

### **Mississippi: Is This America? (1962-1964)**

**ROY WILKINS:** There is no state with a record that approaches that of Mississippi in inhumanity, murder and brutality and racial hatred. It is absolutely at the bottom of the list.

**NARRATOR:** In 1964, the state of Mississippi called it an invasion. Civil rights workers called it Freedom Summer. To change Mississippi and the country, they would risk beatings, arrest, and their lives.

**FANNY CHANEY:** You all know what my child is doing? He was trying for us all to make a better living. And he had two fellows from New York, had their own home and everything, didn't have nothing to worry, but they come here to help us. Did you all know they come here to help us? They died for us.

**UNITA BLACKWELL:** People like myself, I was born on this river. And I love the land. It's the delta, and to me it's now a challenge, it's history, it's everything, to what black people it's all about. We came about slavery and this is where we acted it out, I suppose. All of the work, all them hard works and all that. But we put in our blood, sweat and tears and we love the land. This is Mississippi.

**WHITE HUNTER:** I lived in this delta all my life, my parents before me, my grandparents. I've hunted and fished this land since I was a child. This land is composed of two different cultures, a white culture and a colored culture, and I lived close to them all my life. But I'm told now that we mistreated them and that we must change, and these changes are coming faster than I expected. And I'm required to make decisions on the basis of a new way of thinking and it's difficult. It's difficult for me, it's difficult for all southerners.

**WILLIAM SIMMONS:** I was born in Mississippi, in the United States, and I'm a product of my heredity and education and the society in which I was raised. And I have a vested interest in that society, and I along with a million other white Mississippians will do everything in our power to protect that vested interest. It's just as simple as that.

**NARRATOR:** In 1954, the Citizens Council was established in the delta, the northwest section of the state where blacks outnumbered whites. The council's purpose, to preserve white political power by opposing integration. Council chapters soon spread across the state.

**HODDING CARTER:** Within four years, the Citizens Council was powerful enough that in the election of 1959, it threw its support openly and actively behind the candidacy of a damage suit lawyer named Ross Barnett, not one of the world's most successful politicians up to then and saw him elected over a supposed moderate who was himself a segregationist, but with a quieter voice than Ross Barnett. And from 1959 until 1963 in the Barnett Administration, the Citizens Council was the state and the state effectively on matters racial was the Citizens Council.

**NARRATOR:** Bankers, politicians and owners of businesses joined the Citizens Councils throughout the South. They punished people who supported integration or black voting rights by foreclosing mortgages, firing workers, or refusing loans to farmers. And they used their influence to push through laws that would insure continued white domination.

**WILLIAM SIMMONS:** It's primarily a struggle for power, and I think we would be stupid indeed if we failed to see where the consequences of a supine surrender on our part would lead.

**NARRATOR:** At the center of Mississippi's struggle for power was the black vote. In some counties, blacks outnumbered whites four to one. In 1962, in many counties, no blacks were registered.

**BOB MOSES:** It's a big psychological, you know, gap to overcome, is what a lot of people call the psychology of fear on part of most of the Negroes. They're afraid of losing their jobs, they've been brainwashed. They think that somehow all of this is the business of the white man and it's not something that they're supposed to be doing.

**NARRATOR:** Twenty-six year old Bob Moses came to Mississippi at the request of Amsey Moore, an NAACP leader. Moses and other SNCC organizers opened offices throughout the state to recruit local Mississippians.

**UNITA BLACKWELL:** I was asked, would I join the SNCC, which was Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee and I said yes, and "What do I have to do?" They said just try to encourage people to go and try to register over to the courthouse. And that was my start of going around here to my neighbors and friends and asking them, you know, would they come and go to the courthouse and try to register to vote. People was being put off the plantations, people were threatened, folks was put in jail just because we wanted people to try to register to vote.

**NARRATOR:** Some attempting to register had even been murdered to stop black political activity. And the state passed new voting laws to make registration more difficult.

**REGISTRAR:** On this side ... (inaudible) just like your meaning, your understanding of it.

**LAWRENCE GUYOT:** Registering to vote at that time meant that you filled out a 22-question questionnaire. One of the questions was interpret any of the 286 sections of the Mississippi constitution to the satisfaction of the registrar. Now, you have to bear in mind

that some of those registrars couldn't read or write, but that didn't matter, they could still determine who should be registered if that person happened to be black. Because all whites who attempted to register were registered.

**NARRATOR:** As the struggle for voting rights escalated in the delta, tension was building in Jackson, the state capital, and the last stop of the Freedom Rides in 1961. A leader in Jackson and throughout the state was Medgar Evers, NAACP state field secretary. Evers had supported James Meredith during the battle to integrate the University of Mississippi. For ten years, he had traveled the state fighting for racial justice. And now helped organize the NAACP boycott of downtown stores.

**MEDGAR EVERS:** Don't shop for anything on Capitol Street. Let's let the merchants down on Capitol Street feel the economic pinch. Let me say this to you. I had one merchant call me and he said, "I want you to know that I've talked to my national office today, and they want me to tell you that we don't need nigger business." These are stores that help to support the white Citizens Council, the council that is dedicated to keeping you and I second class citizens.

Now finally, ladies and gentlemen, we'll be demonstrating here until freedom comes to Negroes here in Jackson, Mississippi.

**NARRATOR:** In June, 1963, students in Jackson poured out of their schools to protest the beatings and arrest of demonstrators at downtown sit-ins. In response, Jackson officials put police and firemen on 24 hour alert with orders to contain the demonstrators. Hundreds were arrested. Mayor Allen Thompson announced that Jackson could handle 10,000 if necessary. The attitude of Jackson city officials was another reminder that blacks in Mississippi would have no real power until they had the power to elect those who governed them.

**REV. R. L. T. SMITH:** If you are not a registered voter, remember this one thing. That Alan Thompson got in the mayor's office by the majority of the folks who were qualified to vote and voted on the day that he was elected. Ross Barnett got in office because he was elected by the majority of the folks who were qualified to vote and voted on the day that he was elected. And if you don't like this thing, let's get ready to change it.

**NARRATOR:** Demonstrators were not backing down, and many were being injured. For Medgar Evers, the situation grew more dangerous with every passing day.

**MYRLIE EVERS:** It was simply in the air. You knew that something was going to happen, and the logical person for it to happen to was Medgar. It certainly brought us closer during that time. As a matter of fact, we didn't talk, we didn't have to. We communicated without words. It was a touch, it was a look, it was holding each other, it was music playing. And I used to try to reassure him and tell him, "Nothing's going to happen to you. The FBI is here." He'd laugh. "Everybody knows you, you're in the press, they wouldn't dare do anything to you."

**NARRATOR:** On June 11th, 1963, Myrlie Evers watched at home as President John Kennedy made his strongest speech on civil rights.

**PRESIDENT JOHN F. KENNEDY:** It is not enough to pin the blame on others, to say it is the problem of one section of the country or another, or deplore the facts that we face. A great change is at hand, and our task, our obligation, is to make that revolution, that change, peaceful and constructive for all. Those who do nothing are inviting shame as well as violence. Those who act boldly are recognizing right as well as reality.

**MYRLIE EVERS:** Late that night, he came home, the children were still up. I was asleep across the bed, and we heard the motor of a car coming in and pulling into the driveway. We heard him get out of the car, and the car door slam. And in that same instance, we heard the loud gunfire. The children fell to the floor, as he had taught them to do. I made a run for the front door, turned on the light, and there he was. The force of the bullet had pushed him forward, as I understand, and the strong man that he was, he had his keys in his hand and had pulled his body around the rest of the way to the door. There he lay, and I screamed and people came out, our next door neighbor fired a gun, as he said, to try to frighten anyone away. And I knew then that that was it.

**NARRATOR:** Medgar Evers had been shot in the back by a single round from a high powered rifle. The one fingerprint found on the weapon belonged to Byron de la Beckwith, a member of the Citizens Council in Greenwood, Mississippi. Medgar Evers, 37 years old, died one hour later.

**MYRLIE EVERS:** When Medgar was felled by that shot and I rushed out and saw him lying there and people from the neighborhood began to gather, there were also some whose color happened to have been white. I don't think I have ever hated as much in my life as I did at that particular moment with anyone who had white skin. I screamed at the neighbors and when the police finally got there, I told them that they had killed Medgar. And I can recall wanting so much to have a machine gun or something in my hand and just stand there and mow them all down. I was just -- I can't explain the depth of my hatred at that point.

**ROY WILKINS:** We view this as a cold, brutal, deliberate killing in a savage, uncivilized state; the most savage, the most uncivilized state in the entire 50 states. There is no state with a record that approaches that of Mississippi in inhumanity, murder, brutality and racial hatred. It is absolutely at the bottom of the list.

**DAVE DENNIS:** On the day that Medgar was killed, I mean, there was violence. There was no way to predict it, that was a different element of people who had never participated in a movement before. Guys off the street who were just angry, you know, who at that time we had very little contact with in the Jackson area. We had mostly worked through churches, we had worked through students, young people, and then with people in general. But the street people, we had not really worked with because they don't have anything to do with this because they always felt that they could not cope with the non-violence. Not that they disagreed with what the movement, they just thought the tactics ... (inaudible). You know ... (inaudible) that group of people decided to speak out. The police department and others came and they actually antagonized the people. They were there in full battalion gear with the riot armor on and guns and they were being pretty rough with the people on the street. And the people just said, "We're not going to take that. This is a funeral of our leader and here they are, you know, harassing us and the white folk killed him."

**NARRATOR:** Shots had already been fired when John Dorr, a Justice Department attorney, stepped between the crowds and the police. With the help of Dave Dennis and others, Dorr convinced both sides to back off. The demonstrators went home. Medgar Evers was buried in Arlington Cemetery with full military honors. No one was ever convicted of his murder.

The assassination of Medgar Evers focused national attention on the state which seemed at war with half of its own citizens. As anger grew, so did a concern that Mississippi could never be made to change from within. Civil rights leaders and sympathetic whites traveled to the South to see first hand the state called the closed society.

**ALLARD LOWENSTEIN:** Any doubts we had about the desirability of coming down before we came had been removed by what we've seen since we've been here. At least what we've discovered is the people who run Mississippi today can only do so by force. They cannot allow free election in Mississippi because if they did, they wouldn't run Mississippi. And as we go around Mississippi and are arrested and beaten and charged with miscellaneous and very imaginative traffic violations that don't occur and threatened and told to leave, we understand why the people asked us to come down here. Because inside Mississippi, the rule of force is so hard on them that they can't shake the ... (inaudible). But when we leave Mississippi, we'll tell what we found and the people of the United States aren't going to allow this to go on forever.

**NARRATOR:** Movement leaders debated on how to keep national attention on Mississippi. In June, 1964, Bob Moses announced Freedom Summer.

**BOB MOSES:** We hope to send in to Mississippi this summer upwards of 1,000 teachers, ministers, lawyers, and students, from all around the country who will engage in what we're calling Freedom School, community center programs, voter registration activity, research work, work in the white communities. And in general, a program designed to open up Mississippi to the country.

**NARRATOR:** Opening up Mississippi would not be easy. Local newspapers warned of a coming invasion. Governor Paul Johnson calls in more highway patrolman. The city of Jackson ordered an armor truck for riot control, all to resist college students from across the country who had volunteered to work in the state during the summer.

**BOB MOSES:** Most of the students that people were bringing in for the summer project were from the large universities and from the families of --Who were politicians, bankers, lawyers and others. And we felt by this fact that bringing those particular people that the attention of their parents and relatives from the various different other parts of the country would be on these areas. And by having ... (inaudible) whites in here is the press, the American public would have much more concern than if they were just a bunch of blacks they're bringing in the state.

**NARRATOR:** The first Freedom Summer volunteers gathered for training in Oxford, Ohio.

**JIM FORMAN:** We're going down there, we're trying to place a real situation that will occur, namely there'll be a mob at the courthouse and we want to get used to this, used to people jeering at us. And we also want the white students who are playing the mob to get used to saying things, calling out epithets, calling people niggers and nigger-lovers.

That was very good because you all got carried away, see? I mean, you were just supposed to yell and you started hitting us, so you got out our frustration. But that's what happens, you know? It's just what happens. People begins shouting, then somebody lurches forward and then everybody begins to lurch forward so that was even better than we had anticipated.

**NARRATOR:** The students were warned of violence and of the possibility of death once they crossed the Mississippi state line.

**NARRATOR:** The first wave of recruits, including 20 year old Andrew Goodman from New York City, left Saturday, June 20th, for Mississippi. Goodman rode with veteran civil rights workers James Chaney, age 21, and Michael Schwerner, age 24. Sunday, June 21st, on Andy Goodman's first day in Mississippi, the three men drove to investigate the burning of a black Methodist church. The church had been the scene of a civil rights meeting just weeks before. Around 3:00 that afternoon, their 1963 blue Ford station wagon was stopped by Deputy Sheriff Cecil Price outside the town of Philadelphia. The three young men were released by Deputy Price around 10:30 that night. It was then that they disappeared. In Oxford, Ohio, volunteers were waiting to travel south.

**BOB MOSES:** We had to tell the students what we thought was going on, because if in fact anyone was arrested and then taken out of the jail, then the chances that they're alive was just almost zero. And we had to confront the students with that before they went down because they now had --The ball game is changed.

**NARRATOR:** Within days, the disappearance was national news. A massive search was ordered by President Lyndon Johnson. Two hundred sailors from the naval air station in Meridien moved into the Philadelphia area and were joined there by FBI agents.

**TV COMMENTATOR:** In Meridien, the wife of missing Mickey Schwerner, Rita Schwerner, flew from Oxford where she had been training many of the summer volunteers. She was greeted by James Farmer, head of CORE, the Congress of Racial Equality.

**RITA SCHWERNER:** It's tragic, as far as I'm concerned, that white northerners have to be caught up in the machinery of injustice and indifference in the South before the American people register concern. I personally suspect that if Mr. Chaney, who is a native Mississippian Negro, had been alone at the time of the disappearance, that this case, like so many others that have come before, would have gone completely unnoticed.

**SUMMER VOLUNTEER:** Their disappearance, although it might have been calculated to try and drive people away from this state, just the opposite effect on me and everyone else. Whenever an incident like this happens, and they happen fairly often, although not usually this serious, everyone reacts the same way. They become more and more determined to stay in this state and fight the evil system that people have to live under here. I'm down here because I believe my freedom is very much entangled with the freedom of every other man, and if another man's not free, then I'm not free. So I'm fighting for my own freedom here.

**REPORTER:** Are you scared?

**SUMMER VOLUNTEER:** Yes, I'm very much afraid. Everyone here is. But we knew before we came down something about what it's going to be like and I don't know of anybody that's turning back because of things like this that happen.

**J. EDGAR HOOVER:** We most certainly do not and will not give protection to civil rights workers. In the first place, the FBI is not a police organization. It's purely an investigative organization, and the protection of individual citizens, either natives of this state or coming into the state, is a matter for the local authorities. The FBI will not participate in any such protection.

**NARRATOR:** By early July, the volunteers had arrived in full force. During the summer, 80 civil rights workers were beaten, and 1,000 arrests were reported. One of the most dangerous jobs was traveling from house to house in isolated rural areas to build support for a new political party.

**VICTORIA GRAY:** We have organized into the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party. We are holding a ... (inaudible) registration drive throughout the state, encouraging every Negro and white who wants a stake in his political future to prove it by getting his name on a freedom registration book. We have scheduled three state meetings and district caucuses. And on August 6th, here in Jackson, we will hold our state convention. At that time, we will elect a slate of delegates to the national convention in Atlantic City. And when that convention meets, we will present ourselves for seating as the only democratically constituted body of Mississippi citizens worthy of taking part in that convention's business.

**NARRATOR:** Volunteers collecting signatures for the party found themselves openly challenging the way life had been lived in Mississippi for three-quarters of a century.

**PETER ORRIS:** People would be sitting down and you would say hello and you'd shake their hands. Now, that was an unusual thing for a white person to do to a black person in Mississippi at that time. Frequently, people would respond by not looking us in the eye. At the end of every phrase, there would be a ma'am or a sir, depending on who as there, and they would say yes to everything we said. We'd say, "Would you like to be involved in the voter registration project? Will you go down to vote?" "Yes, sir." And we knew we were not getting across. We knew they were just waiting for us to go away because we were a danger to them. And in many ways we were. We had much less to risk than they did. This was their lives, their land, their family, and they were going to be here when we were gone.

**NARRATOR:** Despite the fear, 60,000 signed up as members of the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party. This mass political awakening reminded segregationists of the years following the Civil War, a time when blacks had been elected to high political office.

**WILLIAM SIMMONS:** We have had experience in the past with Negro political domination. It was known as the Reconstruction. There are some who call this present attempt to build up political power through a mass registration of unqualified nigger voters the second reconstruction.

**JUDGE TOM BRADY:** I don't want the Negro, as I have known him and contacted him during my lifetime, as a class to control the making of the law that controls me. To control the government under which I live.

**REPORTER:** Would you feel better, then, if there were some legal means of keeping all Negroes off the rolls?

**JUDGE TOM BRADY:** I'd feel better, and I think this country would be better off if all Negroes were removed from it, because I think it is a potential source of racial strife.

**NARRATOR:** While the search for the missing civil rights workers continued, President Lyndon Johnson signed the Civil Rights Act of 1964. The new law increased the federal government's power to ban discrimination in public places, but did little to give southern blacks the vote. In Mississippi, the civil rights groups pushed forward with the drive to sign up members for the new Freedom Democratic Party. Summer volunteers also supplied legal and medical services and set up a system of community centers and alternative schools, all part of Freedom Summer.

For years, most blacks in Mississippi had been denied the right to a decent education. SNCC opened 41 Freedom schools across the state. By day, the volunteers taught everything from the 3Rs to innovative courses in black history. By night, the schools were used for political meetings, to explain the new party and to sign up new members. These activities and the presence of white volunteers teaching in black schools and living in black homes offended many white Mississippians.

**WILLIAM SIMMONS:** When the civil rights workers invaded the state in the summer of 1964 to change us presumably into their own image, they were met with a feeling of some curiosity, but mostly resentment. They fanned out across the state, made a great to-do of breaking up our customs, of flaunting social practices that had been respected by people here over the years. That was the time of the hippies just coming in. Many had on hippie uniforms and conducted themselves in hippie ways. They were not exactly the types of models that most people that I knew wanted to emulate. Also, the arrogance that they showed in wanting to reform a whole state in the way they thought it should be created resentment.

**NARRATOR:** By late July, the three young men had been missing for six weeks. Many lost hope that they were still alive, but the goals for Freedom Summer were unchanged. Volunteers wanted to prove that black and white could live and work together.

**UNITA BLACKWELL:** I remember cooking some pinto beans and that's all we had. And everybody just got around the pot, you know, and that was an experience, you know, just to see white people coming around the pot and getting a bowl and putting some stuff in. And then sitting around talking and sitting on the floor, sitting anywhere because, you know, there wasn't any great dining room tables and stuff that we had been used to working in the white people houses. And go in there and find them all sitting, you know, and everybody sitting and they'd ring a bell or something and tap, and you'd come in and bring the stuff and put it around. But this, you were sitting on the floor and they was talking, you know, and we was sitting there laughing. I guess they become very real and very human, we each to one another.

**NARRATOR:** On August 4th, on a farm outside the town of Philadelphia, the bodies of Goodman, Chaney and Schwerner were discovered buried together in an earthen dam. The autopsy reports indicated that the men had been killed by .38 caliber bullets. A later report revealed that James Chaney, the one black victim, had also suffered severe bone and skull fractures.

**MR. GOODMAN AND WIFE:** Throughout our history, countless Americans have died in the continuing struggle for equality. We shall continue to work for this goal and we fervently hope that Americans so engaged will be aided and protected in this noble mission. For ourselves, we wish to express our pride in our son's commitment and that of his companions ... (inaudible) and that of his companion now lie now in Mississippi asking each hour to express those truths that are self evident.

**NARRATOR:** August 7th, 1964, the funeral of James Chaney in Meriden, Mississippi.

**DAVE DENNIS:** I feel that he's got his freedom and we're still fighting for it. But what I want to talk about right now is the living dead that we have right among our midst, not only in the state of Mississippi, but throughout the nation. Those are the people who don't care, those who do care but don't have the guts enough to sign up for it, and those people who are busy up in Washington and other places using my freedom and my life to play politics with. That includes the President on down to the governor of the state of Mississippi. In my opinion, as I stand here, I not only blame the people who pulled the trigger or did the beating or dug the hole with the shovel, I bury the peace ... (inaudible). But I blame the people in Washington, DC and on down in the state of Mississippi for what happened just as much as I blame those who pulled the trigger.

See, I know what's going to happen. I feel that even if they find the people who killed those guys in ... (inaudible), you got to come back to the state of Mississippi and have a jury or they come, their aunts, their uncles. And I know what they're going to say, not guilty because no one started pulling the trigger. I'm tired of that.

Another thing that makes me even tireder, though, that is the fact that we as people here in the state and the country are allowing this to continue to happen, even us black folk. So I look at the young kids here, that's something else that I grieve about. And little Ben Chaney here and the other ones like him around in this audience. When you want someone to baby-sit ... (inaudible) black mammy to hold her baby. And as long as he can do that, he can sit down beside me, he can watch me go up there and register to vote, and he can watch me take some ... (inaudible) the garbage in this state and he can sit down as I rule over him just as he's ruled over me for years. This is our country, too. We didn't have to come here, and they brought us over here.



I have been approached by the people of my national office at CORE, and that is to make sure that this speech that's given is calm, they don't want a lot of, you know, things stirred up and everything else like that. And I'd agreed to do that. And I said, "Okay, fine, that's good." Then when I got up there and I looked out there and I saw little Ben Chaney, things just sort of snapped and I was in a fantasy world, to be sitting up here talking about things are going to get better and we should do it in an easy manner in nonviolence and stuff like that because this country, you cannot make a man change by speaking a foreign language, he doesn't understand what you're talking about. This country operated then, and still operates, on violence. I mean, as you've said, an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth, that's what we respect.

**NARRATOR:** The parents of Chaney and Schwerner wanted their sons buried side by side in Meridien. But Mississippi law enforced segregation even in death. James Chaney, age 21, was buried alone in a segregated cemetery. The state never brought anyone to trial for the murder of the three young men. But in federal court, Deputy Cecil Price and six others were found guilty of civil rights violations in connection with the killings and received sentences ranging from three to ten years.

As Freedom Summer moved towards August, the state's Democratic Party met to select delegates to the national convention. As usual, blacks were not allowed to participate. But this would be no ordinary election year. Two weeks later, the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party chose its own delegates to challenge the right of the all white regulars to represent the state. The MFDP emphasized that it was open to all citizens.

**ELLA BAKER:** The Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party is only beginning, and it is beginning on the basis that it believes that a political party should be open to all the people who wish to subscribe to its principles. That means it's open to even the son of the father on whose plantation you worked, if that son has reached the point that he is willing to subscribe to your principles.

**NARRATOR:** The MFDP delegation of 64 blacks and 4 whites prepared to leave for Atlantic City. Their goal was to be seated at the Democratic National Convention as the true representatives of their own state. For many, it was their first trip out of Mississippi. For all, this was the culmination of Freedom Summer, the final opportunity to open up Mississippi to the nation.

**VICTORIA GRAY:** Yeah, I think one of the things that made the delegation of the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party so hopeful, you know, so expectant, was the fact that people had made a discovery, a discovery that there is a way out of, you know, much of what is wrong with our lives. And that there is a way to change it, and that is through the execution of this vote, you know. And so we can't get past these people at the state level because they lock us out. But we just know that once we get to the national level, with all the proof that we have been locked out and the fact that we've had the courage to go ahead and create our own party, then we feel like we are going to get that representation that we've been denied for so long.

**NARRATOR:** Atlantic City, New Jersey, site of the 1964 Democratic Convention. Lyndon Johnson expected no opposition in getting his party's nomination, but was concerned the MFDP would disrupt party unity. With the arrival of the Freedom Democrats on August 20th, there were now two delegations in town from Mississippi. The Democratic Party would have to decide which would represent the state on the convention floor. That decision would be made by the credentials committee. On Saturday, August 22nd, America watched this nationally televised hearing.

**JOE RAUH:** It is the very terror that these people are living through that is the reason that Negroes aren't voting, that they're kept out of the Democratic Party by the terror of the regular party. And what I want the credentials committee to hear is the terror which the regular party uses on the people of Mississippi, which is what Reverend King was explaining, which is what Aaron Henry was explaining, and which is what the next witness will explain, Mrs. Fannie Lou Hamer.

**FANNIE LOU HAMER:** Mr. Chairman and to the credentials committee, my name is Mrs. Fannie Lou Hamer, and I live at 66 East Lafayette Street, Ruleville, Mississippi. Some ... (inaudible) is the home of Senator James O. Eastman and Senator Stint. But 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 their hooks because our lives be threatened daily because we want to live as decent human beings in America.

**EDWARD NEWMAN:** We will return to this scene in Atlantic City, but now we switch to the White House and NBC's Robert Kurlanski.

**NARRATOR:** Lyndon Johnson cut off coverage of MFDP testimony by making a last minute request for network air time.

**JOE RAUH:** We had an hour before the credentials committee. Fannie Lou Hamer made her famous pitch, Martin Luther King -- We had the greatest array of people you can ever imagine and the credentials committee was very impressed, but Johnson was not.

**NARRATOR:** Despite the TV cutoff by the President, Mrs. Hamer's message had gotten through. Viewers back home sent telegrams to delegates, urging support of the MFDP. But President Johnson was afraid southerners would desert the party if the MFDP were seated. He began pressuring liberals close to the Freedom Democrats. Senator Hubert Humphrey, a long time champion of civil rights, was feeling that pressure. Many believed he would not be selected for the vice presidency unless he helped stop the MFDP.

**HUBERT HUMPHREY:** My only interest in this is an attempt to try to bring about a reconciliation of views in the hopes to keep our convention united with one objective: to defeat Mr. Goldwater in November and to carry forward the democratic program.

**NARRATOR:** Humphrey assigned Walter Mondale, his young protege from Minnesota, to work out a solution.

**WALTER MONDALE:** See, everybody was trying to think of something that was simple and would solve it, that would satisfy everybody. The problem was there was no such solution. And so we'd go around and around and around and everybody try this and try that, and writers would see if they could write around the problems and philosophers to see if they could dream of something to dream over the problem. It wouldn't go away, it had to be resolved. It had to be compromise, I think, in the way that we did it. And it was inevitable that some people would be unhappy.

**NARRATOR:** The committee did come up with a compromise. It offered the MFDP two seats at large, meaning they would not represent the state of Mississippi. It allowed the all white regulars to be seated only if they would swear loyalty to the democratic ticket. Finally, the committee promised to bar from future conventions any delegation guilty of discrimination. In response, all but four of the all white regulars walked out of the convention.

**WALTER MONDALE:** It may not satisfy everybody, the extremes on the right or the extremes on the left. But we think it is a just compromise. We think it is based soundly on the law. We think it clearly recognizes without compromises the basic devotion of this party to human rights, and we think it represents and sets the stage for the overwhelming victory of the man who more than anybody else in the world represents the cause of justice and law today, President Lyndon Baines Johnson.

**NARRATOR:** Lyndon Johnson announced that Hubert Humphrey would be his running mate before boarding the plane for the convention. In Atlantic City, the Freedom Democrats had not yet decided whether to accept or reject the compromise.

**JOE RAUH:** We've got an offer to our people, we've got a great deal out of this. I think to call this a loss is a mistake.

**REPORTER:** You were talking before of no compromise. Now you've got two delegates in, the regular party's gotten three. Do you think you've made substantial gain?

**JOE RAUH:** I think we made a terrific gain. We'll always talk no compromise at a convention ... (inaudible).

**REPORTER:** Are the leaders of the Freedom Democrats satisfied?

**JOE RAUH:** I don't think so and I don't blame them. Nobody ever gets all they want. The leaders and the regulars aren't satisfied either, they're going back to Jackson.

**NARRATOR:** Political allies and national civil rights leaders urged the MFDP to accept the compromise. But the Freedom Democrats voted overwhelmingly to turn it down. In the words of Fannie Lou Hamer, "We didn't come all this way for no two seats when all of us is tired."

**BOB MOSES:** I think people felt that the Democratic Party would actually embrace them. I think there was a lack of real understanding of the depth to which the local southern politicians were entwined in the Democratic Party and that there would be a real reluctance on the part of the national Democratic Party leadership to take in black people at the expense of these southern politicians.

**UNITA BLACKWELL:** The whole issue around the compromise for us, and for me, was that it was some kind of political ploy that they understood, but for us, for Mississippi, it was what was right and what was wrong. It was we had been done wrong. Our rights had been taken away, and you just couldn't issue some two seats at large to correct that. And it was a moral situation that had to be righted. So it was not just a political something to get away with, is that we sit in rooms and negotiate. You know, they knew about those kind of things, but we didn't. How to sit in rooms and negotiate away and say, "You know, we'll take the best of this, a piece of that." We went after what was right, and it was the wrong, the way we had been treated for hundreds and hundreds of years; denied the right to register to vote, denied the right to participate in the political process, and that's what was going on.

**NARRATOR:** The MFDP delegates made one last appeal for national attention. They tried to sit in the seats abandoned by the Mississippi regulars.

**REPORTER:** Would you identify yourself for us, please?

**FANNIE LOU HAMER:** My name is Mrs. Fannie Lou Hamer. I'm the vice chairman of the Freedom Democrat Party.

**REPORTER:** Where did you get the credentials to get into the building tonight, Mrs. Hamer?

**FANNIE LOU HAMER:** Some of my old friends of ours gave us an invitation to come in. We sit with them a while, and we wanted to sit in our own seats.

**REPORTER:** Do you have any kind of credentials that will get you into these seats?

**FANNIE LOU HAMER:** No, we don't. Only as American citizens.

**REPORTER:** Mr. Sergeant at Arms, have you had any contingency plans for this?

**SERGEANT AT ARMS:** Not at all, I'm just standing here peacefully trying to keep this aisle clear.

**ANNIE DEVINE:** That's the way do down in Mississippi when they are before the eyes of the world, they are peaceful and loving. And when they get back to Mississippi, "Nigger, you can't come in here, Nigger, you can't come in there. Nigger, you get out!" And here we are in the eyes of the world and seeing the same thing that happens down, way down, in the Deep South, Mississippi.

**NARRATOR:** The MFDP was never seated at the 1964 convention, but their protest opened up the Democratic Party and changed national politics. For some, Atlantic City ended in disillusionment. They had lost faith in America's leaders, but they had come to know their own power.

**ANNIE DEVINE:** The country refuses to demand that Mississippi give Negroes their rights, their privileges. We didn't ask to be elected to anything, we didn't ask for any patronage. All we ask is to let us sit.