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Convention, 1964

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The regular Mississippi delegation was all white. Blacks had been kept out of Mississippi Democratic affairs for more than 70 years. Therefore, led by veterans of the Freedom Summer, the MFDP demanded that the Credentials Committee seat the biracial MFDP delegation in place of the regular delegates.

The committee refused and suggested a compromise, which would have admitted only two MFDP members to the convention; meanwhile, the entire regular delegation would be seated. This the MFDP could not accept. Instead, its supporters chose to dramatize their exclusion by holding a protest rally at the convention.

"Sick and Tired of Being Sick and Tired"

At the Democratic convention, Fannie Lou Hamer spoke before the television cameras. She had challenged Congressman Jamie Whitten for his House seat, claiming that since blacks had not been allowed to vote, his election was a fraud. Now she told the story of her treatment in jail after she used the Winona bus station in 1963:

They carried me into a room and there were two Negro boys in this room. The state highway patrolman gave them a long, wide blackjack and he told one of the boys, "Take this . . . and if you don't use it on her, you know what I'll use on you." . . . That man beat me till he give out. And I was trying to guard some of the licks with my hands and they just beat my hands till they turned blue.

Hamer was no "outside agitator," no professional civil rights worker. Indeed, she had attended her first civil rights meeting only a year earlier. She was born in Montgomery County, the last of twenty children. When she was two, her parents moved to Sunflower County, where they sharecropped. Although her parents worked hard and at one time owned three mules and two cows, they could not escape Delta poverty. Hamer became convinced that things had to be made better.

Fannie Lou Hamer.



She married in 1944 and lived quietly with her husband on a plantation near Ruleville. Then in 1962 the civil rights movement reached Ruleville. Hamer went with seventeen other blacks to Indianola to try to register. When she returned home, she found that the plantation owner had thrown her and her husband off his land. They were without a home or job.

They moved into Ruleville and she became an active SNCC worker. She was a founder of the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party, and when the Freedom Summer was organized, she went to Ohio to work with the volunteers.

Realizing that poor people needed economic help as well as political participation, she organized the Freedom Farms Cooperative, a vegetable-and-livestock enterprise designed to raise the income and improve the diet of Sunflower County residents.

She received national attention. Invitations to speak came from colleges all over America; Tougaloo College and Shaw University gave her honorary degrees. But she remained basically committed to the people of Ruleville and Sunflower County, where she continued to live. Therefore one of her greatest honors was Fannie Lou Hamer Day, held in 1970 in Ruleville Central High School. She died in 1977.

White Attitudes Begin to Change

Gradually most white Mississippians began to tolerate the idea of civil rights for blacks. Even though they might continue to want segregation, they were not willing to sacrifice everything else to keep it. The first example of this new way of thinking took place at Mississippi State University in early spring of 1963. Mississippi State had won the right to represent the Southeastern Conference in the NCAA basketball tournament, but the team would meet teams with black players in the tournament. For years there had been an "unwritten rule" that white schools would not participate under such conditions, but this time Mississippi State decided to play.

Meanwhile in Jackson, Tougaloo faculty members and students contacted performers who were scheduled to give concerts in the capital city. They told the performers that the events were to be segregated and asked them not to perform under such conditions. Several performers agreed to withdraw, and Jacksonians found that they would have to be willing to integrate certain activities or lose the activities entirely.

After the conflict of the 1964 summer, many of the state's leaders realized that times had changed. During the sum-

Gary Graffman, pianist, and Al Hirt, trumpeter, were among those who withdrew.