



Meet Fannie Lou Hamer



Fannie Lou Hamer, the daughter of sharecroppers, became a voting rights activist after being recruited by the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) in 1962. She soon became an important fieldworker, and fundraiser for the SNCC. One of the founders of the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party, she traveled with a delegation to the 1964 Democratic Convention in Atlantic City to present an ultimately unsuccessful challenge to the all-white, all-male Democratic delegation as not representative of the population of Mississippi. President Lyndon Johnson famously called a televised press conference in order to keep her testimony off the air. In the late 1960s and 1970s, Mrs. Hamer turned her attention to local efforts, developing cooperative farm and building houses for the poor of Sunflower County. Fannie Lou Hamer died in 1977. Inscribed on her grave in Ruleville is her most famous quote: “I’m sick and tired of being sick and tired.”

Actress and New Stage Education Director Sharon Miles’ Biography

Sharon Miles is an actor, singer, director, playwright and the Education Director at New Stage Theatre. Her original script, *If Not Us Then Who: Freedom Rides to Freedom Summer* chronicling the Freedom Rides of 1961 and Freedom Summer of 1964- toured through out the state of Mississippi through New Stage’s Theatre’s award-winning education program. Born and raised in Mississippi, Sharon is an avid lover of Mississippi History and seeks to use theatre arts to teach character development, youth empowerment and empathy. Additional original Scripts include: *Who Are You Calling Ugly: A Modern Duck Tale*, *The Middle Passage* and *8:46* and most recently, *The Debate for Democracy*.

A Word from Sharon

I was first introduced to Fannie Lou Hamer as freshman in college. I had spent my entire life in Mississippi, but I had never even heard of her. That bothered me. I considered myself a lover of history and equally passionate about current events, but the words of Fannie Lou Hamer, a civil rights leader from my Mississippi, had never reached me. I was introduced to Mrs. Hamer before I recognized the power of my own voice and before I had fully grasped the unspoken scars that you carry just growing up black in Mississippi. I recognized apart of myself in her. I saw members from my family, my church and my community in her.



Fannie Lou Hamer’s story challenged me, her faith inspired me, and her voice empowered me to embrace all sides of my identity. She helped me fall deeper in love with history and question who’s controlling the narrative? She still inspires me daily. I want to be more like her as she pushes me to be unapologetically me. She challenges me to love America enough to question her, to fight for her to reach her full potential, and make tomorrow better for the next generation just as Mrs. Hamer fought to make this day better for me. I consider it a great privilege of my life to honor this remarkable woman.

**Timeline of Events Referenced
in *Let It Shine*.**

1955: Montgomery bus boycott

1962: SNCC Meeting at William Chapel in Ruleville, MS

1963: SNCC workers attend a voter registration workshop in Charleston, SC

1963: Fannie Lou Hamer arrested in Winona, MS

1963: Medgar Evers is assassinated

1964: Freedom Summer—a voter registration drive aimed at increasing the number of registered Black voters in Mississippi

1964: Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party (MFDP) travels to the National Democratic Convention in Atlantic City, New Jersey

1976: The United States Bicentennial Celebration was a series of celebrations leading up to the creation of America as an independent republic.

Preparing for the Play



Technology Requirements: Internet access and a computer

Length of Play: 70 minutes

High School: Mississippi Studies Standards

MS.8 Evaluate the role of Mississippi in the Civil Rights Movement

1. Analyze the significant figures, groups, events, and strategies of the Civil Rights Movement in Mississippi.
2. Examine the conflict between the Federal and State governments during the Civil Rights Era.

High School: United States History 1877 to Present Standards

US.11 Civil Rights Movement: Evaluate the impact of the Civil Rights Movement on social and political change in the United States.

2. Trace the federal government's involvement in the modern Civil Rights Movement
3. Explain contributions of individuals and groups to the modern Civil Rights Movement, including: Martin Luther King, Jr., Medgar Evers, the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) and the civil rights foot soldiers.



Before the Performance

1. Show students the [trailer](#) for *Let it Shine: A Visit with Fannie Lou Hamer* and have them complete the attached anticipated guide. Students can then add additional information to the guide after the performance.
2. Have students analyze Mississippi's 1962 [literacy test](#) using the Library of Congress' [analysis guide](#).
3. Using the DPLA's [Fannie Lou Hamer and the Civil Rights Movement in Rural Mississippi](#) primary source set, have students reflect on the conditions in that led to her activism.

After the Performance

1. Have students interview a family member or friend who can remember life before the Voting Rights Act of 1965. Brainstorm possible questions that students could ask about race relations, the importance of voting, and the role of local people in bringing about change in government and society.
2. Through poetry, [Voice of Freedom by Carole Boston Weatherford](#) makes real the struggles and heart-wrenching events of Fannie Lou Hamer's life. Have students write their own poetry about the Civil Rights Movement after reading these poems.

Suggested Resources

SNCC Digital Gateway, Fannie Lou Hamer

<https://snccdigital.org/people/fannie-lou-hamer/>

PBS American Experience, Fannie Lou Hamer Article

<https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/features/freedomsummer-hamer/>

Books for Teachers

Maegan Parker Brooks, *A Voice That Could Stir an Army: Fannie Lou Hamer and the Rhetoric of the Black Freedom Movement* (Jackson: University of Mississippi Press, 2014).

Charles E. Cobb, Jr., *This Nonviolent Stuff'll Get You Killed: How Guns Made the Civil Rights Movement Possible* (New York: Basic Books, 2014).

John Dittmer, *Local People: The Struggle for Civil Rights in Mississippi* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1994).

Kay Mills, *This Little Light of Mine: The Life of Fannie Lou Hamer* (New York: A Dutton Book, 1993).

Charles M. Payne, *I've Got the Light of Freedom: The Organizing Tradition and the Mississippi Freedom Struggle* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995).

Words to Know

Civil Rights: personal freedoms that belong to all citizens as guaranteed by the U.S. Constitution.

Discrimination: unfair treatment of people simply because they are different; preventing them from getting jobs, going to school, eating in the same restaurant, etc.

Freedom Summer: campaign in Mississippi during the summer of 1964 where volunteers attempted to register African American voters.

Injustice: violating the rights of others

Integration: the act of uniting people from different races in order to achieve equal rights.

Jim Crow Laws: named after a black character in minstrel shows, these laws from the 1880's to the 1960's enforced segregation.

Literacy Test: a test to determine whether a person qualified to vote was used to keep African Americans from voting before the Voting Rights Act of 1965.

Mississippi Delta: Northwestern section of Mississippi which has a unique racial, cultural, and economic history.

Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party: political party which formed as an alternative to the dominantly white Democratic party in Mississippi.

Political Parties: group of people with similar opinions who work together to get candidates elected to public office.

Prejudice: negative feelings or opinions about other people as a group without good cause.

Racism: negative feelings about people because of the color of their skin.

Segregation: action that separates groups of people from one another.

Sharecropping: families who rented small plots of land and in return the landowner would get a portion each year's crop.

Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC): student led Civil Rights Movement organization in the 1960s.

Suffrage: the right to vote

Voting Rights Act of 1965: federal law aimed to overcome legal barriers that prevented African Americans from exercising the right to vote.

Anticipation Guide

Before the Play		After the Play
	Jim Crow Laws	



[Source](#)

Sharecropping



[Source](#)

Fannie Lou Hamer



[Source](#)

Freedom Summer



[Source](#)

Voting Rights



[Source](#)