



Timeline of Fannie Lou Hamer's Life and Legacy

By Maegan Parker Brooks, PhD

October 6, 1917 Fannie Lou Townsend was born the twentieth child of James Lee and Lou Ella Townsend in Montgomery County, Mississippi.

1919 In search of work, the Townsend family moved to E.W. Brandon's plantation in Sunflower, County Mississippi.

1930 Fannie Lou left school so she could help her family financially by working fulltime in the fields.

1944 Fannie Lou Townsend marries Perry Hamer and moves to the W.D. Marlow plantation, four miles outside the city of Ruleville, Mississippi.



1944-1961 Fannie Lou and Perry Hamer adopt two children from their community, Dorothy Jean and Vergie Ree. They also care for Lou Ella Townsend, Fannie Lou's disabled mother, while working on W.D. Marlow's plantation.

August 27, 1962 Fannie Lou and Perry Hamer attend a mass meeting at William's Chapel Missionary Baptist Church. There they learn from civil rights activists that African American people have a constitutionally-guaranteed right to vote.

August 31, 1962 Fannie Lou Hamer attempts to register to vote at the Sunflower County Courthouse in Indianola, Mississippi. She fails the registration test. As punishment for her attempt, she is fired and evicted from the Marlow plantation upon her return home.

Fall-Winter of 1962 Fannie Lou Hamer becomes the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee's (SNCC) oldest voter registration worker. She attends workshops across the South to learn how to encourage people in her community to become politically active.

January 1963 Passes the voter registration test on her second try and becomes among the first registered black voters in Ruleville, Mississippi.



June 1963 Arrested in Winona, Mississippi on her return trip from a voter education workshop.

- • • She and several other civil rights activists with whom she is jailed are beaten while in police custody.

Spring of 1964 Becomes the first Black woman to run for US Congress and the first Black person to run from her district since the 19th Century.

August 22, 1964 On behalf of the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party, Hamer testified at the Democratic National Convention about the harassment and abuse she experienced in Mississippi for trying to vote. Her testimony is broadcast nationally.

September-October 1964 Travels to the West Coast of Africa, with other members of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, as an honored guest of the Guinean government.

December 1964 Speaks to crowds in Harlem, New York alongside the Black Nationalist Leader, Malcolm X.



January 4, 1965 On behalf of the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party, Hamer, Annie Devine, and Victoria Gray challenge the seating of the five US congressmen sent from Mississippi. They argue that since black people are unconstitutionally prohibited from voting in Mississippi, the representatives do not actually represent the state and, therefore, shouldn't be allowed to serve in the United States' Congress.

April 23, 1965 Becomes the lead plaintiff in the lawsuit *Hamer v. Campbell*, suggesting that elections in Sunflower County should be suspended until black people are given a fair chance to register.



June 1966 Marched alongside Martin Luther King, Jr. and spoke to protestors along the Meredith March Against Fear in Mississippi.

Spring 1967 Fannie Lou Hamer's eldest daughter, Dorothy Jean, dies from complications related to anemia, malnutrition, and inadequate access to health care. Fannie Lou and Pap Hamer adopt Dorothy Jean's two daughters, Jacqueline and Lenora.



August 20, 1968 Formally seated as a delegate from Mississippi to the Democratic National Convention, Hamer receives a standing ovation from the convention floor for her tireless advocacy of voting rights.

1968 With the help of the National Council of Negro Women, Hamer starts a "Pig Bank" in Sunflower County to provide protein to malnourished members of her community.

1968-1972 Fannie Lou Hamer receives honorary doctorates from numerous universities, including Columbia College and Tougaloo College. She also was named the "First Lady of Civil Rights," by the League of Black Women and she received the "Noble Example of Womanhood" and the Mary Church Terrell Awards during this period.

1969 With money she raised by speaking to audiences across the country, Hamer buys the first 40 acres of "Freedom Farm," a cooperative established to provide food and jobs for people in her community. Freedom Farm eventually grows to nearly 700 acres and becomes the third largest employer in Sunflower County.



- • • **July 10, 1971** Spoke at, and participated as a founding member of, the National Women's Political Caucus in Washington, D.C.

July 13, 1972 Hamer is an official delegate from Mississippi to the Democratic National Convention, where she offers a speech in support of Frances Farenthold's candidacy for Vice President.

1972-1976 Helps secure affordable housing for people in Ruleville, while traveling nationally to raise funds for Freedom Farm and advocating for prison and poverty program reforms in Mississippi.

1976-1977 Battles breast cancer, hypertension, and diabetes.



- • • **March 14, 1977** Dies of heart failure at a hospital in Mound Bayou, Mississippi.

Examples of Her Legacy

July 27, 2004 The Democratic National Convention honors Fannie Lou Hamer on the 40th Anniversary of the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party's Credentials Committee Challenge.

2006 The United States Congress reauthorizes the 1965 Voting Rights Act and names it after Fannie Lou Hamer, Rosa Parks, and Coretta Scott King.

February 17, 2009 The International Slavery Museum recognizes Hamer as a "Black Achiever" and hangs her portrait next to one of President Barack Obama in their permanent exhibit.



February 21, 2009 The US Postal Service included Fannie Lou Hamer among twelve civil rights pioneers honored on postage stamps in recognition of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People's 100th Anniversary.

October 6, 2012 In her hometown of Ruleville, Mississippi, an eight-foot bronze statue of Fannie Lou Hamer is dedicated on what would have been her 95th Birthday.

August 8, 2015 Black Lives Matter protestors in Seattle, Washington interrupt Presidential Candidate Bernie Sanders' political rally. The protestor who speaks to the crowd about Black Lives Matter's concerns dons a "Fight Like Fannie Lou" t-shirt.



• • • **August 2018** Shelby County, Tennessee Commissioner, Tami Sawyer, is sworn into office on a biography about Fannie Lou Hamer and a collection of her speeches.

Summer 2019 The feature film, *Fannie Lou Hamer's America* and the K-12 Find Your Voice curriculum is released on the Find Your Voice: Online Resources for Fannie Lou Hamer Studies website: www.findyourvoice.willamette.edu