

# 1 **Fannie Lou Hamer Biography**

2 Civil Rights Activist, Philanthropist (1917–1977)

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## 4 **Synopsis**

5 Fannie Lou Hamer was born on October 6, 1917, in Montgomery County, Mississippi. In 1962, she met  
6 civil rights activists who encouraged blacks to register to vote, and soon became active in helping.

7 Hamer also worked for the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, which fought racial  
8 segregation and injustice in the South. In 1964, she helped found the Mississippi Freedom Democratic  
9 Party. Hamer died in 1977.

## 10 **Early Life**

11 Civil rights activist Fannie Lou Hamer was born Fannie Lou Townsend on October 6, 1917, in  
12 Montgomery County, Mississippi. She was the youngest of 20 children. Her parents were  
13 sharecroppers in the Mississippi Delta area. Hamer began working the fields when she was only 6 years  
14 old.

15         Around the age of 12, Hamer dropped out of school in order to work full-time and help out her  
16 family. She continued to be a share cropper after her 1944 marriage to Perry "Pap" Hamer. The couple  
17 worked on a cotton plantation near Ruleville, Mississippi. They were unable to have children after  
18 Hamer had a surgery to remove a tumor. During the operation, her surgeon gave Hamer a  
19 hysterectomy without her consent.

## 20 **Civil Rights Activist**

21 In the summer of 1962, Hamer made a life-changing decision to attend a protest meeting. She met civil  
22 rights activists there who were there to encourage African Americans to register to vote. Hamer was  
23 one of a small group of African Americans in her area who decided to register themselves. On August  
24 31, 1962, she traveled with 17 others to the county courthouse in Indianola to accomplish this goal.  
25 They encountered opposition from local and state law enforcement along the way.

26         Such bravery came at a high price for Hamer. She was fired from her job and driven from the  
27 plantation she had called home for nearly two decades—just for registering to vote. But these actions  
28 only solidified Hamer's resolve to help other African Americans get the right to vote. According to *The*

29 *New York Times*, she said "They kicked me off the plantation, they set me free. It's the best thing that  
30 could happen. Now I can work for my people."

31 Hamer dedicated her life to the fight for civil rights, working for the Student Nonviolent  
32 Coordinating Committee. This organization was comprised mostly of African-American students who  
33 engaged in acts of civil disobedience to fight racial segregation and injustice in the South. These acts  
34 often were met with violent responses by angry whites. During the course of her activist career, Hamer  
35 was threatened, arrested, beaten, and shot at. She was severely injured in 1963 in a Winona,  
36 Mississippi jail. She and two other activists were taken in by police after attending a training workshop.  
37 Hamer was beaten so badly that she suffered permanent kidney damage.

38 In 1964, Hamer helped found the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party, which was established  
39 in opposition to her state's all-white delegation to that year's Democratic convention. She brought the  
40 civil rights struggle in Mississippi to the attention of the entire nation during a televised session at the  
41 convention. The following year, Hamer ran for Congress in Mississippi, but was unsuccessful in her bid.

42 Along with her political activism, Hamer worked to help the poor and families in need in her  
43 Mississippi community. She also set up organizations to increase business opportunities for minorities  
44 and to provide childcare and other family services. She helped establish the National Women's Political  
45 Caucus in 1971.

## 46 **Death and Legacy**

47 In 1976, Hamer was diagnosed with breast cancer. She continued to fight for civil rights, despite her  
48 illness. Hamer died on March 14, 1977, in a hospital in Mound Bayou, Mississippi. Hundreds crowded  
49 into a Ruleville church to say good-bye to this tireless champion for racial equality. Andrew Young Jr.,  
50 then a U.S. delegate to the United Nations, gave the eulogy at Hamer's funeral. He explained, "None of  
51 us would be where we are today had she not been here then," according to *The New York Times*.

52 Young said that the progress of the Civil Rights Movement had been made through "the sweat and  
53 blood" of activists like Hamer. On her tombstone is written one of her most famous quotes: "I am sick  
54 and tired of being sick and tired."