

# Fannie Lou Hamer

October 6, 1917 – March 14, 1977

## Resilience



“You don’t run away from problems – you just face them.” Fannie Lou Hamer

**F**annie Lou Hamer was a powerful force of honesty and unwavering determination. She illuminated the events of her own experience as a reflection of a problem that needed reckoning to highlight racism and its brutal grip on her community in the rural South. Her voice became so powerful and supported other activists during her time. Hamer co-founded the *Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party (MFDP)*, helped to organize Freedom Summer for hundreds of college students to help with voter registration efforts in the South. Hamer was a member of the first integrated delegation in Mississippi. Hamer announced candidacy for the Mississippi House of Representatives and was prevented from appearing on the ballot, which led her to become one of the first black women to appear before the U.S. Congress in formal protest. She was one of the founding members of the *National Women’s Political Caucus*.

Fannie Lou (Townsend) Hamer was born into poverty in Montgomery County, Mississippi, as the 20th and youngest child of sharecroppers on October 6, 1917. She started working in the cotton fields with her family at the age of six. When Hamer was 12, she left school to work in the fields full-time.

Hamer was keenly aware of discrimination in her own life by being ostracized and humiliated when she and 17 others attempted to register to vote in Indianola, Mississippi. She eventually

registered in Charleston, South Carolina, after which she was brutally beaten. In addition, she had an unwanted hysterectomy when she thought she was receiving treatment for another ailment. This deception was a method of sterilization imposed on African American women as a means of population control at that time. All of these events provided her a strength that no politician or police brutality could squelch. She shared her powerfully honest story during a hearing which was broadcast live and was interrupted by a Presidential announcement. As a result, the media felt compelled to share her message over and over again to great effect in the hours and days that followed. Hamer’s honest and painful message resonated with the oppressed, snowballing change throughout Mississippi, the nation and the world. Hamer’s **soft skill of resilience** made her an indomitable force.

Hamer continued to provide relief to others by helping farmers in rural Mississippi through the provision of free pigs, called a “pig bank.” She also launched the *Freedom Farm Cooperative (FFC)* so that African American communities could operate the farm co-op collectively and benefit from it as well.

In 1977 at the age of 59, Hamer died of breast cancer, but her inspiration lives on.

**Scan the QR code to learn more.**



Connect for more



### REFLECT:

How are you showing resilience through your work at SSU in preparation for your future?