

COMMENTARY

# Mississippi memoir: Hamer's legacy lives on

*Special to Sentinel-Voice*  
I knew I was standing on hallowed ground and that it would be one of those moments that I would always remember. I was standing in front of the modest tombstone of one of the great heroes of our time, Fannie Lou Hamer. A woman I never met but have come to love.

She was a fearless, truth-telling, powerful singing, unblinking, plainspoken, justice-loving woman of God. An extraordinary human being whose force of personality threatened even the president of the United States. I knew I was standing on hallowed ground.

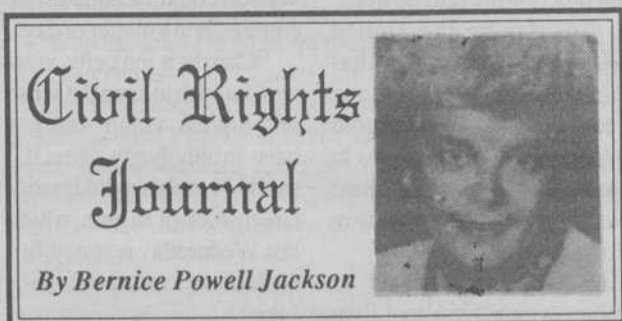
The graves of Hamer and her husband are in a small, unadorned public park and nearby the boys from the neighborhood are playing ball. Here, in Sunflower County, Miss., there are moments when I felt like I had stepped into a time warp

and that it could be 1969 or 1869. But, then I look down the street and see the cars and know that it really is 1999 and only a few months from the turn of the century.

It was to this little, tiny town of Ruleville that Mrs. Hamer fled when she was forced off the plantation where she had lived and worked for 18 years when she dared to try to register to vote.

Within hours of her first attempt to register, she and her family were evicted with all their belongings. As I look around at the small, shotgun-style houses, I wonder at how much protection she could have found there. The Klan must have known where they were.

That's what else I notice here in the Mississippi Delta. It's so flat that you can see for miles. No place to run, no place to hide. And between Yazoo City and Indianola,



only small hamlets amidst the fields.

Last year the Commission for Racial Justice released a report on the rampant environmental racism that we found in Convent, La., a little town along the Mississippi between Baton Rouge and New Orleans.

We entitled it From Plantations to Plants because it seemed to us that that area, which once was plantations where black people worked as slaves and then sharecroppers, now is being turned into plants, where black residents are being subjected

to a new kind of oppression.

The Mississippi Delta feels to me like plantations to plants all over again. But this time, instead of chemical plants its catfish farms. Driving on Highway 49, all I can see for miles in both directions are the pools where catfish are grown.

There are still some cotton fields and now some soy fields, but many of the old plantations have been converted to catfish farms. Processing plants have sprung up across the Delta to package and ship catfish around the country. Not one

is owned by an African-American. And even the plantations, which do still exist, plantations that were built off of free labor and nearly free labor for two hundred years, are still owned by white families. They are mostly rich white families, many of whom now live in Texas or Florida or somewhere far away.

We talk with a woman who has been trying to organize the workers in the catfish processing plants, which have grown astronomically over the past decade or so.

Before the unions, there were less than humane working conditions: few or no bathroom privileges for those working on the processing line and no bathroom doors in the women's room, little job security, low wages, no pension plan, segregated work places (few or no African-Americans working

in the office jobs and few or no European Americans working on the lines), and job safety issues on the line. With the unions, much of that has improved, but still no black workers in the offices and still no white workers on the lines. From plantations to plants.

The more things change, the more they remain the same. But the spirit of Fannie Lou Hamer lives in this woman and those who are standing with the poor and the workers in the Delta.

And then there are the schools in the Delta.

The city of Metcalfe is in a nearby county. It's a mostly African-American city, which has only been incorporated for 20 years.

Its mayor, Shirley Allen, is proud of their new sewer and water and gas lines and of the fact that they are now an Empowerment Zone and  
*(See Hamer, Page 15)*

## Carl Rowan's Commentary

### Hillary Clinton must shed victimization role to win

*Special to Sentinel-Voice*  
As I write this, Hillary Rodham Clinton is set to visit upstate New York and announce from retiring Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan's (D) home that she has officially formed an exploratory committee with the aim of running for senator



CARL ROWAN

from New York. The strategy for her right now is to "listen and learn." That's because she has virtually no support in upstate New York for a possible candidacy. All her support is in New York City.

"Listen and learn"?! How insulting is that to the people of New York! The first lady has NEVER lived here, NEVER worked here, and has no credentials to be senator from this state as a result. In fact, if the truth be known, she has no credentials to be a senator period!

Mrs. Clinton has even had the audacity to "play" senator from New York. Her husband was running a meeting on Medicare changes, which would directly affect New York State residents. These changes are adverse to New York. Mrs. Clinton sat at that table with various health-care advocates championing New York's cause. That takes incredible gall! She's not even elected and she's pretending to be senator.

While Democrats pooh-pooh the carpetbagger issue, I can assure you it is a very big deal in upstate New York. Heavily Republican, this part of the state has never supported the Clintons. They are suffering

from more than what's been described as "Clinton fatigue." It wouldn't be too much to say that they hate the Clintons and all they've stood for.

As for New York City itself, I hear from certain key Democrats that many of them are less than enamored of a Hillary candidacy. They are genuinely suffering from "Clinton fatigue." They feel that all those scandals should be laid to rest once and for all. Should Hilary run, those scandals will be right back out in the open, nipping at her heels.

As for her husband, he is said to have told her to feel free to "beat up on him" in order to win if that's what it takes. Wow! Finally, an honest assessment from a man who wouldn't know the truth if it rose up and bit him on his nethermost fleshiest parts!

As for the Republican front-runner, Rudy Giuliani, as the saying goes, "He hasn't yet begun to fight." Look for him to come out swinging big-time when the race really begins! Rudy has proven he can certainly brawl with the best of them. And lest Hillary try to hide behind her skirts, claiming she's being "picked on" because she's a woman, she'll really be sorry! Rudy will point out that she can't have it both ways. She's either a strong, independent woman who can man the trenches as well as any male, or she's a pouty feminine lightweight who can't take criticism. Take your pick, Hillary. You can only have one!

## Examining conditions of our economic disparity

*E. Louis Overstreet  
Special to Sentinel-Voice*

Why is there such a disparity in family income between African-Americans and Whites living in Las Vegas?

Data reported in *We the American...* Blacks, when compared to statistics reported by the Metropolitan Research Association reveals that the average annual family income for African-Americans is \$30,900 for Blacks versus \$39,900 for Whites.

This \$9,000 a year disparity is equivalent to the cost of sending a student to UNLV on an annual basis.

The answer to the disparity question is made all the more puzzling in that the education levels of adult Blacks and Whites living in Las Vegas are statistically the same.

Thus, the traditional answer as to why there exists an economic disparity, which is if you are better educated, you are better compensated, does not fit the conditions here in Las Vegas.

Unfortunately, it must be written that we are aiding and abetting the conditions that result in our economic disparity. The top ten reasons are the following:

- We do not register to vote.
- If we are registered, we do not bother to vote.

- When we vote, we often do not vote our economic interests.
- We have been "brainwashed" into believing that longtime residents and recent arrivals can not work together on issues.
- We engage in self-destructive behavior that allows us to be stereotyped in a manner that suggests we are less moral and not as law abiding as other ethnic and racial groups.
- We are more concerned with wanting people to love us, rather than behaving in ways that command respect.
- We do not patronize our own businesses.
- We think our history to be that of slavery, rather than to learn that we are the descendants of people who built civilizations thousands of years before Christ our savior was born.
- We hold the mistaken belief that all Whites are our enemies and that all Black folks are our friends.
- We don't understand that Black is not only our race, but also our present condition in America.

If we want to change our condition, we must change our thinking and behavior.

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