



# **The Senator and the Sharecropper: The Freedom Struggles of James O. Eastland and Fannie Lou Hamer**

*Chris Myers Asch*

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**The epic struggle for black equality in the twentieth century, told through the deeply intertwined life histories of the staunch segregationist and his sharecropper nemesis.**

Sunflower County, Mississippi, is a land of seeming contradictions. It boasts some of the world's richest soil, yet has produced widespread poverty that lingers to this day. It stood at the epicenter of the civil rights movement, yet still suffers from racial inequality. It has been on the forefront of globalization, yet continues to stagnate economically.

*The Senator and the Sharecropper* explores these paradoxes, telling the story of two larger-than-life personalities who epitomized the county's extremes: the senator, James O. Eastland, a wealthy white cotton planter who was one of the most powerful segregationists in the U.S. Senate, and the sharecropper, Fannie Lou Hamer, who grew up desperately poor just a few miles from the Eastland plantation and rose to become the spiritual leader of the Mississippi freedom struggle. Their intertwined histories-set against a backdrop of Sunflower County's rise and fall as a center of cotton agriculture-show how this isolated county weathered revolutionary changes in seemingly distant realms, from the global economy to the Cold War to national politics.

Although Sunflower County would be transformed during the tumultuous decades of the mid-twentieth century, it remained at century's end resiliently separate and unequal. Asch, who spent nearly a decade here as an educator, combines a scholar's attention to fact with an insider's love of the area to tell a maddening but compelling, discouraging yet inspirational story of change and continuity in a land few Americans understand.

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