

Fannie lou hamer's civil rights activism



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Fannie Lou Hamer was not only a wife and a mother, but she was a woman who was dedicated to the advancement of black men and women. Even though Hamer went through her many sufferings, Hamer used those experiences to create a voice for not only herself but for all her fellow brothers and sisters who did not have one. Fannie Lou Hamer was born on October 6th, 1917 and she was the last of 20 children. By the age of six, Fannie Lou Hamer started helping her family pick cotton on the fields, and by the age of 12, Hamer was forced to leave school in order to continue her work at the plantation (Michals 2017). In 1944, Hamer married Perry Hamer and they moved to a plantation that was owned by B. D. Marlowe and Hamer became a timekeeper due to her ability to read and write (PBS). According to The National Woman's History Museum, in 1961, Fannie Lou Hamer went into surgery to remove a uterine tumor and the white doctor performed a hysterectomy without her consent leading to the adoption of her two daughters (this procedure became so common that it was nicknamed the Mississippi Appendectomy) (2017). Not long after that, Hamer attended a voting rights meeting that was hosted by the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC). Hamer was so moved by the organization and its agenda that she became an organizer for the SNCC (Michals 2017). A year later, on August 31st of 1962, Hamer along with seventeen other volunteers took a bus to the Indianola, Mississippi Courthouse in order to register to vote. Only allowing Hamer and one other volunteer to enter the courthouse, after taking a literacy test, they were both denied the right to vote and, on their way back home the bus was stopped by police and they were fined one hundred dollars due to the bus being "too yellow" (PBS).

After coming together to raise enough money, Hamer along with other SNCC were able to help pay off the unreasonable fine.

Once Hamer got back home to the plantation, unless Hamer withdrew her registration, she would be kicked off the plantation. Hamer decided to leave the plantation and her husband would later join her in Sunflower County (PBS). Hamer caught the attention of the SNCC field secretary - Bob Moses who saw her as a potential leader, so he invited her to an SNCC conference and Hamer became a new community organizer. Later, in June of 1963, according to Michals, after Fannie Hamer and a couple of other black women were able to register to vote, they were arrested for sitting at a restaurant that was labeled as "whites-only" (2017). While in the jail cells, Hamer along with the other women was brutally beaten. In her testimony at the 1964 National Democratic Convention, Hamer gives a detailed description of how she heard the screams of the other women, and how she herself was beaten, "He said, you are from Ruleville alright and he used a curse word. And he said we going to make you wish you was dead...I was carried out of that cell into another cell where they had two negro prisoners. The state highway patrolman ordered the first negro to take the blackjack...the first negro prisoner ordered me by orders from the state highway patrolman for me to lay down on a bunk bed on my face. I laid down on my face and the first negro began to beat me and I was beat by the first negro until he was exhausted..." (Fannie Lou Hamer 1964). After her time in jail, in 1964, according to Franklin and Higginbotham, SNCC along with Hamer played a huge role in working with the community to challenge the Democratic Party due to it being only for white people (524). Hamer co-founded the Mississippi

Freedom Democratic Party (MFDP), an organization that worked hard to include all races in the fight for racial equality regarding voting and a strong political presence within the Democratic party. From getting a hysterectomy without her consent, to being denied the ability to register to vote because of a literacy test, to getting kicked off a plantation, to being brutally beaten in a jail cell by fellow blacks who were forced to beat her; Fannie Lou Hamer endured a lot of different struggles, but throughout those struggles, Hamer made it a point to fight harder for her beliefs, leading to the foundation of the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party.

Fannie Lou Hamer ' s testimony in 1964 gave the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party a bigger platform to stand on because of the fact that it was broadcasted on all of the major TV networks. After hearing Hamer's emotionally moving testimony, support started to come in from all across the nation for the MFDP. Although the MFDP failed at gaining a seat at the Democratic National Convention, four years later the MFDP succeeded in getting at least two voting seats at the DNC in Chicago. Hamer became the first African American and the first African American woman from Mississippi to gain a seat as a delegate at a convention (American Public Media). On August 22nd, 1964, Fannie Lou Hamer stood before the Democratic National Convention's credentials committee, advocating on behalf of the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party, for a place among the all-white delegation (Waxman 2017). The National Democratic Party was composed of white men and did not allow black men or women to join. Hamer, with just one television broadcast, started a snowball effect that resulted in the unseating of an all-white delegation.

According to Eric Foner and John Garraty, Freedom Summer was also known as the Mississippi Summer Project; the Freedom Summer was a voter registration drive in 1964 that aimed to increase the number of blacks registering to vote in the South, especially in Mississippi where voter registration for African Americans was at its lowest. This drive was sponsored by civil rights organizations such as the Congress on Racial Equality (CORE), and the Council of Federated Organizations (COFO) (2009). Freedom Summer was also sponsored by National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC), and finally, the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) (Franklin & Higginbotham 524). According to Franklin and Higginbotham, the SNCC played the most important role within the Freedom Summer and the SNCC was the organization that Freedom Summer identified with (524). The SNCC (also known as the organization that Fannie Lou Hamer dedicated her life to) contributed to most of the staff participation and took care of most of the funding components regarding the Freedom Summer (Wisconsin Historical Society 2013). When Hamer testified at the National Democratic Convention, she stood for all the same ideas and values that Freedom Summer stood for. Hamer did not only testify for MFDP, but she also testified for organizations such as the SNCC, CORE, NAACP, Freedom Summer and many more.

Lyndon Baines Johnson was originally the vice president of the United States, but later became president of the United States after John F. Kennedy was assassinated in 1963 (Biography.com 2017). According to History.com Editors, after John F. Kennedy's assassination, Johnson vowed to carry out

Kennedy's proposals for civil rights reform (2009). Lyndon B. Johnson made it known that he envisioned a "Great Society" for America, one where there would be no poverty and no racial injustices (Trueman 2015). After becoming president, Johnson's next goal was to stay president, and in order to do so, he needed to gain enough support to get re-elected. After catching wind of the fact that Fannie Lou Hamer would be making her appeal at the 1964 National Democratic Convention, Johnson was opposed to Fannie Lou Hamer's actions because he realized that Hamer's testimony would offend those who he needed the most support from - the Southern Democrats. In order to silence Hamer, Lyndon B. Johnson decided to host a news conference at the same exact time that Hamer would be giving her testimony in order to divert the attention of the news networks (Brown 2017). Although Lyndon B. Johnson did attempt to silence Hamer, he would later be the president to sign the Civil Rights Act of 1964.

I would classify Fannie Lou Hamer as a civil rights activist. According to Franklin and Higginbotham, after Hamer was threatened and arrested for entering the white side of a bus terminal, while in jail, she was mercilessly beaten by the others in the jail once they found out about her involvement in the voting activities (530). Even after this occurred, Hamer did not resort to violence as a black power member would have, she took more of a Martin Luther King Jr. approach and chose to not respond with violence. Instead, Hamer decided to speak out about the violence against her at the 1964 Democratic National Convention, where she testified on behalf of the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party (Franklin and Higginbotham 531). Although Hamer was a part of the SNCC who later started to develop a black

power mindset, Hamer started off with a nonviolence mindset and I believe that even though she understood the SNCC's point of view, that mindset would always follow her no matter which organization she was a part of. In many ways, Fannie Lou Hamer reminds me of Martin Luther King Jr due to how passionate she was about the civil rights movement and how she went about creating change without the use of violence. Not only was Fannie Lou Hamer a part of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, Hamer was also vice-chairwoman of the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party, she also started the Delta Ministry (a ministry for ministers outside of Mississippi to help with the civil rights agenda), Hamer founded the Freedom Farms Cooperation (provided poor farmers with land that they farmed and lived on so that they could eventually purchase it themselves), she was even a part of the National Women's Political Caucus, and was the chair of the board of directors of the National Council of Negro Women (HISTORY 2009). The different organizations that Hamer was a part of shows proof that to her, violence was not a necessity, although she could have advocated for violence if she wanted to. With the platform that Hamer was blessed with, I personally believe that the nonviolent approach would have always been the best way to go about sharing the story that she wanted to tell. Just like Martin Luther King Jr., Fannie Lou Hamer chose to use her voice and experiences to bring about the changes that we see today and even made sure to encourage others to continue the cycle of creating change. " You can pray until you faint., but unless you get up and try to do something, God is not going to put it in your lap" (Fannie Lou Hamer).

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