

Fannie Lou Hamer and the Right to Vote

By Camren Price-Mills

In the 1960s, we had many events that would lead to increasing protests and the civil rights movements, such as the Montgomery bus boycott in Alabama. Other protest movements include the fight for voting rights. One of those protests for equality was held in Mississippi by a woman named Fannie Lou Hamer. Ms. Hamer was a women's rights activist, and she believed in equal voting rights for all people, including for African Americans in the south. In 1964, Fannie Lou Hamer gave her speech "Address to the 1964 Democratic National Convention," which was so effective because of her incorporation of pathos, emotions, and imagery. Hamer describes and gives details to her experiences so the audience could see what she lived through trying to vote in the south. And the emotions that could be felt when by the audience showed how impactful these events were.

First, a form of pathos that is shown is the emotions that would have been felt when Fannie Lou Hamer describes her experience registering to "become a first-class citizen." When registering to vote, Hamer states that "we was met in Indianola by policemen, and they only allowed two of us to register at the time." This section shows that Hamer chose to write and discuss that there was no justice for equality. Justice was not welcomed within the state of Mississippi, there were only those who saw themselves above others. After the encounter with the highway police officers, Fannie Lou Hamer was told to go back to "Indianola where the bus driver was charged with driving the wrong color." The statement provided by Hamer describes an incident where she and others were seen as threats because they had different skin colors. This

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shows the tension and the influence segregation and slavery still had on the south, that even the bus driver was punished by police officers of the state for “driving the wrong color.” This was what Hamer was conveying when giving her statements of her incident, it was to show pathos. But this was not the only time that Hamer had to deal with the kind of treatment toward her and others of color.

Hamer then discusses a time when she traveled with ten other people to Missouri, where her group was arrested when they stopped at a restaurant to use the bathroom. Hamer uses her own experience to convey a form of emotions that are using pathos. “Four people that had gone in to use the restaurant were ordered out.” With this, we can see the use of the highwaymen or the police using force, since there are people of color entering a restaurant and being ordered to leave by officers who automatically believe they are up to no good. The arrest of four people in the group as described with a form of pathos. “I stepped off the bus to see what was happening and somebody screamed ‘get that one there’, and I went to get in the care when the man told me I was under arrest he kicked me.” Another form of pathos comes from this arrest experience that Hamer had, which describes how she was wrongfully arrested and the abuse that she was dealt by the man that arrested her. These two incidents show the build-up of pathos in Hamer’s speech so the audience can show a feeling of remorse for Hamer.

Hamer gives a description of what happened her after being imprison for trying to vote to connect with the readers. “After I was placed in the cell, I began to hear the sounds of licks and screams, I could hear the sounds of licks and horrible screams “ (Adress to 1964). Hamer describes a horrible experience, depicting to her audience that they were beaten and abused for trying vote just because of their skin color. But Hamer had her own experience to tell of being

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treated like the enemy. She was threatened and beaten to the point of exhaustion, and she received death threats from officers stating: “We’re going to make you wish you were dead.”

Hamer that night in the prison cell was treated like she was some sort of enemy to the state when she was ordered into another cell and beaten. “Orders from the State Highway Patrolmen for me to lay down, and I laid on my face while the first Negro began to beat me.” Hamer was beaten to the point where she was too tired to go on. Some of the people she came on that trip with were ordered to beat her. This was a form of the officers abusing their control over the prisoners. But the pain had to be barred by Hamer no matter who it was so that she would not show restraint to the officers. “The State Highway Patrolmen ordered the second Negro to beat me. I began to scream, and one white man got up and began to beat me in the head and to tell me to hush” (Address to 1964). Hamer’s description of her getting beat that night in the jail cell describes her experience to show pathos, giving the audience a clear description to get them on her side. This is proven by her describing the experience in the jail cell and how she was beaten for no reason.

In the end, Fannie Lou Hamer uses her speech “Address to the 1964 Democratic National Convention” to convey pathos to show emotional meaning to her audience. Hamer goes into detail about her experience on what she had to go through to vote, which lead her to unfair treatment that no person should have to go through to vote. In the speech, Hamer uses the strategy of pathos to deliver a speech so that the audience of the council could relate to her emotions and to convince them to take action to fight for equal voting rights.