

The Activism of Fatima Meer

Introduction: Fatima Meer is considered one of South Africa’s most distinguished twentieth century leaders. As a political leader, publisher, writer, scholar, and human rights and gender activist, she worked tirelessly to improve race relations, and promote justice, reconciliation, and nonviolent action both during and after apartheid.

Born in 1928, Professor Meer began her political activism as a high school student. In 1949, she helped found the Durban and District Women’s League—the first women’s organization with joint Indian and African membership. The League aimed to build alliances between Indians and Africans in the city of Durban after violence between those groups that year. In 1955, she helped create the Foundation of South African Women, which led a famous anti-pass march on the national government buildings in Pretoria in 1956. The apartheid government banned Professor Meer twice, first in 1952 for three years, and again in 1975 for five years. In 1976, she was arrested and put in prison for six months. Professor Meer continued her activism after apartheid ended in 1994 in support of South Africa’s poor.

Instructions: As you watch Professor Meer’s videos, answer the questions in the boxes below.

Use the chart below to compare life under apartheid for Africans and Indians.

Life for Africans Under Apartheid	Life for Indians Under Apartheid

Conflict Between Africans and Indians, Durban 1949

How did whites instigate violence between these groups?

Name: _____

Durban and District Women's League

Why was it formed?

What kinds of things did the League do?

Why did Professor Meer think it was important to build ties between Africans and Indians?

Federation of South African Women

Why was it formed?

South Africa Today

What does Professor Meer think are the greatest challenges facing South Africa today?