



Raising our Voices for Change

Carmen Perez, The Gathering For Justice,
Oxnard, California / New York

☀ Call to Action

Raise your voice for change! Join Carmen in the fight for justice.

Follow her on Twitter & Instagram: @msladyjustice1 & learn about the Gathering for Justice: gatheringforjustice.org

☀ Values

- Compassion
- Dedication
- Solidarity
- Reconciliation
- Commitment
- Diligence
- Leadership

☀ Lessons Learned

You can rise above personal tragedy to become a better person, and change your life.

Learning from our mentors and heroes can help us find the way to bring their wisdom into the challenges we face today and find solutions to create a sustainable future.

By working together in solidarity we can achieve much more.

One of the founders of the Women’s March, Carmen Perez, rose to national fame in 2017.

But her path to get there was not without challenges—and she learned many lessons along the way. These lessons came as much from her forebears—leaders like Nane Alejandre, the founder of Barrios Unidos, and Harry Belafonte, a civil rights activist and singer who started The Gathering for Justice—as well as from her basketball coaches Pat Bell and Terrel Harrison, her professor Aida Hurtado, and from her own family, and her personal history of loss and forgiveness. Through these struggles, she realized the importance of looking at injustice from many perspectives, including an environmental one.

☀ Language Arts

Write 15 questions you would like to ask Carmen about her life, her activism, and the incidents that prompted her to become involved in it. Why did you choose those questions? (Write your answer out in a full paragraph).

Farm workers in California have an extensive history of activism. Perhaps the best-known activists in this movement are Cesar Chavez and Dolores Huerta. Write a research paper about them, explaining how their work helped pave the way for younger generations to get involved in the issues affecting farm workers.

Create a five-minute video explaining the adverse effects of using pesticides on crops, not just on consumers, but on the people harvesting the food and living near the fields. What are the most common adverse effects of being exposed to these chemicals? What types of regulation need to be in place to ensure that people are not being hurt by these chemicals?

One of the biggest issues for farm workers is the lack of access to Personal Protective Equipment (PPE). The Covid-19 pandemic has only made the problem more serious. Write an essay about the threat to public health that farm workers face on a daily basis because of the lack of PPE.

STEM Activities

Although Carmen does not directly address mental health issues, her story is centered around her resilience, and her ability to deal with tragedy in her life and transform emotional suffering into a positive outcome. Create a mock mental health workshop to which you could invite a counselor to speak to your peers about the importance of mental health, creating an environment in which students can speak about their experiences.

Carmen has faced many difficult times, but in that regard, she is not unlike many young adults. Design a group activity that allows students to talk about national or personal events that have affected them, and have made them want to change something in their lives or communities.

- **Example:** Scene from *Freedom Writers*. Have all of the students stand in a line, and step forward or backward if the statement spoken applies to them.

Two of the greatest problems facing our country today are climate change/non-sustainable practices, and racism/injustice. Explain how these two problems are connected, and suggest ways that both problems could be solved simultaneously.

Sustainability Innovations

In addition to helping people in prisons turn their lives around, there are hundreds of wrongfully imprisoned individuals in the U.S. The [Innocence Project](#)¹ is one of many organizations working to exonerate wrongfully imprisoned individuals based on DNA testing and reform.

- **Examples -** *Just Mercy* (Movie) and *The Innocence Files* (Netflix TV Show)

The [National Alliance on Mental Health](#)² and the [American Health Association](#)³ are two organizations that prioritize mental health, and create an open environment that welcomes everyone to speak about and understand the importance of mental health.

[Barrios Unidos](#)⁴ is an organization founded by Nane Alejandrez with the mission of promoting multicultural social justice, nonviolence, and economic equity through cultural healing, civic leadership, and youth and community development.

Sustainability Career Pathways

Criminal Justice Reformer. The criminal justice system needs reform: there is a desperate need to shift the emphasis away from long prison sentences to rehabilitation, reconciliation and healing. This will require the help of dedicated individuals--from holistic defense attorneys and progressive prosecutors, to prison educators and society reentry specialists. For an introduction to the many opportunities in this field, read this [American Bar Association article](#)⁵.

Restorative Justice Advocate. Restorative justice shifts the focus away from punishment, to repairing the harm done to the victim and the community. This reframing of justice is in its infancy; it will require passionate organizers and communicators to change peoples' understanding of these issues. Organizations like the Centre for Justice & Reconciliation are a good place to start; they offer advice on how you can [create local efforts to support restorative justice](#)⁶. Also, here is a [listing of jobs and organizations focused on](#)

[justice and peace](#)⁷.

Spiritual Leader. Ministers, rabbis, imams, and other spiritual leaders have played a key role in social reform for centuries. If you are a religious person, you might want to consider becoming a leader in the spiritual community of your faith, and use this position to help heal your community, and to address issues of environmental injustice, xenophobia, misogyny, prison reform, and climate change. Ministers are required to get both a bachelor's degree, and a divinity degree, but there are other spiritual callings (and jobs in religious NGOs) that require less schooling. For more on this calling, [read here](#)⁸.

Diversity & Inclusion (D&I) Officer. More corporations are recognizing the opportunity and responsibility to maintain diverse workforces, and to ensure that all workers feel included in the company culture. There are now a variety of D&I jobs at many large companies, from VPs of D&I, to diversity managers, to D&I trainers. For an introduction to this [field](#)⁹ and [opportunities](#)¹⁰, read these articles.

1 <https://innocenceproject.org/>

2 <https://innocenceproject.org/>

3 <https://www.aha.org/mental-health-awareness-month>

4 <https://barriosunidos.net/>

5 <https://www.americanbar.org/careercenter/blog/new-opportunities-in-criminal-justice-reform/>

6 <https://restorativejustice.org/resources/>

7 <https://justiceandpeace.georgetown.edu/resources/careers/>

8 <https://www.learnhowtobecome.org/minister/>

9 <https://www.aihr.com/blog/diversity-and-inclusion-jobs/>

10 <https://www.shrm.org/membership/communities/chapters/pages/studentarticleconsideranhrcareerindi0620.aspx>

