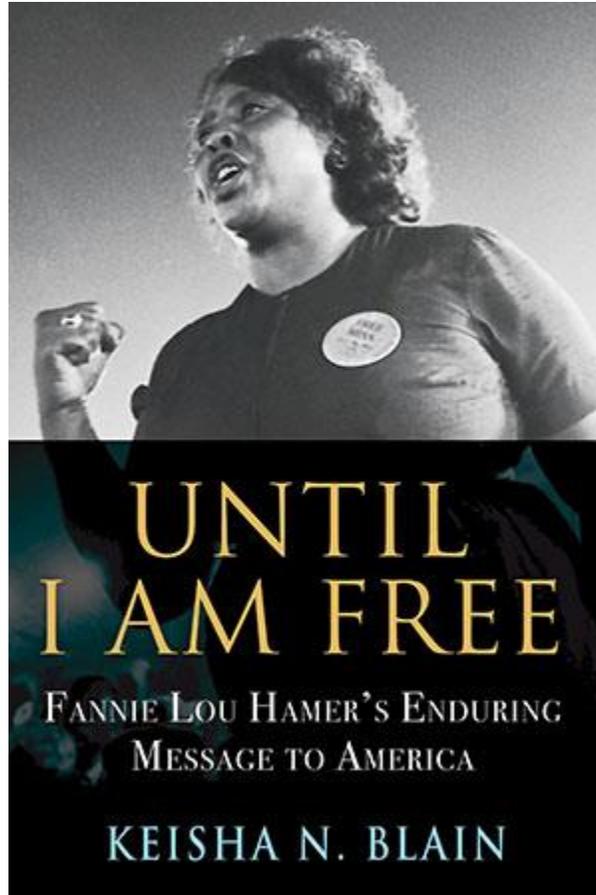


*Until I Am Free: Fannie Lou Hamer's Enduring Message to America*

Reader's Guide Discussion Questions



1. Keisha N. Blain notes that Fannie Lou Hamer, like many other hidden figures, is largely left out of mainstream historical narratives on Black social movements. Why are figures like Hamer often erased, and how can we combat this harmful pattern?
2. How did Hamer's upbringing, of being trapped in poverty by the exploitative nature of the sharecropping system and enduring life as a poor, Black disabled woman in Mississippi, influence her relationship to the Black struggle? How did Hamer's experiences make her an effective organizer and activist?
3. Why do you think Hamer centered voting rights and voters' empowerment in her political work? What is the significance of this goal in our current context, and how has a national perspective on Black voting shifted or stayed the same since Hamer's spirited campaigns?

4. Blain writes that “combining faith with action, Hamer fought to secure the rights and liberation of Black people and all oppressed groups.” How did faith directly shape Hamer’s activism, and how is faith incorporated into or absent from modern-day activist movements?
5. Hamer believed that “Americans committed to social justice could build an inclusive democracy that lived up to the promises of the US Constitution.” What did her investment in the Constitution demonstrate about her political beliefs? How has the role or influence of the Constitution in protecting the rights of American citizens shifted in the decades following Hamer’s activism?
6. How did the gendered and racialized politics of respectability inform Hamer’s personal life and work? How did Hamer challenge notions of Black women’s respectability?
7. What does Blain mean when she says that Hamer understood her life in intersectional terms? How can Hamer’s work and life inform our modern-day understanding of intersectionality? Where do Hamer’s politics align with current Black feminist thought, and where do they diverge?
8. Why did Hamer emphasize the contributions of leaders with limited formal education? What does Hamer’s insistence on a grassroots approach and local leaders tell us about the needs and goals of the movement at the time? Who exemplifies this type of leadership today?
9. Blain ties in current cultural moments with historical ones throughout the text, particularly in reference to acts of violence committed against Black women in the twenty-first century. What makes Hamer’s story and legacy so deeply relevant to the stories of so many Black women today?
10. What is distinct about Hamer’s definition of liberation? How does it compare to national perspectives on liberation? How does it compare to definitions of liberation within anti-racist movements of the time?
11. Hamer opposed women’s reproductive rights while working to expand women’s political leadership. What does this reveal about her politics? Should we view this as a contradiction, and if so, why?
12. How can Hamer’s message of “until I am free, you are not free either” offer hope and guidance to those advocating for social justice today?