

PROFILE OF RESISTANCE

Fannie Lou Hamer

organizer, voting rights activist

"Nobody's free until everybody's free"

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Background

Born: October 6, 1917; Died: March 14, 1977

Fannie Lou Hamer was born in a rural town in Montgomery County, Alabama. As a young girl she noticed that something was wrong in Mississippi. The problem was racism. She grew up in poverty and became a sharecropper at six years old.¹ Hamer did not receive a typical education. She dropped out of school at age 12 to spend more time helping her family. Later in life, she worked as a timekeeper on a plantation with her husband and two children.²

Hamer's Resistance

In 1962, when Hamer was 45 years old, civil rights activists came to her town. They wanted Black Americans like her to register to vote. Before this, she never even knew she was allowed to register to vote. She knew that trying to vote as a Black woman was risky. She decided to try and register with other Black people in her community. When they went to the courthouse to register, they had to take literacy tests. These tests were full of mean tricks and cheats. The tests were used to prevent Black Americans from voting.

On their way home, there was more trouble. Their bus was stopped by the police. Everyone on the bus began to worry. Fannie Lou Hamer began to sing. She sang songs such as "This Little Light of Mine" and the passengers calmed down. After this day, she continued to work hard to register people to vote.³ As a leader in many political organizations she registered people to vote all across the South.

Achievements

Hamer helped establish the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party, was co-founder of the National Woman's Political Caucus, and helped organize the Freedom Summer in 1964 to fight of African Americans civil rights. She is remembered as a hardworking and brave woman who never stopped fighting for voting rights.

¹ Michals, D. (2017). Fannie Lou Hamer. Retrieved from <https://www.womenshistory.org/education-resources/biographies/fannie-lou-hamer>

² Fannie Lou Hamer. (2019, April 15). Retrieved from <https://www.biography.com/activist/fannie-lou-hamer>

³ Hamlet, J. (1996). Fannie Lou Hamer: The Unquenchable Spirit of the Civil Rights Movement. *Journal of Black Studies*, 26(5), 560-576. Retrieved from <http://www.istor.org/stable/2784883>

Essential Questions

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1. How do you think Fannie Lou Hamer was feeling when she was confronted by the police? What do you think motivated her to keep fighting?
2. How did Fannie Lou Hamer show resistance?
3. *“Nobody's free until everybody's free”*
 - a. Do you agree with her statement? Why or Why not?