

“Sick and tired of being sick and tired”- studying Hamer

Written by Titilayo Bediako
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“I’m sick and tired of being sick and tired” are the famous words of the remarkable and immortal African American she-roe, Fannie Lou Hamer. Hamer is best known for her impassioned speech to the Democratic National Convention in 1964 during which she told the world how she was beaten to a pulp and put in jail by Mississippi troopers, for daring to work for freedom and justice for African Americans.

Born in 1917, Hamer worked in the fields of Mississippi from the time she was six-years-old and she had only a sixth grade education. She participated in meetings of the Regional Council of Negro Leadership, where speakers spoke of self-help, civil rights, and voting rights.

In 1962, Hamer began working with the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) registering Black voters in the South. She and her family were kicked off the land they had been working for over 20 years because she dared to help Black folks to vote. SNCC hired her as a field secretary. Hamer was able to register to vote for the first time in her life in 1963. She taught others what they'd need to know to pass the then-required literacy test, which had to be passed in order for African Americans to be able to vote.

After being charged with disorderly conduct for not following a restaurant’s “whites only” policy, Hamer was beaten so badly in jail that she was permanently disabled.

African Americans were excluded from the Mississippi Democratic Party, so the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party (MFDP) was formed, with Hamer as a founding member and vice president. The MFDP sent an alternate delegation to the 1964 Democratic National Convention. They sent 64 Black and four white delegates. Hamer spoke to the convention about the violence and racism faced by Black voters who tried to register to vote. Millions of people from around the country heard the impassioned speech of this great freedom fighter. As a result of the work of Fannie Lou Hamer and others, President Lyndon Johnson signed the voting rights act in 1965, which allowed all American citizens the right to vote.

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