

# Fannie Lou Hamer Memorial Statue

Unveiling and Dedication Ceremony



**Tuesday, October 10, 2023  
10 a.m.**

**James Whelan Boardwalk Hall  
Atlantic City, NJ**



# “If you build it, they will come.”

## The History of the Fannie Lou Hamer Memorial Statue

In the fall of 2009, the ROAR Foundation, under the leadership of Mrs. Patricia Thompson, began its quest to commission the building of a life-size statue of civil rights icon Mrs. Fannie Lou Hamer. A decision was made to expand the committee beyond the local community. Mrs. Thompson reached out to Dr. Patricia Reid-Merritt, Coordinator of Stockton’s Annual Fannie Lou Hamer Human and Civil Rights Symposium, to serve as the national chairperson. The symposiums began in 2004, marking the 40th anniversary of Mrs. Hamer’s historic speech at the 1964 Democratic Convention in Atlantic City, New Jersey. Dr. Reid-Merritt invited numerous Black Studies scholars to serve on the committee to raise money. The National Black United Fund, Inc. (NBUF), under the direction of Mr. William Merritt, CEO, signed on as fiscal sponsor. The fundraising campaign was launched in 2010, with goal raise the funds in time to commemorate Mrs. Hamer’s 95th birthday in October 2012.

In spring of 2011, New Jersey sculptor Brian Hanlon read news story on the leadership efforts of Dr. Reid-Merritt to raise funds for a statue of Mrs. Hamer for a Memorial Garden in her hometown of Ruleville, MS. Hanlon, known for his bronze statues of famous athletic figures, was inspired to help and offered to contribute to the project.

The Committee needed to raise an additional \$50,000.00 of the \$150,000 needed for the project. Among the donors, NBUF received \$10,000.00 from writer/poet Alice Walker with a note indicating, “I do this for my sister, Fannie Lou Hamer.” The notice of the contribution helped turned the tide. Within a few months, significant contributions were received from AT&T Mississippi, Mississippi Freedom 50th Foundation, Inc. South Delta Planning and Development District, Inc, and Double Quick, Inc. The statue and the planned ceremony around the unveiling were secured.

The unveiling of the statue was a momentous event, with over 1,000 attendees and a successfully orchestrated campaign by a committee of individuals from different corners of the nation; many of whom had not even met each other until the day of the event. A decade later, the resin casting mold of the statue was donated to Dr. Reid-Merritt, who gifted it to the City of Atlantic City on October 10, 2023, where it will be permanently displayed in James Whalen Boardwalk Hall, site of the 1964 Democratic National Convention.



## Master of Ceremony

Kaleem Shabazz,  
*Atlantic City Councilman,  
3rd Ward and Council Vice President*

## Musical Performance

“Lift Every Voice”  
Atlantic City High School Choir

## Acceptance of Gift on behalf of Atlantic City

Ernest D. Coursey, *Chief of Staff, Office of the Mayor*

## Special Welcoming Remarks

Dr. Joe Bertolino, *President, Stockton University*  
Vincent J. Polistina, *Senator, District 2*  
Donald Guardian, *Assemblyman, District 2*  
Claire S. Swift, *Assemblywomen, District 2*

## Musical Performance

“This Little Light of Mine”  
Atlantic City High School Choir

## The Significance of the Occasion

Dr. Shirley Weber, *California Secretary of State*  
William T. Merritt, *President & CEO, National Black United Fund*  
Dr. Molefi Asante, *Professor Africology, Temple University*  
Dr. Patricia Reid-Merritt, *Distinguished Professor  
of Africana Studies and Social Work*

## Unveiling of Fannie Lou Hamer Memorial Statue

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