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## **We Didn't Come For No Two Seats: The Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party and the 1964 Presidential Elections'**

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# We Didn't Come For No Two Seats: The Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party and the 1964 Presidential Elections

*Laura Visser-Maessen*

On July 22, 1964, President Lyndon B. Johnson lay wide awake. He was contemplating next month's Democratic National Convention (DNC) in Atlantic City, where delegations from all fifty states would nominate him as their candidate for the upcoming presidential elections. He wanted it to be a triumphant event. But a group of poor, illiterate, disenfranchised black Mississippians threatened this: they had gotten the wild idea of asking to be seated instead of the official, all-white Mississippi delegation, which was elected through the illegitimate exclusion of the state's black population. In doing so this group, the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party (MFDP), effectively asked the national Democratic Party to renege its decades-long cautious approach towards civil rights. Rejecting the 'Dixiecrats', the powerful pro-segregationist Southern wing within the Party, however, could cost Johnson the presidency. But indulging them was also dangerous because it would lose him vital Northern support. 'The only thing that can really screw us good,' the President realized, is 'that group of challengers from Mississippi.'<sup>1</sup>

How did a politically inexperienced, uneducated bunch of black 'country bumpkins', as MFDP-delegate Aaron Henry called themselves, manage to corner the most important man in the nation and thereby change electoral politics forever? The story of the MFDP helps to explain how social change comes about and the role that pressure groups can play in it. In civil rights movement historiography, social change has generally been treated as a top-down product of legislative breakthroughs accomplished through professional civil rights organizations and national leaders like Martin Luther King. More recent scholars, however, downplay the role of the latter. By playing up the importance of 'local people', they see social change predominantly as a bottom-up process of nationwide grassroots activism. As an organization spearheaded by grassroots leadership but facilitated by fulltime organizers, the MFDP accordingly complicates such explanations on the production of social change. Moreover, the MFDP's

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<sup>1</sup> M. R. Beschloss ed., *Taking Charge: The Johnson White House Tapes, 1963-1964* (New York 1997) 467-479, 510-511.

refusal to let the DNC – or Martin Luther King – dictate the way in which social change was realized by rejecting its offer of two seats demonstrates that it is possible for protest groups to play at the highest national level without sacrificing their grassroots character. Or, as MFDP-delegate Fannie Lou Hamer remarked, ‘We didn’t come all this way for no two seats when all of us is tired!’<sup>2</sup>

### Opening the Closed Society

The MFDP’s foundation reflected Mississippi’s abysmal civil rights record. Whereas other Southern state Democratic Parties at least had token black representation and claimed some kinship with its national organ, black participation in Mississippi politics was the lowest nationwide. Although blacks comprised 45% of the population, less than 5% were registered to vote due to whites’ widespread use of intimidation and trickery. To qualify to vote one had to answer 21 questions, including interpreting any of the state Constitution’s 285 sections. The white registrar chose which section and evaluated the interpretation. Not surprisingly, illiterate whites regularly passed while blacks, no matter how educated, nearly always failed. State law also required the printing of registrants’ names in local newspapers. This made them easy targets for terrorist groups like the Ku Klux Klan, but also for landlords or employers to respectively evict or fire them. Critics were forced to leave the state or were even murdered.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Archives Roosevelt Study Center, Archives Lyndon B. Johnson Papers (hereafter: RSC, LBJ Papers), Interview with Aaron Henry, September 12, 1970, Reel 2, Part 3, Files #00170-229; K. Mills, *This Little Light of Mine: The Life of Fannie Lou Hamer* (New York 1994) 5. For an overview of civil rights movement historiography, see S. K. Cha-Jua and C. Lang, ‘The “Long Movement” as Vampire: Temporal and Spatial Fallacies in Recent Black Freedom Studies’, *The Journal of African American History* 92.2 (1997) 265-288.

<sup>3</sup> J. Dittmer, *Local People: The Struggle for Civil Rights in Mississippi* (Jackson and London 1986) 59, 70-73, 101, 105; RSC, Archive Records of the Department of Justice’s Civil Rights Division, 1958-1973, Records B. Marshall and W. Wilson White, ‘Mississippi’ and ‘Mississippi Code’, Reel 3, Files #0233, and ‘Constitutional Law of Mississippi as Adopted February 29, 1956’, Reel 4, Files #0788; C. Payne, *I’ve Got the Light of Freedom: The Organizing Tradition and the Mississippi Freedom Struggle* (Berkeley and Los Angeles 1997) 115; R. P. Moses and C. E. Cobb, Jr., *Radical Equations: Civil Rights from Mississippi to the Algebra Project* (Boston 2001) 46-47.

White rule in Mississippi was so oppressive – local history professor James Silver famously called the state a ‘closed society’ – that civil rights efforts had made little headway. Under the direction of black organizer Robert Parris Moses, the civil rights organization SNCC (Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee) renewed voter registration drives in 1961 on the premise that ordinary citizens, no matter how poor or uneducated, were capable of instigating change. When SNCC’s efforts met vicious resistance, national and local civil rights groups united in one statewide umbrella organization called COFO (Council of Federated Organizations). After three more years of hardship, COFO realized that the only way to better Mississippi blacks’ situation was reaching a national audience, which subsequently could induce the federal government to institute stronger civil rights legislation. With nearly one thousand white Northern volunteers, COFO therefore organized ‘Freedom Summer’, a massive, statewide program of civil rights activities. Local whites felt so threatened by this ‘invasion’ that they fortified their opposition. The FBI documented that COFO suffered 1,000 arrests, 35 shootings, and eight beatings throughout the summer; COFO reported many more. Aided by local policemen the White Knights, a division of the Ku Klux Klan, brutally murdered COFO-workers James Chaney and Michael Schwerner, and volunteer Andrew Goodman. Because Schwerner and Goodman were white, the murders dominated national and even world headlines for two months. This put additional pressure on President Johnson and the Democratic Party to do something about civil rights.<sup>4</sup>

Because 1964 was an election year, COFO reasoned that mounting a political challenge as part of the Freedom Summer program would be its best chance of gaining the federal government’s attention. Or, as Moses

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<sup>4</sup> See J. W. Silver, *Mississippi: The Closed Society* (San Diego and New York 1964); Moses and Cobb, *Radical Equations*, 33; A. Henry and C. Curry, *Aaron Henry: The Fire Ever Burning* (Jackson 2000) 108-109, 115; E. Stoper, *The Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee: The Growth of Radicalism in a Civil Rights Organization* (Brooklyn 1989) 61; Dittmer, *Local People*, 118-119; RSC, Archives Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee Papers, 1959-1972 (hereafter: SNCC Papers), Files Executive Secretary James Forman, Report ‘Mississippi: Structure of the Movement, Present Operations, and Prospectus for this summer’, no date, File #0048; S. Cagin and P. Dray, *We Are Not Afraid: The Story of Goodman, Schwerner, and Chaney, and the Civil Rights Campaign for Mississippi* (New York 2006) 1-46, 278-301; K. O’Reilly, *Racial Matters: The FBI’s Secret File on Black America, 1960-1972* (New York 1989) 160, 166-167.

later reflected, it was ‘our one chance of attacking the state where they were the weakest, and their weakest point politically was at the [DNC].’ They therefore founded the MFDP on April 26. The idea of the MFDP was as simple as it was genius. The regular state Democratic Party, which ruled the state dictatorially, held precinct, county, district, and state elections throughout the summer to choose its delegates for the DNC. Mississippi blacks attempted to vote in these elections, but if excluded, Party bylaws allowed them to duplicate the regular Party’s machinery and hold their own elections to choose DNC delegates. Because their elections would be open to everyone of voting age regardless of race, literacy level, or other qualifications, they could then go to the DNC and claim that their delegates truly represented the state’s population, and thus that the seats of the Mississippi section (and the voting power that came along with them) legitimately belonged to them. Apart from demanding a chance to be included in the state and national democratic process, the MFDP wanted to use their gathered evidence of exclusion by the regular Mississippi Democrats to strengthen the movement’s demands for stronger voter legislation, induce federal lawsuits to nullify state election results, and curtail racial harassment. The MFDP’s seating challenge was thus a one-time, nationally-oriented enterprise, but the party itself was founded as a lasting instrument for grassroots empowerment. It was designed, its organizers documented, to be a racially integrated, statewide ‘people’s organization’ whose leadership was derived from ‘the people’ and was ‘responsible at all times for all its decision[s] to its people.’<sup>5</sup>

Moses and other COFO-workers gathered financial and political support for Freedom Summer and the MFDP from the five largest national civil rights organizations (SNCC, Roy Wilkins’ NAACP, Martin Luther King’s SCLC, James Farmer’s CORE and Whitney Young’s Urban League). They also gained the backing of Bayard Rustin, a brilliant black organizer with a mass of experience – he was a mentor to Martin Luther King and helped organize the March on Washington – and that of Allard Lowenstein, a charismatic white activist with strong ties to northern white students. Even more impressive was the support they secured from Democratic Party

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<sup>5</sup> C. Field and M. Mulford (directors), *Freedom on My Mind*. Clarity Educational Productions, Inc., USA. Release Date: 22 June 1994; Archives Wisconsin Historical Society (hereafter: WHS), Mendy Samstein Papers, Untitled COFO-document on MFDP, no date (likely Fall 1964) Folder 1; W. C. Hogan, *Many Minds, One Heart: SNCC’s Dream For a New America* (Chapel Hill 2007) 176-177.

heavyweights such as Joseph Rauh, who worked as a lawyer for Walter Reuther's United Auto Workers (UAW), then the most powerful union in America. Rauh also belonged to the Credentials Committee, the body that would be deciding the Challenge's outcome. Rauh's presence during these preliminary stages proved vital. 'Without [his] technical guidance,' Henry acknowledged, 'we probably would have been completely overwhelmed.' The MFDP also opened an office under black organizer Ella Baker's direction in Washington. She discussed plans with A. Philip Randolph, Adam Clayton Powell, and other labor, civil rights, and political leaders. Office workers lobbied delegates nationwide to get their states to pass resolutions supporting the MFDP. Subsequently, MFDP-historian Vanessa Davis wrote, 'the Johnson administration (...) began to take the challenge seriously.'<sup>6</sup>

The MFDP's national strategy alongside its grassroots approach accordingly complicates explanations on the production of social change. Henry for instance stated that if one believed that the MFDP could just be 'let in' at Atlantic City 'you ain't with it. It took Whitney Young, Roy Wilkins[,] Martin Luther King [and] the power of this nation to open that door.' Simultaneously he validated grassroots leadership by denying that outsiders brought the idea 'to Mississippi (...) What they found was a discussion of it when they got here [so] let nobody ever feel that the

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<sup>6</sup> SNCC Papers, Files Appendix A: MFDP Papers, Letters Bob Moses to Joseph Rauh, May 1, 1964, File #0799 and to Bill Dodd, Robert Spike, Dean Robb, Larry Landry, Roy Reuther, Mildred Jeffrey, April 30, 1964, Files #0796-0798; Archives Library of Congress (hereafter: LC), James Forman Papers, Memo 'Re: Plans for Action at National Democratic Convention', January 16, 1964, memo 'Preliminary Notes on Primary Elections and Democratic Party Convention', January 5, 1964, Box 1; T. Branch, *Pillar of Fire: America in the King-Years, 1963-65* (New York 1998) 412-413; Archives University of North Carolina, Taylor Branch Papers (hereafter UNC, TB Papers), Interviews Taylor Branch with Robert Parris Moses, August 11, 1983, and February 15, 1991, Box 149, and Anne Romaine Papers (hereafter: UNC, AR Papers), interviews Anne Romaine with Robert Parris Moses, September 1966/November 14, 1987, with Ella Baker, March 25, 1967, Joseph Rauh, June 16, 1967, and Walter Tillow, September 4, 1967; WHS, William Heath Papers (hereafter: WH Papers), Letter Bob Moses to Allard Lowenstein, no date (likely February 1964), Envelope 11; B. Ransby, *Ella Baker & The Black Freedom Movement: A Radical Democratic Vision* (Chapel Hill and London 2003) 332-333, 336-356; Cagin and Dray, *We Are Not Afraid*, 403-405; V. L. Davis, *'Sisters and Brothers All': The Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party and the Struggle for Political Equality* (Dissertation, Vanderbilt University 1996) 80-81, 91; Henry and Curry, *Aaron Henry*, 166, 187.

[MFDP] was an idea imposed upon us – it was us!<sup>7</sup> Moreover, the efforts of (black) Mississippians themselves prompted any outsider's involvement, because they literally risked their lives for its realization. Attending the regular Party elections was so dangerous that locals in several counties refused altogether. In most only a handful tried, although generally futile: despite state law three-quarters of Mississippi's 1,884 precincts held no elections (or whites lied about time and location), in six blacks were excluded, and in the rest generally barred from voting. The few blacks who were admitted to the Regulars' county conventions were similarly excluded there. None were elected to their state convention.<sup>7</sup>

The MFDP now proceeded with its own elections, but only 40 out of Mississippi's 82 counties held them due to white harassment including (false) arrests, beatings, and burnings of meeting places. Elections that were held meticulously followed Party rules, but, inspired by SNCC's ideal of grassroots democracy, discussions lasted until everyone understood the issues to be voted on. The MFDP was an unprecedented experiment in bottom-up leadership in another aspect too. Its composition reflected class conditions in the black community: barely a fifth of its members consisted of the traditional middle-class leadership of ministers, teachers, or businessmen; the rest represented the vast majority of sharecroppers, maids, farmers, and other blue-collar workers. Since decision-making was based upon SNCC's example of consensus – which itself owed much to the Quaker model – sharecroppers had the same powers as the professionals. MFDP-meetings accordingly represented 'a politics unmatched anywhere else in the United States.' Despite participants' inexperience, one observer reported, '[w]ithin minutes they (...) had elected a chairman, secretary, [and] delegates (...) [It was] indicative of the innate political nature of all men.'<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> RSC, LBJ Papers, Interview with Aaron Henry; Hogan, *Many Minds, One Heart*, 178; Moses and Cobb, *Radical Equations*, 20; Davis, 'Sisters and Brothers All', 5, 83-84, 88; Henry and Curry, *Aaron Henry*, 166-167; Branch, *Pillar of Fire*, 296-297; Archives Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture (hereafter: SCRBC), Roberta Yancy Civil Rights Collection, 'Brief submitted by the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party for the Consideration of Credentials Subcommittee of the Democratic National Committee, Credentials Committee of the Democratic National Convention, Delegates to the Democratic National Convention', by Joseph L. Rauh, Box 2; M. E. King, *Freedom Song: A Personal Story of the 1960s Civil Rights Movement* (New York 1987) 338-339.

<sup>8</sup> Ibidem; WHS, WH Papers, Report on MFDP Precinct Meetings June 16, 1964, Envelope 8; Hogan, *Many Minds, One Heart*, 281; Davis, 'Sisters and Brothers All', 87;

Meetings were not successful everywhere, however. Especially in rural areas only few showed up. Integrating meetings to demonstrate the MFDP was an open party was even trickier to realize, because canvassing in white areas meant risking to get shot. Some had difficulty grasping proceedings or the MFDP's significance. 'One man,' one witness commented, 'said flatly that he didn't understand what the purpose of the meeting was.' Fulltime COFO-workers countered such impediments by addressing meetings themselves and distributing memoranda citing the chair's and other officials' responsibilities and instructions on how to formulate resolutions and conduct nominations.<sup>9</sup>

During their August 6 state convention 800 MFDP-representatives elected a 64-headed delegation to the DNC. Black pharmacist Aaron Henry and black sharecropper Fannie Lou Hamer were elected chair and vice chair of the DNC delegation, and black SNCC-worker Lawrence Guyot overall party chairman. Their platform pledged loyalty to the national Party – in contrast to the regular delegation which, disgusted by the 1964 Civil Rights Act's passage, threatened to oppose President Johnson's in the November elections. 'Man, this is the stuff democracy is made of', one observer recorded excited, 'it was a demonstration that the people of Mississippi want to be let into America.' Rauh outlined the '11 and 8'-strategy the MFDP would follow in Atlantic City: First they would present their case to the Credentials Committee. If it refused them, they could request a roll-call

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E. S. Martinez ed., *Letters from Mississippi: Personal Reports from Civil Rights Volunteers of the 1964 Freedom Summer* (Brooklyn 2002) 247-248; SNCC Papers, Files Executive Secretary James Forman, Minutes 'Lafayette County Convention of Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party', July 31, 1964, File #1072.

<sup>9</sup> Dittmer, *Local People*, 280; M. A. Rothschild, *Northern Volunteers and the Southern Freedom Summers', 1964-1965: a social history* (Dissertation, University of Washington 1974) 84-85; Martinez, *Letters from Mississippi*, 252-254; SNCC Papers, State Project Files, Files MFDP Papers, and Files Research Department, Memoranda 'The Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party', no date, Files #0114-0115, 'What To Do At A FDP Precinct Meeting' and 'What To Do At A FDP County Convention', no date, File #0276, 'Convention Challenge', File #1293, 'Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party,' no date, File #1029, and pamphlets outlining MFDP and challenge structure, no date, File #0698; WHS, COFO Records Panola County, Memo to 'All Project Staff from Stokely, Re: Second District Convention', no date, Memo 'to Staff and Summer Volunteers Re: Precinct and County Meetings for Freedom Democratic Party', no date, Memo 'Parliamentary Procedures and Rules of Order for FDP Precinct Meetings', no date, Folder 14.

**Democratic National Convention**

The Democratic National Convention is a very big meeting in August.

It is a very important meeting because people in the Democratic Party choose the person they want to run for President of the United States.

People in the Democratic Party from all over the country come together to talk.

Mississippi sends a group of people to this national meeting.

This summer we are going to send a Freedom group to the national meeting.

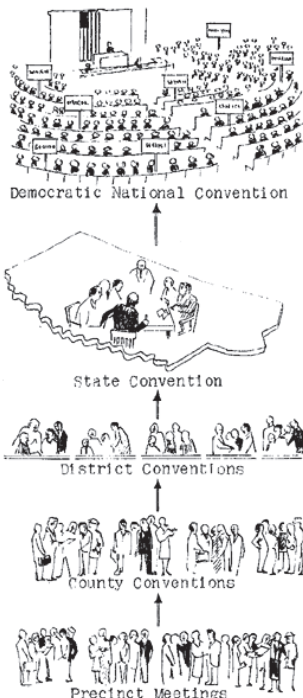
In order to choose the people that we want to go to the National meeting we will have to have four kinds of meetings here in Mississippi first.

We will have: **PRECINCT MEETINGS**

**How many?** As many precinct meetings as we can have—all over the state.

**Who can come?** Everyone who is registered on the Freedom Registration books.

**What will they do?** They will choose people to go to the county meetings.



We will have: **COUNTY MEETINGS**

**How many?** There will be 82 county meetings—one in each county in the state.

**Who can come?** The people who we picked at the precinct meeting.

**What will they do?** They will choose people to go to the district and state meetings

We will have: **DISTRICT MEETINGS**

**How many?** There will be five district meetings—one in each district in the state.

**Who can come?** The people who were picked at the county meetings.

**What will they do?** They will choose some people to go to the national meeting.

We will have: **A STATE MEETING**

**How many?** There will be one state meeting.

**Who can come?** The same people who went to the district meetings.

**What will they do?** They will all get together and choose more people to go to the national meeting.

Fig. 1: Pamphlet explaining the MFDP in simplistic terms (Source: <http://www.educationanddemocracy.org>)

– if supported by eleven of the Committee’s 108 members and eight state delegations – which meant that all fifty state delegations were forced to vote on the issue. Several already pledged support. Subsequently most participants, Moses recalled, began to believe that ‘the [national] party would embrace them.’<sup>10</sup>

<sup>10</sup> Davis, *Sisters and Brothers All*, 88-89; SCRBC, Iris Greenberg Freedom Summer Collection, Documents ‘Platform and Principles MFDP’ and ‘Loyalty Resolution’, no dates; King, *Freedom Song*, 341; Hogan, *Many Minds, One Heart*, 181; Dittmer, *Local People*, 281-283; WHS, COFO Records Panola County, Memo to ‘All Project Staff from Stokely, Re: Second District Convention’, no date, Folder 14; RSC, SNCC Papers, Files MFDP Papers, ‘Platform and Principles of the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party’, no date, Files #0983-0984; Moses and Cobb, *Radical Equations*, 78; C. Carson ed., *The Student Voice 1960-1965: Periodical of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee* (Westport and London 1990) 183, 186; UNC, AR

## Catch-22

State and national politicians' reactions demonstrated that they instantly recognized the MFDP as powerful despite its inexperience. The regular Mississippi Democrats<sup>11</sup> vigorously crossed its efforts, which paradoxically strengthened the MFDP's case. Guyot was falsely arrested<sup>12</sup> and Secretary of State Herbert Heber refused to register the MFDP. The State Attorney General filed injunctions prohibiting it from using the name of Freedom Democratic Party and MFDP-leaders from acting as its representatives. At their state convention the Regulars adopted Governor Paul Johnson's plea to 'refrain from taking any position regarding support of presidential and vice-presidential candidates' until the DNC rejected the MFDP. Most Regulars openly supported the President's conservative Republican opponent, Barry Goldwater.<sup>13</sup> The governors of Alabama, Arkansas, Louisiana, and Florida likewise threatened to boycott the DNC if it seated the MFDP.<sup>14</sup>

Meanwhile nine northern states (California, Michigan, Wisconsin, Colorado, Massachusetts, Minnesota, Oregon, New York, and Washington)

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Papers, Interview Anne Romaine with Joseph Rauh, June 16, 1967; Archive Washington University Libraries, Henry Hampton Collection (hereafter WUL, HHC), Interview with Robert Moses, May 19, 1986, conducted by Blackside, Inc. for *Eyes on the Prize: America's Civil Rights Years (1954-1965)*.

<sup>11</sup> From here on the regular, all-white Mississippi delegation will simply be referred to as 'the Regulars'.

<sup>12</sup> Not only was Guyot imprisoned for old, trumped-up voter registration charges, he was deliberately detained until the DNC was over so Guyot could not exercise any influence in Atlantic City.

<sup>13</sup> After the DNC the Regulars endorsed Goldwater officially, feeling that 'Mississippi's debt to the national Democratic Party is now paid in full.' See: Davis, *Sisters and Brothers All*, 109.

<sup>14</sup> Davis, *Sisters and Brothers All*, 89-90, 93-94; SCRBC, Iris Greenberg Freedom Summer Collection, Letter Annie Devine and Ed King to Herbert Heber, July 20, 1964; WHS, COFO Records Panola County, Memorandum to Officers and Members of the MFDP 'Re: Freedom Democratic Party injunction', no date, Folder 15; RSC, SNCC Papers, Files MFDP Papers, Documents 'Platform and Principles of the Mississippi State Democratic Party', June 30, 1960, and 'Mississippi State Democratic Party', 'Address by Governor Paul B. Johnson to State Democratic Convention', and 'Resolution[s]', July 28, 1964, Files #1125-1133; C. Marsh, *God's Long Summer: Stories of Faith and Civil Rights* (New Jersey 1997); Carson, *The Student Voice*, 179, 182, 187, 190.

and the District of Columbia ardently supported the MFDP. Their reasons, however, varied. The Michigan and New York delegations, for instance, emphasized that the DNC ‘should consist only of delegates devoted to the principles and objectives of the Party’, whereas the Minnesota and Wisconsin delegations stressed the ‘opportunity (...) to demonstrate [the Party’s] devotion to justice and equal rights.’ Yet memoranda from the DNC’s general counsel, Harold Leventhal, show that overall the Party was more concerned with the Regulars’ disloyalty than with discrimination, because, he asked, ‘what Southern delegation isn’t truly subject to the same charge?’<sup>15</sup>

The MFDP nonetheless directly influenced the Democratic Party’s leadership. For example, the administration was preoccupied with the MFDP well before August. In July Leventhal wrote Credentials Committee chair David Lawrence to offer the MFDP ‘fine spectator seats’ as honored guests. As the MFDP’s support grew, however, he realized the Party was in a regular Catch-22 that made a full rejection impossible: ‘The contestants – while weak on their own credentials – make a case against the Regular Democrats that will seem strong and just in many quarters.’ He therefore advocated an ‘intermediate solution’ like ‘splitting the delegation on a lopsided basis’ and a promise of future reform. But President Johnson had meanwhile decided not to seat the MFDP because he feared the southern walk-out. He promised Hubert Humphrey the vice-presidency if he could prevent it and pressured moderate civil rights allies like NAACP-director Roy Wilkins and UAW-president Walter Reuther to help him. He also ordered the FBI to infiltrate MFDP-meetings and wiretap King, Rustin, SNCC, and the MFDP. He even contemplated renouncing his nomination, because he did not ‘want to have to *fight* to carry Texas’, his pro-segregationist home state. Although it is doubtful whether he was serious, the MFDP had evidently penetrated his conscience – to the extent of obsession. Simultaneously he also sympathized with its cause. As he privately stated in August: the Regulars ‘oughtn’t to be seated. [They] wouldn’t let those nigras vote. And that’s not right.’ The MFDP’s effect on politics was thus immediate *and* long-term: it helped officials like Johnson in their determination to do something about civil rights – even if it had to

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<sup>15</sup> Carson, ‘*The Student Voice*’, 187, 190; WHS, COFO Records Panola County, Transcript ‘State Democratic Resolutions in Support of the FDP’ by Michigan, Wisconsin, Minnesota, Massachusetts, Oregon, New York, California, no date, Folder 15; Dittmer, *Local People*, 290; Davis, *Sisters and Brothers All*, 92-93.

wait until after the presidential elections due to 'politics'. As he told Reuther on August 9, 'If they give us four years, I'll guarantee the [MFDP] (...) will be seated four years from now.' On August 25 he repeated this commitment: 'We're hearing 'em...We passed a law back there in '57 and said it was the first time in eighty-five years that everyone was going to have a chance to vote (...) And we're going to say it again (...) in '64.'<sup>16</sup>

### **Showdown in Atlantic City**

Ignorant of the President's machinations against them, the MFDP arrived confidently in Atlantic City. The reception of their Credentials Committee presentation on Saturday, August 22, encouraged their optimism. Joseph Rauh summarized their arguments: the MFDP's loyalty to the national party's slate, its meticulous following of party rules, and the Regulars' denunciation of both. Several Mississippians testified of the harassment they had suffered in their quest for the vote. Fannie Lou Hamer's testimony was so heart-wrenching that President Johnson ordered a press conference in its middle to get her off the air. T.V. networks, however, cunningly replayed her speech at prime time, after which 416 support telegrams arrived at the White House. Outsiders like Martin Luther King also played on the Committee members' emotions, reminding them of 'the moral health of this party and this nation.' The MFDP's moral plea proved highly effective, especially against the Regulars' hollow rebuttal: they denied discrimination and asked not to seat this 'group of dissatisfied, power-hungry soreheads.' Consequently, 'no human being confronted with the truth or our testimony could remain indifferent,' one SNCC-worker reported, 'Many tears fell.' After Rauh spoke, *The New Republic* observed, 'even the reporters rose and

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<sup>16</sup> WHS, WH Papers, Letters Harold Leventhal to David Lawrence, August 5, 1964, and to John Bailey and David Lawrence, August 17, 1964; Davis, 'Sisters and Brothers All', 92-93; Transcript calls Lyndon B. Johnson to James Rowe, July 23, 1964, to Hubert Humphrey, May 23, 1964, and August 14, 1964, to Cartha DeLoach, August 15, 1964, to Roy Wilkins, August 15, 1964, to Hubert Humphrey and Walter Reuther, August 25, 1964, and to Walter Jenkins, August 25, 1964. See: Beschloss, *Taking Charge*, 353-355, 467-469, 485, 510-511, 515-518, 523-527, 531-535; Dittmer, *Local People*, 286, 290-293; O'Reilly, *Racial Matters*, 186-190.

applauded.<sup>17</sup> Credentials Committee chair David Lawrence then postponed a decision until Sunday.<sup>17</sup>



Fig. 2: Testimony Fannie Lou Hamer during the MFDP's presentation before the Credentials Committee. (Source: <http://americanradioworks.publicradio.org>)

The MFDP clearly won this round. The Credentials Committee therefore offered it seats as 'honored guests.' The MFDP rejected this, so the Committee again postponed until Monday. The MFDP optimistically continued lobbying, but nonetheless discussed potential compromises. It approved of one that Oregon Congressman Edith Green proposed: the proportional seating of all in both Mississippi delegations who pledged alliance to the national party. This was sound pragmatic politics, indicating

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<sup>17</sup> Davis, *Sisters and Brothers All*, 94-97; UNC AR Papers, Interview Anne Romaine with Joseph Rauh, June 16, 1967; Dittmer, *Local People*, 288-289; LC, Joseph Rauh Papers, Transcript 'Partial Proceedings of the Democratic National Convention 1964 Credentials Committee', August 22, 1964, Container 29; RSC, Records of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, 1954-1970, Transcript 'Statement Before the Credentials Committee', by Martin Luther King, August 22, 1964, Reel 20, Part 1, Files #00254-257; Hogan, *Many Minds, One Heart*, 190; WHS, WH Papers, C. Sherrod, 'Mississippi at Atlantic City', *The Grain of Salt*, October 12, 1964, Envelope; M. Kempton, 'Conscience of a Convention', *The New Republic*, September 5, 1964, Envelope 4.

that the MFDP was not naive. The MFDP actually expected the seating of both since this had been customary in the past, like the 1944 DNC which seated two competing Texas delegations. In one Lyndon Johnson himself had been a delegate.<sup>18</sup>

Although the MFDP's top strategists determined many of its moves, they always consulted its members. Moses mediated between them and national party representatives at high-level political meetings. This was necessary, Rauh explained, because even though 'you couldn't do better than [utilizing these Mississippi] people as their own advocates' they 'hadn't been going around the country' like Moses. But Moses insisted that the rest of the MFDP-delegates should be incorporated in such meetings because they could only reach consensus on a seating decision if all – as in their meetings at home – were equally privileged to information. He considered the convention 'a huge classroom' in which Mississippi blacks could '[learn] the democratic process.' After all, '[t]hey were there[,] had nothing else to do, and they could all sit, while we all talked.' Moses spent Sunday explaining the different compromises to them because most 'couldn't follow all the shifts in strategy.' He even declined to leave an MFDP-rally where he would speak to attend a top-level meeting in King's suite. Moses sent Hamer, Henry, and three other Mississippi blacks instead, who likewise insisted that any other interested MFDP-delegates could listen from the hall through an open door.<sup>19</sup>

Many national black leaders, however, felt that politics was best left to the professional politicians, whereas Moses believed that despite the MFDP members' lack of education they were perfectly capable of understanding 'the relationship of the politics they were trying to challenge to the life they wanted to lead.' Or, as one MFDP-delegate said, 'we was

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<sup>18</sup> WHS, Howard Zinn Papers (hereafter: HZ Papers), 'Notes on the Democratic National Convention, Atlantic City, August 1964' by Arthur I. Waskow, Folder 23; Dittmer, *Local People*, 289, 293; Archive Howard University, Ralph J. Bunche Collection, Interview Katherine Shannon with Joseph Rauh, August 28, 1967; T. Gitlin, *The Sixties: Years of Hope, Days of Rage* (New York 1987) 156.

<sup>19</sup> UNC, AR Papers, Interviews Anne Romaine with Joseph Rauh, June 16, 1967, and with Mendy Samstein, September 4, 1966; Interview Clayborne Carson with Robert Parris Moses, March 29-30, 1982; Hogan, *Many Minds, One Heart*, 189-190; C. K. Lee, *For Freedom's Sake: The Life of Fannie Lou Hamer* (Chicago 2000) 90; Transcript calls Lyndon B. Johnson to Roy Wilkins, August 15, 1964, to Hubert Humphrey, August 14, 1964, Walter Reuther, August 9, 1964. See: Beschloss, *Taking Charge*, 510-511, 515-518.

ignorant [but] not stupid.’ But Wilkins told MFDP-members that he had ‘been in the business over twenty years [so] why don’t you pack up and go home?’ In a meeting that deliberately excluded the MFDP, the conservative black representatives of Northern delegations also told SNCC-workers they believed the MFDP should do what President Johnson wanted. One of them even tricked Moses into giving up a list of the Credential Committee members who supported the MFDP. Subsequently all received phone calls from presidential aides pressuring them to withdraw their support or they would lose benefits like loans or job offers.<sup>20</sup>

The white liberal establishment viewed the MFDP similarly. Humphrey and Reuther privately characterized the MFDP as ‘emotionally [unstable]’, but were open to its ‘more reasonable’ middle-class representatives, like Henry. The Democratic machine’s ‘real resentment [was] not against the exclusion of Paul Johnson’s crowd’, Rauh accordingly concluded, but ‘against the inclusion of our crowd.’ This interpretation was reinforced on Monday when Humphrey convened with several Credentials Committee members, along with King, Moses, Henry, Hamer, and white Mississippi minister Ed King. In tears he explained his vice-presidency was at risk. Hamer, crying as well, shamed him by asking if his ‘position [was] more important...than four hundred thousand black people’s lives?’ She left in disgust, and was deliberately excluded from further meetings. Humphrey later admitted that the President had said he did not want ‘that illiterate woman’ speaking before the DNC. The Democratic politicians preferred dealing with the Harvard-educated Moses (Humphrey patronizingly believed that anything Moses told ‘those people they’re bound to do’) and Martin Luther King. Edith Green, who had also left angry, announced they still had enough support on the Credentials Committee to get a minority report asking for a roll call, although their number had now dropped considerably. David Lawrence then again postponed a decision until Tuesday.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Dittmer, *Local People*, 289-290, 295-296; E. Burner, *And Gently He Shall Lead Them: Robert Parris Moses and Civil Rights in Mississippi* (New York and London 1994) 186; Sherrod, ‘Mississippi at Atlantic City’; Hogan, *Many Minds, One Heart*, 192-194; Moses and Cobb, *Radical Equations*, 82-83; Archive University of Southern Mississippi (hereafter: USM), Interview Michael Garvey with Unita Blackwell, April 21 and May 12, 1977.

<sup>21</sup> UNC, AR Papers, Interviews Anne Romaine with Joseph Rauh, June 16, 1967, and Ed King, 1966; WHS, HZ Papers, Waskow, ‘Notes on the Democratic National Convention’; Dittmer, *Local People*, 293-298; Lee, *For Freedom’s Sake*, 93-96;

That day Humphrey met again with Henry, Moses, Martin Luther King, and Ed King. Also present were Bayard Rustin and Walter Reuther, whom President Johnson had asked to fly in to help stop the MFDP. Reuther compliantly threatened to fire Rauh and to cease his union's financial support for Martin Luther King. Humphrey then outlined a new compromise to the MFDP-delegates: the DNC would seat Henry and Ed King as at-large delegates, the rest of the MFDP as 'honored guests' (without voting powers) and all Regulars who signed a loyalty oath. It also promised to end voter discrimination during the elections of future state delegations. Joined by Reuther and Rustin he insisted that the MFDP-representatives accepted the compromise immediately, without consulting their colleagues. The tension in the room was palpable. When Humphrey incredibly impressed that 'the peace of the world depends on you and what you do now', Moses quietly retorted, '[W]e didn't come here to represent the people of the world. We are here to represent the voteless people of Mississippi.'<sup>22</sup>

The back-and-forth stopped when a senator aide came in, shouting 'It's over!' They rushed to the next room to watch a bulletin announcing that the Credentials Committee had unanimously accepted the compromise, while the people in Humphrey's suite still thought it was up for negotiation. Moses angrily left the room, shouting 'You tricked us!' at Humphrey and slamming the door in his face. Moses was also furious at Rauh, because the Committee's 'unanimous' acceptance implied that he had accepted too. He and the other MFDP-supporters in the Committee had actually voted 'no,' but Rauh still believed that fighting on was futile because their numbers had

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Branch, *Pillar of Fire*, 465-466, 468-471; Gitlin, *The Sixties*, 158; Burner, *And Gently He Shall Lead Them*, 178-183; UNC, TB Papers, Interview Taylor Branch with Robert Parris Moses, August 11, 1983, Box 149; Transcript calls Lyndon B. Johnson to Roy Wilkins, August 15, 1964, to Hubert Humphrey, August 14, 1964, Walter Reuther, August 9, 1964, to Walter Jenkins and Walter Reuther, August 24, 1964, and to Hubert Humphrey and Walter Reuther, August 25, 1964. See: Beschloss, *Taking Charge*, 510-511, 515-518, 523-527, 531-535.

<sup>22</sup> Ibidem; Henry and Curry, *Aaron Henry*, 189; WHS, Transcript conference 'Mississippi's 'Freedom Summer'. Reviewed: A Fifteen year perspective on progress in race relations, 1964-1979' (hereafter: MFSR) Folder 6; Moses and Cobb, *Radical Equations*, 81-82; WUL, HHC, Interview with *Joseph Rauh*, conducted by Blackside, Inc. on October 31, 1985, for *Eyes on the Prize: America's Civil Rights Years (1954-1965)*.

now dropped beneath the necessary eleven and because he regarded the compromise 'a great victory for civil rights.'<sup>23</sup>

The MFDP considered the compromise appalling. It was not even a real compromise but rather 'a decision made and told to the delegation.' Coupled with the administration's trickery, the MFDP explained, this represented the 'kind of dictation' Mississippi blacks were 'learning to stand up against.' The compromise was paternalistic in other ways too. First, the two seats with the national party deciding who occupied them – two middle-class men – was 'token recognition' and 'typical white man picking Black folks' leaders.' Second, the promise of future reform was empty, because it prohibited discrimination against 'voters', and Mississippi blacks still had little chance of becoming registered. When Moses asked Humphrey how many voters he could 'guarantee us in Mississippi in the next four years,' he simply replied, 'We can't guarantee you any because the Democratic Party doesn't run the administration.' Third, the two seats were *at large*, which meant that the MFDP would not represent Mississippi, but blacks nationwide. They were simply two extra seats that were created for this purpose, so the administration cunningly would not have to take them away from the Regulars. Fourth, the compromise did not offer the MFDP 'permanent recognition, patronage, official status or a guarantee of participation in the 1968 convention.' Above all, MFDP-delegate Victoria

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<sup>23</sup> UNC, AR Papers, Interviews Anne Romaine with Joseph Rauh, June 16, 1967, and Ed King, 1966; WHS, HZ Papers, Waskow, 'Notes on the Democratic National Convention'; Dittmer, *Local People*, 293-298; Lee, *For Freedom's Sake*, 93-96; Branch, *Pillar of Fire*, 465-466, 468-471; Gitlin, *The Sixties*, 158; Burner, *And Gently He Shall Lead Them*, 178-183; UNC, TB Papers, Interview Taylor Branch with Robert Parris Moses, August 11, 1983, Box 149; Transcript calls Lyndon B. Johnson to Roy Wilkins, August 15, 1964, to Hubert Humphrey, August 14, 1964, Walter Reuther, August 9, 1964, to Walter Jenkins and Walter Reuther, August 24, 1964, and to Hubert Humphrey and Walter Reuther, August 25, 1964. See: Beschloss, *Taking Charge*, 510-511, 515-518, 523-527, 531-535. Henry and Curry, *Aaron Henry*, 189; WHS, Transcript conference 'Mississippi's 'Freedom Summer'. Reviewed: A Fifteen year perspective on progress in race relations, 1964-1979' (hereafter: MFSR) Folder 6; Moses and Cobb, *Radical Equations*, 81-82; WUL, HHC, Interview with *Joseph Rauh*, conducted by Blackside, Inc. on October 31, 1985, for *Eyes on the Prize: America's Civil Rights Years (1954-1965)*.

Gray explained, accepting meant 'betraying the very many people back there in Mississippi [who had risked] their lives.'<sup>24</sup>

The mood at the nearby Union Baptist Church, where the MFDP delegation met to discuss the events, was bitter. It now realized, one volunteer noted, that 'naked coercion, arm twisting, and sneaky backroom deals' was 'also the stuff democracy is made of.' 'Had we been more politically sophisticated,' Henry agreed, 'we could have seen that, on the national level, the party comes before issues.' The MFDP angrily voted to accept nothing less than Green's proposal. That evening it held a sit-in in the empty Mississippi section; all but four Regulars had refused the loyalty pledge and returned home. Yet because of the unit-rule, these four could still cast votes on behalf of all the Regulars. This essentially meant they had won: even in absence they kept their seats *and* their votes. Meanwhile the chair read out the compromise to all the state delegations; it passed within thirty seconds.<sup>25</sup>

On Wednesday Aaron Henry reconvened the MFDP to hear several national civil rights and political leaders including Rustin and Lowenstein. They all urged the MFDP to reconsider, insisting it did not understand the difference between 'protest and politics.' Even Martin Luther King, who admitted that he would have voted against it if he had been a native Mississippian, asserted that pragmatism should prevail 'even in the most idealistic of situations.' Fearing the delegation was overwhelmed by the presence of these 'big shots', Moses advised the group that their decision should be based on 'Mississippi and its own hopes and desires', not on '[pleasing] the liberal civil rights establishment.' The MFDP then reviewed the compromise in private. Most of its moderate middle-class members

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<sup>24</sup> Personal conversation author with Freedom Summer COFO-volunteer Lisa Anderson Todd, November 12, 2009; RSC, SNCC Papers, Files MFDP Papers, Report 'The Convention Challenge', no date (likely late August or September 1964), Files #0273-0274; Davis, *Sisters and Brothers All*, 100. Henry and Curry, *Aaron Henry*, 190; 'Moses in Mississippi', *Pacific Scene*, February 3, 1965; WUL, HHC, Interview with Victoria Gray Adams, conducted by Blackside, Inc. on November 9, 1985, for *Eyes on the Prize: America's Civil Rights Years (1954-1965)*.

<sup>25</sup> B. Watson, *Freedom Summer: The Savage Season That Made Mississippi Burn and Made America A Democracy* (New York 2010) 256-257; WHS, HZ Papers, Waskow, 'Notes on the Democratic National Convention'; Dittmer, *Local People*, 298; Lee, *For Freedom's Sake*, 96; Davis, *Sisters and Brothers All*, 110; Henry and Curry, *Aaron Henry*, 187.

argued in favor, but after Hamer, Gray, and others insisted they were betraying their constituents, they voted for rejection once more.<sup>26</sup>

### Victory or Defeat?

'In the short [run]', SNCC-worker Ivanhoe Donaldson concluded, the Challenge 'was a bitter defeat.' It painfully revealed the class-bias among national civil rights leaders and white liberals, leading to the break of large segments of civil rights workers away from both. 'Atlantic City was a watershed,' Moses asserted, '[T]he idea had been that you were working more or less with the support of the Democratic Party [but now you] turned around and your support was puddle-deep.' Consequently, the Party 'lost a whole generation of its [bottom-up] activists.' First it fueled the movement's transition to Black Power. 'Anyone who trusted the white man at this point', SNCC-chairman John Lewis wrote, 'was a fool, a[n Uncle] Tom.' SNCC's embrace of Black Power in turn alienated it further from the liberal establishment and from the poor blacks, many of whom stayed true to the Democratic Party, whom it had helped organize, like Hamer. Other workers, like Moses, simply dropped out of the movement altogether. Second, many of the white Freedom Summer volunteers, reunited in the anti-Vietnam War Movement, were disillusioned too. Atlantic City, Lewis summarized, turned them 'into radicals and revolutionaries. It fuelled the very forces of protest (...) that would eventually drive Lyndon Johnson out of office.'<sup>27</sup>

Yet in all social revolutions there are periods which are experienced as setbacks but with hindsight are seen as advanced. A similar argument

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<sup>26</sup> B. Watson, *Freedom Summer: The Savage Season That Made Mississippi Burn and Made America A Democracy* (New York 2010) 256-257; WHS, HZ Papers, Waskow, 'Notes on the Democratic National Convention'; Dittmer, *Local People*, 298; Lee, *For Freedom's Sake*, 96; Davis, *Sisters and Brothers All*, 110; Henry and Curry, *Aaron Henry*, 187; Dittmer, *Local People*, 299-302; Lee, *For Freedom's Sake*, 97-99; Burner, *And Gently He Shall Lead Them*, 186-187.

<sup>27</sup> UNC, Allard Lowenstein Papers, Interviews William Chafe with Ivanhoe Donaldson, date unclear, and Robert Parris Moses, October 7, 1989; Gitlin, *The Sixties*, 162; Interview Clayborne Carson with Robert Parris Moses, March 29-30, 1982; F. Poletta, *Strategy and Identity in 1960's Black Protest* (Dissertation, Yale University 1997) 151-153; J. Lewis and M. D'Orso, *Walking with the Wind: A Memoir of the Movement* (San Diego and New York 1998) 291-292.

could be made for the MFDP because 'in the long run', Donaldson admitted, 'from a franchise point-of-view (...) the party won.' In the North, Moses recalled, 'It was the [bottom-up] political movement that grew out of the MFDP that began to speak to [inner-city blacks and got them] to run' for office and vote on election days. Furthermore, the Democratic Party kept its promise to end its internal racism: delegations now have to consist of minority and white delegates according to their states' racial composition and pledge Party loyalty. At the 1968 DNC the Regulars were ousted. 'The fact that there will never again be all-white delegations', Guyot proudly concluded, 'is attributed to what we did in 1964.' It also expanded its outreach to other minorities like Hispanics and to women.<sup>28</sup>

The Challenge additionally spurred the acceptance of Southern blacks into the political process and the Democratic Party's ranks. The MFDP had strengthened President Johnson's commitment to ending black disfranchisement and immediately after his reelection in November, he ordered the Justice Department to draft appropriate legislation. The subsequent Voting Rights Act of 1965, which ruled discriminatory voting practices unconstitutional, ensured that by 1968 almost 60% of Mississippi's eligible blacks were registered. Consequently, the number of black elected officials grew from 1,469 nationwide in 1968 to 9,040 in 2000. 1,628 of them lived in Mississippi and Alabama. The MFDP's continued activism also helped force its adoption. Unlike most national civil rights activists, the MFDP left the DNC proudly. After all, one COFO-worker observed, 'They had the President of the United States stop for them.' They kept building their party as a grassroots instrument for long-term social change. In some counties the MFDP still existed in 1979. In 1965 it organized another national enterprise, the Congressional Challenge, which demonstrated through hundreds of depositions from locals that the state's Congressmen were elected illegitimately. While the bloody civil rights marches in Selma helped the administration persuade the public at large to support the Act, behind-the-scenes the MFDP had made the opening salvo. Politicians, Ed King explained in 2010, do not 'pass a new law because people are in the

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<sup>28</sup> UNC, Allard Lowenstein Papers, Interviews William Chafe with Ivanhoe Donaldson, date unclear, and Robert Parris Moses, October 7, 1989; Gitlin, *The Sixties*, 162; Interview Clayborne Carson with Robert Parris Moses, March 29-30, 1982; F. Poletta, *Strategy and Identity in 1960's Black Protest* (Dissertation, Yale University 1997) 151-153; J. Lewis and M. D'Orso, *Walking with the Wind: A Memoir of the Movement* (San Diego and New York 1998) 291-292; Hogan, *Many Minds, One Heart*, 194; USM, Interview John Rachal with Lawrence Guyot, September 7, 1966.

streets... they need [to be able to] say 'we did this with reason, with calm. We had thousands of documents.'<sup>29</sup>

Consequently, Joseph Rauh was right when he proclaimed that 'the Democratic Party was remade' in August 1964: all this ultimately opened the way for Barack Obama's nomination as the Party's presidential candidate and the expanded black electorate that helped him become the nation's first African-American President in 2008.<sup>30</sup>

## Conclusion

The Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party's Challenge provides historians with a better understanding of the production of social change as a top-down or bottom-up process. The MFDP was both: its efforts on the national level complimented grassroots initiatives in Mississippi and vice versa. Its influential Northern allies pressured the administration into taking the challenge seriously, and lawyers like Rauh devised needed strategies. The COFO-workers, aided by the white Northern volunteers, facilitated the successful execution of MFDP meetings. Simultaneously its success depended on grassroots leadership in showing the Regulars' intent at exclusion and in building the MFDP at the base. Or, as Moses argued, 'No matter how great Martin Luther King was, he could not go and challenge [the Regulars] (...) the only people who could do that were the people from Mississippi.' Ultimately, 'it was when sharecroppers, day laborers, and domestic workers found their voice (...) that the Mississippi political game was really over.'<sup>31</sup>

Although the extent of the social change the MFDP set in motion did not become visible until years later, the MFDP succeeded in its goals. The Democratic Party's extensive resort to trickery to stop it testifies to its power. It penetrated the conscience of the nation's leading politicians, even

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<sup>29</sup> UNC, AR Papers, Interview Anne Romaine with Mendy Samstein, September 4, 1966; [http://www.core-online.org/History/voting\\_rights.htm](http://www.core-online.org/History/voting_rights.htm). Viewed on: April 9, 2012; <http://www.jointcenter.org/research/black-elected-officials-a-statistical-summary-2000>. Viewed on: April 28, 2012; Interviews author with Lisa Anderson Todd, October 23, 2008, and with Ed King, April 14, 2010; Payne, *I've Got the Light of Freedom*, 318; Dittmer, *Local People*, 338-341.

<sup>30</sup> WHS, MFSR, Folder 6.

<sup>31</sup> Moses and Cobb, *Radical Equations*, 20.

as they dictated the time line in which social change would be institutionalized. The MFDP, however, stayed true to its grassroots core. It refused to let 'big shot' political, labor, and civil rights leaders (or their money) decide its future in backrooms. Instead it ensured that all its members, including the poor and uneducated, were privy to the same information and made decisions on consensus. Because it simultaneously worked well inside *and* outside the established system, the MFDP managed, against all odds, to accomplish a historic feat of which the effects still resonate, including in the man who occupies Lyndon Johnson's seat today.