Women as Culture Carriers in the Civil Rights Movement: Fannie Lou Hamer

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Understanding Fannie Lou Hamer and her role as a cultural carrier becomes clearer when we recognize that she opened many mass meetings by pulling the congregation into a community of singing.

Remember me
Remember me
Oh Lord, remember me.

Father, I stretch
My hands to thee
No other help I know.

You remembered my mother, remember me
You remembered mother, remember me
Oh Lord, remember me.

There is something I feel when sound runs through my body. I cannot sing without experiencing a change in my mood, a change in the way I feel. In the African American culture, that is a major function of singing. People
come to singing because of how they feel in it and on the other side of the song. The aim is to be sure that whatever shape you were in before you started to produce this sound is transformed when the singing is over. There are cultures where one can engage in singing without having one’s inner self aroused, but this is not the case with the African American congregational song tradition.

Fannie Lou Hamer was an activist and a cultural leader who assumed major responsibility for the creation and maintenance of the environment within which those who struggle for freedom lived and worked. She positioned herself so that she was constantly in great danger; she operated in the open, aboveground, confronting an entire system that was organized to keep her and all Black people subjugated. When Mrs. Hamer found her voice as a fighter, she became a transmitter of the culture of that struggle. Her work as an organizer was grounded in her own testimony. She called and urged others to join in battling racism, poverty, and injustice. A natural and fearless community leader, master orator, and song leader, she used her stories and songs to nurture the air we breathed as fighters.

The first time I saw Fannie Lou Hamer she came up to me and thanked me for everything we had done for her. I couldn’t figure out why this giant was thanking me. I struggled a long time to figure out whom she was talking about. She was talking about the young people who made up the staff of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC).

I was in the Atlanta SNCC office, and she was a SNCC field secretary by then, primarily organizing in Mississippi, but increasingly traveling throughout the South and the nation telling stories about what it took for a citizen of the United States of America of African descent to vote in the state of Mississippi. In expressing her thanks to SNCC, Mrs. Hamer was defining and validating the work of the movement from a new perspective. She was saying that the movement was the best thing that had ever happened to her. She sounded as if we in SNCC had rescued her. When I thought about it, I understood what she meant. The movement gave all of us choices about how we would live, and it gave us the chance to act as people with power.

Fannie Lou Hamer was expressing thanks—as I have done many times since—for the opportunity to become, for her time and her community and her people, more like herself. We all have souls, an inner voice that wants to find its essence through the expression of our living. Often we feel that the world would not tolerate us if we followed our hearts. The movement
provided a nurturing ground that encouraged us to open up and move beyond our fears and become who we were in our hearts. One who answered that call was Fannie Lou Hamer.

Fannie Lou Hamer was born in Montgomery County, Mississippi, in 1917. She was the youngest of twenty children born to Jim and Lou Ella Townsend, who worked as sharecroppers. From the age of two, she lived in Sunflower County and she began to pick cotton at six. Of her childhood years, she said: “Life was worse than hard. It was horrible! We never did have enough to eat and I don’t remember how old I was when I got my first pair of shoes, but I was a big girl. Mama tried to keep our feet warm by wrapping them in rags and tying them with string.”

One year after a good season, her father cleared enough to rent land and buy stock and a car. A white neighbor envious of this progress struck a devastating blow by poisoning the stock with Paris green, an insecticide. This plunged the family back into poverty, from which they never recovered. The family’s situation was complicated by an accident that left her mother blind. As the plight of the family worsened, Fannie Lou Hamer was forced to leave school at twelve years of age, just able to read and write. So in 1962, when the movement came to Ruleville, Mississippi, she was working weighing cotton and serving as timekeeper for B. D. Marlowe, a job she held for eighteen years until she made her first attempt to register to vote.

We know about Fannie Lou Hamer because of her tireless efforts to change the conditions of African Americans in Mississippi in particular and the country in general. We know about her because of the price that she paid to participate in the struggle for change. We know about her because of the power of her voice. Everywhere she went she spoke, sang, and shared her life and her vision of a better world. It was a powerful message; her delivery was Southern, Black and riveting.

The first time I heard her speak was in Town Hall in New York City. It was the first time I had ever been to Town Hall. I owe a lot to the movement that the first time I entered this hallowed hall of the land was to hear Fannie Lou Hamer tell the stories of our fight for justice. Walking into Town Hall, New York City, for the first time to hear Mrs. Hamer, E. W. Steptoe, and Hartman Turnbow, all from Mississippi, was the way to learn about that place and others like it. Because of the movement, such places became ours, to use for our forums and our messages. They were never beyond our lives and our reach. The first time I ever heard about Carnegie Hall, I was invited to sing there as a Freedom Singer.
Listening to the story of Fannie Lou Hamer took me to a place I had witnessed so many times in Black church services. Someone rises and through her or his offerings begins to charge up the air. Sometimes after a service has begun somebody will just come out of a corner and with the support of the congregants will do something to bring the space under his or her power. This refocusing and transforming spaces goes beyond content and data; it deals directly with the power to establish the tone and tenor of the environment. Within the African American oral tradition our stories and our legacies travel through time in a bed of rich cultural sound. I am not talking about simply starting something in a room and changing the space the people in the room have to deal with. It goes much farther because the oral tradition requires the transmission of its lode across generations. When you are a part of such an environment the experiences that are passed in that space become forever a part of who you are. In order to serve and extend the process and keep alive these treasures for others living in your time and beyond, you walk out of that space with responsibility for the stories you now carry within your soul. For example, I know

Walk with me, my Lord, walk with me
Walk with me, my Lord, walk with me
While I’m on this tedious journey
I want Jesus to walk with me.

I cannot tell you when I learned that song. I did not get it out of a book and I did not learn it in a classroom. It was traveling to me through time, an integral element of the cultural world into which I was born. I know the song and the singing because when I was surrounded by it, its power moved me and became a comfort to me, and I now continue its life in sharing it.

Make a way for me, now Lord, make a way for me
Make a way for me, now Lord, make a way for me
While I’m on this tedious journey
I want Jesus to walk with me.

It is important to talk about cultural transmission, how ideas, analysis, social stances, and worldviews move through communities and across time. A lot of us do not understand what it really would take to make our work
available to the next generation—not only for those who follow us to read about what we believed and valued and tried to do with our living, but also to receive our stories as models and the base from which our children may move in the world they struggle to shape. The idea that the world you live in is one you should work to shape moves across time only if it is a part of the cultural environment you create and put in motion.

This work within African American culture—the work of passing on the stories of life in song, in ceremonies, in games, in the sounds around us—has been carried to a large extent by the women. You know who you are before you remember that you don’t know who you are. And you know that from the women. They whisper it to you in the cracks between feeding and the air you breathe. Fannie Lou Hamer understood that what she experienced was not for her alone but for those who would be moved by the sound of her voice and the power of her living.

That night at Town Hall, Mrs. Hamer told the story of her arrest and the severe beating she and Annelle Ponder received because of their efforts to register voters in Mississippi. It was a story I was to hear many times, but that night it was engraved in my heart. I was transformed by the intensity of her identification with struggle. There was no separation; she had stepped onto a path and found joy amid unspeakable danger. As a young woman beginning to find my own voice, it was crucial that I sat in an environment created by the life and struggle of Fannie Lou Hamer.

She began, “My name is Fannie Lou Hamer. I live in Ruleville, Mississippi. . . .” She told how she and five other people had been returning from a voter registration training session in Charleston, South Carolina. Their bus was stopped in Winona, Mississippi, and they were arrested. From her cell, Mrs. Hamer could hear Annelle Ponder, a student from Atlanta who worked with the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC), screaming as they beat her. When Annelle Ponder, her face swollen, walked past Mrs. Hamer’s cell, she whispered, “Pray for me.”

Then Mrs. Hamer heard her own name called and they came and got her and made her lie down on a bench. She was beaten by two Black men, prisoners called trustees, who were charged to beat her by two white guards who held guns on them to make sure they gave her a good whipping. As they lashed her about her legs, her dress started to move up her thighs and as she reached to try and pull it down, one of the guards pulled her dress over her head. They beat her with leather straps until her thighs were as hard as a board, until pain came and went. When they told her to get up she
didn’t think she could move. When she finally was able to get up, she knew
that although they had whipped her body, they had not whipped her soul.
She knew that freedom was when you understood that not even an attempt
to kill you would determine what you did or said.

Fannie Lou Hamer’s participation in the movement seemed to come from
a long-held desire to do something about the way her people had been
forced to live. This pride was instilled in her by her mother: “Sometimes
when things were so bad and I’d start thinking maybe it would be better if
we were white, she’d [Hamer’s mother] insisted that we should be proud to
be Black, telling us, ‘nobody will respect you unless you stand up for
yourself.’”

Growing up believing in God and being taught not to hate, Mrs. Hamer
discovered that there were many things “dead wrong” with the lives of Blacks
and whites in Mississippi. “I used to think . . . let me have a chance, and
whatever this is . . . I’m gonna do somethin’ about it.”

Her chance came one night when she went to a mass meeting at a church
in Ruleville, where she heard James Forman and James Bevel speak about
voter registration. Reverend Bevel told those gathered about how many Black
people there were in the county and how, if they were voters, they could
remove from power the racist politicians who controlled their state. They
also learned that in Washington, many of the senior members of the House
and Senate were from the South because they were able to hold on to their
seats for the most terms. Their longevity was directly related to Blacks not
participating in the political system; they did not have to be accountable to
the majority of people in their districts since most of them were not allowed
to vote.

Mrs. Hamer was one of those who volunteered to try to register, and she
was made the leader of the group. This resulted in her losing her job and her
family being kicked off the plantation. She often told this story in mass
meetings to encourage others to join the movement.

It was 1962, thirty-first of August that eighteen of us traveled twenty-six miles
to this place to the county courthouse to try to register to become first-class
citizens. When we got here to Indianola to the courthouse, that was a day I
saw more policemen with guns than I’d ever seen in my life at one time. They
were standing around, and I never will forget that day. One of the policemen
called the police department in Cleveland, Mississippi, and told him to bring
some type of big book back over there. Anyway, we stayed in the registrar’s
office—I was one of the first persons to complete, as far as I knew how to
complete, my registration form and I went and got back on the bus. During
the time we were on the bus, the policeman kept watching the bus and I noticed a highway patrolman watching the bus. After everybody had completed their forms and after we started back to Ruleville, Mississippi, we were stopped by the policeman and highway patrolmen and was ordered to come back to Indianola, Mississippi. When we got back to Indianola, the bus driver was charged with driving the bus the wrong color. This is the gospel truth. This bus had been used for years for cotton chopping, cotton picking, and to carry people to Florida to work in the wintertime to make enough to live on to get back here in the spring and summer. But that day the bus had the wrong color. We got to Ruleville about five o'clock.

Reverend Jeff Sunny drove me out to the rural area where I had been working as a timekeeper and a sharecropper for eighteen years. When I got there I was already fired. My children met and told me, “Mama, this man is hot! Said you will have to go back and withdraw [your registration application] or you will have to leave.” . . . It wasn't too long before my husband came and he said the same thing. I walked in the house, set down on the side of my little daughter's bed, and then this white man walked over and said, “Pap, did you tell Fannie Lou what I said?” I said, “He did.” “Well, Fannie Lou, you will have to go down and withdraw or you will have to leave.” And I addressed and told him, as we have always had to say “Mr., I didn't register for you; I was trying to register for myself.” He said, “We're not ready for that in Mississippi.” He wasn't ready, but I been ready a long time. I had to leave that same night.4

While organizing in Mississippi, Mrs. Hamer never hesitated to speak of the cost and danger of entering a life of activism against racism: “On the tenth of September in 1962, sixteen bullets were fired into the home of Mr. and Mrs. Robert Tucker for me. That same night two girls were shot at Mr. Herman Sissan's in Ruleville. They also shot Mr. Joe McDonald's house that same night.”5 She then moved from her personal testimony to sharply focused analysis: “Now the question I raise, is this America? The land of the free and the home of the brave? Where people are being murdered, lynched, and killed because we want to register and vote!”6

As a good organizer, she never failed to return to the immediate goals of the project. “You know I feel good. I never know what's gonna happen to me tonight. But you see, you know the ballot is good. If it wasn't good, how come he trying to keep you from it and he still doing it? Don't be foolish, folks. They go in there by the droves and they had guns to keep us out of there the other day, and dogs. And if that's good enough for them, I want some of it too.”7

Mrs. Hamer was much more than a talker, organizer, and singer; her efforts brought results. She failed the literacy test the first time she tried to
register to vote. She told the registrar she would return every thirty days until she passed the test. And she did. She wore them out with her living and became one of the first African Americans to register to vote in the Sunflower County voting campaign.

It was perhaps these two stories—Mrs. Hamer and Annelle Ponder being beaten in jail and her first efforts to register to vote—that pushed me to write this song when I heard that she had passed.

Fannie Lou Hamer, Fannie Lou Hamer
Fannie Lou Hamer, Fannie Lou Hamer

This Little Light of mine
Her song would fill the air
She rocking the state of Mississippi
Now a few more Black people stand there.

For twenty years she weighed cotton
Down on a white man’s farm
She received threats on her life, fired from her job
Scorned and kicked off the farm.

We’re sick and tired of being sick and tired
That’s what the lady would yell
Her body was beaten and she walked crippled
Trying to vote, she was thrown in jail.

Land of the tree and home of the slave
She criticized the law of this land
For hundreds of years Blacks had lived in fear
Now we marched took our lives in our hands.

She came by here and she didn’t stay long
Helped to turn a few things around
Cancer took her body, the struggle’s got her soul
Now we’ve laid her body in the ground.

When I look at the words of Fannie Lou Hamer, I am always struck by how she defined who she was. She was a religious woman, and whenever she got
up to speak she took a text or she quoted from the Scripture. In this case, she defines the work she felt she was called to do. The first thing she did was to lead out on “This Little Light of Mine.” Then right out of the song she said:

From the fourth chapter of St. Luke, beginning at the eighteenth verse: “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the broken-hearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them who are bruised, to preach the acceptable day of the Lord.”

Now the time have come, that was Christ’s purpose on earth, and we only been getting by paving our way to hell, but the time is out. When Simon Cyrene was helping Christ to bear his cross up the hill, he said; “Must Jesus bear this cross alone and all the world go free? No, there’s a cross for everyone and there’s a cross for me. This consecrated cross I’ll bear, till death shall set me free. And then go home a crown to wear, for there’s a crown for me.”

When she finished quoting that hymn (and I understood that Simon Cyrene had not said those particular words), she added, “It is not easy out there. We just got to make up our minds and face it, folk, and if I can face the issue, you can too.” In this sermon, she is saying that she is charged to do the work from the highest source she has operating in her life. The preaching of the gospel, and the anointing, and the giving of sight to the blind are activities that Jesus did. She claims that territory where seemingly impossible changes are brought forth, for herself. And before she finishes, she calls the congregation to action by saying, “If I can do it, you can too.”

Fannie Lou Hamer placed Jesus where his experiences, as passed through the traditions of the Black church, could be used in the freedom struggle. She used all of this material and she brought its full force to bear on the work she had to do.

There was the time in the mass meeting in Greenwood when Mrs. Hamer talked about how long she had been concerned about the system she was now risking her life every day to challenge.

And brothers, you can believe this or not—I been sick of this system as long as I can remember. Heard some people speak of the Depression in the thirties; in the twenties it was always “pression” with me! Depression! I been as hungry. . . . You know it’s been a long time, people, I have worked, I have worked as hard as anybody. I have been picking cotton and would be so hungry and one of the poison things about it, wondering what I was gone cook that night, but you see, all of them things were wrong? And I asked
God, and I have said, "Now Lord," and it ain’t no need a lying and saying you ain’t, "open a way for us. Please make a way for us, Jesus, where I can stand up and speak for my race and speak for my hungry children," and he opened a way and all of them mostly backing out.

It’s a funny thing since I started working for Christ—it’s kinda like in the Twenty-third Psalm, He said, “Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of my enemies; thou anointest my head with oil; and my cup runneth over,” and I have walked through the shadows of death, because it was on the tenth of September in 1962 when they shot sixteen times in a house—and it wasn’t over a foot over the bed where my head was—but that night, I wasn’t there. Don’t you see what God can do? Quit running around trying to dodge death, because this book says, “He that seeketh to save his life is gonna lose it anyhow.”

Mrs. Hamer walked the ground that was the Twenty-third Psalm as a fighter. These Bible stories became concrete in her attempt to register to vote. She always drew on this source in her speeches. For instance, she used the Israelite story of Moses to describe Bob Moses, the head of the Mississippi Freedom Project: “You see, He made it so plain for us: He sent a man to Mississippi with the same name that Moses had to go to Egypt and tell them to go down in Mississippi and tell Ross Barnett to let my people go.”

She directly addressed the fear of the Black people in that church. After telling everyone that they might get killed if they joined the movement, she used this story to show them how that was exactly what they were supposed to do. She was telling Black people that this was the time. How do we know it? Bob Moses was the sign of Moses. And though Bob Moses was not always comfortable with this analogy, Fannie Lou Hamer the organizer used it like a guarantee that the time had arrived. She believed that the movement was an unmistakable door that the people had opened in their own lives and now must be fortified to walk through. Whenever she talked, you felt that she was processing material that had come to her and was analyzing it and blending it with the challenges of the day.

She became a national voice, moving throughout the nation, speaking to the issues of the day. In one speech she was asked to talk about women. In the opening part of the speech, she speaks to white women.

You know I work for the liberation of all people, because when I liberate myself, I’m liberating other people. But you know, sometimes I really feel sorrier for the white woman than I feel for ourselves because she been caught up in this thing, caught up feeling special, and folks, I’m going to put it on the line, because my job is not to make people feel comfortable. You’ve been
caught up in this thing because, you know, you worked my grandmother, and
after that you worked my mother, and then finally you got a hold of me. 12

The irony of the issue, still before us today, was the widening of the historic
gulfs between white women and their nonwhite servants. As “liberated”
women increasingly chose professional careers outside the home as well as
motherhood and homemaking, they turned to poorer women to provide the
services to make their lives possible. Often these women were not paid
enough by their sisters to provide adequate care for the children they had to
leave at home so their employees’ children would be well cared for.

In speaking to issues like this, Mrs. Hamer was and is timeless and
relentless in her honesty. She insisted that the relationships between maids
and nursemaids and their employers be a part of any discussion about
sisterhood. She acknowledged her experiences, including the mixed families
she grew up in, and how many blue-eyed Black people she knew, and how
many cousins she had who said they were white in Mississippi who never
“sistered” or “cousined” her.

For Mrs. Hamer, Black women were in partnership with Black men in the
interest of the family and the future of their people. She was uneasy with
the radical edge of feminism that seemed to say that if you are going to fight
for your freedom as women and you are going to fight against sexism, it
may become necessary and appropriate to separate yourself from your fathers,
your brothers, your male lovers, and your sons. Mrs. Hamer took a strong
position on what she felt was divisive and destructive to Black American
organizing: “I’m not hung up on this about liberating myself from the Black
man, I’m not going to try that thing. I got a Black husband, six feet three,
two hundred and forty pounds, with a 14 shoe, that I don’t want to be
liberated from.” 13

Mrs. Hamer’s view on the partnership between Black men and women was
not a romantic one. As a leader in the movement and in her community,
she did not hesitate to criticize men who wanted to lead but were unable
to confront their fears. She believed that leadership came from actual work
and commitment and was not preordained by sex. She clearly stated her
position on this when urging people to face the danger: “You see the thing
what so pitiful about it, the men been wanting to be the boss all these years,
and the ones not up under the house is under the bed.” 14

Coming out of the poorest state in the nation, from one of the poorest
classes, Mrs. Hamer was harsh and frank about the way some college-
educated Black women had difficulty embracing her as their sister:
A few years ago throughout the country the middle class Black women—I used to say not really Black women, but the middle class colored women, didn’t respect the kind of work that I was doing. But you see now baby, whether you have a ph.d., dd, or no d, we’re in this bag together. And whether you are from Morehouse or Nohouse, we’re still in this bag together. Not to fight to liberate ourselves from the men—this is another trick to get us fighting among ourselves—but to work together with Black men. And then we will have a better chance to just act as human beings, and be treated as human beings in our sick society.¹⁵

Fannie Lou Hamer had a realistic sense of how she was perceived by her community. She understood and spoke about the power of class in paralyzing people to organize against their own oppression.

You see in this struggle, some people say, well she don’t talk too good. The type of education that we get here, years to come, you won’t talk too good. The type of education that we get in the state of Mississippi will make our minds so narrow, it won’t coordinate with our big bodies. We know we have a long fight, because our leaders like the preachers and the teachers, they are failing to stand up today. But we know some of the reasons for that. This brainwashed education that the teachers have got.¹⁶

We have a job as Black women, to support whatever is right, and to bring in justice where we’ve had so much injustice. Some people say, well I work for $24 per week. That’s not true in my case, I work sometimes for $15 per week. I remember my mother working for 25 and 30 cents a day. But we are organizing ourselves now, because we don’t have any other choice.

Sunflower County is one of the few counties in the state of Mississippi where we didn’t lose one Black teacher. Because I went in and told the judge, I said, “judge, we’re not going to stand by and see you take a man with a master’s degree and bring him down to janitor help. So if we don’t have the principal . . . there ain’t going to be no school, private or public.”¹⁷

Looking at the economic reality of slavery and racism, Fannie Lou Hamer blended a familiarity with God with her personal history and testimony to make her point.

A house divided against itself cannot stand. America is divided against itself and without they considering us as human beings one day America will crumble! Because God is not pleased! God is not pleased with all the murdering and all the brutality and all the killing for no reason at all. God is not pleased that the Negro children in the state of Mississippi [are] suffering from malnutrition. God is not pleased because we have to go raggedy and work from ten to eleven hours for three lousy dollars! And then how can they
say that in ten years' time we will force every Negro out of the state of Mississippi. But I want these people to take a good look at themselves, and after they have sent the Chinese back to China, the Jews back to Jerusalem, and give the Indians their land back; they take the Mayflower back from where they came, the Negro will still be in Mississippi! We don't have anything to be ashamed of in Mississippi and actually we don't carry guns, because we don't have anything to hide.18

Fannie Lou Hamer, standing among a chorus of Black women leaders like Ella Baker and Septima Clark, taught something else about being a leader in the movement. These women made their political and social stances primary in their lives. They had jobs of a sort, somebody sometimes paid them wages, but the work never changed. By being in the atmosphere they created and listening to the talk, I learned that it is possible to live in this society and be a radical and always be ready to fight. Sometimes you would get killed, but a lot of times you wouldn't. There was in the midst of pain and effort and the real dangers also a sweetness about struggle that no human being should go through life and not experience.

There is another story Fannie Lou Hamer tells, this one about the 1964 Democratic National Convention in Atlantic City. She described being in a room with Hubert Humphrey, who explained that in his heart he really supported their struggle. The Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party was challenging the seats of the all-white Mississippi delegation on the grounds that Blacks were not allowed to exercise their rights as citizens to participate in electoral politics in that state. However, Humphrey's chance to be on the ticket with Lyndon Johnson would be jeopardized if the issue reached the floor. Mrs. Hamer said:

I was delighted even to have a chance to talk with this man. But here say a little round-eyed man with his eyes full of tears, when our attorney at the time, Joseph Rauh, said if we didn't stop pushing them and fighting to come to the floor, that Mr. Humphrey wouldn't be nominated that night for vice-president of the United States, I was amazed, and I said, "Well Mr. Humphrey, do you mean to tell me that your position is more important to you than 400,000 Black lives?" And I didn't try to force nobody else to say it, but I told him I wouldn't stoop to no two votes at large.19

It takes a fresh vision to raise that question and then stand on your position and say that's your ground. Mrs. Hamer refused the compromise offered by the convention—to seat the regular all-white delegation and give the MFDP two seats at-large. "Now they thought they had us sewed up, bag sewed up,
but I told it everywhere. You can kill a man, but you can't kill ideas. 'Cause that idea's going to be transferred from one generation 'til after a while, if it's not too late for all of us, we'll be free."20

It was this Fannie Lou Hamer who, when I actually met her, said, "I want to thank you all for what you are trying to do for us." I will always stand in her shadow charged by the power of her work.

I wandered far away from God
Now I'm coming home
The path of sin too long I've trod
Now I'm coming home.

This is a favorite hymn in the Black church. If you are not a Christian, go beyond the specific text and think about being lost from yourself. You cannot understand what the civil rights movement means or what you did if you don't have a space like this where out of the heat of the activity you can sit and ponder it. Fannie Lou Hamer's reality of representing 600,000 people in the state of Mississippi was her home base. No matter where she was, she knew that if she moved with integrity from that reality she would be on solid ground. Committing oneself to long-time struggle requires the search for oneself and the embracing of your vision of the world and yourself in it at your fullest development as "home." Then from that place you can move and return as you struggle to make a way for the life you have to live.

Coming home,
Coming home,
Never more to roam.
Open wide, thine arms of love
Now I'm coming home.
NOTES

2. Ibid.
5. Ibid.
6. Ibid.
7. Ibid.
9. Ibid.
10. Ibid.
11. Ibid.
13. Ibid.
15. Hamer, NAACP speech.
16. Hamer, Hattiesburg meeting.
17. Hamer, NAACP speech.
18. Hamer, Hattiesburg meeting.
20. Ibid.