

Dear Educator:

Welcome to the Find Your Voice K-12 Curriculum! We are thrilled that you have chosen to teach your students more about the life and legacy of the indomitable human rights activist, Fannie Lou Hamer. By way of introduction, allow me to provide you with background information about, and an overview of, this truly unique collaborative project.

Project Background

As a White woman from the North, who's spent the last fifteen years studying the life of a Black woman from the South, I often return to Jacqueline Jones Royster's instructions for cross-boundary analysis. In her essay, "When the First Voice You Hear is Not Your Own," Royster writes:

When you visit other people's 'home places,' especially when you have not been invited, you simply can not go tramping around the house like you own the place, no matter how smart you are, or how much imagination you can muster, or how much authority and entitlement outside that home you may be privileged to hold . . . the concept of 'home training' . . . acknowledges that when we are away from home, we need to know that what we think we see in places that we do not really know very well may not actually be what is there at all . . . Coming to judgment too quickly, drawing on information too narrowly . . . [is] not appropriate. Such behavior is not good manners.

And such behavior certainly doesn't make for good scholarship. The way Royster features the concept of "home places" in this passage, as a metaphor to frame research across the boundaries of identity, inspired me to consider: what does it mean for me to be on my best manners while conducting research in Hamer's home place of the Mississippi Delta? In my own home place, I learned long ago to never show up empty-handed to another's home. As I thought about how this early lesson in manners from my home place could extend to my work in the Delta, I began to see Hamer's home place with fresh eyes--not just as a place where I could go to gain knowledge and information for my Hamer-related research projects, but rather as a place where I should simultaneously share the research I've gathered and where I should responsively engage with, and promote, existing community-led projects.

One of the earliest and most meaningful community-led projects I engaged with was the Fannie Lou Hamer Statue Fund Committee. After several years of conducting oral history interviews in the region, I was asked by members of Hamer's hometown to join the board of the Statue Fund Committee, a group of local activists hoping to bring a full-sized statue of Hamer to her hometown of Ruleville, Mississippi. Working together with the Hamer family, her friends, and fellow activists, as well as nationally-recognized scholars and media personalities, we raised enough money for the statue and we agreed upon the design concept. We also planned an unveiling celebration--to be held on what would have been Hamer's 95th Birthday. The committee members and I publicized the unveiling by reaching out to local and national media organizations, political representatives, and well-known supporters of Fannie Lou Hamer. We also invited local public school teachers, hoping they would bring students to this truly monumental celebration, to be held on October 6, 2012.

The teachers' responses to our outreach really surprised me. I knew that Mississippi was one of the first states in the nation to require that the Civil Rights Movement be taught in public schools and I was aware that their state standards explicitly mention Fannie Lou Hamer by name. So, when the teachers told us that they had no materials to teach about Hamer and that students had only a vague idea of who she was or why she was significant. I was, indeed, shocked. Back in 2012, I responded to the Delta-area teachers by providing CDs of Hamer's songs and speeches, copies of campaign posters, and newspaper articles. I hastily gathered anything I could think of from my Hamer research that would get Delta students interested in learning about this phenomenal woman from their home county. But back then, I didn't have the time or resources to create a meaningful, coherent curriculum that would adequately contextualize the primary source material I shared with these teachers.

And then this happened.

The day after the big unveiling celebration, during a more modest annual birthday party thrown in Hamer's honor by her friends and family, I glimpsed this young girl looking up at the statue with reverence and awe. I'll admit, as I snapped this picture I was momentarily patting myself on the back for a job well done.

But then, a powerful expression of Hamer's came to my mind:

"Don't say you're behind me. I don't want you back there. Say you're with me and we'll march up this freedom road together!"



Fannie Lou Hamer Statue in Ruleville, Mississippi

As I considered this statement, my heart sank a bit, and I wondered if the Statue Fund Committee had unwittingly created a larger-than-life hero out of an activist with whom we had hoped young people in her community would relate. After all, we had literally set Hamer on a pedestal. I wondered, had we set her accomplishments out of reach as well? Without proper context and background knowledge, I worried, was this statue potentially disempowering to Delta-area students?

These concerns stayed with me. And rather than viewing the statue as a successful contribution to her local community, I began hoping that the statue could become an opening salvo to a more meaningful public education project.

Thankfully, it became just that.

My colleague, Davis W. Houck, connected me with Mrs. Hamer's niece, the celebrated journalist, Ms. Monica Land, and she shared with us her dream of creating a documentary about her great aunt. Ms. Land asked if Houck and I would work with her as researchers on this project. We agreed and started pooling our resources. We soon learned that together we had a veritable treasure trove of Hamer-related material, including images, songs, speeches, interviews, television and radio appearances, personal letters Hamer penned to northern activists, over one hundred Hamer-related newspaper clippings spanning nearly sixty years, campaign platforms, receipts from her Freedom Farm, a cookbook, signed children's books, telegrams and much more.

As we read across our collection, we realized that through these materials we could create not only the first Hamer documentary told exclusively in her own words, but also the K-12 curriculum I had been dreaming about. Fast forward through several grueling years of fundraising efforts by the incredible Land, continued research by us all, and a year-long partnership with teachers across the Mississippi Delta and the Find Your Voice K-12 Curriculum is now ready to share with you and your students!

Curriculum Overview

During our year-long partnership with award-winning Mississippi educators, we developed eighteen curricular units, containing a total of thirty-two lesson plans, that span the subject areas of Social Studies, English/Language Arts, Science, American Government, US History, Geography, Black History, Women’s Studies, Politics, Economics, Agricultural Studies, Journalism, Filmmaking, and Musicology. The plans we’ve collaboratively designed are flexible--adaptable for multiple grade levels, depending on how you calibrate the depth of knowledge. The plans also contain learning objectives that are broad enough for you to adapt to your school, district, and state standards. Further still, many of the plans can be contracted to a single lesson or expanded to span several days, as instruction time and student interest permits.

The plans include high impact pedagogies ranging from a puzzle-piece gallery walk that features timeline events and corresponding images of Hamer to a STEM project that leads students in the process of growing crops for a local food bank. Further still, these units introduce students to rich concepts such as the West African idea of “Griots” or culture carriers, even as the lesson plans compel classrooms to grapple with complex contemporary questions about allyship, public memory, poverty politics, and voter disenfranchisement. The learning materials supporting each unit are innovative as well--featuring Freedom Songs from the 1960s, a federal trial transcript, historical newspapers and census data, as well as rare audio-visual recordings of Hamer’s speeches and television appearances.

Moreover, the curricular units debut new Hamer resources we created--including two new children’s books, original poems, a biographical sketch, a timeline, and an image gallery. In addition to helpful worksheets and assignment templates. The plans have also gathered existing Hamer-related teaching resources such as Carol Boston Weatherford’s award-winning book *Voice of Freedom: Fannie Lou Hamer the Spirit of the Civil Rights Movement* and the Scholastic play about Hamer entitled, *A Long Road to Freedom*.

Throughout the design process, I had the great fortune of working on the Find Your Voice project with Mississippi educators as well as teachers and students at Lowrie Primary School in my hometown of Wilsonville, Oregon. While trying out lesson plans in elementary classrooms, I saw how much the younger students enjoyed BrainPOP Cartoons. So I reached out to the organization and consulted on the creation of the first Fannie Lou Hamer cartoon. BrainPOP is generously providing free access to this episode through our website and you’ll find that teachers have woven it into the Find Your Voice Curriculum as well. Older students are sure to enjoy the *Find Your Voice* film created by the Sunflower County Film Academy. The Academy’s inaugural summer-long workshop, led by Joy Davenport, Pablo Correa, and R.J. Fitzpatrick, culminated in this short film, which premiered at the 2019 Crossroads Film Festival in Jackson, Mississippi. Finally, the feature film *Fannie Lou Hamer’s America* by the acclaimed filmmaker, Joy Davenport, is also available for free on the Find Your Voice website. *Fannie Lou Hamer’s America* would make a great

multi-media complement to any of the 9-12 grade lesson plans. What's more, you can find a community discussion guide for the film on our website. Find Your Voice: The Online Resource for Fannie Lou Hamer Studies website was expertly designed by Pablo Correa to become not only a clearinghouse of resources for students, scholars, artists and activists alike, but also a space to promote contemporary people who "Fight Like Fannie Lou." Check back often for updated materials and inspiration!

The eighteen curricular units we collaboratively designed carry forth Fannie Lou Hamer's spirit by encouraging students to reflect on injustices that surround them and to stand up to these injustices through the creation of their own speeches, film sketches, opinion editorials, debates, narrative poems, and much more. As the editor of this project, I sincerely hope you and your students enjoy learning more about Fannie Lou Hamer through the materials we've created. Most importantly, I hope you are all inspired to Find Your Voice!

Yours in the struggle,



Maegan Parker Brooks, PhD

Editor, Find Your Voice K-12 Curriculum
Researcher, Fannie Lou Hamer's America
Assistant Professor, Willamette University



From left to right: Dr. Davis W. Houck, Mrs. Valerie D. Fairley, Mr. R.J. Morgan, Mrs. Brenda Kirkham, Mrs. Alicia Ervin-Rawls, Mrs. Latasha S. Rodgers, Mrs. Danielle Creel Martin, and Dr. Maegan Parker Brooks