

PROJECT DESCRIPTION: The Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party

This fellowship will enable me to complete research and writing of a book on the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party. In the late 1960s I completed a first draft of this material and a second draft a few years later. I am now completing a book on the 1964 Freedom Summer in Mississippi to be published in 1994 by Rutgers University Press. I had thought to combine most of my present material on the MFDP into this book but the MFDP material needs a full book length treatment. (One chapter will summarize some MFDP activity for the Freedom Summer book). The goal is publication of a book on MFDP. Since I have much of the material now in a second draft I should be able to do additional research and complete the final draft of the book in the year at Virginia.

I will need to use the SNCC archives, especially for material from the Atlanta SNCC office about the MFDP. I would also like to do some research in archives reasonably near Charlottesville such as the Howard University oral history material, the Library of Congress for the Joe Rauh papers and Democratic National Committee material. I have done some research over past few years in the L. B. Johnson papers in Austin and in the Al Lowenstein papers in Chapel Hill, but might still need one more trip to each library.

I am uniquely qualified to do this work. I am a native white Mississippian who was active in the leadership of the Civil Rights Movement in that state, an organizer of the "Freedom Summer," and one of the founders and officers of the Freedom Democratic Party. I am a teacher, researcher, and published writer. I have given lectures at colleges on this topic for many years. There is currently a rising interest in such topics.

The MFDP is important as an expression of black political aspirations and as a major expression of "grass-roots" political organizing in this country. Political writer Theodore White said that the "success" of the MFDP in breaking down all white delegations at the 1964 Democratic Convention led to the emphasis on "inclusion" for all groups in all aspects of society and the MFDP has had a greater impact on U.S. politics than the advent of TV. Attorney Lannie Guinier titled her now famous law review article on minority political participation "No Two Seats," in direct reference to the words of Mrs. Hamer of the MFDP at that same 1964 Convention. The MFDP was an inspiration for political organizing by blacks in other states and for many other people in the sixties and since. No basic study of the origins and first year of the MFDP have been published, especially not by a founder-leader trained in the social sciences to do analytical as well as "participant-observer" writing.

The Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party, 1963-1968; People, Power, Hope.

Edwin King (Outline of book, second draft)

SECTION ONE. The 1963 Freedom Vote. PART I. (about 17 double spaced pages.)

A. "Vote For Freedom," Introduction and background on status of black voting in Mississippi, Reconstruction to 1963. Short (3 or 4 pages) summary history of past discrimination. Focus on voter registration efforts of 1950's and early 1960's. Data from specific counties of blocking black registration. Poll Tax. Literacy tests. State constitution interpretation test. Civil Rights groups, especially NAACP and SNCC, work on voter registration and fail. Different results in different regions of state. Old black Republicans and rise of new white Republicans. White Dixiecrats. U.S. Justice Department suits and efforts. SCLC and training of local leaders such as Fannie Lou Hamer. Establishment of COFO, Council of Federated Organizations, for cooperation among civil rights groups.

B. Initial voter registration efforts. McComb; Greenwood; Jackson, etc. First electoral campaigns. Bill Higgs, white liberal, for U.S. Congress, 1960. The Rev. R. L. T. Smith, black NAACP leader, for U.S. Congress, 1962.

C. Failure of COFO and SNCC and NAACP voter registration campaigns--and all other civil rights activities, 1960-63. Greenwood Movement and Jackson Movement and Clarksdale Movement all blocked, smashed, spring and summer of 1963. Murder of Medgar Evers. Morale of civil rights workers very low; creativity very low. Desperate strategy. Talk of attempted general strike in cotton fields, etc.

D. Visits of Allard Lowenstein and stimulating ideas and suggestions culminating in research on old laws and new possibilities. Mock elections in a few counties in August of 1963 with blacks as write in candidates for local offices, sheriff, etc.,

PART TWO (about 15 pages)

A. COFO and SNCC plans for fall 1963 and winter 1964.

B. Development of "Freedom Vote" strategy of mock election of demonstration that black citizens do want to participate in politics; are not allowed to do so by white power; and that black participation would make significant difference in elections, etc. COFO, led by SNCC and Robert Moses, selects black NAACP leader

Aaron Henry to "run" for Governor and white native Mississippian, Rev. Ed King, Tougaloo College Chaplain and "veteran" of several civil rights campaigns--and prisons--to run for Lt. Governor. Election will take place at same time as "white only" general election battle between white Democratic Paul Johnson and the white Republican Reubel Phillips, in first modern serious campaign by Republicans.

C. COFO Freedom Vote strategy. Grassroots focus and organization. Quotations from literature. Short description, biography of Aaron Henry. Platform on Justice, Education, Jobs, Economics. Goals of organizing new counties, etc. Staff structure.

D. Ed King. Personal decision to run. Doubts about a Southern white man doing this. Encouragement (pressure) from Bob Moses et al to make this an "integrated" effort. Personal comments on my own Southern background and family and my own work in Movement past few years with arrests in Alabama and Mississippi and close work with Medgar Evers, etc., and place of Tougaloo College (where I was Chaplain) in the Movement.

PART THREE. (about ten pages).

A. Campaign organization. Staff. Leadership. Bob Moses and Miss. SNCC. James Foreman and Atlanta SNCC. Dave Dennis and CORE. Charles Evers, Rev. R.L. T. Smith and NAACP. Al Lowenstein, white national liberal leader as political advisor.

B. The other candidates. The white racist candidates of regular Democratic and Republican Parties. Their campaign literature quoted in detail for racism and other themes. Their basic goal to attack "the Kennedys" black "radicals" and "reds." Their use and understanding of history as they each hark back to Reconstruction and overthrow of black voting. C. Tentative new name for our black led political movement, "Freedom Party."

PART FOUR: (about 120 pages)

A. Campaign strategy--reach "grass roots" people, especially in new counties. Atlanta SNCC sends staff help but needs are greater than all staff available. Al Lowenstein suggests out of state students, chiefly white, from Stanford and Yale. With some doubt SNCC and COFO agree. New volunteers come. Campaign stories--Greenwood, Greenville, Hattiesburg, Gulf Coast, Southwest counties, etc. White harassment. Support and speeches of Norman Thomas. Aaron Henry speeches. Efforts to reach national press. (45 pages)

B. Details and statistics of actual vote, over 90,000 people respond. Discussion of past (slavery and Reconstruction) and future. Debates over two points--role of whites in Movement and whether this present effort should expand into what becomes "Freedom Summer," and discussion of how to produce (or force) adequate response from Federal government--protection for lives of workers and people, and the right to vote. Discussions of whether nonviolence will work or if a military occupation of state is needed. (45 pages.)

C. Analysis of positive and negative results of campaign by SNCC and personal by E.King. Debate over expansion of Movement and role of outside whites. Emerging problems of social class differences in black community reflected in response to Movement. Future goals of building a party and of challenging seating of white Congressmen in Washington and of white only delegation at national Democratic Convention. (40 pages).

SECTION TWO Building a Political Party. Winter, spring 1964. Part I. (about 40 pages)

A. Organization of new party, the Mississippi Freedom Democratic party. Statewide voter registration and education work. Support from Atlanta SNCC office. Ella Baker chosen to direct national efforts to organize support for MFDP within Democratic Party. Bob Moses talks with attorney Joe Rauh who agrees to direct legal efforts in convention challenge.

B. Tensions with Charles Evers who does not support effort and is hostile to "grass roots" organizing and general program of SNCC. Other internal divisions. Local leaders called upon to become statewide leaders.

C. Clear decision after debate for use of outside volunteers, chiefly white college students, in Freedom Summer and the MFDP will use such assistance.

Part II. (about 15 pages)

Political "Direct Action." 1964 Democratic Primary Elections (before volunteers arrive) with major focus on Congressional Challenge. Fannie Lou Hamer et al run for U. S. Congress. Mississippi Democratic Party precinct meetings to select delegates to Democratic National Convention. Blacks attempt to participate and are blocked. Few whites actually participate.

SECTION THREE. Building a Political Party. Freedom Summer, 1964. Part I. (80 pages)

A. White Politics. Democrats. Republicans.

B. Growth of MFDP with student volunteers assistance "from precinct to state convention." Stories to

illustrate local problems and achievements. Roles of the volunteers. Tensions: black/white on the staff; middle class/the poor in the community. Hostility of Charles Evers and NAACP. Local community structures. County and congressional district meetings. "Freedom Registration." Neshoba murders and effect on rest of state.

Jackson and Hinds County MFDP meetings. M.L.King speaks in Neshoba County on behalf of MFDP.

C. "Help" from national leadership. Visit of U.S. Congressmen to Mississippi and, even, McComb.

"Summit" meeting of top national leadership of major Civil Rights groups (except for NAACP, already fighting MFDP, at Tougaloo College and in my home. Debates with Bayard Rustin over whether national people would/should take over fight for MFDP. Efforts to replace Ella Baker as coordinator of out of state support for MFDP from liberal Democrats with Al Lowenstein and have Bayard Rustin direct all national Civil Rights support and any demonstrations in Atlantic City. Bitter philosophic differences. King and James Farmer of CORE stick with us. Rustin balks and warns Democratic Party liberals will not accept us.

D. Plans for Atlantic City Democratic National Convention. Strategy. Anticipation of need to compromise and consideration of possible fall back positions. National efforts to block MFDP by LBJ and to support us by some liberals--or to settle quietly with tokens.

E. MFDP State Convention. Jackson, the day after bodies found in dam in Neshoba County. Keynote speech by Ella Baker. Completion of election of delegates and state officers. Platform (even with traditional liberal cold-war statements on international issues and no reference to Vietnam). Enthusiasm and hope.

SECTION FOUR. 1964 Democratic Convention in Atlantic City. Part I. (40 pages).

This is a very detailed, day by day, sometimes hour by hour account, made from notes from the time, Convention records, published statements, press reports, etc.

Part I. (40 pages)

A. Strategy. Goals of Minority Reports and Floor Fight.

B. Support from other state delegations.

Part II. (80 pages)

A. Credentials Committee Hearing. Fannie Lou Hamer. M. L. King. Roy Wilkins, et al.

Quotes from speeches and legal brief. Hostility from LBJ. Walter Mondale of Minnesota named head of

subcommittee to "settle" problems. Joe Rauh is attorney for MFDP.

B. Lobbying state delegations. White House pressure on liberals, threats and rewards.

C. Negotiations on minor settlement efforts. LBJ names Sen. Humphrey to deal with MFDP, with his vice-presidential nomination riding on his ability to control the liberals in the party and to stop the black upstarts of MFDP.

D. Al Lowenstein arranges for Humphrey to meet with Fannie Lou Hamer and Ed King.

Part III. (50 pages)

Final secret negotiations. Humphrey, Walter Reuther of UAW, Bayard Rustin, Martin King and Andy Young of SCLC, Bob Moses, Aaron Henry, and Ed King of MFDP. Several hours of talk about the soul of America, the role of Liberalism, the white backlash, the rising rightwing, as well as "mere" Mississippi racial politics.

Power. Fear. Hope. Announcement of forced compromise of two at large seats at convention (for Aaron Henry and Ed King) and future "inclusive" conventions.

Part IV. (55 pages)

A. Compromise rejected by MFDP delegates despite Mondale's forcing it through the Credentials Committee and Convention claiming we agreed. No floor fight

B. Debate before MFDP delegations about merits and demerits of compromise proposal. MLKing, Bayard Rustin, Bob Moses, et al. SNCC almost desperate in morale and behavior and disillusionment. MFDP delegates reject Compromise. "No Two Seats."

C. Convention floor protest "sit-in" with badges from liberal delegates.

D. MFDP delegates return to Mississippi to face violence but to work for LBJ-HHH ticket.

Part V. (60 pages)

A. Press reaction. Most of liberal press denounces MFDP as too radical for politics.

B. MFDP reaction. Printed statements and speeches and conversations.

C. Reaction of summer volunteers. Massive disillusionment with traditional liberalism in politics, openness to radical critiques which soon become attacks on Vietnam War.

D. Personal analysis by Ed King.

Part VI MFDP, 1964-68. Congressional Challenge. Voter registration. Chicago Convention. (50 pages)

A. MFDP Congressional Challenge. Selma. Voter registration and education.

B. Internal tensions in Mississippi between the "poor" in MFDP and the "middle class" blacks in NAACP which is supported by White Establishment, from White House, to Poverty Programs to the white governor of Mississippi. "Loyalist" controlled party built up as rival to MFDP. Eventual merger will occur. Redistricting. Local elections

C. SNCC abandons Mississippi and MFDP but many volunteers stay and work with local people to build a grass roots party. Mississippian Lawrence Guyot is chairman. New issues. War in Vietnam. Black Power.

D. 1968 Democratic Convention in Chicago. Georgia and other states show influence of MFDP in their challenges and integrated delegations. Inclusive Mississippi delegation seated. Madness in streets of Chicago as outside Convention Hall police riot against peace demonstrators. MFDP as statewide group merged with "Loyalists," Labor, and others into new state Democratic Party but grassroots local MFDP groups continue.