

Speech for
Floor fight
Miss. Freedom Dems
Atlantic City
Dem Natl
Convention
1964
No floor
fight
occurred
SADCC

Mr. Chairman, Delegates, Fellow Democrats, Fellow Americans:

The issue that we have before us tonight is no mere matter of dusty legalism, though legally we are in the right. It is an issue that goes to the very nature and origins of our great Democratic Party. The first Democratic Party candidate for President was Thomas Jefferson. In the 1790s when Jefferson and his friends were putting together the Democratic Party, they searched in the cities of New York and Boston, the towns of Pennsylvania and South Carolina, the farms of Virginia and New Hampshire, for people who were creative and forward-looking, who cared about ordinary people, who were willing to bravely face entrenched opponents.

The Jeffersonians founded this Democratic Party of ours by setting up the first local political clubs and associations. The right wingers of that day began to mutter about what they called "some dangerous self-created societies", and in a few places there were some Democrats who were even put in jail for daring to set up a new political party.

And now what do we face today? From one of our sister states in this Union have come the delegates of an oppressed people--messengers to the Democratic Party which speaks for all the oppressed people of the world. In the state of Mississippi, there are Democrats who believe in the same kind of Democratic Party that Jefferson believed in--a Democratic Party created by the people themselves, to speak for the people themselves. These Mississippi Democrats were shut out of the ordinary political parties of Mississippi, and so they did what Jefferson did--they created local political clubs and associations of their own, open to all

decent Democrats who wanted to join. But they were not interested in founding a new political party--they liked Jefferson's party too well. So they founded the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party, and they have asked us to recognize them as our fellow Democrats. For daring to act like Jefferson, they have been jailed by the men who run Mississippi, even as some of Jefferson's friends were jailed. They have been beaten by the Mississippi police, or by mobs of night riders while the police turned their backs. Some of them--I remind you in sorrow--have died for trying to do what Jefferson did, for trying to found a truly Democratic Party in Mississippi. The graves of three of these true Democrats are scarcely two months old in Mississippi.

And how have these new, true, Democrats responded? Have they turned in desperation to guerrilla warfare against their oppressors in Mississippi, as some misguided people in other places have proposed? No--they have rejected the very thought of violence and have appealed instead to decency and love.

Have they gone out into the streets to create disorder and chaos by blocking traffic, as has occurred in other places? No; they have rejected the very thought of chaos and have appealed instead for liberty and peace. Where have they come for redress? They have come here--to Jefferson's party, using Jefferson's approach. ~~They have~~

The Freedom Democratic Party believes in our Democratic President. In fact, it is the only political organization in Mississippi that supports our great President Lyndon Johnson. The Freedom Democrats support our platform--indeed, they are the only political

Mr. organization in Mississippi that supports Medicare for the protection of our older citizens, the nuclear test ban that was the greatest legacy of our late President Kennedy, the law our present Democratic Congress has passed for an educational system of high quality, the Civil Rights Act our Democratic Administration and Congress joined to write and pass. The Freedom Democrats are not only the only party in Mississippi that supports Democratic programs and candidates, they are the only party that operates according to Democratic principles, since no other party in Mississippi admits members and cooses its officers without regard to race or color.

/ And so they have come to our convention. It is our convention, but it is their homw as much As ours. They have suffered jail and beatings o come here, some of them have suffeeded death because hey wanted to me gere. We would turn them away at our peril and ~~that~~ our country 's peril. For when these people knock at our door, they are knpcking at the only door that will let them enter American politics. If hat door refuses to open ,there will be npting left to them but despair. And desperate people would not only be an affront to the conscie ce of the American people, they would be a danger to the peace of the American ~~xxxxxx~~ people. We Democcats, and only we Democrats can express our ~~xxix~~ country's conscience and defend pir contry's honor on this matter. It is a high duty, perhap the highest we face in this convention.

One last point. It has been suggested that we offer "observer " status or "guest" status to the Mississippi Freedom Democrat c Party. Such an arrahgement wpuld be a cru l travesty upon honor and justice. The Fredom Democrats have suffered and worked and and suuffered and died to win he right to vote in Mississippi. How can they t row away all that, when yhey come here? How can they