

SNCC 60TH ANNIVERSARY CONFERENCE, 2021

The Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party

Speaker 1 (00:00:12):

We're winner and never why you can't make people in. Cause some people mind is in your way. No more tears. And we winner and everybody,

Speaker 2 (00:02:25):

People

Speaker 1 (00:02:25):

Get a, you don't need no baggage. You just get all you need is just you just

Speaker 2 (00:02:48):

Thankful.

Speaker 1 (00:02:59):

So people get ready. The, the have pity on

Speaker 2 (00:03:54):

Those whose

Speaker 1 (00:03:56):

Chances there's the

Speaker 2 (00:04:12):

You

Speaker 1 (00:04:30):

Just

Speaker 3 (00:04:58):

To the Mississippi freedom democratic party session. We are glad to have you with us while we talk about 1961 to 1964, asserting our political place and power in Mississippi, the Mississippi freedom democratic party stood up defiantly to big party politics to declare that their votes meant more than compromise and created a lesson for the future. And so today we have joining us for this conversation, Mr. Charles MC.

Speaker 4 (00:05:45):

Hello everybody. It's great to be here.

Speaker 3 (00:05:51):

Goodnight. We're so glad to have you with us today.

Speaker 4 (00:05:55):

Thank you.

Speaker 3 (00:05:57):

And next we have Hollis Watkins and he is a SNCC veteran founder of the rights movement. We're glad to have you here with us today.

Speaker 4 (00:06:15):

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I'm I'm glad you're glad to have today because I'm glad to be had.

Speaker 3 (00:06:21):

<laugh> fantastic. And the other person that will be joining in this conversation is Fred fiddle. Also a SNCC veteran and SNCC legacy project board member.

Speaker 5 (00:06:33):

Hello, and it's great to be here with my two brothers from the movement, Charles and Hollis
<laugh>

Speaker 3 (00:06:42):

And our moderator for this session, Dr. McLemore is having some technical issues. And so if he's able to join us for the conversation, then we'll be able to hear him, but we're gonna start with Hollis walk. Paul wa Wakin, please share what you will with us about the Mississippi freedom democratic club.

Speaker 4 (00:07:03):

It's good to be here. I hope what I have to offer be be will be beneficial. I wanna say, first of all, is working in the civil rights movement, creates a test, indeed, for all of us, that's working a test that is hard for many of us to pass many of the areas that we went into have not been given the credit that is due, but everybody don't get it. Some gets it for if we are serious, we got to keep on until we reach the max. And that's one of the things that I intend was trying to do is reach the max. Wanna make sure the maximum that I can do gets done because when you come up with, I mean, with a family, the way I came up, lots of children come up with 12, 12, 12. So I'm still working, building a family, doing what's necessary, help those that have large family, especially that sin tend to be having family problems that I try to provide some counseling to them, not so much about which they become everyday street beggar, but by which they learn how to, in many instances, the skills environment that they have, I say, keep on no glad that I can be able to share the little expense, the little excuse that I have in, in that process.

Speaker 6 (00:09:30):

God.

Speaker 4 (00:09:35):

So I'm asking all of us, so let's continue to work possible. Can Bob Moses, he came to Mississippi, did a one job and assistant in aiding us in the process of helping to improve the voter registration, which leads to many other important issues and events that goes on and is taking place here in Mississippi. And I just have to say to what children and this hour do, like the song said, the song said, keep on or pushing. I can't stop. Now that's the spirit and the attitude of you to have the spirit and attitude that says to you, you got to keep on pushing, keep on pushing. And one of the things based on what I saw in the early phases of the civil rights movement, if we, the older ones will step over to the side and become one that the I'm that donates and helps the young people who get it done. The reason I know is because I used to be a young person.

Speaker 4 (00:11:20):

Doesn't got to be a old man right now, but that's all right. When you compare my work today with the work that I did back during the early sixties, you'll see. When I look at these statistics of these, what have you, I looking at work work, the, it is not hard with the little help for the young people to do what need to be done. And I think the problem is that young people work so fast and

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hard and good until it frightens. We older people and says, somebody else need to do this job. Cause I don't, I don't understand. And that's the setback. So we need to make sure that when we are doing jobs and working on different issues, we have it where the young people have their opportunity to explore and explore their possibilities. And that's why I'm always doing what I can to help young people move beyond the stage of stagnation and by giving a lot of them opportunities to do different things at different points.

Speaker 4 (00:13:05):

In times, they'll tell you says, I didn't know I could do that. I didn't know I could do that. The reason they don't, they could do it is that they never would give them the opportunity to do what need to be done. So I'm asking all of you. I did as much as I think I possibly could spending the summer in the Mississippi state penitentiary, didn't turn me around. And that's where we got our song from you start singing the song and, and it took on meaning the one that says ain't going to let nobody turn me, turn,

Speaker 7 (00:14:04):

Turn me. Ain't going. Let nobody turn me around. I'm going to keep on walking, keep on

Speaker 4 (00:14:15):

Talking, walking up the highway. We gotta keep the on pushing. Don't let nobody turn us around. Cause because we were not made with a lot of fear, this we were made with determination willpower to fool ahead.

Speaker 4 (00:14:47):

We talk about McComb being our starting place. There were other places that started in the same area, same time. And they kept on moving, marching up the Kings highway. And I want to ask all of those young people today and goes to come, keep the spirit up, keep the, keep your head high and don't let nobody turn you around. When you see how the movement in McComb kicked off it started, went from McComb over to Harrisburg, went from Burg back to Jackson, then left Jackson and went in number of different ways into the Delta. And the Delta area was my favorite.

Speaker 4 (00:15:59):

Cause I got a chance to meet people like Hardman, turn people like Amey Moore. And I ain't gonna go no, no further in that because Mike Lauren is here and he's well prepared to tell you what needs to be done. And you going cut off right there and say, if when I can build system, call me. And I guess the deepest of problems that I had with the folks in the Delta is that the, the local county officials sent me to the Mississippi state Penn retention, where I spent 55 days in maximum security unit on this road. But did that stop me? No. Did like the song says, say you better keep on or pushing. Don't just stop now. And that's what I did. And that's what I say. All the young people expressing keep on pushing, keep <affirmative> keep up to good words and you will ultimately overcome. I don't, I don't how long, but I, I know I can get big mouth and go on and on and on. So I'm gonna stop right there and say thanks to those that made this happen and I'll be here. I'm around. I ain't scared.

Speaker 4 (00:18:00):

Like that song said, ain't scared of nobody cause I want my, so thank you.

Speaker 3 (00:18:11):

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That is the introduction for Mr. Charles MC Lauren to join and share from his experiences. And so it looks like we're not able to hear you just yet. Hold on one quick second so that we can fix that for you. All right. Let's hear from you, Mr. Charles MC.

Speaker 4 (00:18:41):

Thank you. And on pushing, I've reading in the advocate and Jackson papers about your leadership, uh, seminars that you're doing and teach teaching young people. You've always been good at that. So, uh, I hope to, uh, see you in person real soon.

Speaker 4 (00:19:06):

I I'd like to start talking briefly about the Mississippi Delta because that's where actually, uh, my, uh, really involvement in the movement started, uh, in 1962, uh, Bob Moses, uh, brought myself and Charlie Cobb and land Magna to the Mississippi Delta and, um, brought us Sam Z Moore house who, uh, NAACP leader who wanted to initiate voter registration, uh, in the Delta. And so, uh, Bob Moses brought us to, uh, little town called Ruleville Mississippi in the mid, in the mid Delta and, uh, left us with some leaders, uh, black leaders and in the rural community who wanted to, to organize, uh, and, uh, get registered to vote so that they can vote in sunflower county, which is the county seat. So organizing at that point was not something that I'd ever done before and, uh, was a little bit lost at first, uh, until I took my first two people to the courthouse in Indianola, uh, we had to go from Indianola, meaning from Ruleville to Indianola about 26 miles, uh, to the county seat to register, to vote.

Speaker 4 (00:20:42):

All people who, all, anyone trying to register to vote in those days had to be 21 years of age or older. And, um, they had to go to the county seat to register, which was really <laugh> voter suppression. I mean, you make a person travel 26 miles to take a literacy test. Uh, and, um, and, and then you, there was no intention from the beginning of that person, uh, becoming a registered voter. So sunflower county was about where I finally land and started to, uh, do, um, my work, um, was about 70% black and there was one, uh, registered voter. Of course we never found him, but the record showed that there was one, uh, at that time in 19 61 62, uh, that was not a single black elected official in the whole state. Mississippi only had about 5% of the, uh, African American or black population registered to vote.

Speaker 4 (00:21:56):

So I had received some training early. I had been to Mount Buer and, and, uh, MES had, uh, talked with myself and some of my friends there in Jackson where I had grown up, and one day I went to me, ask him about how, uh, we were gonna stop, uh, Mr. Charlie or the white man from lynching us. And, uh, me said, uh, you get the guys and, and come by the office this afternoon, about three o'clock. And, um, so we did and went up there and, and me took out this big map of the state of Mississippi. And he drew a, a circle around the Mississippi Delta. He said, here's where we start. And he talked about then how the legislature was a portion, how many, uh, members in the house, how many in the Senate, and, uh, pointed out the fact that if we got significant number of, of, uh, African Americans in the Delta registered, we could, uh, send, uh, a number of, uh, African Americans or good white folks to the legislature.

Speaker 4 (00:23:07):

Uh, and, uh, we could, that's the way we were going to change things. So saw that right away. And it was real anxious. <laugh> when Bob left us up there in Ruleville, uh, I was anxious to get started. I, I thought we could, uh, register all of the, uh, a significant number of African

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Americans in about six months. And, uh, and I'd go back to Jackson and go back to college. And, uh, <laugh> yeah, it was up there in the Delta, uh, taking people to the courthouse, um, numbers of people to the courthouse. They gotta pass this literacy test, the plantation owners on which they, um, plantation that they were living, uh, getting harassed, some, getting kicked off of the plantation and a very good example. And, and, and future leader was that the one of the plantations near Ruleville Mississippi kicked told Fannie Lou Hamer really that, uh, you know, that she wouldn't go back to the courthouse and withdraw her application to register the vote that she, she would have to leave.

Speaker 4 (00:24:20):

And that even if she went back and withdrew the application, there was a possibility she still might have to leave. So Fannie Lou Haman, uh, left the plantation and, uh, and came into Ruleville and, uh, she became one of the most important leaders in the effort to register to vote. Um, I had the opportunity to, uh, bringing her to sneak, uh, after she left the plantation, Bob Moses requested that I bring her, uh, to Tulu college and from Tulu college high, remember do, um, Joyce Macon and a whole bunch of us, James Jones traveled to Nashville, Tennessee to the SN conference there. And we brought Fannie Lou Haer with us. And, uh, but we, over the years, we saw that taking people to the courthouse and hundreds and people going to the courthouse, and we really wasn't having any results. So we needed to ha needed some other strategy.

Speaker 4 (00:25:29):

We needed somehow to, uh, bring, uh, pressure to at the local level, at the state level and at the national level. So we got all the NAACP core SNCC, SCL, CDs organizations, and put them in to under an umbrella called COFO COFO is now an organization that, uh, was easier for us to go out and, and encourage people to work under because the NAACP had been kinda underground because over the years, they had, uh, white people on the power structure had, had, uh, stigmatized the NAACP to the point that a lot of blacks were afraid to identify with it. So under COFO, we now have, uh, uh, a banner under which all of these organizations are pooling their resources and, uh, these resources, uh, were mostly now, uh, aim at developing, uh, leadership in the various communities. And what, uh, one of the things that I think I know Hollis and, and that we did was that we, we had to communicate, find a way of communicating with, uh, people.

Speaker 4 (00:27:00):

So we did this do to do canvassing and, uh, we had to educate, uh, so we had mass meetings, we, uh, citizenship classes and, uh, these, uh, uh, kinds of things that we had to do because actually black people had not in Mississippi had not voted since the 1890s. And you can see the period between 1890 and 19 60 61. Um, there, there, there was, there was black folks just didn't see the importance, especially in the Delta, did not see the importance of voting. They couldn't see, there's a guy working on a plantation, and he's been told that, uh, if he gets involved with the NAACP, he gets involved in any kinda organizations. If you get an education he's gonna lose, uh, you gotta move, he's gotta leave. So, um, we had to find ways, um, to, uh, get national focus on, uh, Mississippi so that, uh, we could break open this closed society that has been cl had been created there.

Speaker 4 (00:28:15):

Uh, we, we were in a condition and, and I always described it as we were, we were hostage, uh, that there was a level as to how high we could go. Uh, and we couldn't go any higher than that. And we could not participate in the democratic process. So we had, uh, really, uh, we were just the people being used, misused and abused. So we gotta now find ways to, to, to, to keep moving

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the people that we had gotten ready to, um, uh, take 'em into the courthouse and got them up, build their interest. We had to somehow keep from losing them. So we decide to have a mark election where we're gonna run our own candidates, uh, for governor, Lieutenant governor. And then we are going to run in three of the five congressional districts where we had the largest population. And, uh, that was the fifth, which included Burg.

Speaker 4 (00:29:18):

And, um, our candidate was, uh, Ms. Victoria Gray. And, uh, in the fourth, uh, we, uh, was going to get for having this anti divine and in the second congressional district, which we failed was our district. We wanted to get to get our district back. The second congressional district included the Delta and John A. Lynch, historically the black, uh, Congressman had lost his, our political, uh, district there, uh, with the Mississippi legislature and 1890, uh, constitution. So our aim now is to keep moving till we can get to somebody who are somewhere where somebody would listen to us. So we mark election, we went out and set up our own registration forms, uh, registered people who were 21 years of age or older anywhere. We found them cotton field, junk joints, uh, church house, junk house, wherever we found people willing to, uh, let us make an application for them to, to, uh, as a, as a registered voter with what is coming and what is coming is freedom summer and freedom.

Speaker 4 (00:30:44):

Summer is, um, going to help us, uh, continue our voter registration effort is gonna help us set up, um, uh, freedom, uh, centers, uh, freedom schools, uh, across the state. And it's going to help us begin to develop the, uh, Mississippi freedom democratic party. And the purpose for this is that we are going to challenge the deceiving of the regular Mississippi Democrats, uh, in, uh, in the credentials committee. And, and if we, uh, are not successful there, we hoped to get a full fight where we failed. We had some support, uh, and what happened. Uh, we went to Atlantic city and, um, I had a good time <laugh>, but, uh, we also went there, you know, to conduct some business. And our business was to unseat the regular delegates, uh, Fannie Lou Hama spoke to the credentials committee, Henry spoke to the con credentials committee.

Speaker 4 (00:31:55):

And so did Dr. Martin Luther king Jr. But the, but the, um, uh, testimony that really brought the attention on Mississippi and, uh, broke open the, uh, closed the, and took the hoods off of Thelan was Fannie Lou Haman's testimony. And that testimony, uh, brought us in contact, uh, brought the Mississippi freedom democratic party in contact with the president of the United States, uh, Lindon Johnson, who, uh, was, uh, in office as a result of the death of Kennedy and wanted a full term. And, uh, so we, uh, the Mississippi freedom democratic party is now in a position where, um, I, I never thought we would be, I mean, you think the president of the United States is now involved in what is happening in the Mississippi and Mississippi is the spotlight here. Uh, of course, uh, we didn't unseat the, the, uh, regulars, um, but, uh, they did offer us what they thought was a compromise.

Speaker 4 (00:33:12):

Uh, uh, president Johnson sent his, um, two, uh, henchman, um, Walter Mondale and, and, uh, Senator Humphrey and, uh, offered us what they thought we would take as a compromise of two seats at large. And then they were going to tell us who would occupy those two seats. So, uh, when we met and Fannie Lou Haman, and all of the devils got together, Fannie Lou Haman said, this is nothing. And it really was nothing you think about that after the convention would've been over, we accepted that, uh, and gone home. We were coming right back to Mississippi where the

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same Mississippi Democrats, D Democrats, that they were called were still in charge. They didn't even, uh, try to offer us some seats in the democratic party, but they're gonna leave us up there in limbo talking about two seats at large Fannie Lou Hamer said no.

Speaker 4 (00:34:18):

And all of the delegates voted that we would not accept that compromise. And of course, you know, the regular, uh, Mississippi Democrats were, uh, asked to, uh, pledge loyalty to the democratic nominee and, uh, they refused and came home and they left. So that then left us in Atlantic city. And you, you may have seen some of these pictures of how jut our people was down there under the, the Mississippi, uh, delegate banner. And of course, uh, the next phase of our, our effort there, would've been, uh, a floor fight, but of course, president Johnson, uh, worried about losing, uh, what he thought was his Southern base. Um, the national democratic party, um, accepted Johnson's nominee for the democratic party by acclamation, and, uh, really that ended the convention. Uh, so, uh, we came home Fannie Lou and I came home, uh, really, uh, because we to, uh, continue our fight, uh, because we knew that the problems that we were going to face were in the Mississippi legislature and in these counties back home.

Speaker 4 (00:35:40):

So we came back home, filed lawsuits and, um, um, Fannie one lawsuit that Fannie Lou Hama, uh, filed, uh, Hama versus Campbell, that lawsuit led to some changes in, uh, the pilot, um, the politics in Indianola, and then, and in the two little communities within sunflower county. So, um, our whole effort was to build a movement. We build that movement. We, that movement brought us to the national, uh, scenes. And of course, as a result of our going the freedom democratic party going in the challenge, uh, the, the national democratic party changes, uh, uh, their rules and, and for 1968, uh, all delegations that, uh, came to the convention, um, should be, uh, more representative of the population, uh, back in the com back, uh, at, in, in the home place. So, um, we have good success in terms of our organization, our movement and, and the, the, and the results that we got 1968, the, uh, Mississippi freedom, democratic party, and a group called the lawless, went to Atlanta, went to, uh, Chicago.

Speaker 4 (00:37:06):

And of course, uh, the law group was seated in place of the, uh, Mississippi delegation, all of the, uh, so-called D Democrats and, and, uh, and, uh, democratic, uh, people, uh, came back to Mississippi and the Republican party became the strongest party in the south. So, uh, today we are, uh, up against basically the same people, the same system, uh, with this voter suppression and, uh, you know, and, and the, um, uh, putting books, laws, and things on the book that we'll have to fight for the next 20, 30 years. And ho is right to got to get the young people ready to meet those challenges. Say that I it's hard as said earlier, it's hard to talk about, you know, to end, uh, when the, you, you, you've done so much and know so much about certain things that has happened, and when you get an opportunity to express it, uh, they have to cut your <laugh> it's notable <laugh> you got it.

Speaker 5 (00:38:33):

Oh, okay. I met Charles MCON, who came also into the, into the Delta, into Greenwood. Sam blocked actually was probably the first organizer that really walked into Greenwood. And Sam actually had grown up in the Delta in Cleveland ammo. And all of this is really connections. People, all who know each other, encourage each other to do other things. So ammo meets Sam as he comes home as a veteran from the air force, and he tells Sam, you need to get involved. And he encourages Sam and Sam is very eager to be involved and to get things moving. So he

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sends Sam over to Greenwood Sam who had been taking courses at Mississippi valley state, which was then Mississippi vocational college. Cause all of this is all of the things that the state was doing to make sure that people of color had no opportunities to do anything.

Speaker 5 (00:39:45):

So Sam was there at, uh, at Mississippi vocational college, met my brother doit, who was also a return Navy veteran there at, uh, Mississippi vocational college. And, and they began to talk and he, Sam came into Greenwood. The whole process was to meet, encourage and tried to get as many people as you could to register to vote. Now, given the conditions in the Delta for people of color was very high. I mean, people were living on plantations. People were who wasn't living on plantations with picking, being picked up by, by trucks, taking them out to work the field. And this is what people there was no real jobs for most of the people. So often these people, the opportunity to be able to do something else and that, and, and that's one of the biggest things was going around doing door to door canvassing, encouraging people to register vote.

Speaker 5 (00:40:51):

And that's basically what all of the organization was all about. You were going on knocking on doors, talking to people, going into churches, talking to people, going to man to two halls, wherever the people were. You were going to try to talk to people about register and vote. And as Charles MCON has told you one of the, uh, testing processes to try to make sure that people really were interested in that we had this mock election in the mock election, 80,000 people, 80,000 black people went out to vote. And all of these people are, are going to vote because I mean, apathy was not the issue, the intimidation being afraid, being afraid of, uh, what could happen, losing your job, losing your house, losing, being killed, you know, all these were kinds of things that was happening to people so that the, the fear, the fear was real.

Speaker 5 (00:41:56):

So that the testing process of doing the mock election, um, proved that, that the, that the people really wanted to be involved. They wanted to change their conditions that they were living on. And they knew that the only way these conditions could be changed, you had to vote out some of these people that was in, in office. And one of the other things that we were doing is that we were setting up citizenship classes, trying to help people, um, as, as you have to be 21 to register to vote. So that people like me who were in high school, uh, at that particular time, I was, I was too young. I worked, uh, helping in, in the, uh, uh, citizenship classes and all, and, and all of this was to help the people vote. Now, Mississippi was harsh as always. And Mississippi came after us with vengeance with people trying to register to vote.

Speaker 5 (00:42:59):

So all of these people that had been receiving food subsidies from the state as a matter of just of being able to eat Mississippi, cut off the food substance disease. So that then the, the little help that people had was no longer available to them. But the one good thing is within the movement, Bob Moses, and all the, uh, the movement people decided that they talked to their friends OFN that was organized around the country as a way to help the Mississippis. They organized food, drives, clothing, drives to do all of these things, to help the people in Mississippi. Now, that was really a big motivating factor to, to the black folks who lived there because they saw for the first time that the only people that was coming out to help them were movement type people. So this, this, this became as Mississippi cut off the food and they had nothing to do to, uh, had no food to eat and stuff.

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Speaker 5 (00:44:08):

Uh, now there's now the food drives and, and, and the Northern friends of sneakers bringing down Dick, Gregory's flying into plane into Greenwood, and we are now distributing food to assist the people. Now that became a big motivator to a lot of movement people. Now, another big thing that really happened is that with the organization of the Mississippi summer project, in bringing in additional people so that we could organize, we would have more people cause at the present during the year of 63, there were very few organizers. Mainly most of them were really Mississippi people. You know, uh, there was a couple people that were not from Mississippi, but we were trying to get a larger group of people to come into the state. So the organization of the Mississippi summer project brought in all of these people, we were able to then put in staff, people, volunteers into basically all the different counters and all the different projects. We then could have a larger thing. And that allowed us to be able to organize the Mississippi freedom democratic party and to get more people involved in it because we had more hands on deck as they say today.

Speaker 5 (00:45:37):

So do we really? So as we are now having all of these different projects, I worked in Greenwood, which is really my hometown. And then the summer of 64, I was working down in the McComb area. Uh, one of these things that were constantly began was all of the violence that was really going on. I mean, uh, a lot of black churches were really just blown up, you know, uh, burned down. So all of this was the whole intimidation to try to prevent people from attempting to register to vote. Unfortunately, it just began to encourage more people to register, to vote. And we were then able to have our little conventions to get ready for the Mississippi, the, the national democratic convention, which was held in August of 19 64.

Speaker 3 (00:46:44):

And so it doesn't look like we have any questions in the chat. And so I share any additional information with the people that are viewing about, uh, next steps or things that they may be able to do to get involved.

Speaker 8 (00:47:09):

If I mentioned,

Speaker 5 (00:47:16):

I think you have to have an interest in, in a particular, a particular thing, you know, you, uh, you've tried to, like now it's the whole question of, of Boga suppression, you know, and, and the real big impact that it really has on people. And to understand that, you know, it's local elections, that's very, very important. And it's just to try to encourage people to, uh, to participate in the system.

Speaker 4 (00:47:51):

Another thing that, um, that, uh, of course the legislatures in these various communities, uh, various, uh, states, you know, really where, uh, the problems really, uh, we, um, uh, democracy, uh, from what happened in, uh, January 6th, uh, is a lesson. I think that, that there, the extent to which, uh, some, uh, people will go, uh, to, uh, get their way. So we, we need, we need to bring together nationally and locally. Uh, those people who see the need, those organizations, we may, you may, we may need a, we need a co for, or something like that. All of the organizations concerned about saving democracy in America need to get busy and mobilize, organize and educate, uh, people, uh, because this thing is not ended. It

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Speaker 3 (00:49:08):

Absolutely. And so you all have shared so much information and we greatly appreciated. And so we are getting ready to come to an end. I would like to find out if we can get some closing remarks from each of you. So if we can start with you, Mr. Charles MC Lauren, if you wanna give us your closing remarks, and then we'll move to Hollis and then Freddy for how you would like to, to end our session. So Mr. MC Lauren, if you can provide us with your closing remarks,

Speaker 4 (00:49:44):

Let's get ready, let's get young people involved and let's save democracy.

Speaker 3 (00:49:55):

So those were shorter than I anticipated. <laugh>. So ho did you have some closing remark for us? The marching orders?

Speaker 4 (00:50:05):

I just wanna say that the proof is in the, I know we have a lot, lot of young people, so we are gonna have to not be afraid to reach out to those young people and give them the opportunity, enjoy some of the wonderful pieces life and helping to see their county, their city improve into and wonderful. And

Speaker 3 (00:50:59):

I agree as a, a young person that has learned so much from the wisdom of those that have come before us. I appreciate the intention on making sure that you all are sharing what you've learned so that we can continue to make strides. If we can have some closing remarks from you also, uh, miss Fred Biddle.

Speaker 5 (00:51:25):

Yes. One of the things that happened was black, uh, Mississippis have been mistreated all of their lives. They have seen opportunities that were not available to them. They now see the chance that these same opportunities are not gonna be available to their children and possibly for their grandchildren. So you look at this and you say, how can I make a difference? And the way you can make a difference is to get involved. So you talk to some, to somebody else, talk to another younger person, and you try to find out what are the kinds of things that bother you the most? Is it going into schools where the books all very badly used because they've been passed on from one school to another school? So you say, well, uh, where is the chance for you to then be able to see that your children can do something else, and then not only your children, but the children in the community.

Speaker 5 (00:52:37):

You know, we all talk about how there's a lot of crime and stuff that's going on, but then we don't talk about how, what we can do to get involved, to create opportunities. So people can be able to acquire skills acquire. Now the, a quiet, no knowledge to be able to figure out how to move from one step to another step. And so it, it really does start very, very small. You know, it's, it's not, even though we always talk about having big mass meetings. A lot of times the mass meetings are like two or three different people, maybe 10, you know, but they're not really huge through groups. So you're starting very, very small. And, and I think that's why some of the young people get discouraged because they, they don't feel that they see enough people involved, but you have to start small to build up so that you can create a environment so that other people will want to be involved and want to do something to change this whole world, because we can't let it, I mean,

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we can't let it go back. I mean, we, we, we made a little bit success, but we can't go back. And that's what it really looks like in terms of our democracy right now, because we see what all of these state legislations are trying to do, you know?

Speaker 3 (00:54:08):

Absolutely you are right. We cannot go back. And so I thought that we were wrapping up, but we've got a couple of questions coming in from the chat and a couple of notes that I wanted to share with you all. We had Robin in the chat that just wrote saying that if someone only listened to this workshop, they got a bargain that they're honored and blown away from the information you have shared. And then we had a question from Marilyn who asked sister Fred and brother Hollis, and brother MC Lauren, could you share some of what the Mississippi freedom democratic party did after the Atlantic city convention that I know who may want to take that and, and give us a little information about what you all did after the Atlantic city convention?

Speaker 4 (00:54:54):

Well, why brother Matt is getting ready to talk about that a little bit. Just wanna say that Dick Gregory and Harte are two people that supplied food globe to people in Mississippi, and that should not never be forgotten cause it was there and they used it, but thank for providing them.

Speaker 3 (00:55:41):

Yep. We can hear you,

Speaker 4 (00:55:42):

Uh, to the, uh, question about the, uh, Mr. Freedom democratic party after Atlantic city. Uh, one, one thing you have to realize, uh, the most, uh, the, the, the troops are the, the, uh, organizers of the, uh, Mississippi freedom democratic party was SNCC people, SNCC organized and, uh, and, and, and promoted the, the, uh, Mississippi freedom democratic party. Uh, so really, uh, the, uh, SNCC people after Atlantic city, most of them, the ones from out of state, uh, either moved to other areas or went home. Those of us who lived in Mississippi came back to Mississippi and continued to work and, uh, filing lawsuits, uh, to, uh, create, uh, single member districts, legislative districts in the legislature, uh, and, and, uh, filing lawsuits to, uh, recoup re recoup our second congressional district, uh, district with a significant number of African Americans in it. So that, uh, who are voting aid, so we could get our congressmen back there.

Speaker 4 (00:57:02):

We had lost, and of course we were successful these lawsuits and the continuous works of work of, of, uh, Mississippi freedom, democratic party types, uh, see the leadership, uh, uh, of the, uh, Mississippi freedom democratic party was under the leadership of, of Lawrence GI out the late Lawrence GI out who was a SNCC, uh, field secret secretary. And the office that was left in Jackson was relocated to the small town of sunflower, Mississippi, where finally Lou Hama had won a lawsuit that, uh, uh, throughout the elections, uh, because of, of, of discrimination and, uh, the Mississippi freedom democratic party, uh, got involved in that. And that was the last, uh, effort of the Mississippi freedom democratic party at that point, before it merged into what became the lawless.

Speaker 3 (00:58:03):

And we do have one other question that came through, uh, Mike is wondering if, uh, you, if sister Fred or brother Charles could talk more about what Fannie Lou Hamer and others faced

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when they came back from Atlantic city and why accepting two seats was not really an option for them?

Speaker 4 (00:58:24):

Well, Fannie Lou Hamer came home and, and as I mentioned, and she continued to be harassed, but, uh, you know, she never really stopped. Uh, she spent a lot of time after Atlantic city, uh, on the road traveling across the country, speaking and, um, and, uh, accepting two seats at large. Uh, what, what state was the, these seats? What, uh, we got, we have, what, 52, uh, states now, which one of these states, uh, was those two seats in, they, they, one in Mississippi, they didn't tell us that we had two seats in, in Mississippi, we, or in, in Illinois or New York, it was a forest. It was just something they threw up there expecting us to go for it, which really meant nothing. There was, you know, uh, the Lyndon Johnson and, and the, and the democratic party had already selected the two people that they, uh, would be, uh, dealing through. And that was, uh, Dr. Aaron Henry and, uh, the, uh, chaplain, the TULO, uh, at that time, uh, ed king, these were the, uh, leaders of the Mississippi freedom democratic party that they felt acceptable to them, to the national democratic party. So, uh, you know, it was, it was nothing in that for the masses.

Speaker 5 (01:00:05):

And I think one other thing is that Charles, that people did go back to, uh, districts and began to work on, on local election.

Speaker 4 (01:00:15):

Yes. As

Speaker 5 (01:00:16):

A result in Mississippi, uh, Mississippi has a lot of black people. That's now in local, they have won seats in local elections, more low, they are little positions, but this is the basis of what democracy is about. Um, and, uh, and, and, and this is as a result of the Mississippi freedom democratic party, cause that set the foundation,

Speaker 4 (01:00:45):

Right. It brought these people out, uh, right now Mississippi has more, uh, elected officials than any state in the nation. And, um, it's all a result,

Speaker 5 (01:00:55):

You know, of the Mississippi freedom,

Speaker 4 (01:00:58):

Right. Of the work that the Mississippi freedom democratic party, uh, uh, did. And these, these are the people who, uh, were, uh, it, it, most of them were in colleges, uh, or high schools. And when they grew up, they they're now in the office. In fact, almost, there's not a co single county in the Mississippi Delta that there's not a, a black mayor, uh, five members of the board of supervisors, uh, uh, the, the increased numbers in the, in the legislature. Uh, and, uh, we in this LA last election, we got a, uh, transportation commissioner, uh, that's a, a broad political, uh, uh, geographical area that, uh, these are people who, uh, were friends and, uh, of Santa Lou, Haman's friends of, uh, the Mississippi freedom democratic party. And they, uh, they're, they're Democrats, all of the, I don't think there's a single, uh, member of the Mississippi legislature on the African American side. That's not a, a Democrat. And, uh, that's the result of 1964. It's the

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result of 1968. And it's the result of hard work at the community levels of, um, step towards Haris mentioned and, and, uh, Herbert Lee and Lee and Moore, Aaron Henry Lou.

Speaker 3 (01:02:37):

So we do have another question that came through. John is asking, uh, obviously this goes for the whole state of Mississippi, but how much backlash was there absent the media attention to the volunteers from out of state?

Speaker 4 (01:02:54):

How much media attention,

Speaker 3 (01:02:57):

I guess he's asking how much backlash was there, uh, with the absence of media attention to the volunteers from out of state?

Speaker 4 (01:03:07):

Oh, well, many of them were jailed and, uh, you know, I, the, uh, what was that was left, I think at that point, uh, the, uh, fear, a lot of the fear that African Americans had, uh, of being involved, uh, had, had, had, had gone, uh, the state started to, uh, become more, uh, Republican, uh, and as a result, uh, you know, we wound up with, uh, in the state of Mississippi at the state level is not, I don't think there's a, a Democrat in office other than in the legislature and in the, in the Senate. But, um, so the backlash to the community, uh, in my estimation was minimal. You know, they, uh, as Fred had mentioned earlier, we had overcome, uh, the, um, uh, loss of the federal sub plus food, uh, in the county, in Lalo county and in the, in the county's surrounding, uh, and, uh, people had had, uh, the head start program came along and, uh, offered, uh, opportunities for jobs that, uh, that African Americans that never, uh, had at a, at a livable wage at that time. And, uh, a lot of training and, uh, conferences and education, uh, people were just a little too busy to be worried at that time about, uh, as long as they, they, they stayed away from, uh, you know, the, the bad white folks.

Speaker 5 (01:04:55):

Yeah. I think that the, the violence in Mississippi and the types of backlash probably was early on, you're talking about 63, 64, um, yes, six to five, but six to three was probably one of the worst years. It was also the same year that they killed Pedro Edwards, you know, um, you know, so it, it, it was a series of violence had really, sorry,

Speaker 9 (01:05:24):

I can't search what

Speaker 4 (01:05:25):

Something, and that, that didn't, didn't do what they expected death that didn't do what the, the, uh, the, uh, people, the, the clan and others, they at hope that would dampen or decrease the, uh, movement of black people in, in con, uh, continuing to, um, press forward for their rights. Uh,

Speaker 5 (01:05:53):

And that's basically what was happening with the violence throughout the killing, the mega, the shooting of all of these people, but all of this tend to have brought in more and more people were willing to get involved in the movement.

Speaker 4 (01:06:07):

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Yeah.

Speaker 3 (01:06:10):

And so we have one last question that I see here in the chat. Oh, actually two, every time you all talk, another question comes through, but the next question that came up is what was miss Hammer's role in the creation of the Mississippi freedom democratic party. And I know we're getting close to the end. And so I don't know who wants to take that, uh, question off just the role of MSHA

Speaker 4 (01:06:37):

Since I was her campaign manager during her run for Congress. Um, she, uh, well, if you recall, and maybe you don't, but, uh, FA Louma was one of the organizers. She was the vice chair of the freedom, uh, democratic party. And, um, we ran her for Congress, uh, along with the other women, the other two, uh, ladies who, uh, ran, but we legally qualified her so that the lawsuit could be filed. That led to a challenge in 1965 on the floor of Congress, San Lou Hama, and the three, and the other two women, uh, that we ran for, for the, uh, for, for Congress filed a lawsuit. And that lawsuit was heard in 1965, uh, and Fannie Lou Hama and, and the two other, uh, uh, candidates were the first blacks to be seated on the floor of the us Congress, as a result of that Fannie Louma continued work with Northern groups and was very involved in the election Chisholm, the first African American woman to be seated in. She didn't stop.

Speaker 3 (01:08:05):

All right. The last question that we have, and this can be a, a, a quick yes or no, maybe <laugh>, but were any of your parents involved in politics? That is Rick's question,

Speaker 4 (01:08:20):

Man was

Speaker 5 (01:08:21):

<laugh>. My father was one of the delegates to the Mississippi freedom democratic party, and was very involved in, in both registration around the Greenwood area.

Speaker 3 (01:08:39):

How about you, uh, Mr. Hollis Watkins?

Speaker 4 (01:08:44):

Well, Mr. John Wakin said he had to go slow about his time. Cause if he didn't and wasn't sure he would find himself having kill a few people that along the way found themselves in the wrong place. So my father, he wanted to support and for the most part support activities that was done, but not bringing them out in the opening, going in all kind of way, because he said, you know, based on his coming up, you know, he didn't want the white folks to create a situation that would cause him to kill some that maybe should had a little bit longer. So he said, go right ahead and supporting you. And he did supported a few others, but that's, that was my father's.

Speaker 3 (01:10:09):

Got it. And Mr. Charles MC Lauren, did you, uh, indicate if your parents were involved in politics?

Speaker 4 (01:10:15):

They were not.

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Speaker 3 (01:10:18):

All right. And so this is the last question that we'll be able to accept from the chat, cuz we've only got two minutes left. We are wrapping up this incredible session, but the last question is if one person can speak to Bob Moses and the Mississippi freedom democratic party,

Speaker 4 (01:10:42):

How I think you knew him a little lot, lot better than I did. I was only with him a very short time. Well, Bob, he very and create improvement of with

Speaker 4 (01:11:09):

The different groups who had young people involved in the work they were doing. He, uh, worked and helped inspire two or three in several of the counties that had organized some people to do various things in, in the community. Um, for the most part, a lot of the young people working with the young people, you know, were too afraid to come out in the open issue. And for that reason then for anything to take place, make any progress, the, the burden will fall and you know, myself, you know, my brother, you know, he participating on with us today. So that's, that's kinda where we were

Speaker 3 (01:12:31):

Wonderful. So he helped a lot with organizing the young folks. And so we thank you all for participating in this session with us, Mr. Hollis, Watson Watkins, Mr. Charles McClure, Ms. Fred bit, thank you for your wisdom for your work and for allowing us to hear a little bit more from you all about what was done and what we can do moving forward. And so we thank everyone for joining us. We ask that you check the session agenda that is on the lobby page of the site for the next set of sessions. And we look forward to seeing you this evening at the mixer that's taking place. Thank you everyone.