

Leadership

Fannie Lou Hamer, Angela Davis, and Michelle Obama

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We live in a world made of different countries, different cultures, and different ethnicities. All these differences can create situations that allow people to rise and leave a great legacy or sink below and leave a great lesson. The United States is unique in that it took all the unwanted from the different countries of the world and created a melting pot under one flag. With so many different people, from different walks of life living in one nation; it was a recipe that could create so of the best inspirations or the worst obstacles. Inspiration can be defined as the act of drawing in, or a divine influence or action on a person believed to qualify him or her to receive and communicate sacred revelation. This country was built from struggle. From these struggles great individuals were made. There are many people who I admire, and there are many people who have inspired me. The three women I have chosen to write about have each overcome major obstacles in their personal lives and have set an example that many can find no fault in following. Fannie Lou Hamer, Angela Davis, and Michelle Obama, to me, epitomize how we as women need to stand up and fight for our beliefs through motivation and education, without discrimination.

Fannie Lou Hamer was a prominent voice in the early civil and voting rights movements. Her hope was having these rights would allow for greater economic opportunities for African Americans [1]. Fannie Lou was born in Montgomery, Mississippi to sharecroppers Lou Ella and James Townsend [1]. During her time that she worked on a plantation owned by a fellow named B.D. Marlowe, she was also regulated as the timekeeper because she was the only one who could read and write [1]. This was a time in our nation's history, where those of African American descent were not treated as equals. There were many atrocities that occurred during this time, one of which Fannie Lou suffered through was forced sterilization. In 1961, Fannie Lou required surgery to remove a uterine tumor and was subject to a hysterectomy without her consent [1]. This was done to countless Black women to reduce the black population, dubbed a "Mississippi appendectomy" [1]. This violation of that she suffered would compel her to fight for the human rights of all [2]. The following summer Fannie Lou attended her first civil rights meeting and picked up the torch of the voting rights efforts for African American people [1]. In the 1960s, people had to pass what could be deemed and unfair literacy test before they could vote. Fannie was denied the right to vote due to this literacy test and was subsequently fired by Marlow, who still required that her husband, Perry Hamer, to stay until the harvest [1]. Fannie was successful at completing her voting registration in 1963 in Charleston, South Carolina along with other Black women, but that still did not stop her march for equality. She was arrested for sitting in whites-only bus station in Winona Mississippi, where she and several other women were severely beaten at the Winona jailhouse, leaving her with several lifelong injuries from a blood clot in her eye, kidney damage, and leg damage [1].



She cofounded the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party (MFDP), which challenged the efforts of the current Democratic party from blocking black participation [1]. In pursuit of justice, the MFDP went to the Democratic National Convention with hopes that they would be able to bring recognition to the current plight that African Americans were suffering through. Hamer was set to speak in a televised slot, but President Lyndon Johnson held

a televised press conference so she would get no airtime [1]. When she arrived at the witness chair she folded her hands and without notes proceeded to speak for 13 enthralling minutes on the injustices on people who wanted to vote [2]. President Johnson was terrified of the appeal she would make in 1964 before the Democratic National Committee's credentials panel on behalf of MFDP [2]. This was the same Lyndon B. Johnson who would later sign the landmark Civil Rights Act of 1964. Her speech that she gave was so inspiring that, television networks aired it later for viewers to see [1]. Fannie Lou always responded to injustice with justice. Due to the violence and intimidation tactics that she was subject to, she responded by launching a campaign for the U.S. Senate; a long shot at best. She empowered others by entering the electoral realm of politics [3]. She continued to push for social justice, and in 1964 Hamer along with Victoria Garand and Annie Devine (find something about them) became the first Black women to stand before the U.S. congress for the unsuccessful protest of the Mississippi house election of 1964.

Angela Davis was a political activist and author who emerged in the 1960's. She was a prominent leader associated with the Black Panther Party during the Civil Rights Movement [4]. She attended Brandeis University in Waltham, Massachusetts and further expanded her views on the world by taking frequent trips to France, Switzerland, and Finland [4]. Davis excelled as a student and thrived at Brandeis in what she would deem to be an "intellectual atmosphere" being one of just a handful of Black students on the campus [5]. During her undergraduate years, Davis learned of the 16th Street Baptist Church bombing, where four little girls were killed; girls that she had known in her youth. This marked a major turn in the Civil Rights Movement and spurred her resolve to pursue justice and equality [5]. She continued towards a master's degree at [San Diego] and rounded out her education with a doctorate from Humboldt University in East Berlin in philosophy [4]. During this time, the Black Panther Party began to emerge, and Davis knew that she wanted to be a part of that organization, wanting to make a change in the world that would be earthshaking [5]. Once she had completed her education, she later joined the teaching staff at the University of California Los Angeles and her popularity as professor of philosophy stemmed from her work to empower women and would ultimately put a bullseye on her back [4]. Angela Davis found herself in a position of having to defend herself against the FBI who considered her to be of great interest and placed her on the top ten of the FBI's Ten Most Wanted Fugitive List [4]. She was falsely accused of kidnapping and first-degree murder when a 17-year-old Jonathan Jackson used a weapon that she had purchased in a hostile situation [4]. She was not alone in her struggle. Across the nation, thousands of people rallied behind her declaration that, "before the court, before the people of this country that I am innocent of all charges which have been levelled against me by the state of California" [4]. By 1971 more than 200 local committees in the United States and 67 in foreign countries worked to free Angela Davis from jail. Davis was ultimately tried by an all-white jury and found not guilty as simply owning the guns used in a crime is not sufficient evidence for giving Davis the mastermind title of the plot [4].



In the time after her acquittal, Angela Davis authored many books on activism and picked up many crusades for the disenfranchised. Angela Davis also had two Vice Presidency runs in 1980 and 1984. A few years after her presidential runs was when she became more active in reform organizations. The organizations that Davis gravitated toward were those of prison reform. She joined many organizations for Black women such as Sisters Inside and Critical Resistance of which she helped found [5]. As a self-described prison abolitionist, she has played a major role in the push for criminal justice and other resistance to what she calls the “prison-industrial complex” [5]. Even though Davis was a member of the Black Panther Party, she has stated that she felt the group was paternalistic and sexist and expected the women to take a back seat and sit at the feet of the men [5]. Angela Davis was a powerful figure who supported those who could not support themselves. She fought battles and made a name for herself that resonates even today. She further set the standard for my next leader who inspires me to be great.



Michelle Obama was the First Lady of the United States from 2009-2017. She was an Ivy League graduate and was a successful lawyer before her husband took office. Like most First Ladies, Michelle supported many causes, such as advocating support for military families and encouraging healthy eating to help solve the epidemic of childhood obesity [6]. When asked to describe herself, she would be the first to say that to say that she is foremost, Malia and Sasha’s mom [7]. Michelle Obama and her family always valued education, and knew it was something one needed to succeed in life. Growing up in Chicago, Illinois, Michelle was raised in a modest household and was pushed to excel in school. It is no surprise that she skipped the second grade and was later chosen for a gifted-student program that allowed her to take advanced curriculum [6]. Her undergraduate years were spent at Princeton University, where she created reading programs for children. She majored in sociology with a minor in African American studies. She continued her studies at Harvard Law School and later joined Sidley Austin as a junior associate specializing in marketing and intellectual property [6].

In 1991, she left corporate law to pursue a career in public service. Her goal with this new pursuit was to fulfil a personal passion of serving the community. In 1993, she was named the executive director for the Chicago branch of Public Allies, a leadership-training program for young adults [6]. Once her husband decided to run for state senator, she proved to be a disciplined campaign aide which helped him secure his victory. The Obama’s ambitions lead them to the ultimate height of political power when Michelle’s husband ran for President of the United States and succeeded in 2007 to become the 44th President. Not one to hold back on her opinion, she was criticized for her candour on the campaign trail which proved to be an asset and helped deliver a win. Michelle became the first African American First Lady [6]. Once the Obama’s were in office, Michelle sought to pursue her own agendas which targeted childhood obesity. She spent her time planting vegetable gardens for local elementary schools to launch healthy eating campaign. She helped to expand the foundation Joining Forces to develop educational and employment opportunities for veterans’ and raise awareness about the difficulties plaguing military families [6]. Michelle Obama is a force to be reckoned with.

Scholars and journalists alike speak of the changing status of the former FLOTUS as a role model not just because she resided in the East wing of the White house but because she is an African American, a strong and unapologetically independent person, an activist, a spouse and a mother.

Fannie Lou was a pioneer before her time. She was not afraid to speak her mind and fight for herself. She rivaled the great Martin Luther King Jr. In her command of the audiences [2]. Angela Davis was a continuation of the greatness that was Fannie Lou Hamer. These women came to their own in a time where no woman had the same rights as men and made a name for themselves. Michelle Obama was a mother, a wife, a lawyer, and a writer. She can inspire young women everywhere to strive for their own success. We can look to all of these women see them for the role models that they were. They each strived for equality and self-efficacy amongst different races and different genders. These women have set a precedence for what we need to strive for not only as women but as human beings. I will try to live up to these women's heritage and try to always be considerate of others as they did to those of their time.

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