

Interview with **Walter Mondale**

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Washington, D.C.

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Note: These transcripts contain material that did not appear in the final program. Only text appearing in *bold italics* was used in the final version of *Eyes on the Prize*.

00:00:01:00

[camera roll 420]

[sound roll 1360]

CAMERA CREW MEMBER 1: ROLLING. SPEED. MARK IT.

[sync tone]

CAMERA CREW MEMBER 1: ONE.

INTERVIEWER: I'M GOING TO START WITH A, A NICE GENERAL QUESTION. AT THE 1964 CONVENTION, WHO WERE THE DELEGATES, WHO WAS REPRESENTED IN THE PARTY AND WHO WASN'T REPRESENTED IN THAT, IN THAT LARGE GROUP OF DELEGATES?

Mondale: Well, as, as all Democratic conventions, it was enormous. I think we had two or three thousand delegates and in most cases, they represented the rank and file of Democrats across the board. Unfortunately, and that was the problem, there were several states in the deep South that had closed party systems that in effect, sealed black Democrats from the process. And that's why Mississippi came up front, because that was a classic segregated political party in which blacks need not apply.

INTERVIEWER: WOULD YOU SAY THAT IT WAS A NORMAL CONVENTION IN

THAT REPRESENTATION? I MEAN THAT WAS THE WAY IT HAD ALWAYS BEEN—

Mondale: Well, yes, as a matter of fact, there had been some progress in some southern states. That's what was different. But in a few hold out states, there had been none; Mississippi was the, the example. But up until oh, the mid or late 50s, totally segregated, lily white, delegations from the South were more or less accepted and were picked by a, a governor or some leader of the party, and that's the way it was.

00:01:45:00

INTERVIEWER: NOW COMING INTO THE CONVENTION, WHAT WAS IT THAT WAS THE REAL CHALLENGE? THIS MISSISSIPPI FREEDOM DEMOCRATS PARTY CAME IN AND, AND CHALLENGED THE REGULAR MISSISSIPPI DELEGATION. WHAT WAS IT ABOUT THAT CHALLENGE THAT WAS SO DISTURBING TO PRESIDENT JOHNSON?

Mondale: I don't think it was. I think the probl— what was difficult was how to resolve it. In other words, you, there was no question that the Mississippi regular Democratic Party delegation was segregated. And there was no question that the black competing delegation, the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Delegation, was also virtually a single non party group that came up to present themselves as a party. How to resolve the basic underlying injustice of it all, and at the same time, put in, into place, a system that would create integrated parties in the South; that was the tough part of it. It's easy to be, on one side or the other, but how to resolve it. That's what that's what was difficult.

00:02:50:00

INTERVIEWER: THERE WASN'T A, A, A QUESTION OF, BECAUSE IT WAS A RACIAL QUESTION, THAT IT WAS PARTICULARLY—

Mondale: Now bear in mind that Lyndon Johnson and Hubert Humphrey probably in American history, are the strongest pro-civil rights people in history as, as President/Vice President. I also had a strong record and have a strong record. We were trying to set up a system here that from there on out, would in effect be a civil rights law for our party, as it's proven to be, and would cause in each of these states, an integrated party to be established—not just all white or all black, but a party of all Democrats. And that's what we were up to.

INTERVIEWER: WHAT I'M, WHAT I'M, WHAT I'M WONDERING ABOUT IS, WAS IT A PROBLEM AT, BECAUSE IT WAS AT THE CONVENTION, THAT IT WAS HAPPENING PUBLICLY, THAT THERE WAS A, A QUESTION HERE. WE, WE LOOK AT THE, THE WRITING ON THIS AND THEY'RE IMPLYING IN SOME WAYS, JOHNSON FELT THAT IT WAS, IT WAS A CHALLENGE TO HIM PERSONALLY, TO HIS IMAGE, THAT, THAT THIS SHOULD HAPPEN IN PUBLIC. NOT THAT HE WAS OPPOSED TO IT.

Mondale: Yeah, I never, I never talked to President Johnson. I, I worked with Hubert Humphrey on it. As you know, there were many many news conferences many public discussions I think everybody knew it would be worked out in public and it was. Now some of the sessions of the committee itself and the subcommittee, were private. But I don't think there was anything that anybody there thought, that I talked to, that this matter could be handled privately.

00:04:28:00

INTERVIEWER: MOVING OURSELVES THROUGH THIS TIME PERIOD. TWO DAYS BEFORE THE CONVENTION OPENED, FANNIE LOU HAMER GAVE A VERY POWERFUL TESTIMONY IN FRONT OF THE COMMITTEE COULD YOU TALK A LITTLE BIT ABOUT WHAT THE IMPACT OF THAT WAS?

Mondale: Well, it was very strong and her central case was undeniable, and that is that at that time, in Mississippi, a black Democrat could not participate in the selection of delegates or become a delegate, and that life was very tough and even cruel on those who tried. And she made a powerful presence and a powerful case.

INTRVIEWER: WHAT DO YOU THINK IT DID TO THE VOTES IN THE COMMITTEE?

Mondale: Well, this might surprise you, I think that we had the votes all along for what we did. I don't, I think it made the issue more urgent, I think it impressed on a lot of delegates that we had to confront the issue of racial discrimination but I believe we had the votes for that anyway.

INTERVIEWER: DO YOU THINK THAT YOU HAD, I, SOME OF THE MFD P PEOPLE REMEMBER IT, PERHAPS-

Mondale: Sure.

INTERVIEWER: -TO THEIR OWN INTEREST, THAT THEY FELT AFTER THAT THEY HAD THE VOTES TO GET MORE.

Mondale: Well, that may be but I, you know, the way I remember that. I was chairman of the subcommittee, I'm a strong pro-civil rights advocate; they were pushing against an open door in terms of the objective of civil rights and preventing any future lily white, segregated delegations. The tough question was always, how do we handle it? What, what should be the best way to resolve this? One theory was you just take the black delegation and seat them, kick the white delegation out. And that's all you needed to do. Well, that didn't solve any long term problems. It didn't establish any rule of law for civil rights, and if all it is is going to be fight against black or whites, one winning, one losing, there was no hope for a healthy political party. So the question was how to do it. And, and I think the way we came up was exactly right.

00:6:36:00

INTERVIEWER: THAT'S WONDERFUL.

Mondale: Yeah.

INTERVIEWER: LET'S CHECK EVERYBODY'S—

[cut]

CAMERA CREW MEMBER 1: MARK IT.

[sync tone]

00:06:46:00

INTERVIEWER: CAN YOU EXPLAIN FOR US THE SOUTHERN DELEGATES' POSITION AND ALSO WHAT YOU THOUGHT THEY MIGHT DO IF THEY FELT THEY LOST?

Mondale: There was a deep division, or split, in the South, depending on their view of what this party had to do to resolve its discrimination problems. Many of them favored strongly and effectively eliminating discrimination, some didn't, depending on where you were and how their, what their views were. Mississippi was the toughest example at the time because it was just a classic old segregated environment. And I think the result that we came out with was quite acceptable to most of the party, resented by some in the South and perhaps elsewhere.

INTERVIEWER: DID THE MISSISSIPPI DELEGATION WANT YOU SIMPLY TO DENY THEM, THE MSDP CHALLENGE ENTIRELY? IS THAT WHAT THEY WERE LOOKING FOR?

Mondale: They wanted to be seated on the grounds that they were the Democrats and I think some of them denied there was discrimination but that case couldn't hold because there wasn't a single black in the delegation as I recall. And just forget it and go on like we had in the good old days. That was the basically the case they made.

INTERVIEWER: WERE YOU AFRAID THAT THEY WOULD WALK OUT?

Mondale: No, that was, they were permi—

INTERVIEWER: EXCUSE ME, I'VE GOT TO ASK YOU TO—

Mondale: Yeah. No, we weren't afraid they, we, we expected they'd walk out and that was fine by us because you couldn't justify what they'd done.

00:08:16:00

INTERVIEWER: YOU WERE, YOU, ACTUALLY I'M, I'M A LITTLE TAKEN ABACK. YOU WERE PREPARED FOR THE, THE REGULAR DEMOCRATIC CONVENTION TO WALK, DELEGATES TO WALK OUT?

Mondale: No. From Mississippi, yeah. And they did.

INTERVIEWER: WERE YOU AFRAID THAT A LARGER—

Mondale: No.

INTERVIEWER: —NUMBER OF PEOPLE WOULD?

Mondale: No. I think this was entirely different. Remember in '48 when Hubert Humphrey gave his famous speech and the South walked out. I think times had changed a lot since then, and a lot of, and this is important to remember for historical reasons, there were a lot of southern leaders white and black, who were just as interested in civil rights reform as one found elsewhere.

00:08:55:00

INTERVIEWER: OK. NOW, PRESIDENT JOHNSON OBVIOUSLY WANTED TO SOLVE THIS AS QUICKLY, AS EASILY AND AS, AS PRIVATELY AS WAS POSSIBLE, MAYBE NOT ENTIRELY. WHAT DO YOU THINK HE USED AS, AS HIS CARDS, WHAT WERE HIS PRESSURE POINTS IN THIS, IN THIS NEGOTIATION?

Mondale: Well as I said, I never talked to Lyndon Johnson once, I worked for Hubert Humphrey, with Walter Reuther, with Joe Rauh who was representing or working with the Mississippi Freedom Democrats with, some of the names skip me right now, but you know, I had had a lot of years in the civil rights movement and so on, so I'd, I knew most of the players. And we were trying to come up, as I've said before and I won't repeat it, with, with the answer that would provide the future for a nonsegregated Democratic party, and we did. And it took two or three days to review this with everyone concerned and I think the result we came up with was quite acceptable.

00:10:00:00

INTERVIEWER: THE, THE WRITINGS TED WHITE AND A NUMBER OF PEOPLES WRITING ON THIS, TALK ABOUT JOHNSON REALLY WANTING THIS CONVENTION TO RUN A CERTAIN WAY SO THAT HE WOULD HAVE, A, A, A PLATFORM OF UNITY FROM WHICH TO GO FORWARD.

Mondale: Yeah. I, I'm sure of that, I didn't talk to him, but I have no doubt that that he wanted a unified, strong convention that would permit he and Hubert to be elected with a big margin, which is exactly what happened.

INTERVIEWER: NOW YOU SAY JOHNSON AND, AND HUMPHREY, BUT IT SEEMS THAT AT THAT TIME, THAT WAS NOT CLEAR THAT THAT WAS THE TICKET.

Mondale: No, it wasn't until the end of the [sic] but Johnson knew who, who he wanted. And, and he wanted a unified national party that could go to the public without all the traditional fights that Democrats often have.

CAMERA CREW MEMBER 1: END OF ROLL.

INTERVIEWER: I WAS GOING TO SAY CAN WE STOP FOR A MOMENT.

[cut]

[slate]

[change camera roll to 421]

CAMERA CREW MEMBER 1: MARK IT.

[sync tone]

00:11:06:00

INTERVIEWER: WHEN SENATOR HUMPHREY ASKED YOU TO CHAIR THIS, THIS, THIS COMMITTEE, WHAT DID HE SAY WAS AT STAKE FOR FOR HIM? WHY WAS HE ASKING YOU TO DO THIS?

Mondale: He asked me to do it and—

INTERVIEWER: I'M GOING TO ASK YOU TO SAY—

Mondale: Say, Hubert Humphrey asked me to do it, I'm not, I don't recall that he gave me an explanation that might bear on his own career. But obviously, he was being considered and was selected as Johnson's running mate, Vice President, and I, I'm sure he was anxious that this matter be resolved in a way that was both principled and politically effective.

INTERVIEWER: BUT HE IN, IN FACT NE... IT WAS NOT, AS FAR AS YOU KNEW, A DIRECT PRESSURE? YOU GET THIS—

Mondale: No, no, he never talked to me that way.

INTERVIEWER: SORRY, I'M GOING TO ASK YOU TO SAY HIS NAME.

Mondale: No, Hubert never talked to me, nor would he talk to me that way. You know, he had a long record, Humphrey did, of civil rights. probably the best civil rights advocate of his

generation, the pioneer. And I was very much of that same mold, and spent my life in civil rights. So we didn't, there was no talk ever, no suggestion that, that what we were doing here could compromise that fundamental principle. And as a matter of fact, I think history is going to feel, deal very kindly with what we did there, because it was in effect, the civil rights act for the Democratic party, an act that the Republicans have yet to adopt these many years later. From then on out at every convention the people that were discriminated against, if they were, could make that a legal grounds of challenge. And in fact, if you look at national Democratic delegations from the South and elsewhere now, since that convention they are now fully integrated delegations. So it was a very very profound change in the Democratic party that took place in the rules adopted at the '64 convention, and I'm proud of it.

00:13:08:00

INTERVIEWER: OK. I, I THINK THAT, THAT, THAT'S A VERY CLEAR PART OF IT, THAT THAT--

Mondale: It's more than that. We elected Johnson and Humphrey and because we had a successful convention, we had the largest range of fundamental civil rights adopted in our history. The Voting Rights Act, the Fair Housing Act the other major measures. All of the programs for educational assistance, poverty assistance early childhood nutrition food stamps. All of that came about because we had a team that believed in social justice and civil rights.

INTERVIEWER: I, I THINK THAT THAT, THERE'S NO QUESTION ON THAT, I MEAN--

Mondale: Needs to be restated though.

INTERVIEWER: JOHNSON'S RECORD, JOHNSON'S RECORD FROM '56 WHERE HE REFUSES TO JOIN ALL THE OTHER SOUTHERN SENATORS--

Mondale: Right.

INTERVIEWER: --IN THE SOUTHERN MANIFESTO IS IMPECCABLE--

Mondale: Right.

INTERVIEWER: --AND, AND HUMPHREY'S RECORD OF, OF, I, I DON'T KNOW WHAT, IS MORE THAN IMPECCABLE--

Mondale: Yeah.

INTERVIEWER: --ABSOLUTELY AND THE '48 CONVENTION--

Mondale: Yeah.

INTERVIEWER: –IS A PART OF THAT. SO THERE’S NOT A QUESTION OF WHETHER THERE WAS, THERE WAS A LACK OF INTEREST IN THE CHALLENGE OR WHETHER HUMPHREY WAS BEING ARM TWISTED TO DO SOMETHING HE DIDN’T BELIEVE IN.

Mondale: Yeah.

INTERVIEWER: THAT’S NOT THE QUESTION. THE QUESTION WAS, WAS THERE ALSO A MATTER OF POLITICS GOING ON HERE? WAS THERE ALSO A MATTER OF, IF YOU DO THIS RIGHT, WE HAND YOU THE PLUM.

Mondale: I never, I, I never heard that and I don’t think anybody else did. No, there may have been a conversation between Johnson and Humphrey to that effect, but I doubt it. I was very close to Hubert and I never heard anything like that.

INTERVIEWER: SO I’M GOING TO ASK YOU TO SAY THAT AGAIN WITH WHAT, WHAT [INAUDIBLE].

Mondale: Yeah, yeah. Yeah, I, I doubt that very much all the years that I’ve been with Hubert the thought that there would be a deal; you deliver something and I will deliver the vice presidency, that seems very, very unlikely to me. And the thought that Hubert would compromise on civil rights was an outrage, nor did he.

00:15:13:00

INTERVIEWER: GOOD. THERE, THERE’S A, THERE’S A FIRST COMPROMISE MADE THAT FAILS, AND AT THAT PRESIDENT JOHNSON ASKS WALTER REUTHER TO BE PART OF THIS ALSO, TO HELP. COULD YOU TALK ABOUT WHAT IT WAS THAT REUTHER HAD IN TERMS OF INFLUENCE IN THE CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT, THAT MADE HIM AN IMPORTANT FIGURE; WHY HE COULD HELP IN THIS SITUATION, HE CONVINCED PEOPLE, OR HE WAS PART OF THE CONVINCING OF MARTIN KING AND–

Mondale: Yeah, I’m I’m I’m a little vague on this now, what happened at that point in the convention. I vaguely recall that Walter Reuther may have helped, that is the union, the auto worker–

INTERVIEWER: STOP FOR A MOMENT HERE, LET YOU THINK ABOUT IT, WANT TO STOP FOR A MOMENT?

Mondale: Well time’s not going to help so–

[wild audio]

Mondale: –but I, I vaguely remember that, that the, the auto workers had helped provide some of the resources for the Mississippi Freedom Democratic, drive to Atlantic City, and the efforts there. I believe that’s correct, and I think that that the leaders of the Mississippi

challenge were talking very closely to Walter Reuther during this time.

INTERVIEWER: AND, AND, I MEAN—

Mondale: Working closely.

INTERVIEWER: IT IS YOUR SENSE THAT HE WAS INFLUENTIAL, THIS IS CORRECT?

Mondale: Oh yes, there's no question about that. I, I, I, I'm a little unsure of what the basis of his influence may have been with the Mississippi Freedom Democrats, but I think he was active at that time in that effort and thus his judgments would be carefully listened to.

INTERVIEWER: JUST A MINUTE—

[cut]

CAMERA CREW MEMBER: FOUR UP. MARK IT.

[sync tone]

00:16:57:00

Mondale: Well, I think that—

INTERVIEWER: [INAUDIBLE] —GET THE CAMERA SETTLED.

Mondale: I think that Walter Reuther was very influential with the Mississippi Freedom Democrats, but I am vague now as to what the basis was. I believe he was involved in helping pay some of the costs of the Freedom Democrats and I know he worked very closely with Joe Rauh, who was the chief sort of lawyer and advocate at the convention, for that movement. In any event, if we were going to put together a responsible resolution of this, that preserved the good will of those surrounding the Mississippi Freedom Democrats, those were among those that needed to be consulted.

00:17:49:00

INTERVIEWER: CAN YOU DESCRIBE FOR US, GIVE US A, A SORT OF A WORD PICTURE OF THAT NIGHT IN WHICH, IS A LONG NIGHT IN WHICH THE FINAL COMPROMISE IS HAMMERED OUT, AND PEOPLE AREN'T THERE.

Mondale: Well, I assure you that after, what is it now 22 years, it gets a little vague. We had Humphrey was there for a while Reuther was there Joe Rauh was there I think we consulted with Aaron Henry and some of them out of Mississippi Clarence Mitchell of of the NAACP, and others. And this was an effort to resolve how we would settle this situation and as I remember, it was a long night, but I, beyond that it gets a little vague, maybe 'cause it was

such a long night.

INTERVIEWER: IT WAS SORT OF THE FIRST TIME YOU'D BEEN PUT IN THAT POSITION, OF, OF REALLY SHAPING SUCH AN IMPORTANT NATIONAL—

Mondale: Yes, I was a young brand new, Democrat from Minnesota who suddenly ended up in a position like that. But I had been active in the civil rights movement for years so I knew a lot of the characters.

00:19:06:00

INTERVIEWER: WERE YOU USED TO THIS KIND OF HARD BOILED POLITICS IN THE BACK ROOM SETTLING?

Mondale: Not really. It, you know, it was pretty heady stuff for me at that time. I was what about 31, 32? It wasn't that bad though. People are very; that was a collection of very gifted and thoughtful and decent Americans. It was not, it was not machine politics. I mean these were people genuinely trying to wrestle with a, a tough problem in a way that would help civil rights and help the Democrats.

INTERVIEWER: WELL, JOE RAUH WHO I GUESS, WHO, YOU KNOW, MIGHT FEEL THAT HE DIDN'T QUITE WIN WHAT HE WANTED ENTIRELY, ALTHOUGH HE HAS GOOD THINGS TO SAY, HIS DESCRIPTION OF THAT NIGHT IS A LITTLE, A LITTLE STRONGER. HE SAYS, HE SAYS, VERY DIRECTLY, AND I SHOULD LET YOU KNOW THIS, HE SAYS IT WAS LIKE A LYNCH MOB. HE SAYS THERE WERE PEOPLE YELLING AT HIM THEY COULDN'T GET A DELAY, HE WANTED TO NOTIFY HIS PEOPLE, THERE WERE IMPLICATIONS THAT THE MFDP WAS GOING TO SUPPORT THIS WHEN HE KNEW THEY WEREN'T GOING TO IS THIS TRUE?

Mondale: It may be. I don't, I tell you how I remembered it, he remembers it differently. He might be right; I don't recall that severe a challenge, but he might be right.

INTERVIEWER: A KIND OF YELLING, PEOPLE ARE YELLING, VOTE, VOTE!

Mondale: You're trying to, I, I honestly don't remember. I don't want to disappoint you, but I know that there was obviously, a controversy. I remember it as being more civilized than that but I don't disagree with Joe because he may have taken contemporaries, contemporaneous notes, I didn't. And I know the result was very favorable for civil rights and for the future of a more open and just society.

INTERVIEWER: HE ACTUALLY DOESN'T DISAGREE WITH YOU ON THAT. HE JUST, HE JUST HAS A DIFFERENT MEMORY.

Mondale: That may be, and I wouldn't argue with it 'cause I, I find that those things get lost.

00:21:04:00

INTERVIEWER: DO YOU THINK THAT YOU WERE IN ANY WAY TRYING TO SEPARATE OUT THE EMOTION FROM THE FACTS, TRYING TO OUT MANEUVER THE MFDP?

Mondale: No, look, I felt very deeply, and this was the crunch point. I thought the idea of sitting a lily white delegation from Mississippi, segregated, was an outrage, and that we needed rules to prevent that. On the other hand, I was convinced that if we just took an organization that really wasn't a political party, predominantly black, and seated them, that we would make no progress in what really counted, which is the objective of an integrated Democratic party and both whites and blacks, in which both whites and blacks participated. So I never really was for that answer, that answer. I wanted to set up a set of rules and an incentive for people from Mississippi and elsewhere, to go through that door of the political party, and build a political party, just not a quadrennial delegation that showed up with no significance to the public life of the state. And in fact, that's what happened. You see Aaron Henry and many other black leaders, two years ago when a black, Mr. Clark, ran for Congress practically every one of the major white Democratic politicians in Mississippi endorsed him and went up there and campaigned for him. I think if we just created a question of whether there's going to be whites or blacks, I don't think you ever would have had a, that phenomenon happen in Mississippi. So I think we chose the right way and we had some criticism at the time, but I think on the bottom line, we elected the two most civil rights oriented presidents and vice presidents in American history, and we did more for civil rights than any, administration in that, in, in American history—

[wild audio]

Mondale: —and Mississippi is now, that is the Democrats, an integrated party.

00:22:56:00

INTERVIEWER: I'M GOING TO LOSE THE LAST END OF THAT BUT, BUT IT'S A WONDERFUL STORY AND IT'S THERE. We—

[cut]

[slate]

[change camera roll to 422]

CAMERA CREW MEMBER 1: MARK IT.

[sync tone]

INTERVIEWER: IS THAT HERE?

CAMERA CREW MEMBER 1: JUST A SECOND.

Mondale: We started out with that vast Credentials Committee, must have been a hundred people there. It, it couldn't handle that kind of burden in all the others. So we set up a subcommittee which I chaired, and I think we had 7 or 8 members. I forget. And we tried for the better part of 2½ days it seems, maybe 3, to come up with a resolution that would satisfy everyone. You couldn't. And we came up with the result that we did and I think it was a good one.

00:23:42:00

INTERVIEWER: GIVE US THIS, YOU WERE GIVING US A SENSE BEFORE—

Mondale: Yeah.

INTERVIEWER: —WE STOPPED ABOUT GOING AROUND AND ROUND AND—

Mondale: Oh yeah. *See, everybody was trying to think of something that was simple, that would solve it and, and would satisfy everybody. The problem was, there was no such solution. And so we'd go around and around and around and everybody would try this and try that and writers would see if they could write around the problems, and philosophers'd see if they could dream of something to dream over the problem. It never, it, it wouldn't go away. It had to be resolved. It had to be compromised, I think in the way that we did it. And it was inevitable that some people would be unhappy.*

00:24:26:00

INTERVIEWER: NOW, WAS IT THE ISSUE, WAS IT, YOU KNOW, WHETHER TO SEAT THEM OR NOT, OR WAS IT PROCEDURAL, WHETHER TO TAKE IT TO THE FLOOR?

Mondale: It was, it was substance. It was not procedural. What was the best way to handle the Mississippi Freedom challenge? There was no question that the charge that they made of discrimination was absolutely right, and it had to be responded to. And on the other hand, what should the remedy be? Should we simply remove an all-white delegation and seat this black delegation, principally black delegation, from Mississippi, or should we try to resolve it in some way that from here on out, prevented the kind of outrageous discrimination that they were challenging. And that was the result that we thought was best because we thought it created a hope for an integrated Democratic party, and that's exactly what happened in Mississippi, which is, for those of us in the civil rights movement, quite a miracle.

00:25:29:00

INTERVIEWER: THE MFDP PEOPLE THERE REACTED VERY STRONGLY.

Mondale: Oh yeah, they didn't like it. They wanted to be seated, that was the only thing they

would accept. The whites wanted to be seated, that's all they would accept. So in a sense, we fell between the cracks of both delegations. We resented and opposed the discrimination of the white delegation, but we did not think that the long-term health of the party would be solved by simply substituting an all black for an all white delegation. We thought what needed, what really counted was fundamental party reform, what I call the civil rights act of, of the Democratic Party, which in fact, has worked throughout our country including in Mississippi.

INTERVIEWER: DO YOU THINK THEY WERE NAÏVE IN, IN, ON EITHER SIDE OR, OR, UNFAMILIAR WITH THE PROCESSES THAT THEY, THAT THEY SAW ONLY—

Mondale: Yes, yes, I think the delegation that made up the white delegation, was used to segregation, and wanted to live with it. That was unacceptable. I think many of the, of the, who made up the black delegation were, were, were not familiar with the Democratic party, were not thinking in terms of this long-term integration effort, but, but sought a remedy right then and there which would seat them and make them the official Democratic party. I think either remedy would have produced long-term difficulties that we were able to avoid. You look at Mississippi today it's been a, in my opinion, a miracle. The recent Governor of Mississippi was one of the strong supporters of civil rights. Aaron Henry was the national committeeman, and when Clark ran for Congress, the black congressman, a candidate for Congress, the white leadership went in there and campaigned for him. I mean that, that happened, I believe, in part, because we insisted on the process of integration and not--did not put ourselves in the position of being forced to choose between a white delegation or a black delegation. I think that's, it was tough, but I think the long-term health of the party and the cause of, of desegregation, benefited.

00:27:39:00

INTERVIEWER: I'M GOING TO STOP FOR A MOMENT, LET ME THINK ABOUT IF I HAVE ANYTHING ELSE I WANT TO ASK YOU HERE.

[cut]

CAMERA CREW MEMBER 1: MARK IT PLEASE.

[sync tone]

CAMERA CREW MEMBER 1: SYNC.

INTERVIEWER: JUST ASK YOU TO TELL US AGAIN: WAS THE WHITE HOUSE A PART OF THIS IN ANY DIRECT OR INDIRECT WAY? WERE YOU TALKING WITH MR. JOHNSON'S REPRESENTATIVES, HIS PEOPLE, OR WERE YOU PRETTY MUCH LEFT ON YOUR OWN WITH A GENERAL MANDATE?

Mondale: We were pretty much left on our own, but from time to time at these meetings there would be a representative of the White House present. And I'm trying to remember his

name, I can't right now.

INTERVIEWER: BUT THERE WAS NO "JOHNSON WANTS THIS," THAT HAPPENED?

Mondale: No. No.

00:28:23:00

INTERVIEWER: AND I'M INTERESTED ALSO, WERE YOU, TO, TO ASK YOU, WERE YOU PREPARED, ACTUALLY PREPARED, TO, TO LOSE THE TWO DELEGATIONS THAT WALKED OUT: ALABAMA AND MISSISSIPPI?

Mondale: Right. That was almost preordained. The, the walkout of those two wholly white delegations from Alabama and Mississippi, was almost preordained. If you refused to seat a discriminated a, a delegation selected through discrimination, and refused to adopt a rule that prohibited discrimination, that's the only way you could keep those two delegations there. And that was anathema to me and to almost every delegate at that convention. So they, that they were going to walk out was almost certain.

00:29:15:00

INTERVIEWER: BUT HOW DID YOU FEEL WHEN, WHEN THE MFD, NOT ONLY REJECTED THIS COMPROMISE BUT THEY STARTED SITTING IN AND RAISING—

Mondale: We expected that. In other words, they wanted, they, the Mississippi Freedom delegation wanted the white delegation kicked out and they wanted their delegation seated and they in effect, wanted to be anointed the party, official party of Mississippi. I never accepted that as a good long-term answer, because I think what we really wanted, what I really wanted, was an integrated party in Mississippi, which incidentally is what we got. And that meant we should change the rules prohibit discrimination, adopt this civil rights act, what I call, for the Democratic Party, and have a healthy long-term integrated party in Mississippi that would be Democrats regardless of white or black. And that's what we did.

INTERVIEWER: YOU KNOW, I THINK I WAS ASKING SOMETHING SLIGHTLY DIFFERENT ACTUALLY.

Mondale: Yeah.

00:30:12:00

INTERVIEWER: I THINK I WAS ASKING: YOU GET THE COMPROMISE, YOU THINK YOU'VE DONE THE BEST YOU CAN, YOU REALLY DO THINK IT'S THE RIGHT THING, AND THERE THEY ARE MAKING A MESS OF THINGS. AND HOW'D YOU FEEL ABOUT THAT?

Mondale: Well that's, that's the Democratic Party. We have was it Will Rogers said, "I don't belong to any organized political party, I'm a Democrat." They had a powerful moral case to make. And I do not think they were seasoned political party types. They were protesters, and they had a protest that was very, very powerful: discrimination and abuse. And, and they believed that the only remedy was to be seated. And even though we accepted the strength of their moral case, created a revolution in terms of our party and civil rights that has worked from here on out they saw the seating of the delegation as the central point. And that we couldn't give to them, and so they were angry and hurt and they did what they did and I more or less expected it.

INTERVIEWER: YOU THINK THAT IT MADE A BLACK EYE FOR, FOR THE DEMOCRATIC PARTY ON TELEVISION?

Mondale: No, I don't. I think, I, no, I, I do not believe it did. It let them have—

INTERVIEWER: I STILL DIDN'T GET—

Mondale: I do not believe those demonstrations had that effect.

INTERVIEWER: I'M SORRY WE'RE GOING TO HAVE TO-THERE WE GO.

Mondale: I do not believe those demonstrations had that effect, it showed that we were an open party where these sorts of things could be heard and that kind of behavior permitted and in fact we went on to win that election by the largest margin that any Democratic candidates have ever won the presidency and vice presidency by. So I would have to say that the net effect was positive.

00:32:06:00

INTERVIEWER: OK. I THINK, I FEEL PRETTY GOOD ABOUT THAT, IF WE'D STOP OR A MOMENT, THAT WOULD BE GOOD.

[cut]

CAMERA CREW MEMBER 1: MARK IT.

[sync tone]

CAMERA CREW MEMBER 1: JUST A MOMENT. GIVE ME A SECOND.

Mondale: Well, we had this small subcommittee that of 7 or 8 people, that we were, we were together for the better part of 3 days and we were really getting to know each other and it was obvious after about the second day that we were just not making much progress. So finally former Governor Daniel of Texas said, "Would any of you tell me one, one good reason why I should stay on here?" And I said, "I can think of one." He says, "What's that?" I said "Lyndon wants you to." And he said, "All right." And after the end of that, but it really, we

were there for a long time getting punchy.

00:32:57:00

INTERVIEWER: LAST CHANCE, CAMERA ROLL OUT.

CAMERA CREW MEMBER 1: GETTING READY.

Mondale: OK, thank you very much.

[cut]

[end interview]

00:33:03:00

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