

Grade
Level:
Adaptable,
grades 9-12

Fannie Lou Hamer and the Fight for Economic Justice

Social Studies, US History, Economics, American Government, Black History, Women's History

Learning Objectives:

- To understand the relationship between economic exclusion and political exclusion
- To recognize the range of Fannie Lou Hamer's contributions, as a civil rights activist as well as a human rights activist
- To acknowledge how power and privilege perpetuate over time, taking note of the economic inequality that still exists in America today
- To recognize areas in students' own communities where civil and human rights activism is needed

Provided Materials:

- Fannie Lou Hamer BrainPOP episode, available for free on the Find Your Voice website
- Video Clip from News Segment, ["Hunger: American Style"](#)
- Video Clip, PBS ["Slavery by Another Name"](#)
- Video Clip, Black History Minute, [Fannie Lou Hamer](#)
- SNCC Digital Gateway, ["Freedom Farm Cooperative"](#)
- Video Clip, ["One in Five Mississippians Lives in Poverty"](#)
- To better understand the many solutions Hamer proposed to grappling with poverty in the Mississippi Delta, consider this summary of her Freedom Farm Cooperative and this contemporary article by John T. Edge, ["The Hidden Radicalism of Southern Food."](#)

Background Knowledge:

Depending upon your familiarity with Fannie Lou Hamer, you may wish to consult this brief [Biographical Sketch of Fannie Lou Hamer](#) before leading this lesson. Excellent book-length biographies have also been written about Hamer, including: Kay Mills' *This Little Light of Mine*, Chana Kai Lee, *For Freedom's Sake*, and Maegan Parker Brooks, *A Voice that Could Stir an Army*. You may also wish to familiarize yourself with economic, educational, or political inequalities that exist in the

community where you teach so you can help students recognize areas where they can contribute to social change.

Instruction Steps

Anticipatory Set

Step One: If this is your students' first introduction to Fannie Lou Hamer, you might wish to either begin by playing the Fannie Lou Hamer BrainPOP episode available for free on the Find Your Voice website or by summarizing her major contributions based upon your reading of the Biographical Sketch of Fannie Lou Hamer.

Teacher Input

Step Two: Whether you are continuing your study of Hamer with this lesson or introducing Hamer to students for the first time, you can transition here from her voting rights and expressly political activism encapsulated in her involvement in the 1964 Democratic National Convention challenge to her fight against poverty. You can make this transition by showing students this clip of Hamer from the 1968 CBS documentary, *Hunger: American Style*. The entire documentary can be accessed [here](#).

Step Three: Mention that the poverty Hamer described was an outgrowth of the Sharecropping System. To explain this system in more depth, you can play the ["Slavery by Another Name"](#) and follow up with the [Black History Minute](#), devoted to Fannie Lou Hamer.

Step Four: Detail Hamer's many contributions to fighting poverty in the Mississippi Delta. These ranged from her advocacy of voting rights as a means to vote out white supremacist elected officials who kept black people in poverty, to her involvement with Head Start (the first Head Start Centers in the nation were introduced in Mississippi in the summer of 1965), to her creation of the [Freedom Farm Food Cooperative](#) (here is a brief summary of that program).

Step Five: And yet, despite Hamer’s best efforts, you can inform the class that poverty persists in the Mississippi Delta to this day. One demonstration of that poverty is [this](#) contemporary coverage of a recent flood and its aftermath on the most vulnerable in Vicksburg, Mississippi. Use this clip as an entry point to explaining issues of systemic and environmental racism, as well as the flip side—how power, wealth, and privilege compound over time.

Independent Reflection

Step Six: Ask students to independently reflect on what problems (economic, political, social) they see in their own communities and what potential solutions to those problems might be.

Activity

Step Seven: Group students according to the nature of the problems they identify. For example, there might be a group focused on “voter disenfranchisement,” another on the “school to prison pipeline,” and another on the effect “residential segregation has upon the public school system.”

Step Eight: Ask students to write the script for a news report addressing this problem. It might be helpful to show the Vicksburg clip again so students can use this news report as a model. Depending upon how much time you have to devote to the lesson, students can spend time researching the problem they have identified, collaboratively generate a script to raise

awareness about the problem, and even incorporate relevant visuals into their final presentation. Students can also record these presentations on their phones or cameras (if available) and play them for the class. If that technology is not available, students can orally present their segment.

Closure

Step Nine: Lead students in a discussion by asking open-ended and review questions, including:

- What problems motivated Fannie Lou Hamer to become an activist?
- What solutions did she promote to those problems?
- What problems continue to face our community and our country today?
- What stands in the way of activism?
- How can we overcome those obstacles and work to solve our community’s problems?

Assessment of Student Learning: Assessment of student learning occurs at three points in the “Fannie

Lou Hamer: Beyond Civil Rights” lesson. First, students will be asked to independently reflect upon and identify contemporary problems related to race, politics, and economics in their communities, as well as to consider potential solutions to those problems. Next, students will be asked to collaboratively create a news segment raising

awareness about one of those contemporary community problems. Last, students’ knowledge will be assessed through their participation in the discussion questions that serve as a conclusion of the lesson.

Find Your Voice Highlights

Students are inspired by Fannie Lou Hamer to find their own activist voices. Just as Hamer identified problems in her community and developed solutions to solve those problems, so too are students encouraged to raise awareness about contemporary community problems.

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