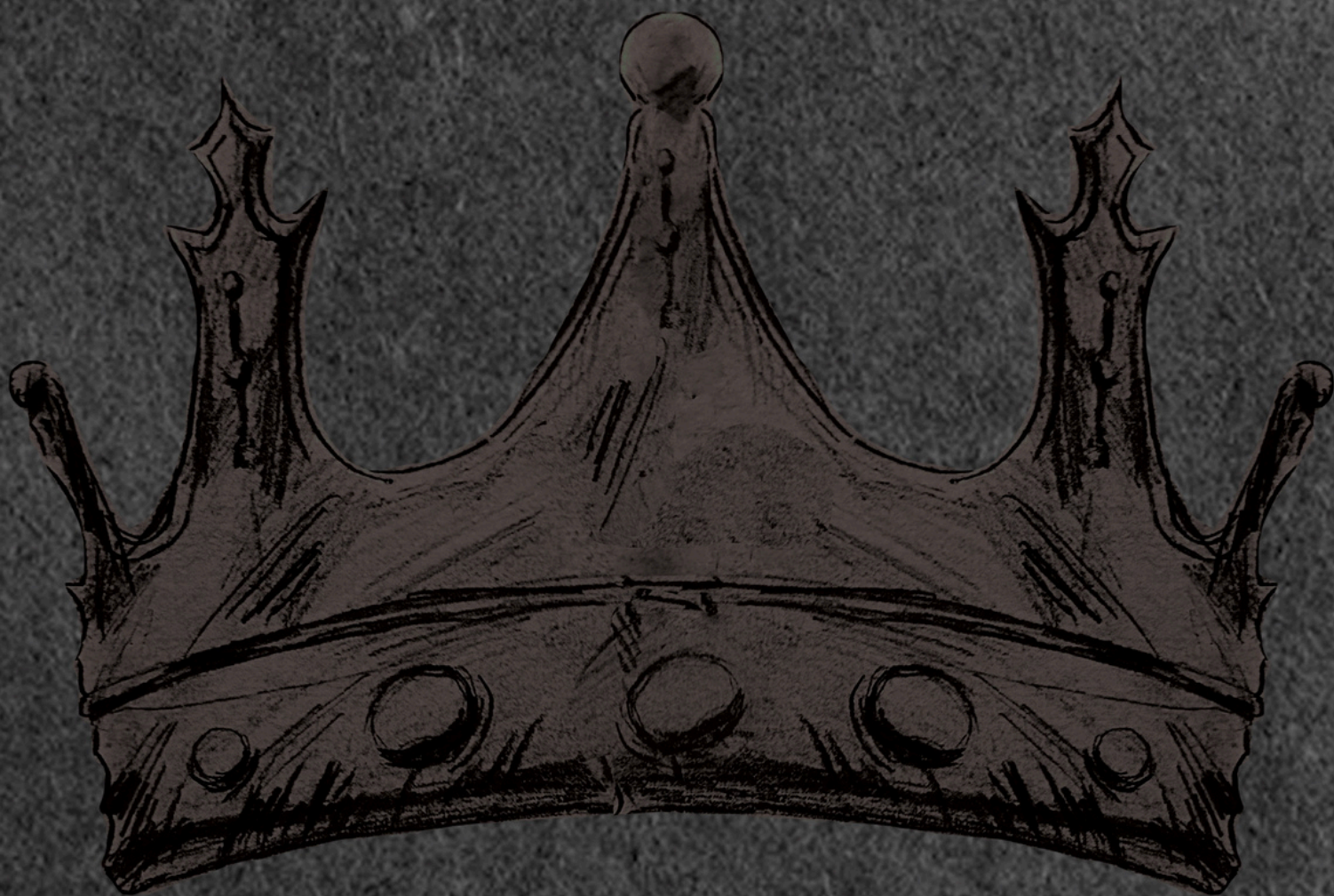






Ultima Ratio

bnsjournal

Ava Wilson

A leader whose grace exceeds her prestige and accomplishment. One who has committed herself to stewarding communities and operating in surrender.

Ultima Ratio

In the final argument of kings, the indisputable is disputed.

The Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party is amongst the most politically sophisticated organizations in world history; created to challenge the merits of an all-white Democratic Party. The design of the MFDP is almost incomprehensible given the hostility of 1960s America. Co-founder Bob Moses is simultaneously described in record as "nuts" and "fascinating."

The success of the MFDP rested on the leadership of a singing woman — Fannie Lou Hamer. Prior to the creation of the MFDP, she caught the attention of Bob Moses on a bus organized for the unprecedented effort of registering Black Americans to vote.

“So I'm sitting up front and there's this lady sitting right behind me who's turned around facing the back of the bus and when the bus pulls off, she starts singing and she never stops. It's one church song. It's like she knew every song that anybody had sung in a black church. What was actually happening was she was really driving away fear. The people were really immersed in the messages of the song and that was Mrs. Hamer. We got off and tried to leaflet. They arrested us.”

Fannie Lou Hamer wasn't just a singing leader; her influence accumulated into legitimate, democratically positioned power. Her authority was absolute as she remained unmoved by attempts on her life, arrests, and debilitating beatings. During her service as a Field Secretary for the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, she went on the road encouraging civic engagement from the entirety of Black Mississippi, eyeing white supremacy with a poker face.

Full-time organizers and volunteers created an entirely new but parallel political process — registering voters into the MFDP while following official procedure from the state Democratic Party. Support remained with the party at the national level, but was genuinely contested within the state, laying groundwork for accountability.

Fannie Lou Hamer, now vice chair of the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party, became the unwavering voice of accountability. For the ruling white aristocracy, she personified persistence in a way that genuinely provoked fear. What made her position more remarkable was that Hamer built it from behind the MFDP's earned institutional power. On August 22nd, 1964, she gave her legacy-defining testimony at the Democratic National Convention, a historic, nationally televised speech challenging the seating of the all-white segregationist Mississippi delegation.

With each word Hamer spoke, hegemony crumbled further. This was a woman acquainted with hell, a direct witness to humanity's iniquity, and she sat there unwavering, ready to lay claim to what could no longer be disputed, backed by the institutional power of the organization she helped build. Even in how she stated her own address, Hamer's demeanor was unshakable — fully aware, perhaps, that dismantling the establishment on national television would only deepen the retaliation already aimed at her. Targeted shootings and death threats had already marked her life; she answered them not with personal submission, but with a constitutional challenge.

"If the Freedom Democratic Party is not seated now, I question America. Is this America? The land of the free and the home of the brave, where we have to sleep — with our telephones off of the hook because our lives be threatened daily — because we want to live as decent human beings."

President Lyndon B. Johnson disrupted the live broadcast of Hamer's testimony with an impromptu White House press conference. This was America's final argument. Authority couldn't be challenged — it was methodically crafted. Testimony couldn't be refuted; reality was too sobering. The constitution itself had been held up to the face of politicians like a mirror.

The response was to shatter the mirror.

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A Conversation with Ava Wilson

You carry a lot of responsibilities quietly. Is that intentional?

I think it is simply how I move through the world. I have never felt the need for every responsibility or sacrifice to be visible. Some of the most important work happens behind the scenes, long before anyone sees the result. My faith has taught me that service is not about recognition; it is about stewardship. If I have been entrusted with a responsibility, my focus is on carrying it well rather than drawing attention to the fact that I am carrying it. I find a great deal of fulfillment in knowing that the work itself is making a difference.

When you're holding space for other people—what does that actually require of you that nobody sees?

It requires a tremendous amount of listening. It requires paying attention not only to what people are saying, but also to what they may be struggling to say. It requires patience, empathy, and a willingness to put aside your own perspective long enough to understand someone else's experience. There is also a great deal of responsibility in making sure people feel heard, respected, and valued. Often, the most important part of leadership is not speaking; it is creating an environment where others feel safe enough to speak for themselves.

Is there something you protect, something that stays yours regardless of what any role or title demands of you?

I protect my integrity. Every role I hold is temporary, but my character is something I carry with me everywhere I go. There will always be opportunities, expectations, and pressures, but I never want those things to define me more than my values do. I protect my relationships, my sense of self, and my commitment to treating people with dignity and respect. Those are the things that keep me grounded when everything else is changing.

How would you describe yourself to someone who had never met you, not your resume, just you?

I would describe myself as a creative blend of Ella Fitzgerald, Ella Baker, and Sade who loves theatre, justice and a good vibe. Give me a good SZA, Bruno Mars or Frank Sinatra record to inspire me. I am a bridge builder who is constantly navigating different worlds, emotions, and perspectives, and discerning moments and opportunities to make the world a more just space.

I value connection, laughter, storytelling, and the energy that comes from being around people I care about. I find meaning in both the big experiences and the small. I find joy in ordinary moments and believe that every human carries inestimable worth..

More than anything, I am someone who tries to live fully and intentionally, to stay open to joy, creativity, and growth, and to carry that sense of life into everything I do.

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