



A TIMELINE OF THE WOMEN
WHO CHANGED AMERICA



February 2025 Her Story ENewsletter Presidential Medal of Freedom Recipients

In early January 2025, President Biden bestowed the Presidential Medal of Freedom on 19 individuals. In this newsletter, we profile two of these new Medalists – Fannie Lou Hamer (whose honor was posthumous) and Hillary Rodham Clinton, both of whom have been inducted into the National Women's Hall of Fame.



Civil rights and voting rights activist **Fannie Lou Hamer**, who died in 1977, was famous for saying “I am sick and tired of being sick and tired.” She was the twentieth and last child of sharecroppers, born into a poor family in the Mississippi Delta. Hamer started picking cotton when she was six years old. A hysterectomy, without her consent, so common on Black women in the Mississippi Delta to reduce the number of Black children born that it was called the “Mississippi appendectomy,” prevented her from having children.

In 1962, Hamer made a life-changing decision at the age of 45; she decided to register to vote. This action was not looked upon favorably in Mississippi, where Hamer was fired from her job. Her resolve stiffened, Hamer spent the rest of her life advocating for civil rights including working for the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee and helping to found the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party. In 1964, Hamer helped organize Freedom Summer, to bring in volunteers to assist with registering Black voters. She tried to run for the Mississippi House of Representatives in 1964 but was

prevented from being on the ballot. Her civil rights efforts only intensified as a result. In 1968, she became the first African American since Reconstruction and the first woman ever to be seated as an official Mississippi state delegate at the Democratic National Convention.



Hillary Rodham Clinton has been active in the political sphere for more than four decades. Her many roles include First Lady of Arkansas, First Lady of the United States, United States Senator from New York (the first female senator from that state), Secretary of State (the third woman to serve in that role), and the first female candidate from a major party to run for President of the United States. A graduate of the Yale Law School, Clinton met her future husband, former President Bill Clinton, during her time at Yale.

Clinton continued her legal career while her husband was Governor of Arkansas. After eight years in the White House as First Lady, she ran for Senator from New York and was elected in 2000. She was elected to a second term in 2006. In 2007, she began her run for President but in 2008, ended her campaign when Barack Obama became the presumptive candidate. After his election as President, Obama named her Secretary of State. Clinton served in that role from 2009 through 2013. She was the Democratic Party's candidate for President in 2016.

Fannie Lou Hamer and Hillary Rodham Clinton are among the more than 850 women profiled in our book *Her Story: A Timeline of the Women Who Changed America*. Women's accomplishments continue to inspire and encourage us. Continue to help us tell women's stories!

Charlotte Waisman and Jill Tietjen

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