

FANNIE

Theatre
Works
SILICON VALLEY

THE MUSIC AND LIFE OF FANNIE LOU HAMER

THE GUIDE BOOK



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About TheatreWorks Silicon Valley

Founded in 1970, TheatreWorks has grown from a truly original Silicon Valley start-up to become the peninsula's leading professional nonprofit theatre company.

Now in our 52nd season, TheatreWorks presents a wide variety of contemporary plays and musicals, as well as revitalizing great works of the past. We are champions of new work, offering artists support and a creative home as they develop exciting new stories for the American theatre. Offstage, arts education programs in our schools and arts engagement programs in our neighborhoods uplift our audiences and strengthen community bonds.

Whether onstage or off, in everything that we do, TheatreWorks seeks to celebrate the human spirit and the wonderful diversity of our Silicon Valley community.

For more info, visit theatreworks.org

How to use this guide? It's easy. It's link-friendly!

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● BLUE text links are active to external resources.

≡ The arrow (middle bottom of page) will take you to the TOC.



Greta Oglesby / All photos by Kevin Berne

SYNOPSIS

FANNIE is a one-woman show about the incredible life and legacy of voting rights activist Fannie Lou Hamer. Accompanied by a live band, Fannie traces her steps from sharecropper to activist to political candidate, takes us on a gospel-filled journey of justice and self-determination.



Greta Oglesby / Photo Meika Ejiasi

AMERICAN POLITICS: PARTIES, PRIMARIES, AND CONVENTIONS

The United States has a unique system of Representative Democracy, with a complex process for electing government officials. That system is central to our story—the play begins as Fannie Lou Hamer addresses the 1964 Democratic Convention to challenge the Mississippi Delegation. There are some quirks in our Electoral System that are unique and interesting.

The Electoral College

When the United States was founded, there was a big argument around how to choose the president:

At the time of the Philadelphia convention, no other country in the world directly elected its chief executive, so the delegates were wading into uncharted territory. Further complicating the task was a deep-rooted distrust of executive power. After all, the fledgling nation had just fought its way out from under a tyrannical king and overreaching colonial governors. They didn't want another despot on their hands. —History.com

Some people believed that Congress couldn't be trusted to play a role in Presidential elections—it would cause too much opportunity for corruption. Others believed that a straight popular vote (the person who gets the most votes wins) wouldn't be suitable—they feared that voters might not be informed enough and a "democratic mob" or a populist president could push the country too far in one direction. Thus, the compromise of the Electoral College was born.



Jimmy Carter campaigns in Iowa, 1976 / Courtesy of The Des Moines Register

How the Electoral College Works:

1. You cast your vote for president.
2. Each state tallies their votes.
3. Each state nominates a group of electors. These people represent all the voters in their state. Each state has the same number of electors as they have members in Congress (2 Senators + that state's number of Representatives).
4. The electors each cast one vote, based on the tally of the votes in their state. In most states the winner takes all the electors, but some states award electors proportionally to multiple candidates depending on how many people voted for them.
5. In order for a President to be elected, at least 270 out of the 538 total electors must vote for that Presidential Candidate.

Presidential Primaries and Caucuses

In the lead up to the election, states have *Primaries* and *Caucuses* in order to choose the candidates that will represent their party.

A **Primary** is a vote run by state and local governments. Voting happens through secret ballots in the way we are generally accustomed to.

A **Caucus** is a private meeting run by a political party. Caucuses are usually held in person on an appointed date and at a specific time. At these events, voters organize themselves physically into groups based on who they support. Groups give speeches in support of candidates and votes are tallied. The number of people standing in each group when the vote is taken decides how many delegates each candidate has won.

This is a relatively recent set of events. Before 1960, candidates only went to national conventions to get the nomination. It wasn't until 1960 with John F. Kennedy that participating in Primaries and Caucuses became popular or important to being elected.





Delegates on the floor at the Democratic National Convention at Boardwalk Hall in Atlantic City / Library of Congress. August 1964

National Conventions

After primaries and caucuses have concluded, each political party has a National Convention. All the delegates won by each candidate in each state go to a big convention to confirm the party's nominee for President.

Generally, the National Convention is an opportunity for the political party to come together behind a candidate. Speeches are given in support and the votes that are taken are purely ceremonial. On rare occasions, Contested Conventions can happen—in this case, it is uncertain who the nominee will be before the Convention begins and the voting (done in a similar way to caucuses) continues until one candidate receives the majority required to win nomination.



Aerial view of delegates at the 1964 Democratic National Convention, Atlantic City, New Jersey / Library of Congress. August 1964.



The Electoral College is a hotly contested issue in **American Politics right now**. Some think, in the same way that Fannie Lou Hamer found the Mississippi Delegation non-representative, that the Electoral College is out of date and doesn't represent the American people. Below are arguments for and against the Electoral College.

☐ FOR

- The Electoral College makes sure that every part of the country is involved in selecting the president, not just those with large populations.
- The Electoral College protects the voices of the minority from being silenced by the majority.
- The Electoral College give certainty to the Presidential Election and makes sure that run-offs and recounts are more rare.

☐ AGAINST

- Swing States (those states that could go to either party) have more power and thus get more attention than any other state.
- The Electoral College is rooted in slavery and racism—the “minority interests” that it was intended to protect were unpopular slave owners in the south.
- Democracy is meant to represent the will of the people. One person-one vote is democracy, some argue having only 538 people elect the President is not democracy at all.

You are tasked with deciding whether or not to reform the Electoral College. *What would you do?*



MISSISSIPPI FREEDOM DEMOCRATIC PARTY

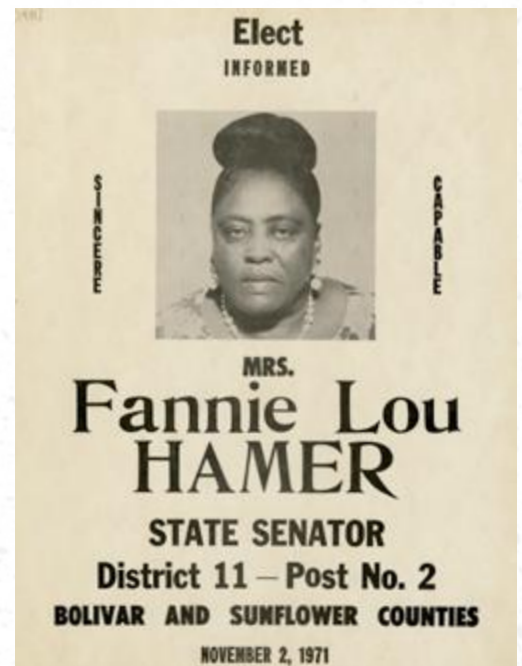
In Mississippi in 1964, in addition to being denied the right to vote, Black people were barred from participating in meetings of the state's Democratic Party even though they made up half the state's population. After trying for over half a century, Black citizens in Mississippi formed the Mississippi Freedom Democratic party—welcoming both white people and black people—in an effort to run candidates for Senate and Congress that they felt truly represented them.

When the Mississippi Democratic Party wanted to send an all-white delegation to the Democratic National Convention, the MFDP protested.

Eventually, the MFDP was offered two non-voting seats with the other delegates. This offer didn't give the Black delegates ANY opportunity to vote on the floor, so the offer was denied. This led to Fannie Lou Hamer speaking on the floor, the speech that begins *FANNIE: The Music and Life of Fannie Lou Hamer*.

Third Parties in the United States

The US has traditionally supported a two party system. Democrats and Republicans are the major parties, but offshoots of parties (like the MFDP) and third parties like the Libertarians and the Green Party have always played a strong role in the American Political System.



(L-R): Fannie Lou Hamer speaks before the Credentials Committee of the Democratic National Convention in Atlantic City, August 1964.

Photo by Warren K. Leffler/U.S. News and World Report, courtesy of the Library of Congress.

Fannie Lou Hamer election poster / Mississippi Department of Archives and History November 1971.

Ready to start your own political party?

Answer the questions below to create your message and determine what is most important to you!



Name of Party

Top 3 Issues of Importance

(What do you think could be better about our country?)

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

What kinds of candidates do you support?

(What traits do you look for in your political leaders?)

What is your party slogan?

(What's one sentence people might use to remember you by?)



CIVIL RIGHTS IN MISSISSIPPI

While the Civil Rights Movement was a national effort, each state had (and still has) its own unique challenges and pursuits.

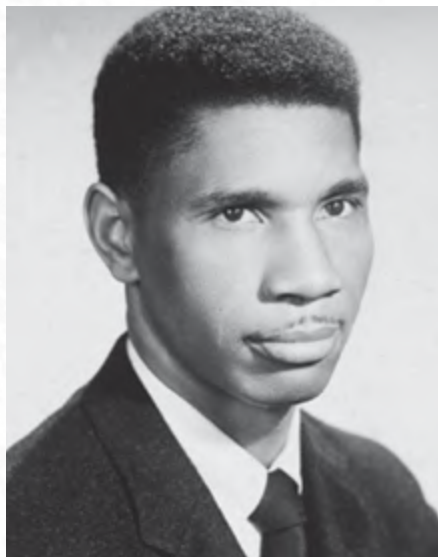
Federal law (the laws that govern all 50 states) might say one thing, but individual states can often get around it through specific state and local laws. Only through court cases, protest, and challenging those law can inconsistencies be fixed.

Even though federal law said you could not discriminate on the basis of race (**the 15th Amendment**), Mississippi (the state where Fannie Lou Hamer grew up), had a challenging relationship with rights for its Black residents.

- When the modern Civil Rights movement began in the mid-twentieth century, Mississippi had the highest percentage of African American residents in the United States, and the lowest percentage of African American voters.
- When the US Supreme Court outlawed racial segregation in 1954, a few white moderates in Mississippi called for gradual acceptance of the ruling. They quickly turned radical, or silent.
- Mississippi whites organized a broad network of citizens groups called The Citizens' Council to enforce racial segregation. Their goal was to maintain white supremacy.
- A state-funded organization called the Mississippi State Sovereignty Commission was formed in 1956 by the state legislature, with a goal of keeping surveillance files on people involved in Civil Rights organizations.



Photos shot by the Mississippi State Sovereignty Commission in 1967 with numbers used to identify individual students. Mississippi Department of Archives and History.



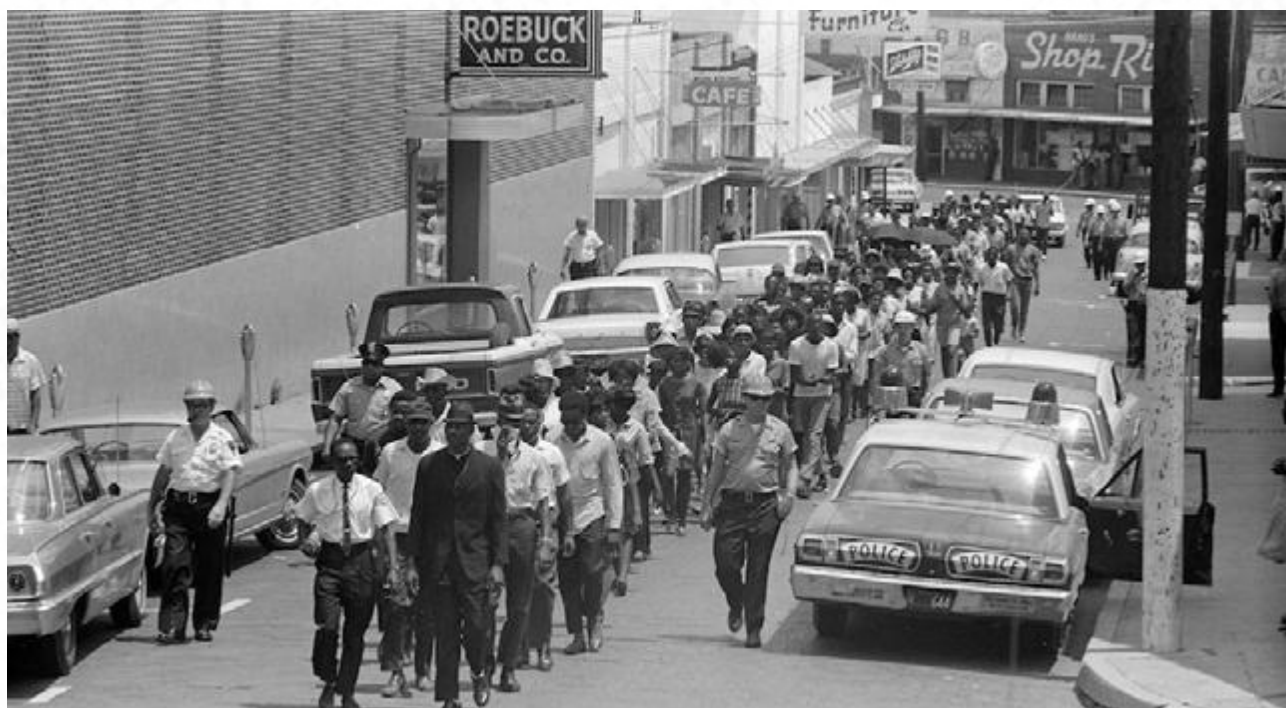
Portrait of Medgar Evers, 1963. Library of Congress.

- Medgar Evers was one of the state's most impassioned activists and orators. A WWII veteran, college graduate, and insurance agent, he was able to see many sides of the population. He became a field secretary at the NAACP after he applied to the University of Mississippi (the first black applicant), but he was rejected on a technicality. He became a prominent activist in the eyes of the public, championing young activists to fight the next generation of battles for equality. In 1963, Evers was shot in the back with a high powered rifle. His funeral procession was attended by around 5,000 mourners.

- James Meredith set about integrating the University of Mississippi by applying to be a student. He was rejected on the basis of his race, but the Kennedy administration pledged to enforce the law. After Meredith arrived on campus with federal officials, a riot broke out on the campus in Oxford.



James Meredith, center, is escorted by federal marshals on his first day of class at the University of Mississippi, 1962 / Marion S. Trikosko, U.S. News & World Report, Wikimedia Commons.



A civil rights march in downtown Hattiesburg, 1967 / Courtesy Mississippi Department of Archives and History.





Nannie Helen Burroughs and members of the Women's Auxiliary of the National Baptist Convention (NBC), circa 1905-1915 / Library of Congress

The work of Fannie Lou Hamer and others in the Civil Rights movement was underpinned by many other Black activists that came before them. In the suffrage movement (the movement that pushed to give women the right to vote), Black women were often left out of the conversation.

**What do you know of the fight
for Black women to vote?**



Match the activist to their accomplishments.

- A. Sojourner Truth (Isabella Bomfree)
- B. Ida B. Wells
- C. Mary Church Terrell
- D. Nannie Helen Burroughs
- E. Mary McLeod Bethune



(L-R): Portraits Courtesy of Burton Historical Collection, Detroit Public Library; Courtesy of University of Chicago Library, Special Collections Research Center; Courtesy of Smithsonian Institution; Courtesy of the Library of Congress.

1. Founded the National Council of Negro Women in 1935 to pursue Civil Rights in states where Black women still weren't allowed to vote after the 19th Amendment.
2. One of the first African American women to earn a college degree, she helped found the National Association of Colored Women, was a key activist in the suffrage movement, and helped desegregate restaurants in Washington, DC.
3. She created the National Training School for Women and Girls in the late 1920s, and worked toward giving women more career choices .
4. She challenged the notions of racial and gender inferiority through notable speeches and a lecture tour, including "Ain't I A Woman?" Her work to help formerly enslaved peoples find jobs and build new lives after the Civil War earned her an invitation to meet President Abraham Lincoln in 1864.
5. She was a prominent journalist, activist, and researcher in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. In her lifetime, she battled sexism, racism, and violence. As a skilled writer, she also used her voice as a journalist to shed light on the conditions of African Americans throughout the South.

Answer key: A-4; B-5; C-2, D-3, E-1

FREEDOM SUMMER

Months before the speech that begins our show, the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party (MFDP), along with many other groups, organized a massive campaign to increase black voter registration in Mississippi. These groups knew that the next step for the Civil Rights movement was to harness political power in their own backyard—in the majority Black communities.

Hundreds of college students flocked to Mississippi to help.



Freedom Summer activists sing before leaving training sessions at Western College for Women in Oxford, Ohio, for Mississippi in June 1964. Credit: Newseum

Freedom Summer of 1964 was a turning point in the Civil Rights Movement. Not only was the protest largely organized and executed by students but it was also one of the first times that the movement gained around the clock media attention.

—[WomensHistory.org](https://www.womenshistory.org)



(L-R): The "Washington Freedom Riders Committee" on a bus from New York City to Washington, D.C. / Library of Congress, May 30, 1961. One of the first Greyhound buses carrying Freedom Riders was fire-bombed while heading to Anniston, Alabama. Bettmann/Getty Images

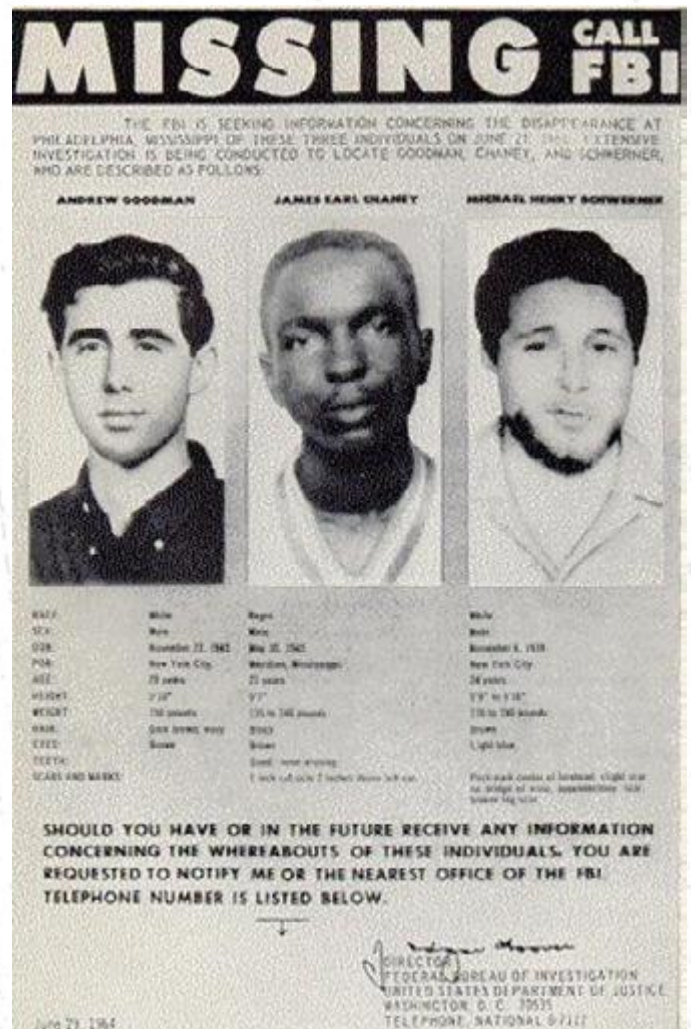
The Ku Klux Klan (KKK) and other groups met this campaign with violent opposition, setting into motion a bloody summer in Mississippi. Church bombings and attacks shook the state.

In June 1964, after hunting for several weeks, members of the KKK set a trap for activists Michael Schwerner, James Chaney, and Andrew Goodman. A Deputy Sheriff name Cecil Price arrested them, then released them later that evening. Members of the KKK then followed them as they left the police station. The three were never heard from again.

In the end, the Klan's homicidal ways backfired. The murders galvanized the nation and provided impetus for the passage of the landmark Civil Rights Act of 1964 on July 2.

-FBI.gov

Missing poster of civil rights workers Andrew Goodman, James Chaney, and Michael Schwerner. Alabama / FBI Archives.



BLACK GOSPEL MUSIC



The music in *FANNIE* is steeped in Black gospel tradition. Gospel music is characterized by an energetic approach to music that mimicked popular music more than traditional religious hymns.

*The tradition that came to be recognized as Black American gospel music emerged in the late 19th and early 20th centuries alongside **ragtime**, **blues**, and **jazz**. The progenitors of the tradition, however, lie in both Black and white musics of the 19th century, including, most notably, Black **spirituals**, songs of enslaved people, and white hymnody.*

–Britannica

Gospel music has become a significant part of the American music catalog.

Can you name the **gospel songs below** from their lyrics?

(Hint: the title might be in the lyrics!):

1. Swing low, sweet chariot
Coming for to carry me home
2. Amazing Grace, how sweet the sound
That saved a wretch like me
3. Go down, Moses,
Way down in Egypt's land;
Tell old Pharaoh
To let My people go!
4. Nobody knows the trouble that I've seen
Nobody knows my sorrow
Nobody knows the trouble that I've seen
Glory hallelujah
5. We Shall Overcome, we shall overcome
We shall overcome someday.
Oh, deep in my heart, I do believe,
We shall overcome someday.





Big name celebrities have written and performed both new and classic gospel music throughout the years.

Can you name 3 Black artists that have written or covered a gospel song?

1.

2.

3.

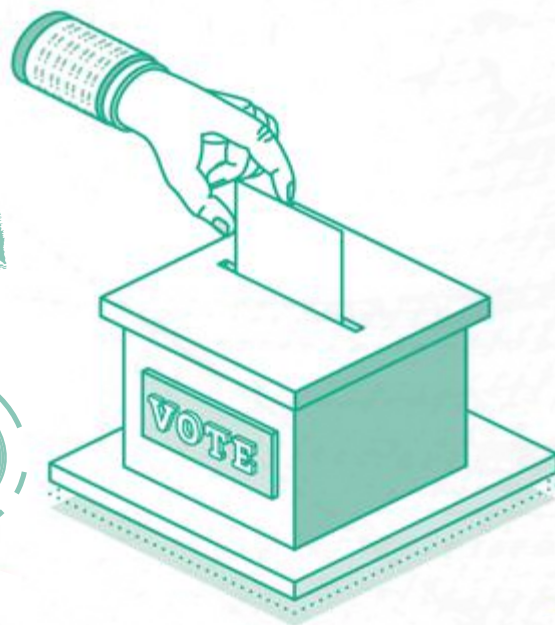
Once you've guessed, [check out this playlist](#) to see if you recognize some of your favorites.



Members of a Pentecostal church praising the Lord in Chicago, IL, 1941 / Courtesy of the Library of Congress



ARE YOU READY TO VOTE?



Fannie Lou Hamer and countless others fought hard for the right of all Americans to vote.

Are you ready to use your voice to help American democracy?

Did you know...?

- In the State of California, you can pre-register to vote at age 16 or 17.
- You can register to vote when you get your driver's license.
- You can either vote by mail in California, or go to the ballot box.
- In some cases, you can register to vote the SAME DAY as the election.

To vote in California, you must be:

- A United States citizen and a resident of California,
- 18 years old or older on Election Day,
- Not currently serving a state or federal prison term for the conviction of a felony (for more information on the rights of people who have been incarcerated, please see the Secretary of State's [Voting Rights: Persons with a Criminal History](#))
- Not currently found mentally incompetent to vote by a court (for more information, please see [Voting Rights: Persons Subject to Conservatorship](#)).

For more information or to register, go to www.sos.ca.gov/elections

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