter from We Cry Justice, "A Mixed Multitude." He also drew from the poem by Aurora Levins Morales, "Red Sea," in which she challenges us to ask: what happens this time if we all cross together? This song has become an important song sung in protest spaces and gatherings calling for a ceasefire in Gaza. For a longer story behind the song, see the link above.

No one is getting left behind this time

No one is getting left behind

No one is getting left behind this time

We get there together or never get there at all

We get there together or never get there at all

We get there together or never get there at all

Set It Right Again

By Ana Hernandez

March or Rally

This song adapts a line from Sojourner Truth's stirring and courageous speech at the 1851 Women's Rights Convention in Akron Ohio, as transcribed by Marius Robinson: "I have heard the Bible and have learned that Eve caused man to sin. Well if woman upset the world, do give her a chance to set it right side up again." The song calls us all to action as we contemplate the "great trouble in this land" – and that we are the ones who will "set it right again".

There's a great trouble in the land

We're gonna set it right again (3x)

We're gonna set it right, set it right again

Trouble been brewing too many years

We need healing across the land

We need justice across the land

We're building a movement across the land

Everybody’s Got a Right to Live

By the Rev. Frederick Douglass Kirk Patrick and Jimmy Collier, Adapted by The Poor People’s Campaign: A National Call for Moral Revival

March or Rally

Everybody’s Got a Right to Live has been a central message of the Poor People’s Campaign since 1968 when the Rev. Frederick Douglass Kirkpatrick and Jimmy Collier sang it in Resurrection City. When we launched the Poor People’s Campaign: A National Call for Moral Revival in 2018, we revived this song and used its power to connect our movement across the country during 40 days of moral fusion direct action. Jimmy Collier once said, “Music is the easiest way to tell the story of what we’re trying to do; [our] songs are one of the best tools for getting people together.”

Everybody’s got a right to live
Everybody’s got a right to live
We say poverty no more
We cry justice for the poor (or justice for sure)
Everybody’s got a right to live

(Break) **(Version w/the break)**

*Everybody’s got a right to live (to live)
Everybody’s got a right to dream (to dream)
Everybody’s got a right to love (to love)
Everybody’s got a right to learn (to learn)
Everybody’s got a right to breath (to breath)
Everybody’s got a right to health (to health)
Everybody’s got a right to care (to care)
Everybody’s got a right to...*

Strange Things (Hunger Games Tune)

Adapted by Vermont Workers Center

Rally, Vigil or Sit In

Our health our live our bodies not for sale
We struggle to change a system that has failed
Strange things have happened here no stranger would it be
Democracy it is our right
A right for you and me

Our health our lives our bodies not for sale
The President’s / Senator _____’s promises each one
has failed
Strange things have happened here no stranger would it be
If we built a system good for you and me

Up Over My Head

Betty Mae Fikes

March or Rally

“Up Over My Head” is a song that comes out of the gospel tradition. It was popularized during the Civil Rights Movement by SNCC (Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee) Freedom Singer - Bettie Mae Fikes. Bettie Mae Fikes was a founding member of the Freedom Singers, who used song as an essential tool to empower and educate audiences about civil rights issues during the Civil Rights Movement of the 60’s.

Up over my head
I see freedom in the air
Up over my head
I see freedom in the air
Up over my head
I see freedom in the air
And I really do believe
I said I really do beliew
A change is coming out there

Up over my head
I see justice...
I see peace...
I see power...
I see hope...
I see change...

Mi Unica (call + response)

By the Peace Poets

March

This song was written by the Peace Poets in collaboration with Migrant Justice and Mijente fighting against the criminalization of immigrant communities and deportations. The Spanish lyrics say - hey yo, my people we bring the strength. Liberation for all is our only flag. It goes on to lift up a native prophecy of the Condor and Eagle, representing a time when the Condor (the south) and the Eagle (the north), societies that had split into two different paths, would be united and create a new level of consciousness for humanity. The song is an affirmation of the connection we share across boundaries, across borders, across identities.

Oye mi gente traemos la fuerza
La libertad es mi única bandera
Rise up my people, my condors, my eagles
No human being will ever be illegal