

Play Guide

FANNIE NIE

**The Music and Life
of Fannie Lou Hamer**

BY CHERYL L. WEST

**DIRECTED BY
HENRY GODINEZ**

**SEATTLE
REP**

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A NOTE FROM THE YOUTH ENGAGEMENT TEAM

Dear Theatergoer,

It's hard to believe that it's been two whole years since we last welcomed audiences into our building. It's hard to believe that so much has changed – socially, politically, environmentally, and in the shape of American Theater. If navigating a global pandemic during an election year wasn't enough, in May of 2020 the unjust murder of George Floyd sparked perhaps the greatest racial reckoning of our time. Artists, activists, and organizers worked tirelessly to mobilize their communities to protest, to stand in their power, and perhaps most importantly to vote.

Thinking about *Fannie* in the wake of the 2020 election, I couldn't help but draw parallels between the work that Fannie Lou Hamer did to mobilize Black communities across the American South in 1964 to that of former Georgia State Representative Stacy Abrams in 2020. In her book *Our Time is Now: Power, Purpose, and the Fight for a Fair America*, Abrams says, "The voting system is not just political; it is economic and social and educational. It is omnipresent and omniscient. And it is fallible. Yet, when a structure is broken, we are fools if we simply ignore the defect in favor of pretending that our democracy isn't cracking at the seams. Our obligation is to understand where the problem is, find a solution, and make the broken whole again."

In this Play Guide we'll look at the life and work of Fannie Lou Hamer, investigate legislation that has led to voter suppression in Black communities throughout history, and offer prompts and resources to mobilize your own community.

We're thrilled to share this beautiful work with you as we all reimagine our place and responsibility as artists and audiences in fighting for our collective freedom and building an America that we all feel proud of.

See you at the theater!



Alex Lee Reed

Associate Director of Arts Engagement,
Youth & Learning



FANNIE LOU HAMER:

A Timeline

OCTOBER 6, 1917: Fannie Lou Townsend is born in Montgomery County, Mississippi. She is the 20th and youngest child of Lou Ella and James Townsend, who eke out a living as sharecroppers.

1924: Fannie begins to attend a one-room schoolhouse, open only between cotton-picking seasons. She excels at spelling bees and reciting poetry. When not at school, she works in the fields.

1930: Fannie's formal education ends at 12 years old, when she leaves school to work full time. She continues to develop her reading skills by reading the Bible.

1944: Fannie marries Perry Hamer, a fellow plantation worker.

1961: Fannie undergoes surgery to remove a uterine tumor. The white doctor removes her entire uterus without her consent. Fannie and Perry would later adopt two daughters.

SUMMER, 1962: Fannie attempts to register to vote, but fails the registration test, which was crafted to keep Black Americans from voting. Upon returning home, her boss fires her for attempting to vote.

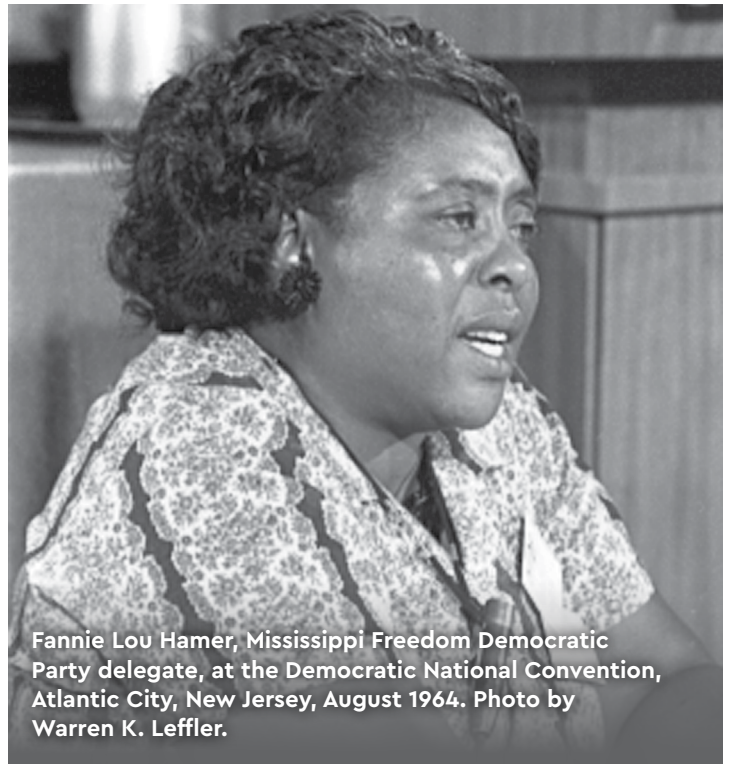
FALL, 1962: White supremacists shoot at Fannie, having heard of her voter registration attempts, but they miss. Fearing further retaliation, Fannie and her family temporarily move to nearby Tallahatchie County.

WINTER, 1962/63: Taking the voter registration test for the third time, Fannie passes. Around this time, she becomes involved with activism, becoming a field secretary for the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC).

SPRING, 1963: While traveling by bus, Fannie and other activists stop at a café. They are refused service, and a patrol officer asks them to leave. Fannie and others are arrested and taken to a jail in Winona, Mississippi. Fannie is confined to a cell and beaten with a blackjack. She never fully recovers from her injuries.

FALL, 1963: Fannie attempts to vote, but is told she needs two poll tax receipts. She obtains them, but is dismayed by the continuous obstacles.

1964: Fannie helps found the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party, which served as a counterpoint to the all-white Democratic Party and aimed to empower Black voices. She represents Mississippi at the Democratic National Convention, giving a televised speech in which she questions why, in the "land of the free," not everyone can register to vote. Additionally this year, Fannie runs for a seat in the Senate, but does not win the election.



Fannie Lou Hamer, Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party delegate, at the Democratic National Convention, Atlantic City, New Jersey, August 1964. Photo by Warren K. Leffler.

1966: Fannie marches with Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. She continues her work with grassroots campaigns and works on an autobiography entitled *To Praise Our Bridges*.

1969: Fannie founds the Freedom Farm Cooperative, which aims to redistribute economic power in agriculture. She also works with the National Council of Negro Women to create a "pig bank," giving pigs to Black farmers, both for food and to help create financial opportunity. The FFC runs through the mid-1970s.

1971: Fannie co-founds the National Women's Political Caucus, which aims to increase women's roles in all aspects of political life and support women running for office. Fannie runs unsuccessfully for the Mississippi State Senate.

1972: Fannie's health begins to deteriorate and she is hospitalized for nervous exhaustion.

MARCH 14, 1977: Fannie dies from complications of hypertension and breast cancer. She is just 59 years old.

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VOTES FOR (SOME) WOMEN

How the Suffrage Movement Left Black Citizens Out

By Neena Arndt

It may seem clear to us today that all adult American citizens should have the right to vote. But it wasn't so long ago that discriminatory actions kept people of color from exercising their civil liberty, as 19th (and even 20th) century activists advocated for their own group while ignoring the rights of those unlike them. While meeting with Frederick Douglass in 1866, Elizabeth Cady Stanton—long enshrined as a heroic figure in the suffrage movement—remarked that she would “cut off this right arm of mine” before she ever fought for voting rights for Black people and not women. Her remark reveals an attitude that remained unfortunately common among suffragists of that era.

The racism of Stanton and other activists was amplified by a sense, after slavery's end, that either women or Black men—but not both—could gain the right to vote. Earlier in the century, Black and white women had sometimes worked side by side; as early as the 1830s, cities like Boston, New York, and Philadelphia all had female anti-slavery societies, in which diverse groups of women expressed their political ideals. Abolitionism provided a natural segue to suffrage for the civic-minded citizen, as activists initiated the United States' centuries-long transformation from a country that categorically privileged white men above all others to a more egalitarian nation. But suffragists splintered over whether to support the 15th amendment, which granted voting rights to Black men. Wendell Phillips, president of the American Anti-Slavery Society, famously referred to this post-slavery period as “the Negro's hour” for voting rights. As writing from this period frequently assumes “Black” to be male and “woman” to be white, Phillips' declaration implies that Black women have no place in this discourse while white women will have to wait their turn.

Stanton went further than ignoring the needs of Black women; she actively sought to deny men of color their rights by questioning their qualification to participate in democracy. Again debating Frederick Douglass at a convention in 1869, she opined, “think of Patrick and Sambo and Hans and Yung-Tung, who do not know the difference between a monarchy and a republic, who cannot read the Declaration of Independence or Webster's spelling book...making laws for Susan B. Anthony. The amendment creates an antagonism



Nine African American women posed, standing, full length, with Nannie Burroughs holding banner reading, “Banner State Woman's National Baptist Convention” (1905–1915). Retrieved from the Library of Congress.

everywhere between educated, refined women and the lower orders of men, especially in the South.”

Given attitudes like these, it's hardly surprising that although the 19th amendment—ratified in 1920—technically granted all women the right to vote, women of color faced obstacles for many decades afterwards. In the South, people had to wait up to 12 hours to register, which proved impossible for those working long hours to earn a meager living. Officials also subjected Southerners to literacy tests, often requiring specific knowledge about the state Constitutions, which many could not pass because they'd had little access to education. Some states also required aspiring voters to pay poll taxes. The theoretical right to vote meant little in practice; Black women and men needed another wave of activism, and more legislation, before they could participate fully in their democracy.

They would have to wait another 40 years before the national sentiment tipped in their favor; it wasn't until the 1960s that the Civil Rights Movement gained momentum. It was then that Fannie Lou Hamer, a woman in her 40s who had spent her life toiling on a plantation, took up the cause after making her first attempt to vote. Although the 19th Amendment had passed when Hamer was three years old, she'd lived decades of her life without knowing it applied to her. “I had never heard until 1962 that Black people could register and vote,” Hamer later said. Although she could read well, Hamer failed a literacy test, only passing it on her third attempt after studying esoteric details of

the Mississippi Constitution. She made it her mission to advocate for voting rights, becoming an important catalyst for the rapid social change that characterized the era.

In June 1964, three civil rights workers, who had volunteered to help Black people register to vote in Mississippi, disappeared. The FBI later recovered their bodies, and indicted sixteen members of the Ku Klux Klan in the murders. It was a high-profile crime that even more clearly brought the issue of voting rights into focus. That same year, President Lyndon Johnson signed into law the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which prohibited unequal application of voter registration requirements. This was followed in 1965 by the Voting Rights Act, which prohibited literacy tests and provided federal monitoring to ensure that no localities took measures to discourage or prevent specific groups from voting.

By this time, 19th century activists like Elizabeth Cady Stanton were long dead—many, like Stanton and Susan B. Anthony, had died before the ratification of the 19th Amendment in 1920. History textbooks memorialize them for their efforts to achieve suffrage—for some.

Today, as civil unrest once again grips our world, we celebrate a woman whose passion, struggle and endurance—“we are sick and tired of being sick and tired”—led to achieving suffrage—for all.

Neena Arndt is the Resident Dramaturg for Goodman Theatre. Republished with permission.

THE HIGH SCHOOLER'S GUIDE TO VOTER SUPPRESSION

In school, I was taught that segregation ended with the Civil Rights Act. This fact has been hammered into me ever since I started studying history in schools – the horrors of Jim Crow and the valiant efforts of Martin Luther King and Malcom X to end this prejudice. Something that I was never taught, though, is that people are pushing to start a new Jim Crow, and their plan is well underway. I recently learned that, as a person of color in America, my right to vote is being threatened. I discovered that there are laws put in place to stop a person like me from voting, as well as organizations pushing more of them. However, I also found that there are some laws and advocates aiding in making voting more accessible to me. All of these laws and organizations I was able to find are below. For each section, you'll find an excerpt from a law or website to explore, a summary of that law, policy, or organization, and the impact that it's had or will have on America.

Note: While there's a lot of information in this document, you can explore whatever parts of it interest you. Think of it as a treasure hunt and be prepared for some troubling information that will spark adverse reactions. This is a resource you can use to protect your right to vote.

Laws barring people of color from voting

EXACT MATCH

POLICY "The protocol codified by HB 268, and implemented by Georgia's Secretary of State, Defendant Brian Kemp, requires county registrars to enter information from a voter registration form into Georgia's statewide voter registration system known as "Enet." That information is then matched against records on file with the Georgia Department of Drivers Services... Or Social Security Administration. If the information entered into "Enet" does not exactly match the applicant's identity data on file... the application is placed in "pending" status. HB 268 then places the burden upon the applicant to then cure the no match result within 26 months. If this deadline is not met, or the application is cancelled, and the applicant must start the voter registration application process anew." – Georgia exact match complaint final

See the full document here: lawyerscommittee.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/Georgia-exact-match-complaint-.pdf

IN OTHER WORDS A policy where the information must exactly match the government records of you, or your ballot is held back. Small differences like using "Tom" instead of "Thomas" can violate the policy, even if the changes weren't in the voter's control.

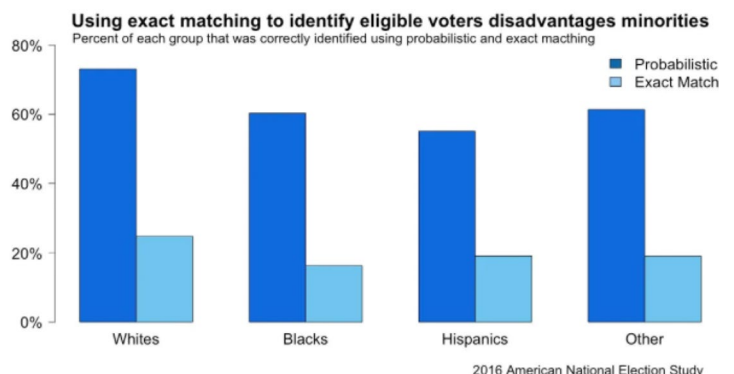
IMPACT "What does this mean for Georgia's voters?"

Georgia's records had a higher proportion of exact matches than we found nationwide – but 30 percent of the actual voters still failed to exactly match in that state.

Among those whose records did not exactly match, we found that 25 percent have at least a 99 percent probability of being correct matches, while 28 percent have at least a 95 percent probability.

As an illustration, using our algorithm, 91 percent of those on Georgia's voter rolls would be cleared to vote, or 3,941,342 voting-eligible citizens – while "exact matching" clears only 70 percent, or 3,031,802 eligible citizens." – Ted Enamorado, Georgia's 'exact match' law could potentially harm many eligible voters

See the full article here: www.washingtonpost.com/news/monkey-cage/wp/2018/10/20/georgias-exact-match-law-could-disenfranchise-3031802-eligible-voters-my-research-finds/



REPEAL OF SECTION 5 OF THE VOTER RIGHTS ACT

POLICY

"On June 25, 2013, the Supreme Court ruled that the coverage formula in Section 4(b) of the Voting Rights Act - which determines which jurisdictions are covered by Section 5 - is unconstitutional because it is based on an old formula. As a practical matter this means that Section 5 is inoperable until Congress enacts a new coverage formula."- The United States Department of Justice, The Shelby County Decision

States Covered as a Whole	Applicable Date	Fed. Register	Date
Alabama	Nov. 1, 1964	30 FR 9897	Aug. 7, 1965
Alaska	Nov. 1, 1972	40 FR 49422	Oct. 22, 1975
Arizona	Nov. 1, 1972	40 FR 43746	Sept. 23, 1975
Georgia	Nov. 1, 1964	30 FR 9897	Aug. 7, 1965
Louisiana	Nov. 1, 1964	30 FR 9897	Aug. 7, 1965
Mississippi	Nov. 1, 1964	30 FR 9897	Aug. 7, 1965
South Carolina	Nov. 1, 1964	30 FR 9897	Aug. 7, 1965
Texas	Nov. 1, 1972	40 FR 43746	Sept. 23, 1975
Virginia	Nov. 1, 1964	30 FR 9897	Aug. 7, 1965

Read the full statement here: www.justice.gov/crt/shelby-county-decision

Image source: www.justice.gov/crt/jurisdictions-previously-covered-section-5

IN OTHER WORDS

Section 5 of the Voting Rights Act (VRA) says that states with a history of discrimination must submit any voting laws to Congress to maintain equality. In 2013, the Supreme Court declared the section listing restricted states unconstitutional because it was based on an old formula. This means that Section 5 can't be used until congress comes up with a new formula, which will take forever.

IMPACT

After section 5 of the VRA was named unconstitutional, Texas, Arizona, and Georgia, all states previously covered by the VRA, began to pass or attempt to pass laws to discourage people of color from voting. This means that section 5 of the VRA was the only thing stopping them from passing these prejudiced laws, and now it's gone.

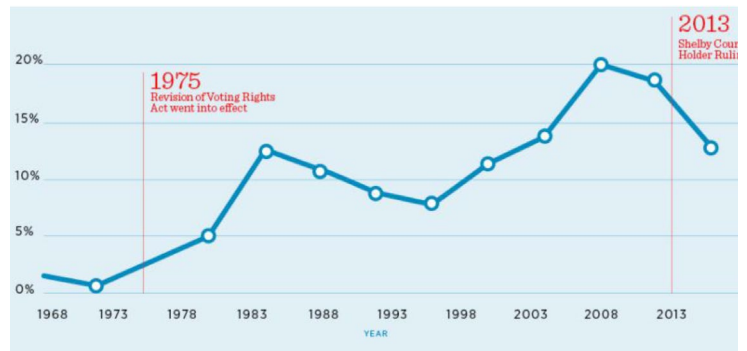
"After Shelby, a myriad of discriminatory voting practices have been implemented both in jurisdictions previously covered by Section 5 and those that were not." - Kristen Clarke, president and executive director of the national Lawyer's Committee for Civil Rights Under Law.

Image source: www.hks.harvard.edu/research-insights/policy-topics/politics/impacts-voting-rights-act-and-supreme-courts-shelby-ruling



E. Faye Butler in *Fannie: The Music and Life of Fannie Lou Hamer* (2022)

BRONWEN HOUCK



OUT-OF-PRECINCT POLICY

POLICY

"The first is an "out-of-precinct" rule that any vote cast in the wrong polling place must be tossed out, even if it is for president, governor, or some other race in which the voter could have cast a ballot anywhere in the state." – Sean Morales-Doyle, The Supreme Court Case Challenging Voting Restrictions in Arizona, Explained

Read the full article here: www.brennancenter.org/our-work/research-reports/supreme-court-case-challenging-voting-restrictions-arizona-explained

IN OTHER WORDS

The out of precinct states that a vote cast outside of a voter's polling place isn't counted.

IMPACT

The Supreme Court decided that the 'out of precinct policy' was constitutional. In the Brnovich V Democratic National Committee ruling.

"I went to vote where I always vote. The poll worker told me that I was in the wrong place and sent me to an old school. When I got there, they scanned my ID and told me that my voting place was Oglethorpe Academy. I left and went to work. When I got off from work, I tried to find the other location. By the time I figured out that Oglethorpe Academy didn't exist and that I was supposed to go to Oglethorpe Charter School, it was 6:48 pm and I wouldn't be able to get there in time. I never got to vote." – Rashiecka, Chatham County

TRUE THE VOTE ORGANIZATION

True the Vote is an organization claiming that mail fraud has affected the outcome of previous elections, the 2020 election in particular. They want to ban the opportunity to vote by mail.

ABOUT THE ORG

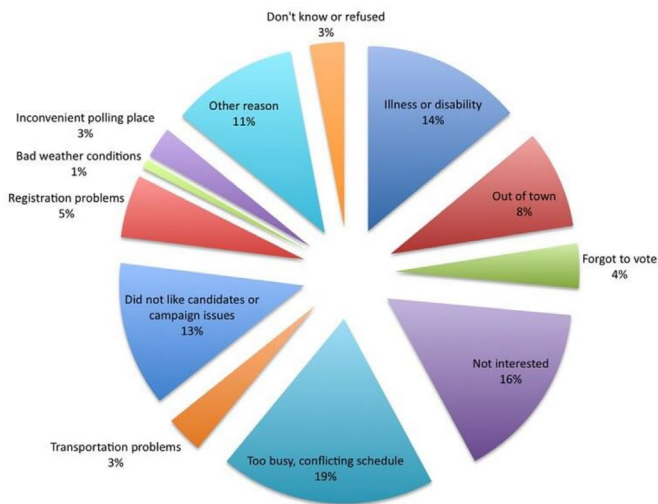
True the vote website: www.trueethevote.org

IN OTHER WORDS

This is Georgia's response to suspecting that the previous election was fraudulent, although all investigations of the matter show otherwise.

IMPACT

Percent distribution of reasons for not voting 2012



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, November 2012.

Read an article about this: abcnews.go.com/Politics/true-vote-intimidating-minority-voters-polls/story?id=17618823

Image source: www.flickr.com/photos/nowcastsa/16886891279

Laws protecting the vote of people of color

VOTING RIGHTS ACT

POLICY "Sec. 2 No voting qualifications or prerequisites to voting, or standard, practice, or procedure shall be imposed or applied by any state or political subdivision to deny or abridge the right of any citizen of the United States to vote on account of race or color." - Voting Rights Act

See the full document here: www.ourdocuments.gov/doc_large_image.php?flash=false&doc=100

IN OTHER WORDS

Voting laws can't discriminate between races. Bans literacy tests and makes states with a history of voter discrimination need 'preclearance' from congress when making voting laws.

IMPACT

"The law had an immediate impact. By the end of 1965, a quarter of a million new black voters had been registered, one-third by Federal examiners. By the end of 1966, only 4 out of the 13 southern states had fewer than 50 percent of African Americans registered to vote. The Voting Rights Act of 1965 was readopted and strengthened in 1970, 1975, and 1982."

See the full document here: www.ourdocuments.gov/doc.php?flash=false&doc=100

JOHN LEWIS VOTING RIGHTS ADVANCEMENT ACT

POLICY

"This Bill establishes new criteria for determining which states and political subdivisions must obtain preclearance before changes to voting practices may take effect..."

A state and all of its political subdivisions shall be subject to preclearance of voting practice changes for a 10-year period if

- 15 or more voting rights violations occurred during the previous 25 years;
 - 10 or more violations occurred during the previous 25 years, at least 1 of which was committed by the state itself; or
 - 3 or more violations occurred during the previous 25 years and the state administers the elections."
- Congress summary of the JLVRAA

View the full article here: www.congress.gov/bill/117th-congress/house-bill/4

IN OTHER WORDS

This policy sets new boundaries for states to need pre-clearance from the government before passing voting laws.

IMPACT

While this policy hasn't even been passed and no one can say for certain what its impact will be, many predict that the act will strengthen the VRA by restoring Article 5 and restricting states from limiting voting opportunities such as shutting down polling places in neighborhoods of color.



BRONWEN HOUCK

E. Faye Butler in *Fannie: The Music and Life of Fannie Lou Hamer* (2022)

THE FREEDOM TO VOTE ACT

POLICY

www.brennancenter.org/our-work/research-reports/freedom-vote-act

IN OTHER WORDS

The Freedom to Vote Act will put in place requirements such as offering earlier voting hours to make voting more accessible and fairer.

IMPACT

This act has just been voted on, but there are high hopes that this will allow voters more access to polls closer to their homes, protect elections from fraud by limiting practices, such as harassment and intimidation, and blunting Jim Crow tactics, such as challenging voter eligibility.

FAIR FIGHT ACT (ORGANIZATION)

The Fair Fight Act is an organization pushing laws to help protect the POC vote, such as the John Lewis Voting Rights Advancement Act and the Freedom to Vote Act.

ABOUT THE ORG

"We are fighting to mitigate voter suppression, anti-democracy, and election sabotage efforts wherever possible – and that includes advocating for federal voting rights legislation in Congress! Call 833-465-7142 to tell your senators that voting rights can't wait!"

We need Congress to pass legislation that will:

- Create national standards to ensure we can safely and freely cast our ballots
- Prevent partisan politicians from sabotaging or overturning our election results
- Ensure trusted election officials count every vote
- Prevent attacks on our freedom to vote
- Ensure the will of the people prevails in our elections" – Fair Fight

Explore the full website here:

www.stopjimcrow2.com

IN OTHER WORDS

The Fair Fight Act is a group working to stop unfair laws against voting rights and put in place new laws to protect voters.

IMPACT

"With the Freedom to Vote Fall, Fair Fight Action is doubling down on its nationwide effort to secure federal voting rights legislation. The announcement of Freedom to Vote Fall comes just one day after senators Manchin, Klobuchar, Warnock, Ossoff, and members of the working group announced the Freedom to Vote Act – a revised version of the For the People Act, which received unanimous Democratic support in the House and Senate." – Fair Fight

See the full article here: fairfight.com/fair-fight-action-launches-freedom-to-vote-fall-redoubling-campaign-to-secure-federal-voting-rights-legislation/

MORE SOURCES:

www.stopjimcrow2.com

www.hks.harvard.edu/research-insights/policy-topics/politics/impacts-voting-rights-act-and-supreme-courts-shelby-ruling

wheneverallvote.org/action/freedom-to-vote-act/



LIZ LAUREN

E. Faye Butler in *Fannie: The Music and Life of Fannie Lou Hamer* (2021)

LIFE, LIBERTY, AND THE PURSUIT OF SOMETHING BETTER TEAM

By Alex Lee Reed

“We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed, by their Creator, with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness.”

Liberty. Justice. Equality. Freedom. Words we all know, but what do they *mean*? When we quote, eyes fixed toward the flag and hands pressed to our hearts, “liberty and justice for all,” will we ever pause to speak truly about *liberation*? Yes, we hold these truths to be self-evident, and yet, 245 years later the evidence tells a different story.

“That to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed, That whenever any Form of Government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the Right of the People to alter or abolish it, and to institute new Government, laying its foundation on such principles, and organizing its powers in such form, as to them shall seem most likely to effect their Safety and Happiness.”

The year is 2020. The place: Atlanta. Detroit. Philadelphia. Minneapolis. DC. A country plagued by disease, death, disaster, violence, and uncertainty – teetering on the precipice of a revolution while partisan political vitriol tries to silence cries for justice for Black lives. George Floyd, another unarmed Black man, is murdered by a Minneapolis Police officer. By August, at least 164 Black

people have been killed by police in the US in 2020 alone. People have reached a breaking point. Pleas to the United States Government for change come from across the globe. “Let’s not excuse violence, or rationalize it, or participate in it,” says former President Barak Obama. “If we want our criminal justice system, and American society at large, to operate on a higher ethical code, then we have to model that code ourselves.” These pleas may be unheard at best, but the reality is much, much worse. Protestors, activists, and organizers across the country rally together – in parks, parking lots, and in the streets – to educate and activate their communities in what would be one of the most important elections of our time, and all too often these protests are met with state sanctioned violence.

Flash back to 1963. Fannie Lou Hamer and other civil rights activists were arrested in Winona, Mississippi while returning from a voter registration workshop in South Carolina. They had been traveling in the “white” section of a Greyhound bus despite threats from the driver that he planned to notify police. When the bus arrived at the Winona bus depot, the activists sat at the “white only” lunch counter inside the terminal. Winona Police Chief Thomas Herrod ordered the group to go to the “colored” side of the depot and arrested them when one of the activists tried to write down his patrol car license number. At the county jail, white jailers forced two African American prisoners to savagely beat Ms. Hamer, and she was nearly killed. Lawyers with the Student Non-violent Coordinating Committee filed suit against the Winona police who brutalized the activists, but an all-white jury acquitted them – a sadly familiar tale.

Ms. Hamer never fully recovered from the attack. She lost vision in one of her eyes and suffered permanent kidney damage, which contributed to her death. Despite the trauma she experienced, Ms. Hamer returned to Mississippi to continue organizing voter registration drives. But why?

“Prudence, indeed, will dictate that Governments long established should not be changed for light and transient causes; and accordingly all experience hath shewn, that mankind are more disposed to suffer, while evils are sufferable, than to right themselves by abolishing the forms to which they are accustomed. But when a long train of abuses and usurpations, pursuing invariably the same Object, evinces a design to reduce them under absolute Despotism, it is their right, it is their duty, to throw off such Government, and to provide new Guards for their future security.”

In one of her most famous speeches, Fannie Lou Hamer said, “We have a long fight, and this fight is not mine alone. But you are not free, whether you are white or black, until I am free.” Why does this message ring so familiar still today? That means that if someone is hurting, it does affect you. If someone is in chains, you are not free, even if you think you are. We may come from different backgrounds, socioeconomic status, or races, but because we are all a part of this nation, the future of the nation depends on all of us.

TRY IT! CONTEMPORARY CONNECTIONS

Check out [This article](#) from Think Progress about a group of Georgia Voters who were forced off a Black Voters Matter bus on their way to the polls in 2020.

What parallels do you see between what these Georgia voters faced the obstacles that Fannie Lou Hamer faces in the play?

Research what laws are in place to prevent voter suppression in 1964, and in 2021.

SOURCES:

www.brookings.edu/blog/how-we-rise/2020/11/24/how-black-americans-saved-biden-and-american-democracy/
www.dw.com/en/has-us-voter-suppression-become-systematic/a-46082766
www.vox.com/2021/10/21/22732924/why-fannie-lou-hamers-definition-of-freedom-still-matters
www.vox.com/ezra-klein-show-podcast/21540804/stacey-abrams-2020-biden-trump-election-voter-suppression-laws-republicans

FANNIE'S FAMOUS SPEECH

Fannie Lou Hamer delivered this moving speech at the 1964 Democratic National Convention.

Listen to the full speech here www.youtube.com/watch?v=RobTthUg04c or read the full text below.

Mr. Chairman, and the Credentials Committee, my name is Mrs. Fannie Lou Hamer, and I live at 626 East Lafayette Street, Ruleville, Mississippi, Sunflower County, the home of Senator James O. Eastland, and Senator Stennis.

It was the 31st of August in 1962 that 18 of us traveled twenty-six miles to the county courthouse in Indianola to try to register to try to become first-class citizens. We was met in Indianola by Mississippi men, highway patrolmen, and they only allowed two of us in to take the literacy test at the time. After we had taken this test and started back to Ruleville, we was held up by the City Police and the State Highway Patrolmen and carried back to Indianola, where the bus driver was charged that day with driving a bus the wrong color.

After we paid the fine among us, we continued on to Ruleville, and Reverend Jeff Sunny carried me four miles in the rural area where I had worked as a timekeeper and sharecropper for eighteen years. I was met there by my children, who told me that the plantation owner was angry because I had gone down to try to register.

After they told me, my husband came, and said that the plantation owner was raising Cain because I had tried to register, and before he quit talking the plantation owner came, and said, "Fannie Lou, do you know—did Pap tell you what I said?"

And I said, "yes, sir."

He said, "I mean that," he said, "If you don't go down and withdraw your registration, you will have to leave," said, "Then if you go down and withdraw," he said, "You will—you might have to go because we are not ready for that in Mississippi."

And I addressed him and told him and said, "I didn't try to register for you. I tried to register for myself." I had to leave that same night.

On the 10th of September, 1962, sixteen bullets was fired into the home of Mr. and Mrs. Robert Tucker for me. That same night two girls were shot in Ruleville, Mississippi. Also Mr. Joe McDonald's house was shot in.

And in June the 9th, 1963, I had attended a voter registration workshop, was returning back to Mississippi. Ten of us was traveling by the Continental Trailway bus. When we got to Winona, Mississippi, which is in Montgomery County, four of the people got off to use the washroom, and two of the people—to use the restaurant—two of the people wanted to use the washroom. The four people that had gone in to use the restaurant was ordered out. During this time I was on the bus. But when I looked through the window and saw they had rushed out, I got off of the bus to see what had happened, and one of the ladies said, "It was a State Highway Patrolman and a chief of police ordered us out."

I got back on the bus and one of the persons had used the washroom got back on the bus, too. As soon as I was seated on the bus, I saw when they began to get the four people in a highway patrolman's car. I stepped off of the bus to see what was happening and somebody screamed from the car that the four workers was in and said, "Get that one there," and when I went to get in the car, when the man told me I was under arrest, he kicked me.

I was carried to the county jail and put in the booking room. They left some of the people in the booking room and began to place us in cells. I was placed in a cell with a young woman called Miss Euvester Simpson. After I was placed in the cell I began to hear the sound of kicks and horrible screams, and I could hear somebody say, "Can you say, yes sir, nigger? Can you say yes, sir?"

And they would say other horrible names. She would say, "Yes, I can say yes, sir."

"So say it."

She says, "I don't know you well enough."

They beat her, I don't know how long, and after a while she began to pray, and asked God to have mercy on those people.

And it wasn't too long before three white men came to my cell. One of these men was a State Highway Patrolman and he asked me where I was from, and I told him Ruleville, he said, "We are going to check this." And they left my cell and it wasn't too long before they came back. He said,

"You are from Ruleville all right," and he used a curse word, and he said, "We are going to make you wish you was dead."

I was carried out of that cell into another cell where they had two Negro prisoners. The State Highway Patrolmen ordered the first Negro to take the blackjack. The first Negro prisoner ordered me, by orders from the State Highway Patrolman for me, to lay down on a bunk bed on my face, and I laid on my face. The first Negro began to beat, and I was beat by the first Negro until he was exhausted, and I was holding my hands behind me at that time on my left side because I suffered from polio when I was six years old. After the first Negro had beat until he was exhausted the State Highway Patrolman ordered the second Negro to take the blackjack.

The second Negro began to beat and I began to work my feet, and the State Highway Patrolman ordered the first Negro who had beat to set on my feet to keep me from working my feet. I began to scream and one white man got up and began to beat me my head and told me to hush. One white man—my dress had worked up high, he walked over and pulled my dress down—and he pulled my dress back, back up.

I was in jail when Medgar Evers was murdered.

All of this is on account we want to register, to become first-class citizens, and if the freedom Democratic Party is not seated now, I question America, is this America, the land of the free and the home of the brave where we have to sleep with our telephones off of the hooks because our lives be threatened daily because we want to live as decent human beings, in America?

Thank you.

SOURCES: Fannie Lou Hamer, Speech at the 1964 Democratic National Convention. August 22, 1964. Available online via Mississippi Department of Archives and History (www.mdah.ms.gov/new/wp-content/uploads/2014/08/Lesson-Five-Mississippi-in-1964-A-Turning-Point.pdf)

MUSIC TO INSPIRE CHANGE

LISTEN TO THE PLAYLIST HERE:

open.spotify.com/playlist/30Ws-1MLvznamaFAOga3POc?si=06f-80b2a390c4dd8



FANNIE'S FAVORITES

In Seattle Rep's production, you will hear some of the gospel songs that Fannie Lou Hamer sang while campaigning for civil rights. To hear more of her favorites, you can listen to a selection of 1963 field recordings in the album "Songs My Mother Taught Me."

HER POLITICAL LEGACY IN MUSIC

Black artists continue to use music to make important social and political statements. Here are just a few examples.

Childish Gambino – This is America

Living Colour – Cult of Personality

Outkast – B.O.B.

2Pac – Me Against the World

Stevie Wonder – Happy Birthday

Prince – Colonized Mind

Public Enemy – Fight the Power

Beyonce – Freedom (feat. Kendrick Lamar)

Tracy Chapman – Across the Lines

Prince – Baltimore

Wynton Marsalis – Black Codes

Common – Glory (feat. John Legend)

Daye Jack – Hands Up (feat. Killer Mike)

Janelle Monae – Say Her Name (Hell You Talmbout)

Swizz Beatz – Sad News (feat. Scarface)

D'Angelo – The Charade

J. Cole – Be Free

Tom Morello – Marching on Ferguson

Usher – Chains (feat. Nas and Bibi Bourelly)

The Game – Don't Shoot (feat. Rick Ross, 2 Chainz, Diddy, Fabolous, Wale, DJ Khaled, Swizz Beatz, Yo Gotti, Curren\$y, Problem, King Pharoah and TGT)

ALA.NI – Lament For Emmett Till

Brittany Campbell – Matter

Jorja Smith – By Any Means

Immanuel Wilkins – Ferguson: An American Tradition

LOCAL BLACK MUSICIANS:

Here is a brief list of Black musicians in the Seattle area.

Shaina Shepherd

Aisha Noir

Lady A (Anita White)

The Black Tones

Parisalexia

Archie

The Black Ends

BEARAXE

Da Qween

DoNormaal

Falon Sierra

Giften Gab

Grace Love

Hanna Benn

JusMoni

Kimya Dawson

Naomi Wachira

SassyBlack

Taylor Elizza Beth

Tiffany Wilson

Whitney Mongé

Adra Boo

Ahamefule J. Oluo

Afrocop

Reggie Garrett

Gabriel Teodos

King Khasm

Blue Scholars

Razor Clam

Ben Hunter & Joe Seamons

Marshall Law Band

For more local Black Musicians:

everout.com/seattle/articles/support-black-music-a-guide-to-the-seattle-artists-you-should-be-streaming-right-now/c3396/

SOURCES & MORE MUSIC:

www.npr.org/898709145/we-insist-a-timeline-of-protest-music-in-2020

www.elitedaily.com/p/20-songs-that-confront-racial-injustice-in-the-us-you-should-listen-to-now-22958788

www.rollingstone.com/music/music-lists/songs-of-black-lives-matter-22-new-protest-anthems-15256/janelle-monae-hell-you-talmbout-32239/

SEATTLE PUBLIC LIBRARY READING LIST

Librarians at Seattle Public Library created this list of books, films, and music to enhance your experience of *Fannie: The Music and Life of Fannie Lou Hamer*.

The Senator and the Sharecropper: The Freedom Struggles of James O. Eastland and Fannie Lou Hamer

by Asch, Chris Myers

Book – 2008

This absorbing history follows the intertwined stories of two Mississippians: Fannie Lou Hamer, a key figure in the civil rights movement, and Senator James Eastland, a staunch segregationist who opposed Hamer's efforts to expand voting rights.

Until I Am Free: Fannie Lou Hamer's Enduring Message to America

by Blain, Keisha N.

Book – 2021

In this well-researched work, historian Blain presents an inspiring and thoughtful portrait of Hamer, exploring her activism and legacy with trenchant analysis and an undeniable admiration for her subject.

Fannie Lou Hamer: The Life of A Civil Rights Icon

by Bracey, Earnest N.

Book – 2011

Black historian Earnest Bracey presents an informative and engaging portrait of Hamer in this short biography that highlights her work with the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party.

Fannie Lou Hamer: America's Freedom Fighting Woman

by Brooks, Maegan Parker

Book – 2020

This recent biography of Hamer is an accessible and enlightening introduction to the life of the woman Malcolm X once dubbed "the country's number one freedom fighting woman."

A Voice That Could Stir An Army: Fannie Lou Hamer and the Rhetoric of the Black Freedom Movement

by Brooks, Maegan Parker

Book – 2014

Brooks, a communications professor, analyzes the symbolism, power and imagery of Hamer's speeches in this companion volume to *The Speeches of Fannie Lou Hamer*.

Classic African American Gospel

Music CD – 2008

Hamer was known for her powerful singing voice as well as her civil rights activism. This collection of African American gospel songs includes her rendition of "Go Tell It On the Mountain."

Fannie Lou Hamer: Voting Rights Activist

Streaming Video – 2016

This short documentary film (about 67 min.) provides a concise biographical sketch of Hamer's life and her work as a civil rights activist in the 1960s.

Festival: Folk Music at Newport, 1963–1966

DVD – 2017

In this historic film, cinematographer Murray Lerner captured many riveting performances during the Newport Folk Festival's peak years, including Fannie Lou Hamer singing songs of protest and freedom.

The Speeches of Fannie Lou Hamer: To Tell It Like It Is

by Hamer, Fannie Lou

Book – 2011

Hamer was a gifted orator, who possessed a remarkable ability to connect with her audiences through her plainspoken yet stirring speeches. This volume collects 21 of her most important speeches and places them in historical context.

Vanguard: How Black Women Broke Barriers, Won the Vote, and Insisted on Equality for All

by Jones, Martha S.

Book – 2020

In this insightful social history, Black historian Martha S. Jones places Hamer's untiring work for voting rights within a larger history of Black women's civil rights activism, stretching from the early 19th century to the present day.

Walk With Me: A Biography of Fannie Lou Hamer

by Larson, Kate Clifford

Book – 2021

Along with Blain's book, *Walk With Me* is one of two biographies of Hamer published in 2021. Read both to get a complete portrait of this remarkable woman's life and achievements.

A Place of Rage

Web Resource:

spl.kanopy.com/video/place-rage-0

Angela Davis, Alice Walker, and June Jordan discuss the life and legacy of Black women civil rights activists like Fannie Lou Hamer and Rosa Parks in this short, inspiring documentary.

The Social Power of Music

Web Resource:

spl.freegalmusic.com/search-page/fannie%2520lou%2520hamer/artists/RmFubmIIIExvdSBiYW1lcg/featuredOn/93074023150/2

From Smithsonian Folkways Recordings comes a collection of more than 80 songs that "remind us that music has the potential to change our world," including Fannie Lou Hamer's rendition of "I Woke Up This Morning."

Freedom Summer: The Savage Summer That Made Mississippi Burn and Made America A Democracy

by Watson, Bruce

Book – 2010

Hamer was one of the key organizers of Freedom Summer, a pivotal moment in the civil rights movement, which culminated in her historic speech at the 1964 Democratic National Convention as a member of the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party.

Jar the Floor

by West, Cheryl L.

Book – 2002

Explore more of Fannie playwright Cheryl L. West's work by reading one of her earliest works, a heartwarming dramatic comedy about four Black women, spanning four generations.

Reserve these materials free to-day with your SPL library card:

seattle.bibliocommons.com/list/share/117997230_seattlenonfictionlibrarians/1819894919_seattle_reps_fannie_beyond_the_theatre

GLOSSARY

Listen for these words and phrases throughout the play.

Second-class citizen: a person belonging to a social or political group whose rights and opportunities are inferior to those of the dominant group in a society.

Testify: give evidence; bear witness; attest to the truth of something

The Credentials Committee (of the DNC): a Democratic National Convention committee that is mandated to examine the credentials of representatives of Member States and to report to the General Assembly on them.

Democratic National Convention (DNC): a series of presidential nominating conventions held every four years. The primary goal of the Democratic National Convention is to officially nominate a candidate for president and vice president, adopt a comprehensive party platform and unify the party.

The Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party (a.k.a. the Freedom Democratic Party): an American political party created in 1964 as a branch of the populist Freedom Democratic organization in the state of Mississippi during the Civil Rights Movement. It was organized by African Americans and whites from Mississippi to challenge the established power of the Mississippi Democratic Party, which at the time allowed participation only by whites, when African Americans made up 40% of the state population. Fannie Lou Hamer was the Vice Chairperson.

John Fitzgerald Kennedy (JFK): a U.S. Democratic president who was famously assassinated in 1963.

Dixiecrats: any of the Southern Democrats who formally withdrew from the party in 1948 in opposition to its policy of extending civil rights.

Sharecropping: a system of farming that developed in the South after the Civil War, when landowners, many of whom had formerly held enslaved people, lacked the cash to pay wages to farm laborers, many of whom were former slaves. The system called for dividing the crop into three shares — one for the landowner, one for the worker, and one for whoever provided seeds, fertilizer, and farm equipment.

Jim Crow: a practice or policy of segregating or discriminating against Black people, as in public places, public vehicles, or employment.

The Book of Ephesians: a book of the New Testament (a part of the Bible)

Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC): The SNCC was founded in 1960 in the wake of student-led sit-ins at segregated lunch counters across the South and became the major channel of student participation in the civil rights movement.

Segregation: the enforced separation of different racial groups.

Bale of cotton: a standard-sized and weighted pack of compressed cotton lint; a large quantity of cotton.

Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC): The SCLC was created in 1957, when sixty Black ministers and civil rights leaders met in Atlanta, Georgia in an effort to replicate the successful strategy and tactics of the recently concluded Montgomery, Alabama bus boycott. Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. was chosen as the first president of this new group dedicated to abolishing legalized segregation and ending the disfranchisement of Black southerners in a non-violent manner. Later SCLC would address the issues of war and poverty.

Plantation: an estate on which crops such as coffee, sugar, and tobacco are cultivated by resident labor. Often enslaved people were forced to work on plantations in the U.S.

De facto laws: an action taken without strict legal authority to do so, but recognized as legally valid nonetheless.

"Raising Cain": causing a commotion; creating a disturbance; making trouble. [Etymology: The Cain in the phrase raise Cain refers to a character in the Old Testament of the Bible. Cain was the son of Adam and Eve, and he murdered his brother Abel. In the story, both Cain and Abel bring an offering to God. God accepts Abel's offering but rejects Cain's offering. In a fit of jealousy, Cain murders Abel.]

Fieldworker (voting): an election worker; someone who registers voters; someone who works at a polling station.

Mayflower: the ship in which the Pilgrims sailed from Southampton to the New World in 1620.

Liberate: set (someone) free from a situation, especially imprisonment or slavery, in which their liberty is severely restricted.

Suffrage: the right to vote in political elections.

Harriet Tubman: (1822–1913) an American abolitionist and political activist. Born into slavery, Tubman escaped and subsequently made some 13 missions to rescue approximately 70 enslaved people, including family and friends using the network of antislavery activists and safe houses known as the Underground Railroad. During the American Civil War, she served as an armed scout and spy for the Union Army. In her later years, Tubman was an activist in the movement for women's suffrage.

Emmett Till: (1941–1955) a 14-year-old African American who was lynched in Mississippi in 1955, after being accused of offending a white woman in her family's grocery store. The brutality of his murder and the fact that his killers were acquitted drew attention to the long history of violent persecution of African Americans in the U.S. Till posthumously became an icon of the Civil Rights Movement.

Montgomery Bus Boycott: a political and social protest campaign against the policy of racial segregation on the public transit system of Montgomery, Alabama. The campaign lasted from December 5, 1955—the Monday after Rosa Parks, an African American woman, was arrested for her refusal to surrender her seat to a white person—to December 20, 1956, when the federal ruling *Browder v. Gayle* took effect, and led to a U.S. Supreme Court decision that declared the Alabama and Montgomery laws that segregated buses were unconstitutional.

Continental Trailway bus: the largest bus system in the U.S. in the 1950s and 1960s. It still exists at the Trailways Transportation System.

June Johnson: an activist with the SNCC who started as a teenager, registering voters and being actively involved in the Civil Rights Movement. In June 1963, on the way back from a voter registration workshop in South Carolina, Johnson was arrested at a Winona, Miss., bus station along with Fannie Lou Hamer. She was beaten in jail by the white sheriff.

Hallelujah: God be praised (uttered in worship or as an expression of rejoicing).

Mr. Guyot: Lawrence Guyot Jr. (1939 – 2012) was an American civil rights activist and the director of the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party in 1964.

Jordan Stream (River Jordan): The Jordan River runs along the border between Jordan, the Palestinian West Bank, Israel, and southwestern Syria. The river holds major significance in Judaism and Christianity. According to the Bible, the Israelites crossed it into the Promised Land and Jesus of Nazareth was baptized by John the Baptist in it.

James Bevel: (1936 – 2008) a minister and a leader of the Civil Rights Movement in the U.S. As the Director of Direct Action and of Nonviolent Education of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC), he initiated, strategized, directed, and developed SCLC's three major successes of the era: the 1963 Birmingham Children's Crusade, the 1965 Selma voting rights movement, and the 1966 Chicago open housing movement.

Reverend Andy Young: (1932 – present) an American politician, diplomat, and activist. Beginning his career as a pastor, Young was an early leader in the Civil Rights Movement, serving as executive director of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) and a close confidant to Martin Luther King Jr.

Dorothy Cotton: (1930–2018) an American civil rights activist and leader, known for being the only woman in the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s inner circle. She was also the highest-ranking woman in King's Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC). As the organization's Educational Director, Cotton ran SCLC's Citizenship Education Program (CEP) for twelve years, which helped empower disenfranchised African Americans to register to vote.

Medgar Evers: (1925 –1963) an American civil rights activist in Mississippi, the state's field secretary for the NAACP. He worked to overturn segregation at the University of Mississippi, end the segregation of public facilities, and expand opportunities for African Americans, which included the enforcement of voting rights. Evers was assassinated in 1963 by a member of the White Citizens' Council in Jackson, Mississippi.

NAACP: The NAACP or National Association for the Advancement of Colored People was established in 1909 and is America's oldest and largest civil rights organization.

Freedom Summer, 1964: a nonviolent effort by civil rights activists to integrate Mississippi's segregated political system. It began late in 1963 when the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) and the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) decided to recruit several hundred northern college students, mostly white, to work in Mississippi during the summer. They helped African American residents try to register to vote, establish a new political party, and learn about history and politics in newly formed Freedom Schools.

Gospel: a now popularized form of impassioned rhythmic spiritual music rooted in the solo and responsive church singing of rural African Americans in the South, central to the development of rhythm and blues and of soul music.

Andy Goodman, James Chaney, and Mickey Schwerner: The murders of Chaney, Goodman, and Schwerner, also known as the Freedom Summer murders, the Mississippi civil rights workers' murders, or the Mississippi Burning murders, refers to three activists who were abducted and murdered in Philadelphia, Mississippi, in June 1964 during the Civil Rights Movement. They had been working with the Freedom Summer campaign by attempting to register African Americans in Mississippi to vote.

KKK: acronym for the Ku Klux Klan, a violent hate group in the U.S., founded in 1915 to suppress the newly acquired rights of Black people and to oppose "carpetbaggers" (Northerners who went to the South after the Civil War). In modern times, they oppose Black people, Muslims, Jews, Catholics, foreign-born individuals, and other groups.

Civil Rights Act (1964): a landmark civil rights and labor law in the U.S. that outlaws discrimination based on race, color, religion, sex, national origin, and later sexual orientation and gender identity. It prohibits unequal application of voter registration requirements, racial segregation in schools and public accommodations, and employment discrimination.

Voter Rights Act (1965): a landmark piece of federal legislation in the U.S. that prohibits racial discrimination in voting.

Repossessed (as in "repossessed a car"): retake possession of (something), especially for nonpayment of money due.

Freedom Farm Cooperative: an agricultural cooperative in Sunflower County, Mississippi, founded by Fannie Lou Hamer in 1969 as a rural economic development and political organizing project. With a farm and a pig-raising program as well as an affordable housing

development and financing, and a host of supplemental programs, it sought to create the conditions of self-sufficiency for African American farmers that alleviated poverty.

Harry Belafonte: (1927 – present) an American singer, songwriter, activist, and actor. One of the most successful Jamaican American pop stars ever, as he popularized the Trinbagonian Caribbean musical style in the 1950s.

The National Council of Negro Women: a nonprofit organization founded in 1935 with the mission to advance the opportunities and the quality of life for African American women, their families, and communities.

Betty Friedan: (1921 –2006) an American feminist writer and activist. A leading figure in the women's movement in the U.S., her 1963 book *The Feminine Mystique* is often credited with sparking the second wave of American feminism in the 20th century. In 1966, she co-founded and was elected the first president of the National Organization for Women (NOW).

John Lewis: (1940 – 2020) an American statesman and civil rights activist who served in the U.S. House of Representatives for Georgia's 5th congressional district. He was the chairman of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) from 1963 to 1966. Lewis was one of the "Big Six" leaders of groups who organized the 1963 March on Washington.

Julian Bond: (1940 – 2015) an American social activist, leader of the Civil Rights Movement, politician, professor, and writer. While he was a student at Morehouse College in Atlanta, Georgia, during the early 1960s, he helped establish the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC). In 1971, he helped found the Southern Poverty Law Center in Montgomery, Alabama.

Senator: a member of the Senate, the legislative branch of the U.S. government which has the power to make laws.

Hypertension: abnormally high blood pressure.

SOURCES:

Dictionary.com, Grammarist, Google, Wikipedia, History.com, BlackPast