

Walter F. Mondale

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Transcript from **Eyes on the Prize: America's Civil Rights Years 1954-1965**

Produced by Blackside, Inc.

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Walter Mondale

Sound Roll 1360-1361, Camera Roll 420-422

[This is the head of Sound Roll 1360 to go with the head of camera roll number 420 for Blackside, Eyes on the Prize, um, Team B, Program 5. Coming up an interview with Fritz Mondale in Washington, D.C., May 5th, 1986. Head of this roll contained several seconds of reference tone, recorded -8dB on a modulometer of an agra 4.2 using an internal crystal operating at 60 hertz. Again, head of Sound Roll 1360, Camera Roll 420, Fritz Mondale, slate one coming.] _____

INTERVIEWER: I'M GOING TO START WITH A, A NICE GENERAL QUESTION UH, 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 uh, 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 uh, closed party systems uh, 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 uh, blacks need not apply.

INTERVIEWER: UH, WOULD YOU SAY THAT IT WAS UM, A NORMAL CONVENTION IN THAT REPRESENTATION? I MEAN THAT WAS THE WAY IT HAD ALWAYS BEEN, (INAUDIBLE).

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 uh, uh, up until oh, the mid or late 50s uh, totally segregated, lily white uh, delegations from the South were more or less accepted... and were picked by a, a governor or some uh, leader of the party, and uh, that's the way it was.

INTERVIEWER: UM, 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 uh, regular Democratic party delegation was segregated. And there was no question that the black competing delegation, the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Delegation, was also virtually uh, a single non party group that came up to present themselves as a party - how to resolve the basic underlying unj...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 uh, on one side or the other, but how to resolve it - that's what, well that's what was difficult.

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 uh, in history as, as President/Vice President. Uh, I also had uh, 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 FLET 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. Um, uh, as you know, there were many many news conferences uh, many

public discussions uh, 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.

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

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

INTERVIEWER: DO YOU THINK THAT YOU HAD... I, SOME OF THE MFDP PEOPLE REMEMBER IT, PERHAPS...

Mondale: Sure.

INTERVIEWER: ...TO THEIR OWN UH, 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 uh, 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. Uh, 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.

INTERVIEWER: THAT'S WONDERFUL. (INAUDIBLE). LET'S CHECK EVERYBODY'S _____ UM, 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 uh, discrimination problems. Many of them favored uh, strongly and effectively eliminating discrimination, some didn't, depending on wh... 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. Um, and um, uh, I think the result that we came out with was quite acceptable to most of the party uh, uh, resented by some in the South and perhaps elsewhere.

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

Mondale: They wanted to be seated on the grounds that uh, they were the Democrats and uh, 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 uh, just forget it and go on like we had in the good old days. Uh, that was the basically the case they made.

INTERVIEWER: WERE YOU AFRAID THAT THEY WOULD WALK OUT?

Mondale: No, uh, that was uh, they were permi...

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.

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

Mondale: No. Uh, uh, 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 uh, famous uh, speech uh, 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 uh, white and black, who were just as interested in civil rights reform as one found elsewhere.

INTERVIEWER: OK. NOW... PRESIDENT JOHNSON OBVIOUSLY WANTED TO SOLVE THIS AS QUICKLY, AS EASILY... AND AS, AS PRIVATELY AS WAS POSSIBLE, MAYBE NOT ENTIRELY. UM, 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, uh, I worked for Hubert Humphrey, with Walter Ruther uh, with Joe Rauh who was representing or working with the Mississippi Freedom Democrats um, 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 uh, uh, uh, review this with everyone concerned and I think the result we came up with was uh, quite acceptable.

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

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 uh,

strong convention that would uh, permit he and Hubert to uh, be uh, 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... but Johnson knew who... who he wanted. And uh, and he wanted a unified uh, national party that could uh, go to the public uh, without all the traditional fights that uh, Democrats often have.

INTERVIEWER: UM, I WAS GOING TO SAY COULD YOU STOP FOR A MOMENT. _____ WHEN SENATOR HUMPHREY ASKED YOU TO CHAIR THIS, THIS UH... 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... uh, Hubert Humphrey asked me to do it... I'm not, I don't recall that he gave me an explanation uh, that might uh, bear on his own career. But obviously, he was uh, being considered uh, and was selected as uh, 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 uh, 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 uh, these many years later. From then on out uh, at every convention uh, the uh, people that were discriminated against, if they were, could make that a legal grounds of challenge. And in fact, if you look at uh, national Democratic delegations from the South and elsewhere now - since that convention uh, 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.

INTERVIEWER: OKAY. I, I THINK THAT, THAT, THAT'S A VERY CLEAR PART OF IT, THAT THAT UM...

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. Uh, the Voting Rights Act, the Fair Housing Act uh, the other major uh, measures - all of the uh, programs for educational assistance, poverty assistance uh, early childhood nutrition uh, 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 IN THE SOUTHERN MANIFESTO... IS IMPECCABLE AND, AND HUMPHREY'S RECORD OF, OF, I, I DON'T KNOW WHAT... IS MORE THAN IMPECCABLE, ABSOLUTELY UH, AND THE '48 CONVENTION 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. 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 uh, 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 uh, uh, all the years that I've been with Hubert uh, uh, the thought that uh, there would be a deal - you deliver something and I will uh, deliver the vice presidency - that seems very very unlikely to me. And the thought that Hubert would uh, compromise on Civil Rights uh, was an outrage, nor did he.

INTERVIEWER: UM HUM. GOOD. UM, THERE, THERE, THERE'S A, THERE'S A FIRST COMPROMISE MADE THAT FAILS, AND AT THAT POINT UM, PRESIDENT JOHNSON ASKS WALTER RUTHER TO BE PART OF THIS ALSO, TO HELP. COULD YOU TALK ABOUT WHAT IT WAS THAT RUTHER UH, 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. Uh, I vaguely recall that uh, Walter Ruther 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... but I, I vaguely remember that uh, that the auto workers had helped uh, provide some of the resources for the Mississippi Freedom Democratic uh, uh, drive to Atlantic City, and the efforts there. I believe that's correct, and I think that uh, that the leaders of the uh, Mississippi challenge uh, uh, were talking very closely to Walter Ruther uh, during this time.

INTERVIEWER: AND, AND, I MEAN...

Mondale: Working closely.

INTERVIEWER: IT IS YOUR SENSE THAT HE WAS UH, 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 uh, his uh, judgments would be carefully listened to.

INTERVIEWER: JUST A MINUTE...

Mondale: Well, I think that...

INTERVIEWER: (INAUDIBLE) ...GET THE CAMERA SETTLED.

Mondale: I think that Walter Ruther was uh, 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 uh, sort of lawyer and advocate uh, at the convention, for that movement. In any event, if we were going to put together a responsible resolution of this, that uh, preserved the good will of uh, those uh, surrounding the Mississippi Freedom Democrats - those were among those that needed to be consulted.

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 uh, uh, 22 years, it gets a little vague. Uh, we had uh, uh, Humphrey was there for a while uh, Ruther was there uh, uh, Joe Rauh was there uh, I think we consulted with Aaron Henry and some of them out of Mississippi uh, uh, Clarence Mitchell of uh, of the NAACP, and others. And uh, this was an effort to resolve how we would settle this situation and uh, 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 UM, 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 uh, 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.

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

Mondale: Um, not really. It, you know, it was pretty heady stuff for me at that time. I was what uh, about 31, 32?

INTERVIEWER: UM..

Mondale: It wasn't that bad though - people are very ded...that was uh, a collection of very gifted and thoughtful and decent Americans. It was not, it was not uh, 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 UH, 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 UH, 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 UH, 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 UH... 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 uh, 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 uh, 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... co...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.

INTERVIEWER: DO YOU THINK THAT YOU WERE IN ANY WAY UM, 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 o...of an integrated Democratic party and both whites and blacks partic... 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... uh, two years ago when a black, Mr. Clark, ran for Congress uh, 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, uh, administration in that, in, in American history, and Mississippi is now, that is the Democrats, an integrated party.

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

[Uh, this is the head of Sound Roll 1361 for Camera Roll 422, Blackside, Eyes on the Prize. Um, we're continuing our interview with Fritz Mondale in Washington, D.C., May 5th, 1986. Uh, slate number 5 coming.]

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. Uh, and, uh, we came up with the result that we did and I think it was a good one.

INTERVIEWER: GIVE US THIS - YOU WERE GIVING US A SENSE BEFORE...

Mondale: Yeah.

INTERVIEWER: ...WE STOPPED ABOUT UH, 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 see if they could uh, 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.*

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. Uh, and uh, on the other hand, what should the remedy be? Should we simply uh, remove an all white delegation and seat this uh, 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.

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. Uh, 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 uh, 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. Uh, I think either remedy would have produced long-term difficulties that we were able to avoid. You look at Mississippi today uh, it's been a, in my opinion, a miracle. Uh, the uh, recent Governor of Mississippi was one of the strong supporters of civil rights. Uh, 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 uh, desegregation, benefited.

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

ASK YOU UM, 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 uh, 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.

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

Mondale: Right. That was almost preordained. The, the walk out 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 uh, refused to uh, adopt a uh, 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.

INTERVIEWER: BUT HOW DID YOU FEEL WHEN, WHEN THE MFDP, 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. Uh, 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 uh, prohibit discrimination, adopt this Civil Rights Act, what I call, for the Democratic Party, and have a healthy long-term uh,

integrated party in Mississippi that uh, 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.

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 uh, uh, was it Will Rogers said - I don't belong to any organized political party, I'm a Democrat. Uh, they had a powerful moral case to make. And I do not think they were seasoned uh, political party types. They were protesters, and they had a protest that was very very powerful - discrimination uh, 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 uh, they did what they did and I more or less expected it.

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

Mondale: Uh, 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 uh, 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.

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

Mondale: Well, we had this small subcommittee that uh, 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, uh, former Governor Daniel of uh, 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, "Alright." And after the end of that, but it really, we were there for a long time getting punchy.

INTERVIEWER: LAST CHANCE, CAMERA ROLL OUT.

Mondale: Okay, thank you very much.

INTERVIEWER: COULD WE JUST... DO YOU NEED HIM TO SIT HERE? COULD WE HAVE SOMEBODY ELSE SIT HERE?

Mondale: Okay. _____

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