

**RHETORIC AND HERESTHETIC IN THE MISSISSIPPI FREEDOM PARTY  
CONTROVERSY AT THE 1964 DEMOCRATIC CONVENTION**

A Thesis

by

ADRIA BATTAGLIA

Submitted to the Office of Graduate Studies of  
Texas A&M University  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

August 2005

Major Subject: Speech Communication

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**ABSTRACT**

Rhetoric and Heresthetic in the Mississippi Freedom Party  
Controversy at the 1964 Democratic Convention. (August 2005)

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This thesis shows the development and shifts in rhetorical form as strategies evolve to meet heresthetic demands. This thesis explores the rhetorical crisis that emerged between the Democratic Party and the Mississippi Freedom Party at the 1964 Democratic Convention. Specifically, the focus is on the rhetorical discourse presented by the members of the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party, Fannie Lou Hamer in particular, at the Credentials Committee two days before the onset of the actual Convention. It is the rhetorical interplay in the specific context of the Committee, the subsequent political bargaining behind the scenes during the next four days of the Convention, and the emerging and evolving constraints as a result of this bargaining that illuminate the symbolic power and limitations behind a rhetoric aimed at redefining race in the nation's social and political consciousness.

"History is the witness that testifies to the passing of time; it illuminates reality, vitalizes memory, provides guidance in daily life, and brings us tidings of antiquity." ~ Cicero

To my mother and father.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank the staff in the Reading Room at the Lyndon B. Johnson Library in Austin, Texas for their time and energies. In particular, I would like to thank archivist Sarah Haldeman for her endless patience and guidance throughout the course of this research process. It is a dedicated archivist who truly enjoys sharing the excitement again and again as each scholar explores the vast amounts of presidential information and stories for his or her first time.

Also, I would like to extend my gratitude to the Department of Communication at Texas A&M University. The faculty and students are a second family to me, and I am eternally grateful for the nurturing yet challenging academic environment they foster. Special thanks to my dear friend and mentor Jeremiah Hickey, who amidst his own comps and dissertation, found the interest and time to read through several drafts. I appreciate the extremely constructive criticism, the hundreds of additions to my life-long reading list, and the introduction to ‘Lady Day.’

To my committee, thank you. Thank you for being intellectually generous, encouraging, challenging and inspiring. Chief, you have all my gratitude and respect. Wherever I go, I will remember: “Look what a lot of things there are to learn.”

Last but not least, all my appreciation to my family and friends. For reminding me to laugh, love and breathe. And to Goose, for all your love.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
ABSTRACT.....	iii
DEDICATION.....	iv
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS.....	v
TABLE OF CONTENTS.....	vi
CHAPTER	
I INTRODUCTION.....	1
II THE VANTAGE POINT REVISITED.....	20
Form and Power.....	22
The Exigence: Pre-Credentials Committee.....	26
The Evolving Exigence: Crisis at the Credentials Committee.....	32
III THE CHALLENGE.....	39
IV A VISION.....	57
V THE FIGHT FOR REALITY.....	77
VI CONCLUSION.....	95
NOTES.....	104
REFERENCES.....	115
VITA.....	122

## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

In the summer of 2004, *American Heritage* columnist Joshua Zeitz wrote an article entitled “Democratic Debacle,” in which he traced the party’s “loss of the South” and subsequent political problems back to the convention crisis of the Sixties.<sup>1</sup> But Zeitz wasn’t referring to the well-known convention calamity in Chicago, 1968. In fact, he writes,

[The] woes of the Democratic Party didn’t originate in Chicago, or even in 1968. They can be traced back to another convention, in another city, in another year. Forty years ago this summer, the Democratic Party met in Atlantic City to nominate the incumbent president, Lyndon Johnson, for another term. Nobody knew it then, but that 1964 Democratic National Convention would be a turning point for the party. It was Atlantic City that sowed the seeds of the internecine wars that tore apart the Democratic coalition four years later in Chicago and that have left it wounded ever since.<sup>2</sup>

The 1964 Democratic National Convention provided the context for a rhetorical crisis. The residue of this crisis continues to permeate the party’s public and private image.

Yet this crisis involved more players than those within the party, for the 1964 convention was the forum chosen by the organizations within the Civil Rights Movement to lobby their equal political representation plan to the party, the president

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This thesis follows the style of *Rhetoric & Public Affairs*.

and the American public. The lobbyists came to Atlantic City as representatives of blacks in Mississippi (they held elections and were recognized within the black community, but were not considered legitimate by white politicians in the South). Known as the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party, these representatives embodied the final chapter of Freedom Summer, a Civil Rights project designed to register blacks to vote in the South. The Freedom Party had been conceived as soon as volunteers and civil rights activists realized that any progress they made in voter registration was negated by absolutely no representation in the party. They could not have known that this rhetorical crisis would prove equally divisive for their Movement as it would for the Democratic Party.

In this thesis, I explore the rhetorical crisis that emerged between the Democratic Party and the Mississippi Freedom Party at the 1964 Democratic Convention. Specifically, the focus is on the rhetorical discourse presented by the members of the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party, Fannie Lou Hamer in particular, at the Credentials Committee two days before the onset of the actual Convention. It is the rhetorical interplay in the specific context of the Committee, the subsequent political bargaining behind the scenes during the next four days of the Convention, and the emerging and evolving constraints as a result of this bargaining that illuminate the symbolic power and limitations behind a rhetoric aimed at redefining race in the nation's social and political consciousness.

Because the term "rhetorical crisis" is used throughout this thesis, it seems worth pausing to define a "rhetorical crisis." In this thesis, I interchange the term "rhetorical



crisis” with the term “rhetorical exigency.” Synonyms, crisis and exigency simply mean a situation marked by urgency; a state requiring immediate action. What is a *rhetorical* crisis or exigency? The works of both Parke G. Burgess and Lloyd F. Bitzer seek to answer this question, and offer definitions and concepts that are crucial to the rhetorical description of this thesis.

The idea of crisis rhetoric was developed by Burgess in his article, “Crisis Rhetoric: Coercion vs. Force.”<sup>3</sup> Using a frog-pond parable, Burgess explores the possible modes of rhetoric that people choose from to deal with a crisis, and sets up his definition of crisis rhetoric. In the parable, a frog sits on a rock in the middle of a pond. A boy standing on the edge of the pond begins to throw rocks at the frog in an effort to kill it. Burgess explains that both the frog and the boy face a crisis because their physical and symbolic space is now complicated. The physical space, obviously, is composed of the physical characteristics in this particular situation. So, the distance between the frog and boy, the depth and temperature of the pond, the strength and endurance to move and survive (or kill) all make up the physical space. The symbolic space exists for the boy only. Burgess notes that “the boy cannot persuade or coerce the frog, as such symbolic action would fall on deaf frog-ears,” but that the boy can morally decide and then mentally calculate his strategy to kill the frog. “The scene becomes what it was not before,” writes Burgess, “because of personal power to fill symbolic space with a conceived world of decision and action.” This becomes his foundation for his definition of crisis rhetoric.

According to Burgess, “As crisis pervades the people-pond of a society deeply divided by change and increasingly cognizant of new privileges, the shallow and tranquil waters of conventional persuasion seem no more equipped to resolve it than a violent dive into the center of the pond. Consequently, persuasion can soon merge into coercion.” When conflict arises, people strategize about how to act and move—like the frog and the boy. Crisis rhetoric, then, can consist of persuasion—rhetoric that seeks to alter its audience’s thoughts, values or beliefs, coercion—persuasion that elicits a threat of force rather than actual force, or force—physical action versus an appeal to symbolic space, like the boy who throws a rock at the frog.

Burgess’s parable is useful in understanding crisis rhetoric, but particularly important to this thesis is Bitzer’s identification of a rhetorical situation. Not only does this concept of a rhetorical situation offer a definition of a rhetorical exigence, but it sets up several other key concepts to the rhetorical description presented in this thesis. In his article, “The Rhetorical Situation,” Bitzer establishes the components of a rhetorical situation, and in so doing, defines rhetorical exigency. Bitzer explains that rhetorical situations are marked by three elements—a controlling exigence, an audience and a set of constraints. The first component, the “controlling exigence,” presents Bitzer’s definition of a rhetorical exigence. Expanding upon the basic definition of exigency and crisis, he writes,

Any exigence is an imperfection marked by urgency; it is a defect, an obstacle, something waiting to be done, a thing which is other than it should be. In almost any sort of context, there will be numerous exigencies, but not all are elements of

a rhetorical situation—not all are rhetorical exigencies. An exigence which cannot be modified is not rhetorical; thus, whatever comes about of necessity and cannot be changed—death, winter, and some natural disasters, for instance—are exigencies to be sure, but they are not rhetorical. . . . An exigence is rhetorical when it is capable of positive modification and when positive modification requires discourse or can be assisted by discourse.<sup>4</sup>

In other words, a rhetorical exigency emerges when there is some “specific condition,” “an imperfection marked by urgency,” that elicits utterance.<sup>5</sup>

The controlling exigence introduces the second component of a rhetorical situation, and elaborates on the definition of a rhetorical exigency. The controlling exigency dictates what the main problem is—why an utterance is needed—and what audience shall be addressed in regards to this problem.<sup>6</sup> The second element is the audience. More specifically, the audience composed of “only those persons who are capable of being influenced by discourse and of being mediators of change.”

The third and final element of a rhetorical situation is a set of constraints. Constraints, Bitzer notes, are “persons, events, objects, and relations which are parts of the situation because they have the power to constrain decision and action needed to modify the exigence.”<sup>7</sup> Bitzer adds that once the orator engages in the rhetorical situation, “both he and his speech are additional constituents.”<sup>8</sup> These concepts and definitions laid forth by Bitzer and Burgess offer a foundation on which this thesis builds.

The 1964 Democratic Convention provides an ideal case study for exploring how each of the elements of a rhetorical situation—the controlling exigence, the audience and

the set of constraints—can empower and constrain rhetorical strategies. Hence this thesis offers a reconstruction of this particular rhetorical situation by exploring the rhetorical interplay of a social movement and the political, legal and social spheres that the movement seeks to change. In his essay, “Defining Movements Rhetorically: Casting the Widest Net,” Malcolm O. Sillars notes that “the environment in which a message is given, including other conflicting and supporting messages, is an essential part of [a] rhetorical analysis.”<sup>9</sup> To reconstruct the rhetorical situation at the Credentials Committee required a repertoire of research including transcripts of testimonies, speeches and phone records throughout the period of the convention, journals and memoirs of President Johnson, news coverage during and immediately following the convention, and biographies of and interviews with the key players. Much of this material was obtained from the archives of the Lyndon Baines Johnson Library. Other material was collected from the historical, sociological and rhetorical analyses of other scholars.

Concomitantly, the research gathered facilitates the recreation of the historical context and consequently of the rhetorical situation. My aim is to explore why out of all of the Freedom Delegates’ testimonies, Fannie Lou Hamer’s testimony elicited the greatest response from both Johnson and the public. The Mississippi sharecropper delivered an emotionally-laden testimony that seemed quite effective in gaining national sympathy momentarily, but was unsuccessful at maintaining the attention and support of her audience. I believe that her loss of legitimacy and public support is due to the constraints of her rhetorical situation. For example, the presence of the media impacted and altered the rhetorical interplay between Johnson, the Democratic delegates and the

Freedom delegates throughout the convention. But the media also played an important role in reflecting the crisis to the ultimate judge of this case—the audience: the nation.

The shift in public response can be traced through the media's presence (or lack thereof), coverage and interpretation of the events, and can illuminate one constraint of the rhetorical situation. But this thesis seeks to explore all of the constraints, and hopes to demonstrate how the constraints can be empowering one moment, and constraining in another moment. The social and political conscience, for example, existed during an extremely tumultuous time, particularly in regards to the issues of race and racism. As will be explained, Hamer embodied a moral symbolic power that addressed the social and political conscience by questioning the nation's espoused ideals and challenging the country to redefine reality to better achieve those ideals. Yet ultimately, Hamer's moral symbolic power was overshadowed, ironically, by a nation mourning the loss of Kennedy, a forerunner in civil rights, and the nomination of a president under the party whose platform had just proclaimed the protection of civil rights.

As I previously stated, my aim is to offer an account of the rhetorical crisis at the Credentials Committee at the 1964 Democratic Convention. In his article, "A Skeptical View of Movement Studies," David Zarefsky notes that "history has many dimensions," and "like other phenomena, a historical movement can be studied from different points of view; the rhetorical historian complements the efforts of other scholars who examine the political dimensions, or the economic, or the cultural."<sup>10</sup> As with any case study, however, particularly of a historical event, there are many scholarly accounts and arguments from a wide array of perspectives and disciplines. Previous analyses and

descriptions offer a clearer understanding of the exigency that created this situation, and demonstrate the need for a rhetorical addition to their scholarship. Hence before I explore the rhetorical situation—exigency, audience and constraints—at the 1964 Democratic National Convention, I offer a synopsis of the work of other scholars from a multitude of disciplines, which focuses on issues occurring around the time of the convention.

The majority of this work emerges from the fields of history and sociology, and tends to emphasize the precursor to the development of Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party, Freedom Summer. Particularly from a historical and sociological standpoint, Freedom Summer is intriguing. Sociologists are fascinated with how it developed, uniting several of the civil rights groups for one poignant cause and acquiring members of the nation's white youth as volunteers. A review of the research on Freedom Summer illustrates the sociological interest in the movement, and several key reasons seem to emerge to explain general scholarly interest in the Summer Project.

To begin with, Freedom Summer was successful in a) gaining national attention and consequently putting Mississippi under strict legal scrutiny, b) demonstrating the ability of blacks and whites to work together, and c) registering black voters. As David Chalmers points out, “the summer's national publicity and a grudging compliance with the new Civil Rights Law marked the end of ‘massive resistance’ in Mississippi.”<sup>11</sup> Providing a rhetorical analysis of the media coverage of Freedom Summer, Susan Weill performed a content analysis of newspapers in Mississippi that summer to analyze how

local news coverage framed the summer events for Southerners, thus contributing to how the events were handled.<sup>12</sup>

According to scholars, the summer project was also a success in that it exhibited the power of collective action, and was unique in exhibiting the power of collective action of a racially integrated group during a racially tense time. As Nicholas Mills notes, it “revealed the power of black-and-white-together activism.”<sup>13</sup> Doug McAdam explores this activism further in his analysis on “Gender as a Mediator of the Activist Experience: The Case of Freedom Summer.”<sup>14</sup> Kenneth Andrews explores the impact of this particular social movement’s activism on the political process by assessing the black electoral politics in Mississippi before and after Freedom Summer. He notes that “civil rights mobilization shaped electoral outcomes 10 to 20 years after the peak of the movement.”<sup>15</sup> According to Andrews, the strategies employed by Freedom Summer “escalated the pace of mobilization” and at the end of the summer, the problem was not “registering voters but electing Black candidates to office.”<sup>16</sup> To many, the success of the project offered the potential to unite and the power to desegregate much more than Mississippi.

Most sociology scholars also focus on the racial tension and dissension of Freedom Summer. Hence the second reason this Project is of particular interest to scholars is because from its inception, Freedom Summer elicited the ideological conflict that had been boiling beneath the surface of the Civil Rights Movement for some time—the conflict that would ultimately cause a rift in the Movement as a whole. As Sally Belfrage remembers, “Black and white had to fight together in the movement, but the

fight was as much against its own internal racism as the outer world's."<sup>17</sup> The seeds of discontent began with the very proposition of a project that incorporated white, middle-class youths as volunteers for a black cause. When the Freedom Summer proposal was brought to the SNCC table by Bob Moses and Allard Lowenstein, the debate began. According to R. Edward Nordhaus, "many of [SNCC's] leaders did not want to admit whites for fear that the whites might dominate and eventually take over the organization."<sup>18</sup> Nordhaus attributes this fear to two reasons:

First, for the black worker to feel gratitude for the help of the white volunteers was to admit inferiority. Second, whereas the white volunteers could, literally, blend back into society after the summer, the blacks were fighting a battle that was a lifetime battle and one that could not be ignored or avoided.<sup>19</sup>

Akinyele Umoja adds that the majority of the SNCC field staff opposed the summer proposal, afraid that the presence of whites would "discourage black initiative and self-reliance. . . [possibly intimidating] Mississippi blacks with little formal education."<sup>20</sup> In the end, however, after three votes and a compromise that limited the number of white volunteers (a compromise that would be forgone during the course of the Project due to the hostile environmental demands requiring more volunteers), Freedom Summer was put into action. The Project proved so successful at registering voters, leaders shifted their focus to political representation.

Thus at the end of the summer, the movement turned its entire attention to the goal of the Freedom Party. The idea of the party had been conceived during the initial creation of the goals of Freedom Summer. The party offered collective political action



against the regular Democrats in Mississippi. Instead of fighting in the South, the activists decided to fight in the North. While the Summer Project sought black voter registration, the Freedom Party sought to “unseat the all-white Mississippi delegation of the regular Democratic Party at the 1964 convention.”<sup>21</sup> Because the regular Democrats succeeded in passing numerous laws that evaded the black vote in Mississippi, registering black voters was still a long way away from blacks actually voting. And because current political processes in the state effectively barred blacks from participating, the Freedom Party established a political process that paralleled that of the regulars.

The Democratic Party protocol stated that any contested issues regarding delegate credentials must be presented two days before the actual convention, before the Credentials Committee. The Freedom Party had to elect its own delegation to attend the convention and contest the right of the regular Mississippi delegation. Barred from all regular state conventions, the members of the Freedom Party held their own precinct meetings, county elections and state convention. Their meetings and elections were held in accordance with the legal procedures of such events, given that they were not allowed to participate in the nationally recognized process for the state. Mills documents this line of events,

The Freedom Democrats moved forward in organizing their challenge against the regular Democrats, holding two weeks of precinct meetings in twenty-six counties in late July and early August. Thirty-five hundred people participated. Then came a week of county conventions in thirty-five counties at which 282

delegates were elected to go to the state convention in Jackson August 6. . . From among the people present, sixty-eight delegates and alternates were chosen to go to the national convention.<sup>22</sup>

The Freedom delegation left Jackson, Mississippi by bus load, “eating soda crackers and drinking Cokes because they had little money for real meals,” and headed out to Atlantic City, New Jersey for the Democratic National Convention.<sup>23</sup>

Because the life cycle of the Freedom Party was brief, there is not an extensive body of research on it. There are two prominent historical accounts, however, that offer intricate details of the events that occurred as the Freedom Delegates testified before the Credentials Committee at the 1964 Democratic National Convention. One of these accounts is presented in Kay Mills’s book, *This Little Light of Mine: The Life of Fannie Lou Hamer*. The other account is by Nick Kotz in his book, *Judgment Days: Lyndon Baines Johnson, Martin Luther King Jr., and the Laws that Changed America*.<sup>24</sup> Mills and Kotz devote a chapter in each of their books that trace the events from the Freedom Party’s arrival in Atlantic City to the close of the convention. Mills focuses on Hamer’s role throughout the course of the convention while Kotz emphasizes Johnson’s struggle to appease the South, the North and the insurgent delegates without losing the public appearance of party unity.

The majority of scholars, however, typically give the historical account of the events at this convention as a means of illustrating how the failure of the Freedom Party to secure its seats was, as Nordhaus notes, the “turning point of SNCC” and consequently of the Civil Rights Movement as a whole.<sup>25</sup> Janice D. Hamlet touches

briefly upon a portion of Hamer's testimony before the convention in an article entitled "Fannie Lou Hamer: The Unquenchable Spirit of the Civil Rights Movement," and while Hamlet does examine the power of ethos and image in Hamer's rhetorical behavior, she does so primarily through a multitude of excerpts from various speeches.<sup>26</sup> Most scholars, however, focus on the shift in social movement strategy and ideology.

Summarizing Mills's argument in *Like A Holy Crusade*, McMillen notes that

The conflicts between black and white, indeed the deep-seated suspicion and anger felt by so many southern black organizers toward whites, were manageable until the Democratic National Convention offered only a token recognition to the [MFDP] at Atlantic City. . . . Thereafter, the thin voice of interracialism was easily shouted down by the militant cry of white betrayal.<sup>27</sup>

The political failure combined with their memory of a summer of violence created the breaking point for the movement. Everything seemed to come to a head with the failure of the Freedom Party: the racial tensions within the movement had been exacerbated during the summer; the strategies of nonviolence and working within the system seemed useless.

Scholarly literature focuses almost exclusively on the black leaders and activists that were left in the wake of the Freedom Party's failure, disillusioned with government support and distrustful of white people. The heated debates at the inception of Freedom Summer returned at the Freedom movement's termination to disunite it. Mills laments the failure of the movement, noting that it "eroded black commitment to interracialism and nonviolence, and opened the way to the self-defeating tendencies of Black Power."<sup>28</sup>

With the ideological split in SNCC, many of the great original leaders left the movement, including Bob Moses and Fannie Lou Hamer. A new leader, Stokely Carmichael, emerged, and with him, a new ideology: Black Power. Nordhaus summarizes the events, “The beatings by whites, passivity of the government, and betrayal by their allies had taken their toll. . . SNCC would counter violence with violence.”<sup>29</sup> Hence the literature jumps from the events of Freedom Summer to the events post-Atlantic City, exploring the history, strategies and rhetoric of “black power” ideology.<sup>30</sup>

There seems to be a good deal of literature on Carmichael himself, and the impact of the rhetoric of “black power” on activists, institutions, the general public, and the Civil Rights Movement as a whole. One such interested scholar, Charles J. Stewart, wrote,

The unrealistic dreams of perfect social orders that permeate social movement rhetoric heighten expectations and demands that remain only dreams after years of struggle and suffering. Frustration builds within new generations of activists who become increasingly disaffected with social movement establishments which preach uninstitutionalized versions of patience and gradualism. The evolution of a revolution made leaders who can take advantages of opportunities, recreate and redefine social reality, offer new dreams, and energize a new generation of true believers. Stokely Carmichael’s rhetoric of black power can best be understood as a striving for evolutionary changes within the civil rights movement that would replace integration with black power and a passive,

common ground rhetoric with a militant, confrontational rhetoric better suited for his generation, growing disaffection for the movement, and the search for black Americans for their African roots.<sup>31</sup>

Aside from pieces on black power rhetoric, there is virtually no communication literature on the rhetorical crisis at the 1964 Democratic National Convention.<sup>32</sup>

Hence, in this thesis, I plan to explore the rhetorical dimension of the convention by reconstructing the rhetorical exigency as it developed at the Credentials Committee. I approach the events of the convention from a historical perspective.<sup>33</sup> In regard to the rhetorical strategies employed by the Freedom Democrats, I am primarily interested in understanding why Fannie Lou Hamer was labeled by news coverage as the most “dramatic” of all of the Freedom delegates.<sup>34</sup> I explore how Hamer’s rhetoric is different from the rhetoric of the other Freedom delegates that day, causing her speech to provoke a deluge of calls from the nation in support of her cause, and yet failing to maintain that support after the Freedom Party rejected President Johnson’s compromise.

Aside from Hamer’s speech, I aim to illuminate what Robert S. Cathcart calls the “rhetorical transactions” that took place between the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party and the “established system” or “controlling agency.”<sup>35</sup> I am interested in the shifts in rhetorical strategies of both the Freedom Democrats and the “regular” Democrats throughout the course of the convention. The rhetorical exigency was constrained not just by what was said by the Freedom Democrats or by President Johnson, but by the presence and response of the media, and thus the public. For example, the lawyer for the Freedom Party, Joseph Rauh, struggled to the last minute to secure the presence of the

media in the Credentials Committee meeting, where Hamer and the other Freedom Party representatives were scheduled to testify. The media's presence provoked Johnson's alleged command to cut Hamer off of the air before she was done speaking, but also inhibited him from forcibly removing the Freedom Party members who stormed the actual convention hall to take the seats of the regular, all-white representatives.

I intend to explore the role of the media in both facilitating these rhetorical transactions and impacting the effectiveness of the rhetorical strategies of both the Freedom Democrats and regular Democrats. This role of the media in leading, focusing, and shaping the public's view of the Freedom Party cannot be ignored as a significant constraint. Because there were various messages throughout the convention that competed for legitimacy, the media held a strong role in the development of the rhetorical situation. The public's acceptance or rejection of one articulated reality over another was at the very least partially influenced by the media.

However, public legitimation was also constrained by a host of other factors, such as the continued mourning of John F. Kennedy, President Johnson's acceptance of the party nomination, Humphrey's nomination as vice president and the generally accepted rituals of convention rhetoric. In particular, this final factor could very well have been an important influence in the public's response, as the rhetoric of the Freedom Party representatives was disruptive and not in accordance with typical convention protocol.<sup>36</sup> As the rhetorical situation evolved in response to the various constraints, the Freedom Party's strategy to juxtapose rhetorical speech and rhetorical acts might have been too radical in such a conservative context.

Ultimately, I seek to contribute a rhetorical dimension to a historical case study. Zarefsky explained the contribution of a rhetorical scholar's analysis of social movements on the scope of history. Indeed, the cross-fertilization of disciplines offers the potential for a more thorough and comprehensive understanding of an event. By offering a rhetorical analysis to what has previously been analyzed predominately through a historical lens, I intend to contribute a more thorough understanding of Fannie Lou Hamer and the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party at the 1964 National Democratic Convention. This case study is ideal for understanding the demands that a rhetorical situation places on the orators' rhetorical strategies, empowering and simultaneously limiting their effectiveness. I believe that this rhetorical analysis will suggest further directions for future research in comprehending this powerful, albeit brief, rhetorical situation—a situation which just might have been the precipitating event for the Democratic Party's troubles over the years.

In Chapter I, I offer a foundation of key concepts and events crucial to understanding this particular rhetorical situation. The chapter begins by exploring the political and social context in which the testimonies were delivered. The chapter introduces Omi and Winant's concept of racial formation and racial projects, then, drawing from the works of Campbell and Jamieson, explains the ideas of rhetorical form and genre. Next, the chapter looks at the rhetorical significance of Bourdieu's concept of symbolic power. Then the chapter introduces the importance of Riker's concept of heresthetics in the development of the rhetorical crisis. Finally, the chapter sets the stage for the rhetorical situation with the historical context that led up to the Credentials

Committee hearing and the rest of the 1964 Democratic National Convention. The purpose of Chapter I is to create a foundation for the rhetorical situation.

Chapter II builds on this foundation. In this chapter, the dramatic testimony of the Freedom Party is presented. This chapter continues to build upon the rhetorical situation—exploring the ways in which the exigence evolved, and with it, the ways in which the rhetorical strategies evolved.

Hamer's testimony was labeled by news reporters as the most dramatic of all of the testimonies that day. Because her testimony exemplified the power and constraint within the Freedom Party's rhetorical strategy, Chapter III offers a close reading of Hamer's testimony. Building on concepts from Chapter I, this chapter explores how her testimony exemplifies a rhetorical strategy that toggles between traditional political convention rhetorical form and an evolving, black rhetorical form. Chapter III also returns to Bourdieu's idea of symbolic power, and introduces another concept—enactment. Using these concepts, the purpose of Chapter III is to illuminate the rhetorical exigence.

Chapter IV returns to the rhetorical situation to explain how the rhetorical crisis resolved and to wrap up the events that occurred during the remainder of the convention. The purpose of Chapter IV is to give not only a historical account of the four days of the convention, but to examine how the rhetorical situation concluded. Specifically, this chapter explores Johnson's response to the exigence, an exigence that included the symbolic power of the Freedom Party's racial project, and the continued struggle over that symbolic power. This chapter also examines the media's rhetorical construction of



the events, and suggests that the media's role, combined with Johnson's rhetorical strategies and heresthetic control, caused the demise of the Freedom Party's legitimacy.

## CHAPTER II

### THE VANTAGE POINT REVISITED

This country, with its institutions, belongs to the people who inhabit it. Whenever they shall grow weary of the existing Government, they can exercise their *constitutional* right of amending it, or their *revolutionary* right to dismember or overthrow it.

–Lincoln, First Inaugural

In 1948, Truman issued an Executive Order that prohibited segregation in the nation's armed forces and forbade discrimination in federal employment and government contract facilities. In protest, the Southern Delegates staged a walkout from the 1948 Democratic Party Convention and created the States' Rights Democratic Party, otherwise known as the Dixiecrats, which although politically unsuccessful, continued to propagate white supremacy throughout the South.<sup>1</sup> By 1954, the Supreme Court had declared segregation in public schools unconstitutional in the landmark case of *Brown v. Board*. It wasn't until 1957, when Melba Beals and her eight friends were escorted by Eisenhower's 101<sup>st</sup> airborne soldiers into Central High School in Little Rock, Arkansas, that the first black students entered a previously all-white, Southern public school.<sup>2</sup>

With a country full of resistance, the disparity between law and practice left much to be desired of desegregation and racial equality. As the Southern states continued to mobilize their defenses, civil rights activists mobilized the wide array of grassroots organizations into a cohesive movement, using collective action and powerful rhetoric to diminish the gap between political policies and reality. In the sixties, this struggle broke the bonds of silence that had gagged past social and political efforts, and progressed beyond the Mason-Dixon Line to the top of the national agenda.

As civil rights issues penetrated political platforms, the country was forced to reexamine race. In their book, *Racial Formation in the United States*, Omi and Winant present a compelling account of racial dynamics within the United States, particularly as they appear in the political arena. They note that race is “an unstable and ‘decentered’ complex of social meanings constantly being transformed by political struggle.”<sup>3</sup> They argue that race is not simply a concrete, biological construct; but nor is it merely an “illusion” or “ideological construct.”<sup>4</sup> The sixties illuminated the white majority’s dilemma of comprehending race, and set the stage for a new analysis of race as a structural and cultural problem. Omi and Winant define this concept of race as “signif[ying] and symboliz[ing] social conflicts and interests by referring to different types of human bodies.”<sup>5</sup> From this definition, Omi and Winant propose a theory of racial formation, which is “the sociohistorical process by which racial categories are created, inhabited, transformed, and destroyed.”<sup>6</sup> They posit that “racial projects” occur when groups organize to represent and explain the current racial dynamics in an effort to “reorganize and redistribute resources along particular racial lines.”<sup>7</sup> Thus the importance of the rhetoric that was developed and employed by civil rights activists during the sixties is seen in challenging not only the discrepancies within the national law, but the hypocrisies embedded in the national rhetoric of equality.

To reflect back on the rhetorical crisis at the Credentials Committee at the 1964 Democratic Convention demonstrates the persuasive power in the mere presence of the Freedom Delegates on the national political agenda. And yet simultaneously, the crisis illustrates the limitations placed on their rhetoric by a political and social consciousness

that had just begun to struggle with how to redefine race and define racism. The testimony of Fannie Lou Hamer, in particular, exemplifies this juxtaposition of the persuasive power and the heresthetic limitations of this rhetorical interaction between the insurgents and society.<sup>8</sup> In order to understand the rhetorical interplay between Fannie Lou Hamer and the American public, it is crucial to understand the social and political context in which Hamer testified and her audience judged.

The purpose of this chapter is to create a foundation for understanding this rhetorical situation by establishing key concepts and events. Drawing from the works of Karlyn Campbell, Kathleen Jamieson and Pierre Bourdieu, this chapter defines the concepts of rhetorical form and symbolic power. The chapter outlines the evolving exigence before and up to the beginning of the Credentials Committee hearing. The chapter also introduces emerging constraints and strategies within this rhetorical situation, setting the stage for the dramatic testimonies that Chapter II presents.

### **Form and Power**

First, it is necessary to understand the traditional rhetorical forms that confronted and shaped the rhetorical strategies during the hearing. The rich tradition of political convention rhetoric is deeply seeded in American history and deeply rooted in American consciousness. There is a shared expectation for how political conventions proceed, and this expectation far exceeds *Robert's Rules of Order*.

The pomp and circumstance that has become associated with national party conventions began with the gathering of a third party, the Anti-Masons, in 1831. One year later, the Democrats nominated Andrew Jackson and Martin Van Buren in what

would become the first national convention of a major party. The Republicans followed suit in 1856. Since then, the nation has developed a political convention protocol. In his article, “Political Conventions as Legitimation Ritual,” Thomas B. Farrell writes, “The optimal convention ritual begins with the statement and demonstration of theme, progresses to the clustering of roles and generic personae, and culminates in the anointing of the person who condenses, symbolizes, and enacts the theme.”<sup>9</sup> This is the traditional form of the political convention.

This traditional form of political convention elicits a traditional form of political convention rhetoric. This traditional rhetoric is expressed in several ways. Farrell notes, “The statement and expression of theme is of initial importance to political convention ritual. Traditionally, such statement has been the responsibility of keynote and guest speakers. As the musical etymology of keynote suggests, one responsibility of such a speaker is to sound the theme of the convention in a “responsive chord”—one which will set a proper mood for the proceedings. . . . In addition to articulating a central theme through ceremonial discourse, each political convention ritual will display a cluster of role archetypes, to lend a sense of historical continuity, generic permanence, and audience recognition. . . . [and finally] Whether any political convention effectively initiates its chosen candidates, and offers an effective strategy for gaining and using power will depend upon the actual performance of the candidates themselves.”<sup>10</sup>

This traditional form of political convention rhetoric develops the context and dictates the rules for all those who engage in it. This form is the key to power in this context. For

this reason, perhaps it is best to pause and explain what is meant by this use of “power” and “rhetorical form.”

In an introduction to a collection of essays on form and genre, Karlyn Campbell and Kathleen Jamieson emphasize the importance of forms in rhetorical criticism. They note,

Rhetorical forms that establish genres are stylistic and substantive responses to perceived situational demands. In addition, forms are central to all types of criticism because they define the unique qualities of any rhetorical act, and because they are the means through which we come to understand how an act works to achieve its ends.<sup>11</sup>

In the rhetorical crisis at the 1964 convention, the Freedom Party was confronted with the constraint of a powerful, established, traditional form of political convention rhetoric and subsequently the limitations of their own emerging, evolving rhetorical form. Consequently, the Freedom Party had to develop a strategic form that would work within the previously established rhetorical framework of the convention, and capture the symbolic power needed to redefine national connotations of race and racism.

The concept of symbolic power comes from Bourdieu, who defines it as “a power of constituting the given through utterances, of making people see and believe, of confirming or transforming the vision of the world and, thereby, action on the world and thus the world itself.”<sup>12</sup> In the context of the 1964 Credential Committee, it is quite evident that the challengers were challenging the Democratic Party’s, and simultaneously the nation’s, vision of the world. There **was** a discrepancy between law

and practice. There **was** a discrepancy between Southern Democrats and the National Democratic Creed. There **was** a serious discrepancy between the espoused American dream and reality. The goal of the Freedom Party was to gain the symbolic power that was then being denied blacks—the power to redefine how the nation understood race and equality and democracy. The rhetorical goal was to transform reality through testimonies that illustrated these discrepancies and illuminated a new vision of the world.

The difficulty of this task is marked by the speech that Chairman Lawrence gave at the start of the Credential Committee hearings. He urged the members and press to remember Kennedy (a theme through the political convention ritual), and Kennedy's goals for the nation. He read a passage from one of Kennedy's speeches:

We in this country, in this generation, are by destiny, rather than choice, the watchmen on the walls of world freedom. We ask, therefore, that we may be worthy of our power and responsibility that we may exercise our strength with wisdom and restraint, and that we may achieve in our time, for all time, the ancient vision of peace on earth, good will toward men. That must always be our goal; and the righteousness of our cause must always underlie our strength.<sup>13</sup>

By evoking what had become a nationally sacred memory of the former president, Chairman Lawrence was establishing a theme and consequently conveying an image of “unity and affirmed consensus.”<sup>14</sup>

This is the rhetorical form that the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party was pitted against. In fact, it is not just a form, it is a genre. Campbell and Jamieson note, “If the recurrences of similar forms establish a genre, then genres are groups of discourses

which share substantive, stylistic, and situational characteristics.”<sup>15</sup> Democratic conventions are rhetorical contexts in which similar forms had established a rhetorical genre—as Farrell’s article terms traditional political convention rhetoric. At each Democratic convention, the speeches that are made convey similar ideas and evoke similar ideals belonging not just to the Democratic Party but also to the American dream of life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. This rhetorical form espouses equality and supports its claim with the document inscribed with the precious words “All men are created equal.” The Freedom Democrats had to shadow-box this rhetorical form, hoping to illuminate the ghosts of inequality that haunted it. In order to challenge the reality, they had to challenge the rhetorical form.

What is unique about the Freedom Democrats is that the various testimonies they offered wove rhetorical forms in and out of the traditional convention rhetoric genre. Before this is explained further, however, the rhetorical exigence that motivated the Freedom Party to confront the powerful political and social traditions should be explained. Through this explanation, the traditional form of the political convention and the struggle of the regular Democrats—including Johnson—to uphold this traditional form will be illuminated.

### **The Exigence: Pre-Credentials Committee**

On June 19, 1964, the Senate passed the Civil Rights Act, which had been introduced by Kennedy just one year earlier. Three days later Andrew Goodman, Michael Schwerner and James Chaney disappeared in Nashoba County while volunteering for the Freedom Summer voter registration project. On July 2, President



Johnson signed the Civil Rights Act, banning segregation and authorizing legal recourse for racial discrimination. In response, the Mississippi regular delegates passed a resolution at their state convention that said, “We believe in the separation of the races in all phases of life.”<sup>16</sup> Fifteen days later, Aaron Henry,<sup>17</sup> the Chairman of the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party, wrote a letter to John Bailey, the Chairman of the Democratic National Convention and informed Bailey of the Freedom Party’s intent to send a full delegation and alternates to the Democratic National Convention.

In the letter Henry stated, “Our delegation will represent Democratic residents of the State of Mississippi who are loyal to the United States Constitution and to the National Democratic Party and most of whom are barred from the “regular” Democratic Party by terroristic and other un-Constitutional methods.” He then laid out the nominating process of the Freedom Delegates. Their procedures mirrored those of the “regular” party and acted in accordance with Mississippi law, except, Henry wrote, “our meetings will be open to all Democrats while their meetings effectively bar Negroes.” Already, the Freedom Party’s mere formation and procedures were challenging the traditional form of the National Democratic Party.

On August 4, the murdered bodies of the three volunteers were found. Two days later, in Jackson, Mississippi, Ella Baker presented the keynote address for the Freedom Party’s state convention. She said, “The symbol of politics in Mississippi lies in those three bodies that were dug from the earth this week.”<sup>18</sup> Documenting the Freedom Party’s state convention, television reporters asked Joseph Rauh,<sup>19</sup> the Freedom Party’s legal representation, if he thought this case had a chance before the Democratic National

Convention. Rauh declared, “. . . before those national television cameras, there’s no doubt in my mind that they [the states] will go [vote] with us.” He added, “If we have eight states and eleven members of the credentials committee, we can win.”<sup>20</sup> In the background emerged a large black woman who began to lead the crowd in the chant, “Eleven and eight!” This woman was Fannie Lou Hamer. Her boisterous presence, coupled with Rauh’s confidence, created concern in the White House.

The president resented Rauh’s involvement. Rauh remembered the political games of that summer well. He reflected on the events that transpired between Johnson and himself, and noted that “Johnson . . . [believed that] ‘every man has his price.’ Since I obviously was a serious figure in this thing, he tried to get me out of it.” The president, his experience in the Senate of placing people under political pressure providing him with confidence in his persuasive power, called up Senator Hubert Humphrey and UAW President Walter Reuther, both of whom were political allies and business associates of Rauh. In essence, Rauh recalled, “the president told them, ‘You tell that bastard god damn lawyer friend of yours that there ain’t gonna be all that eleven and eight shit at the convention.’”<sup>21</sup> So Johnson began his covert campaign to uphold the traditional form of national conventions.

The pressure from Rauh’s political allies Humphrey and Reuther was intense. In an interview, Rauh remembered the most hysterical of all the phone calls he received from Johnson’s pit bulls. Rauh recounted his conversation with Reuther:

Walter said, “I’ve been talking to the president and we have agreed that if you go through with this, we’re going to lose the election.” I said, “Are you serious?”

Goldwater has been nominated! How can you lose it!” He said, “We both think the backlash is so tremendous that either we’re going to lose the Negro vote if you go through with this and don’t win, or if you do win, the picture of your all black delegation going on the floor to replace the white one is going to add to the backlash. We really think that Goldwater’s going to be president.”<sup>22</sup>

Humphrey was far less threatening than Reuther was to Rauh. Looking back, Rauh notes that he felt that Humphrey’s nomination as vice president was dependent on how he handled the Freedom Party situation. It was Johnson’s test of his potential running mate. In his interview in 1969, however, Rauh was adamant that the world should know that Humphrey “never once, even when his vice presidency was at stake there, did he ever say, ‘Joe, you’ve got to take this settlement to help me.’ Never once.” Rauh told the interviewer, “We would be alone at 4 in the morning negotiating, but he’d never use our relationships. To me that was the highest ethical standard.”<sup>23</sup> Johnson, on the other hand, found Rauh’s involvement a betrayal of their friendship.

Johnson was bewildered not only by the involvement of Rauh, but by the choice of timing on the part of the activists. Were they ungrateful for all that he had accomplished for them? Why were they so impatient for all that he intended to do for them in the next four years? Did they not realize that to create a calamity at the convention would destroy the opportunity for his nomination and subsequent election? And then who would help them? Certainly not Barry Goldwater!

Johnson expressed his frustration with the Freedom Delegates in several phone calls with White House aides and other politicians. In one such phone call between

Johnson and Labor Secretary Willard Wirtz, the president bemoans the Freedom Party's actions, "If the liberals weren't in charge, and didn't have the president, and didn't have the vice president, and didn't have the platform, and didn't have everything they want, they ought to do this [Freedom Democrats challenge]; they do [have all of those things]." <sup>24</sup> Johnson expressed a similar sentiment in a phone conversation with Humphrey. With agitation ringing in his voice, the president appealed to his mediator, "See if the Negroes don't realize that they've got the president, they'll have the vice president, they've got the law, they'll have the government for four years—that'll be fair with them, be just with them, and why in the livin' hell do they want to hand shovel Goldwater fifteen states?" <sup>25</sup>

Rauh found no validity in Johnson's threats of a Goldwater victory and maintained his position that they had a strong, legitimate case. On August 13, when the Mississippi state court ruled that it would bar the insurgent group from using the Democratic name, Rauh informed the press that his group would continue to fight in spite of the court's ruling. In his personal files, White House aide Bill Moyers noted, "Chairman Bailey said that he will recommend that neither delegation be put on temporary roll and that the question of which to seat should go before the credentials committee." <sup>26</sup> Confident, the young attorney cautioned Johnson that any attempts to remove his legal counsel from the case would prove more problematic than to address the legal breach. A memo written by a White House aide outlines Rauh's position for the president:

1. The Freedom Party was not his [Rauh's] idea, and he would be just as happy if it would evaporate.
2. Clearly the Freedom Party supporters and Joe have as their primary principal objective your victory in November.
3. If you believe Joe should pull out of the case, he will do so, although it is his view that the control over the case will then pass to communist lawyers...<sup>27</sup>
4. [His brief] studies and finds that the regulars have failed to meet the Party Requirements.<sup>28</sup>

The brief mentioned in the memo was Rauh's source of strength and security. Assisted by Eleanor K. Holmes and H. Miles Jaffe, Rauh had prepared the brief weeks before the convention. He was particularly proud of his research referring to the 1944 convention, in which two delegations from Texas were seated and split the vote of the state. Rauh notes, "Nobody was going to vote in the '44 convention. Roosevelt was going to be renominated, so what was the use of fighting? Let everybody be seated, like a party. Why don't you do the same thing? Nobody's going to vote in '64."<sup>29</sup>

But Johnson's legal aides cautioned Johnson's consideration of an appropriate course of action. In their analysis of the situation, the aides laid out both sides of the argument. They told the president to avoid "weakening [his] civil rights image. . .having delegations walk out. . .inquiring into the legality of other state delegations. . .an extended floor debate. . .physical violence. . .and encouraging massive civil rights demonstrations in Atlantic City and throughout the country."<sup>30</sup> Johnson was faced with a plethora of pitfalls, one of which found Johnson before he even had the chance to find it.

On August 19, just five days before the convention, Moyers sent Johnson a memo warning him of a planned demonstration outside the convention hall. The memo stated that a good friend of Moyers, Robert Spike of the National Council of Churches, had told Moyers that many of the civil rights groups throughout the nation had heard of the challenges the Freedom Democrats were facing in their struggle to be seated. They decided to “mount a serious demonstration on Monday afternoon in Atlantic City, [and] that it could continue throughout the week, with the biggest efforts coming on Wednesday.”<sup>31</sup> Despite these events and Johnson’s obvious preoccupation with attempting to dispel any possibility for a floor fight to ensue, his journals and memoirs do not mention the crisis *at all*: “Atlantic City in August 1964 was a place of happy, surging crowds and thundering cheers. To a man as troubled as I was by party and national divisions, this display of unity was welcome indeed.”<sup>32</sup>

### **The Evolving Exigence: Crisis at the Credentials Committee**

On Saturday, August 22, just a few hours before the hearing began, Aaron Henry wrote a telegram to President Johnson. The telegram read:

Yesterday the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party completed its 1200 mile bus trip to the Democratic National Convention. Our trip has, in many ways, been one of discovery . . . Your benevolent neutrality, we believe, contrasts with the tight control the Republican Party leadership imposes upon its delegates in San Francisco, and we urge you to maintain this truly Democratic attitude . . . whatever the outcome of this fight to be seated, we want you to know we will support you with all our hearts in the upcoming election.<sup>33</sup>

Attached to the telegram was a memo from White House Special Assistant Paul Pople to the president, which read, “Over the past few days, we have received a total of 416 telegrams supporting the seating of the Freedom Party delegation; most of these have come in yesterday and today. Only one telegram has come in supporting the regular delegation.”<sup>34</sup> People from all over the country, but primarily from New York, New Jersey, Illinois, Pennsylvania and California, had sent telegrams to the White House in support of the Freedom Party. They were from a wide array of the American public—students, doctors, wives, even congressmen.

Most telegrams simply read, “Seat the MFDP.” One telegram in particular was signed from a group of congressmen. It read, “In light of the fact that the Mississippi Democratic Party is segregated and has not pledged support for the National Democratic Ticket, we strongly urge you Seat the MFDP.”<sup>35</sup> Although the majority of the telegrams were overwhelmingly supportive of the Freedom Party, several disturbing messages from opponents would arrive later, primarily prominent southerners. For example, Congressman L.C. Lowe of Mississippi sent a telegram warning Johnson that the Democrats were losing the South, and that many Southern Democrats were afraid to even go to the convention, as undoubtedly it would ruin their careers in their respective States.<sup>36</sup>

The telegrams would not be enough to bring a roll call vote to the floor. Rauh knew that the presence of the press during the testimonies would be crucial to the case: politicians would respond differently to the undeniably confrontational rhetoric of the Freedom Delegates if the proceedings took place in the sunshine of the public’s presence

than if they occurred behind closed doors. Less than an hour before the Credentials Committee began, Rauh was stopped in the hallway by television newsman Sandy Vanocur. In an interview with Kay Mills, Rauh recalled, “He [Vanocur] came to me in the middle of the afternoon and he said, ‘Joe, they’ve screwed you.’ I said, ‘My god, already?’” He came back and said you and I have got this thing open. They’re going to have television and cameras and everything.”<sup>37</sup>

The issue of securing the public’s presence at the testimonies introduces the struggle for control of the heresthetic. Heresthetic is a word coined by William H. Riker in his book, *The Strategy of Rhetoric: Campaigning for the American Constitution*. Riker writes

Heresthetic is a word I coined from a Greek root for choosing and deciding, and I use it to describe the art of setting up situations—composing the alternatives among which political actors must choose—in such a way that even those who do not wish to do so are compelled by the structure of the situation to support the heresthetician’s purpose. [Heresthetic differs from rhetoric because there is much more than eloquence and elegance involved in heresthetic. People win politically by more than rhetorical attraction. Typically they win because they have set up the situation in such a way that other people will want to join them—or feel forced by circumstances to join them—even without any persuasion at all.]<sup>38</sup>

This idea of heresthetic plays an important role in this particular rhetorical situation. Throughout the remainder of the convention, it will serve to empower and constrain both the Freedom Party, and Johnson and the regular Democrats. The struggle between them



to be the heresthetician will illuminate the constant manipulation and shifts in power that forced rhetorical strategies to be altered.

For example, a look back at Johnson's frustration with the emergence of the Freedom Party demonstrates the initial struggle for heresthetic control. Johnson seemed bewildered at the sense of timing on the part of the Freedom Party. He sought control of the convention, and believed that any agitation would cost him either his nomination or election. Yet for the Freedom Party, and the civil rights organizations that they represented, there was no better time to protest. They had struggled for centuries in an effort to establish equality, and Johnson's presence in the White House offered an opportunity to take another step forward. When Johnson set Reuther and Humphrey on Rauh, he attempted to establish heresthetic control over the events at the convention.

When it looked as though Rauh and the Freedom Party would be at the convention anyway, the next struggle for heresthetic control developed over the issue of the press's presence at the hearing. Johnson attempted to control the situation and make sure that the hearing was conducted in a room too small for the press. Unfortunately for Johnson, Rauh made a scene. The young attorney demanded that the hearing be moved to a room big enough for the regular democrats, the credentials committee, the Freedom delegates and the press. In a phone conversation with Reuther, Johnson relayed his concern over Rauh "raising hell" in Atlantic City:

He's gonna get it. I don't know. Maybe I better get your judgment on these things. He looks like [he's] trying to start around [to] get more on television. We can not. . . I think the more they get [on television] the worse we are. . .Our

people say that they're causing trouble and they're gonna have to go and move it to another room but if they're gonna get a compromise out of him and get him to agree to not just ruin the election for us then maybe we ought to go along with him. My experience has been on these things that when you try to put a top on a tea kettle sometimes it blows off and sometimes you have to give a man a little rope. On the other hand, I just hate to see it cost us."<sup>39</sup>

Reuther promised Johnson that Rauh agreed that if he could "have his show," he would agree to go along with a reasonable compromise when it was offered. Johnson conceded, "I think I'll say to him, 'Go on and move it to a bigger room.' I don't give a damn if he puts on a little show as long as he don't wreck us; if he comes out right. I think it's a good thing to give these fellows a little encouragement once and awhile."<sup>40</sup> In this instance, Rauh acted as the heresthetician, setting up the rhetorical situation so that the crisis would be presented in front of the whole country. It seems safe to assume that had the press not been at the hearings, events would have proceeded in an entirely different manner.

In fact, the Freedom Party depended on the presence of the press. Without the cameras and reporters, regular delegates, specifically Southerners, were free to reign; with the cameras and reporters, the Freedom delegates were free to protest. So there was little to no fear in the Freedom Party as they entered the convention hall and that "were seated directly opposite the party regulars."<sup>41</sup> According to Freedom delegate Leslie McLemore, "Some of the Freedom Democrats saw their plantation 'bosses'; some saw the women for whom they had worked as maids and cooks, and others, perhaps, saw

some of their fellow townsmen.”<sup>42</sup> The seats of the Freedom delegates were diametrically opposed to that of their white counterparts, many of whom had used their power as a reign of terror in the South. But here, looking around at the numerous television cameras and reporters, the Freedom delegates knew that this time, the confrontation would be mediated by the watchful eye of the public. Here, they had a chance.

This chapter created a foundation for understanding the rhetorical situation of the 1964 Democratic National Convention. By establishing key concepts and events, the chapter outlined the evolving exigence before and up to the beginning of the Credentials Committee hearing. This chapter has introduced Bitzer’s elements of a rhetorical situation that were explained in the introduction—the controlling exigence, the audience and the set of constraints.

The “controlling exigence” at the convention was the Freedom Party’s confrontation of the moral and legal right of the regular Mississippi delegates to sit and represent Mississippi at the convention. The ominous situation in the South prompted the creation of the Freedom Party, or what Omi and Winant would call a “racial project,” that sought to reorganize and redistribute power through the symbolic power of rhetorical speech. Hence, this chapter sought to introduce the importance of rhetorical strategy and its ability to empower as well as constrain the orators. As the exigence creates waves in the pond of the nation’s social and political conscience, it will become apparent that the decisions and actions of the key players in their use, manipulation or invention of rhetorical form yields and constrains the power throughout this rhetorical

situation. What does this power provide? The power presents the opportunity to redefine the waters of the pond; to redefine reality. So, as the players struggle along with their physical and symbolic spaces, they are struggling to redefine reality for an audience much bigger than the Credentials Committee: the nation.

In the beginning of this thesis, it was noted that Bitzer once said that once the orator engages in the rhetorical situation, “both he and his speech are additional constituents.”<sup>43</sup> The link between rhetorical form and symbolic power will develop throughout the remainder of this thesis. The next chapter will continue to develop the rhetorical situation and highlight the elements of the rhetorical situation—exigence, audience and set of constraints—by presenting the dramatic case that the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party delivered before the Credentials Committee and the entire nation. After all, it was the testimonies that cast waves into the social and political pond of the nation.

### CHAPTER III

#### THE CHALLENGE

What happens to a dream deferred? Does it dry up like a raisin in the sun?  
Or fester like a sore--And then run? Does it stink like rotten meat? Or crust and sugar  
over--like a syrupy sweet? Maybe it just sags like a heavy load.  
Or does it explode? --Langston Hughes<sup>1</sup>

The case set forth by the Freedom Democrats had to appeal to a number of different audiences. Obviously there was the Credentials Committee, who would determine whether or not the issue went to the floor for a roll-call vote. But their testimony appealed to a moral power, and that was addressed to those beyond the convention hall. It was addressed to the nation. The Freedom delegates were asking to reshape the traditional way of politically representing the state of Mississippi, but they asked to reshape the country. This appeal was aimed at the conscience of the country. Dave Dennis, a member of CORE, stressed the exigence. Those that were selected to testify had to reach what he called “the living dead—those who do not care and those who care but have no guts.”<sup>2</sup> Only if America could understand the racial exigence inherent in the system could they gain the support they needed to win this fight.

Chapter I introduced several key concepts and events crucial to understanding this rhetorical situation. This chapter presents the dramatic case that the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party delivered to the Credentials Committee and to America. The rhetorical strategies of the testimonies will be analyzed in Chapter III, which builds on the concepts of rhetorical form and symbolic power. Before an in-depth reading of the testimonies is offered, however, the case must be presented. What follows is a reconstructed account of the rhetorical situation the day of the hearing.

Chairman David Lawrence called the Credentials Committee to order. This hearing tribunal had gathered two days before the official start of the Democratic National Convention to sit in judgment of four contests (contesting the legal right of the entire delegation of a state) and one contest for resolution (contesting the legal right of certain delegates within a state delegation). The entire delegations from Alabama, Mississippi, Puerto Rico and the territory of the Virgin Islands were contested, while specific alternates within the Oregon delegation were brought into question. The Pennsylvania Governor urged the delegates to remember that the ultimate goal was the “smashing Democratic victory” and that while “some of the cases are charged with emotion,” their duty was to “listen to the arguments dispassionately and to reach a conclusion which is both legal and proper.”<sup>3</sup>

At 2:55pm, Rauh stood before Governor Lawrence, the one-hundred and ten members of the Credentials Committee, and the television cameras that had almost not seen this event due to political ploys to silence this issue. Rauh addressed the committee members, all the while acutely aware of the cameras, “In this hour I shall show you that the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party is the loyal, legal, and long-suffering body of Mississippi.”<sup>4</sup> He began to present the case of the Freedom Party. The first witness called to the stand was the Chairman of the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party, Aaron Henry.

The forty-two year old had come a long way from his sharecropper family’s home in the Mississippi Delta. Well-educated, Henry had graduated with a degree in pharmacy from Xavier University, New Orleans, in 1950 on the GI Bill. He had been

active with the NAACP ever since his high school teacher had introduced the organization to his class.<sup>5</sup> Now the president of the Mississippi Branch of the NAACP and Chairman of the Freedom Party sat before the convention and cameras in a dark business suit, his neck tie centered perfectly in the collar of his crisp, white shirt. His testimony established the position of the Freedom Party, justifying its inception and development by systematically demonstrating the atrocities that Mississippi blacks faced.

Henry carefully explained the statistics of poverty and voter registration among blacks in the state. He conceded that he was a registered voter, but that this was due to his level of education—an anomaly in the black population of Mississippi, which had the “lowest academic attainment” in the nation. He outlined the terrorism that blacks encountered at the hands of white, Mississippi leaders—leaders who sat in this very convention hall under the guise of being part of the Democratic Party and yet repeatedly demonstrated through both words and deeds that they did not support LBJ or the Democratic platform. Henry read a quote by Mississippi Governor Paul Johnson, head of the Democratic Party, in which the governor, in a statement in reference to the murder of the three civil rights workers said, “No one in Mississippi condones murder, but we are not going to be run over.”<sup>6</sup> The legal counsel in the Democratic Party, Mississippian E.C. Collins, stated, in regard to segregation, “We must win this fight regardless of the cost in human lives.”<sup>7</sup> The entymeme was clear: Delegates of the Democratic Party should adhere to the party’s platform, which includes support of the Civil Rights Act as well as of President Johnson, and represent their constituents. The Mississippi regulars

clearly did not support desegregation, had spoken out against LBJ and his signing of the Civil Rights Act, and did not support almost half of their state's population. Therefore, the Mississippi regulars were unfit to serve as representatives in the Democratic Party.

Henry shifted his address directly to the American public, "Those watching these proceedings who want to know what you can do to help Mississippi, send telegrams to State Democratic Delegates asking that they vote to seat the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party." He concluded with an appeal in which he explained why freedom could no longer be delayed, postponed, or deferred. "Langston Hughes," Henry spoke, "somehow sums up this frustration in his 'What happens to a dream deferred?'" He then read the poem and finished, "The answer is up to you. Thank you kindly for your attention."<sup>8</sup> Fourteen years later, almost to the day, T.H. Barker asked Henry in an interview, "Did you really think that you could be seated as the delegation from Mississippi, or did you just intend to bring up the issue, or what?" Henry replied, "Yes. We went to win."<sup>9</sup>

Next Rauh introduced the Tougaloo College Chaplain Edwin King, vice-chairman of the Freedom Party, one of four white delegates in the Freedom Party and one of two white delegates to testify. A native Mississippian, Chaplain sat before the committee and cameras. Above his suit and tie, severe scars crawled up his neck and around his face. Brutalized by police, KKK members and other southern racists for his participation in civil rights activities, King's face testified of the injustices in Mississippi.



His speech was well-crafted, though significantly shorter than Henry's testimony, and outlined the fringe-nature of Mississippi politics and values. He explained that there would be more whites involved in this cause if not for the fact that any who did inevitably faced social ostracism, loss of jobs and death threats. He testified to his own experience volunteering with a voter registration rally, and how he was almost killed on the way home by a carload of white men, an act which the police ignored. Well-spoken, the Chaplin concluded, "When we have free elections in Mississippi. . .we will join the mainstream, we will reject the extremism which has charred the beautiful name of Mississippi."<sup>10</sup> King's description of a "charred Mississippi" alluded to the charred vehicle of the three murdered volunteers. Interestingly enough, the very next day protestors would gather outside the convention hall in support of the Freedom Party, singing songs with Hamer and displaying powerful images—probably the most powerful of these was a "replica of a charred Ford station wagon, delivered by a flatbed truck from Mississippi; three poles beside it bore photographs of James Cheney, Andrew Goodman, and Michael Schwerner."<sup>11</sup>

Before Rauh could introduce his next witness, Governor Lawrence interrupted. He objected to the emphasis of the testimonies on the "general life of the state of Mississippi," noting that it would save time if the speakers could confine their testimonies to "the question of the election machinery and so forth."<sup>12</sup> Rauh defended the subject of his witnesses, noting that their experiences are critical to the case. He then called Fannie Lou Hamer. Hamer's testimony was labeled the most dramatic of

testimonies at the Committee hearing that day, and allegedly provoked an emergency impromptu televised speech by Johnson.<sup>13</sup>

The third to testify on behalf of the Freedom Party, forty-six year old Hamer slowly approached the witness table, walking with a slight limp from either a childhood bout with polio or an accident that had occurred in her youth. The two-hundred pound black woman was dressed in a dark-colored floral-printed dress, purse in hand. Bernice Johnson Reagon, a Freedom Singer and later a SNCC field secretary, remarked that Hamer “looked like all the black women I knew . . .she was hefty, she was short, she had a signing voice much like the women who came out of our church. . .she looked like a real regular.”<sup>14</sup> Hamer’s testimony exemplifies a rhetorical strategy that toggles between traditional political convention rhetorical form and an evolving, black rhetorical form, which I will explain in the next chapter. Because of this, and because her testimony was labeled as the most dramatic of all of the testimonies that day, her testimony warrants a full, direct quotation. What follows is Hamer’s testimony.

Mr. Chairman, and the Credentials Committee, my name is Mrs. Fanny Lou Hamer, and I live at 626 East Lafayette Street, Ruleville, Mississippi, Sunflower County, the home of Senator James O. Eastland, and Senator Stennis.

It was the 31st of August in 1962 that 18 of us traveled 26 miles to the county courthouse in Indianola to try to register to try to become first-class citizens.

We was met in Indianola by Mississippi men, Highway Patrolmens and they only allowed two of us in to take the literacy test at the time. After we had taken this test and started back to Ruleville, we was held up by the City Police and the State

Highway Patrolmen and carried back to Indianola where the bus driver was charged that day with driving a bus the wrong color.

After we paid the fine among us, we continued on to Ruleville, and Reverend Jeff Sunny carried me four miles in the rural areas where I had worked as a timekeeper and sharecropper for 18 years. I was met there by my children, who told me the plantation owner was angry because I had gone down to try to register.

After they told me, my husband came, and said the plantation owner was raising Cain because I had tried to register, and before he quit talking the plantation owner came, and said, "Fanny Lou, do you know--did Pap tell you what I said?" And I said, "Yes, sir."

He said, "I mean that, he said, "If you don't go down and withdraw your registration, you will have to leave," said, "Then if you go down and withdraw," he said, you will--you might have to go because we are not ready for that in Mississippi.

And I addressed him and told him and said "I didn't try to register for you. I tried to register for myself."

I had to leave that same night.

On the 10th of September 1962, 16 bullets was fired into the home of Mr. And Mrs. Robert Tucker for me.<sup>15</sup> That same night two girls were shot in Rulesville, Mississippi. Also, Mr. Joe McDonald's house was shot in.

And in June the 9th, 1963, I had attended a voter registration workshop, was returning back to Mississippi. Ten of us was traveling by the Continental Trailway bus. When we got to Winona, Mississippi, which is Montgomery County, four of the people got off to use the washroom, and two of the people--to use the restaurant--two of the people wanted to use the washroom.

The four people that had gone in to use the restaurant was ordered out. During this time I was on the bus. But when I looked through the window and saw they had rushed out I got off the bus to see what had happened, and one of the ladies said, "it was a State Highway Patrolman and a Chief Justice of Police ordered us out."

I got back on the bus and one of the persons had used the washroom got back on the bus, too.

As soon as I was seated on the bus, I saw when they began to get the four people in a highway patrolman's car, I stepped off of the bus to see what was happening and somebody screamed from the car that the four workers was in and said, "Get that one there, and when I went to get in the car, when the man told me I was under arrest, he kicked me.

I was carried to the county jail, and put in the booking room. They left some of the people in the booking room and began to place us in cells. I was placed in a cell with a young woman called Miss Ivesta Simpson. After I was laced in the cell I began to hear sounds of licks and screams. I could hear the sounds of licks

and horrible screams, and I could hear somebody say, "Can you say, yes, sir, nigger? Can you say yes, sir?"

And they would say other horrible names.

She would say, "Yes, I can say yes, sir."

"So say it."

She says, "I don't know you well enough."

They beat her, I don't know how long, and after a while she began to pray, and asked God to have mercy on these people.

And it wasn't long before three white men came to my cell. One of these men was a State Highway Patrolman and he asked me where I was from, and I told him Ruleville, and he said, "We are going to check this."

And they left my cell and it wasn't too long before they came back. He said, "You are from Ruleville all right," and he used a curse word, and he said, "We are going to make you wish you was dead."

I was carried out of that cell into another cell where they had two Negro prisoners. The State Highway Patrolmen order the first Negro to take the blackjack. The first Negro prisoner ordered me, by orders from the State Highway Patrolman for me, to lay on a bunk bed on my face, and I laid on my face. The first Negro began to beat, and I was beat by the first Negro until he was exhausted, and I was holding my hands behind me at that time on my left side because I suffered from polio when I was six years old. After the first Negro had beat me until he was exhausted the State Highway Patrolman ordered the second

Negro to take the blackjack. The second Negro began to beat me and I began to work my feet, and the State Highway Patrolman ordered the first Negro who had beat to set on my feet to keep me from working my feet. I began to scream and one white man got up and began to beat in my head and tell me to hush. One white man--my dress had worked up high, he walked over and pulled my dress down and he pulled my dress back, back up.

I was in jail when Medgar Evers was murdered.

All of this on account we want to register, to become first-class citizens, and if the freedom Democratic Party is not seated now, I question America, is this America, the land of the free and the home of the brave where we have to sleep with our telephones off of the hooks because our lives be threatened daily because we want to live as decent human beings, in America?

Thank you. (Applause)<sup>16</sup>

When she had finished speaking, someone took off her microphone. Hamer slowly rose, took her purse, and walked back to her party's table.

Hamer's testimony had been an account of the facts of her experience trying to vote as she remembered them. But her speech was delivered with such emotion, that she evoked empathy, if not guilt, from her audience. When she first sat down to speak, her boisterous presence commanded almost complete silence from the convention hall. The two hundred pound woman was already growing sweaty in her faded floral-print dress. As she began to speak, her loud, melodious voice covered any whispering that might have been going on between delegates. The rhythm of her speech mimicked that of the

preachers from her church—her narrative was broken into segments that had pauses now and again as if to demand reflection. Her story climaxed with the statement, “I was in jail when Medgar Evers was murdered,” at which point she began to cry.<sup>17</sup> By the end of her speech, tears had intermingled with sweat. Together, the tears and sweat glistened around her eyes, poured down her face, and seemed to cover her entire body.

According to Lynne Olson, there was a moment of absolute silence.<sup>18</sup> Mills notes that “some of the seated politicians listening were in tears.” However, Mills also notes that “One of the regulars criticized Mrs. Hamer’s testimony, calling it a ‘pitiful story’ told by a woman who had, in fact, had a chance to participate in the electoral process.”<sup>19</sup> Whether or not the rest of the nation had responded similarly to Hamer’s testimony was not apparent . . . at least, not immediately.

In truth, the nation did not see Hamer’s speech in its entirety until the network news aired it later that evening. The White House had been watching the convention, and responded to Hamer’s testimony in particular, with rage. Hamer remembers a man present at the testimony who echoed Johnson’s orders to take the camera off of her:

It was a man there, very close, that told me that he said to get—told them people with the cameras to get that goddamn television off them niggers in Mississippi and put it back on the convention, because, see, the whole world was hearing too much . . . see because, I found out after then women and men from all over the country wept when I was testifying—because when I testified, I was crying too.<sup>20</sup>

We can infer from the interview that Hamer was emotional during her speech and tape, and that she managed to arouse people all over the country—be it in anger or tears.

Olson notes that the network stories that aired later that night “led to a deluge of calls and telegrams to the Credentials Committee from all over the country in support of the Freedom Party challenge.”<sup>21</sup> Kotz notes that following the appearance of her testimony on the evening news, the White House received another deluge of telegrams and phone calls from the nation—all but one in favor of seating the Freedom Democrats.<sup>22</sup> This time, however, the telegrams were in response to the televised testimonies, not just Rauh’s lobbying. Because of the press coverage that hailed Hamer as the most dramatic of the testimonies, and because she seems to be the emphasis in historical accounts of this credentials committee hearing, it seems reasonable to assume that it was the emotional nature of her message that incited these telegrams and phone calls.

After Hamer testified, Rauh decided to skip the next witness in the interest of time, and called Rita Schwerner to the stand. The pale woman seemed even paler in her dark dress. The murder of her husband with the two other Freedom Summer volunteers had drained her. Her presence provoked Mr. E.K. Collins, who rose and declared that Schwerner was only “being put on for passion and prejudice against the delegates here from Mississippi.” Chairman Lawrence responded, “I think we can all rely on the members of our committee—they are all capable people—to screen out of the testimony any testimony which is important to the issue and particularly applicable to the issue.”<sup>23</sup> Mrs. Schwerner was permitted to testify.

The small, thin, brunette woman was so pale that her dark dress created the illusion that her white skin was glowing. Her words, like her movements, seemed to float with purpose, but there was something horribly haunting behind her testimony. She



spoke of the disappearance of her husband and her subsequent numerous and unsuccessful attempts to speak with Mississippi Governor Paul Johnson. She finished her speech by telling the Committee that “no official report” had been released, and that she had been unable to obtain her husband’s death certificate from Neshoba County.<sup>24</sup> She left the table, and along with it, the ghost of her plea behind her.

As Schwerner returned to the Freedom Party’s table, Rauh passed over another witness of “a similar nature” and called Reverend James C. Moore to the stand. Reverend Moore, part of the National Council of Churches’ Commission on Religion and Race, attested to the legitimacy of the Freedom Party as a representative of all of the people in Mississippi. Having worked in Mississippi, he felt that he and the rest of the people in his organization had been “at an excellent vantage point from which to witness life in Mississippi.” Through his personal experience, he felt confident that the FDP would be a “permanent, constructive influence in the life of the State.”<sup>25</sup> Reverend Moore’s testimony was followed by three more: James Farmer, Roy Wilkins and Martin Luther King, Jr.

The Freedom Party Chairman rose and walked to the table where he would testify. Behind the microphone, Farmer sat in a suit and tie. His rich voice poured out over the audience as he began to compare the historical positions of the Freedom Party and the Underground Railroad. He stated, “[The MFDP] is not underground, it is above ground and it is not seeking to lead people out of the South and some place else. It is seeking to lead them into the heart of the Nation and the mainspring and mainstream of the Democratic Party and of this Nation.” His speech appealed to the loyalty of the

Democrats—if they wanted to be true to their party’s platform, there was no question which Mississippi group should be seated. Farmer’s testimony was followed by that of Roy Wilkins.

Like the other male members of the Freedom Delegates who testified, Wilkins appeared before the committee and the television cameras in a suit and tie. Tall and slender, he sat before the public and cut straight to the point. His speech was brief and made a direct appeal to the committee members. He propositioned them,

Ladies and gentlemen, you come from political districts, you come from precincts, you come from counties, you come from states, and you know that you would not tolerate a situation in your state where forty-two percent of the population had no voice. I ask you from Iowa, Nebraska, and Wyoming and Michigan and Indiana, and yes, from Georgia and from Louisiana—I ask you here to apply that political rule, and I ask something else. I ask that you apply the higher rule than political rule, the rule of morality.<sup>26</sup>

Like Hamer, Wilkins evoked a moral power which crescendoed with his concluding commentary on the state of affairs in the United States. He begged his audience, “I ask you to remember that this Nation was founded upon the declaration that Government is by consent of the governed, and that we fought a war with England, a hopeless war, they said, because they had no representative in the English Parliament.”<sup>27</sup> Wilkins appealed to the nation’s founding principles and the ideals the founders fought so vigilantly for all those years ago.

The final Freedom Delegate to testify was no stranger to the national scene. Martin Luther King, Jr. took the stand and continued to build what would become a rhetorical legacy. Mills notes

Although he knew Goldwater might try to exploit the white backlash, King felt that some satisfactory adjustment to the Freedom Party issue had to be found or there might be even more racial protests that could hurt Johnson's prospects in November. He thought black votes could make a difference in a few states, especially Georgia and Tennessee, but if black voters felt the election was irrelevant, they might stay at home.<sup>28</sup>

King's presence at the hearing gave the Freedom Party's case an added power and legitimation that would otherwise have been missing. No longer was the party just a bunch of unknown insurgents; they were civil rights activists who worked with Martin Luther King, Jr. Furthermore, King was recognized as someone who worked through the system, as opposed to engaging in violent methods of change. So there was no need to fear the Freedom Party; it must be comprised of assimilationists. His ethos already firmly established by public appearances such as the March on Washington and the signing of the Civil Rights Act, King's presence at the end of the testimonies reaffirmed the legitimacy and power of the Freedom Party as a civil rights organization.

Eloquent and poetic, King's argument focused on persuading the Democrats that their party platform was endangered by the defiance of their Mississippi delegates. He said, "No state in the Union is as extreme in its racism as Mississippi."<sup>29</sup> He accused Mississippi of "making a mockery of the Democratic process," and pointed out that the

Mississippi regulars had already “pledged to defy the platform of this great national party.” He told the committee that if they were to seat the Freedom Party, they would be giving the symbolic promise “of the intention of this country to bring freedom and democracy to all people.” King’s appeal to the committee demonstrates an acute awareness of the power in the symbolic act of representing the state of Mississippi. It is through the symbolic representation of a state—the ability to define reality for a state—that power shifts from symbolic to real.

At the conclusion of King’s testimony, the challengers rested. The regulars were given an opportunity to refute the arguments made by Rauh and those that testified on behalf of the Freedom Party. Mr. Collins began his rebuttal by comparing the “so-called Freedom Democratic Party” to the Ku Klux Klan, observing that both organizations kept “their delegations or their rolls secret.” He argued, “No we would [not let the Freedom Democratic Party be seated] . . . because they are illegal, illegally constituted, the same as the KKK.” Furthermore, Collins declared, “they represent no one.”<sup>30</sup> His argument was simple: the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party was not legally registered.

Rauh, who had to argue to use the fifteen minutes he saved during his allotted hour of testimonies for a rebuttal to Collins’s argument, said that the FDP would gladly turn over their roll to the credentials committee, but not to the Mississippi regulars. Rauh refuted the claim that the Freedom Party was not legally registered. In fact, he pointed out the Freedom Party was a legal party. He continued, “You can’t follow the laws of Mississippi if you are a Negro. The laws are made to throw Negroes out of every right in Mississippi. All you can do in a legal way is to do the best you can.” He argued that the

FDP could not even hold a meeting in more than thirty-five counties because people were scared for their lives. Rauh proceeded to point out all of the past incidences when the Mississippi Democratic regulars rejected the National Party's nominees and general platform. He quoted Governor Johnson as having said, "Our MDP is entirely free and independent of the influence or domination of any national party," and "My determination is to do anything I can to get the Kennedy dynasty out of the White House." According to Rauh, if the FDP was not seated, history would be repeating itself.<sup>31</sup>

The waves swelled. In the immediate aftermath of the testimonies, the nation was caught up in the tide of emotion, the Democratic Party was caught up in the tide of moral responsibility and the Credentials Committee was stuck in the riptide of legalities. It seemed as though the whole country was left questioning itself, its morals, its laws, its ideals and values. As the days passed, however, the Mississippi challenge became an undercurrent during the political happenings of the rest of the 1964 Democratic National Convention.

Before recounting those events, however, it is important first to look closer at the rhetorical crisis that occurred on the floor at the Credentials Committee hearing. As Bitzer said, once the orator engages in the rhetorical situation, "both he and his speech are additional constituents."<sup>32</sup> Now that the testimonies have been introduced to the rhetorical situation, the next chapter will explore how these testimonies became "additional constituents." After all, it is the rhetorical interplay in the specific context of the Committee, the subsequent political bargaining behind the scenes during the next

four days of the convention, and the exigence that evolved as a result of this bargaining that illuminate the symbolic power and limitations behind a rhetoric aimed at redefining race in the nation's social and political consciousness.

As I previously stated, Hamer's testimony elicited the most response from the Democrats as well as from the public. Identified as a leader in the Freedom Party, remembered as the "most dramatic" by the public, and singled out as "the" troublemaker by Johnson and the regulars, Hamer embodies the rhetorical crisis at the convention. It was her testimony that made the audience *feel* the urgency of the situation. It was her testimony that conveyed the idea that a promise of future reform was no longer good enough; the Freedom Party must be seated *now*. Hence, the following chapter is devoted to a close reading of her testimony. Chapter III chapter suggests that Hamer was both empowered and constrained by her rhetorical strategies. This Chapter also suggests that her strategies enabled her, and consequently the Freedom Party, to transcend the symbolic power of the Democratic Party. Yet simultaneously, these strategies confined her and the Freedom Party to the paternalistic pandering of the public.

## CHAPTER IV

### A VISION

If there is no struggle there is no progress. Those who profess to favor freedom and yet depreciate agitation, are men who want crops without plowing up the ground, they want rain without thunder and lightening. They want the ocean without the awful roar of its many waters. Power concedes nothing without a demand. It never did and it never will.

—Frederick Douglass, 1857

When the testimonies from the Mississippi Freedom Delegates aired the evening of August 22<sup>nd</sup>, an entire nation was swept up in a wave of sympathy of the protestors' plight. Over the next few days, however, any current of national concern seemed to recede from the shorefront; only remnants remained—an editorial piece here, a picture of the Freedom Singers there, or an interview with Aaron Henry on television, in which he espoused support of presidential nominee Johnson and offered his organization's efforts in the presidential race. In the wake of presidential and vice-presidential nominations, a moving speech by Robert Kennedy, and convention-business-as-usual, the hopes of the Freedom Delegates had been washed out to sea. The rhetorical crisis that accumulated on Saturday, August 22<sup>nd</sup>, had dissipated by Monday, August 24<sup>th</sup>. Yet despite its brevity, this rhetorical crisis highlights the constraints imposed on the rhetorical form employed by the Freedom Party in this given context.

It seems apparent that the most controversial speaker in this rhetorical situation was Fannie Lou Hamer. The immediate impact of her testimony seemed to gain power for the Freedom Party and fuel the crisis for the Democrats. As will be explored in Chapter IV, however, the Democrats retaliated with a rhetorical strategy that resolved the crisis in their favor, and Hamer's power vanished. Because this thesis seeks to

understand the rhetorical crisis in this situation, it makes sense to focus on the testimony that established the urgency of the situation most clearly, and that most embodied the rhetorical power of the Freedom Party. It is through that testimony that the rhetorical constraints of the Party emerge. Hence, this chapter offers a close reading of Hamer's testimony in an attempt to understand the development and eventual resolution of the rhetorical crisis that occurred at the Credentials Committee hearing. By unveiling Hamer's rhetorical strategies—her ability to toggle between rhetorical forms, embody symbolic power, and enact moral authority—I hope to illuminate the reasons that the rhetorical crisis developed as it did.

There existed a rhetorical crisis in the very presence of protest rhetoric at the convention, but this crisis was magnified by the tensions between a traditional protest rhetoric and an evolving black protest rhetoric. In other words, the sixties were a tumultuous time in history when the fight for equality reached another peak in United States history. The protest rhetoric of blacks had been evolving for many years. In an effort to gain the symbolic power needed to redefine race, racism and race relations in America, black rhetoric evolved. Different black rhetoricians explored different rhetorical strategies; some linked their rhetoric to the white abolitionist movement, some defied this, others engaged in managerial rhetoric while still others explored confrontational rhetoric.<sup>1</sup> By the time of the convention, the public had seen, at least on their television sets, speakers like Martin Luther King, Bayard Rustin, Bob Moses and Aaron Henry. But there had been limited exposure in the media of speakers like Fannie



Lou Hamer. Perhaps it is best to pause here and reflect upon the woman and the rhetor of Fannie Lou Hamer.

On October 6, 1917, Hamer was born into sharecropping and the on-going exploitation of her race. Eventually, Hamer would break away from the Old South. She was swept up by the Civil Rights Movement, in time becoming a prominent leader for the cause, paving the way for the black vote in the South, running unsuccessfully for several political positions,<sup>2</sup> and later in life, founding multiple social organizations benefiting economically struggling blacks.<sup>3</sup> Biographies of, interviews with and stories about Hamer all illustrate the effect of her voice not only on the Civil Rights Movement, but also on the integrity of blacks for generations to come.

Hamer was introduced to civil rights when Freedom Summer reached her hometown of Ruleville. In a 1972 interview with historian Dr. Neil McMillen, Hamer recalls the exact moment she learned about her rights. She was at the Williams Chapel Church. She recalls,

One night I went to the church. They had this mass meeting. And I went to the church, and they talked about how it was our right, and that we could register and vote. . . That sounded interesting enough to me that I wanted to try it. I had never heard, until 1962, that black people could register and vote.<sup>4</sup>

Hamer, inspired by the words of Bob Moses and Jim Foreman, set out to vote. It would take her three tries before she actually was able to register. The first time she had to take a literacy test, which was to copy down verbatim and then interpret the sixteenth section of the Constitution of Mississippi. Hamer had no idea what it was, so she failed and was

arrested. The second time was a failed attempt as the police made her go back home. Her landowner greeted her return by firing her. The third time, SNCC had prepared her for the interpretive part of the literacy test, so she passed. When she went to cast her ballot, however, she was informed that she could not vote because she had not been paying a poll tax for the legally required length of two years.<sup>5</sup>

Fired from the plantation and inspired by the right to vote, Hamer became a civil rights worker, first for SNCC and then for Council of Federated Organizations. She traveled around with the organizations, educating blacks about voter registration. Having acquired only up to a sixth grade level of education, Hamer versed herself in the legal and political issues through the organizations. It was in her travels that Hamer experienced the fateful bus ride that would lead to her imprisonment and violent beating at the hands of Mississippi police officers. This event became the subject of Hamer's most powerful speech—her testimony before the Credentials Committee at the 1964 Democratic Party.

Hamer's rhetoric is the very evidence of an evolving black rhetoric. Even back to the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, black women in particular struggled to give voice to their reality. Socially, economically and politically beneath not only white men, but white woman as well, black women struggled to be heard, let alone represented in the civil rights movement. When Hamer stood before the one-hundred and ten credential committee members, the television cameras and the press, she represented not just blacks, but black, female, sharecroppers. She was at the bottom of the bottom of the social, economic and political ladder. Her testimony, nay her very presence, drew

attention to the varying degrees of black rhetoric, black female rhetoric, and the stark contrast of this rhetoric in the traditional white political context that she found herself in.

Hence the struggle between rhetorical forms within the Freedom Party can be understood not only by analyzing the rhetorical form of protest in a context of traditional convention form, but also by analyzing the impact of the evolving black, and particularly black female, rhetorical form in a context of traditional white, male rhetorical form. Building on Campbell's definition of form from Chapter I, then, it seems useful and necessary to introduce this concept of an evolving black female rhetorical form. To do this requires another look at Campbell's work. In an article entitled "Style and Content in the Rhetoric of Early Afro-American Feminists," Karlyn Kohrs Campbell outlines the similarities and differences of rhetorical forms between traditional women abolitionists and black women abolitionists.<sup>6</sup> She presents a juxtaposition of early "Afro-American" rhetoric and the tradition of early white women's rhetoric in the time period of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

Afro-American women, Campbell writes, were confronted with many of the same problems of white women. Yet there were political and social divides between the two groups—the most obvious divide was that most white female abolitionists did not have to confront the combined problem of sexism *and* racism, and were more than likely racist themselves. According to Campbell, these divides forced Afro-American women to "converge and diverge" from the rhetorical strategies employed by their "white counterparts." Hence, black women toggled between adherence to this "traditional

feminine style” and the development of their own rhetorical style in as “Afro-American” women in the public sphere.<sup>7</sup>

As a point of comparison and in order to understand one dimension of the evolving Afro-American rhetorical form, Campbell offers a definition of this idea of a “traditional feminine style.” She notes that “like their white counterparts, Afro-American women frequently made use of the ‘feminine’ style in addressing other women or in adapting to white and/or male audiences.”<sup>8</sup> She writes that

Structurally, “feminine” rhetoric is inductive, even circuitous, moving from example to example, and is usually grounded in personal experience. In most instances, personal experience is tested against the pronouncements of male authorities (who can be used for making accusations and indictments that would be impermissible from a woman) and buttressed by limited amounts of statistical evidence demonstrating that personal experience is not atypical. Because of their “natural piety,” women may appeal to biblical authority. Metaphors and figurative analogies are frequently used. Consistent with their allegedly poetic and emotional natures, women tend to adopt associative, dramatic, and narrative modes of development, as opposed to deductive forms of organization. The tone tends to be personal and somewhat tentative, rather than objective or authoritative. The persona tends to be traditionally feminine, like that of teacher, mediator, or layperson, rather than that of expert, leader, preacher, or judge. Strategically, women who use this style will seek ways to reconcile femininity with the traditional “masculinity” of public discourse. A “womanly” speaker

tends to plead, to appeal to the sentiments of the audience, to “court” the audience by being “seductive.”<sup>9</sup>

Campbell continues,

While peculiarly adapted to the conditions of women, this mode of discourse is suitable for both male and female audiences. The style that is “feminine” has many of the characteristics of the “consciousness raising” that have been a central part of the contemporary feminism. Generally, women have perceived themselves in ways that precluded them from functioning as audiences or agents of change.<sup>10</sup>

The traditional feminine style of protest, then, embodies traditional feminine characteristics.

To illustrate how many black women converged to and diverged from this traditional feminine form of rhetoric, Campbell studies the speeches of Sojourner Truth, Ida B. Wells and Mary Church Terrell. Her analysis of fragments of speeches given by Sojourner Truth reveals that like her “white counterparts,” Truth “relied on biblical authority, personal experience, vivid metaphors, and the power of herself as enactment.”<sup>11</sup> Campbell’s article touches only briefly on the ways in which Truth distinguishes herself from early white abolitionist rhetoric.

It should be noted, however, that Truth defied many qualities of the rhetorical strategies of her white counterparts. In her speech “Ain’t I A Woman,” Truth demonstrates the reality that while she is a woman, and she is capable and successful at employing the qualities of traditional feminine rhetoric, she is treated as anything but a

woman. Her children were sold off like cattle, she did the physical labor of a man day in and day out, and she was never lifted over mud puddles or helped into carriages. She was a woman, but she was not treated like a woman. By making such a statement, Truth defied social concepts of “femininity.” Many black feminist theorists argue that in doing so, Truth deconstructed traditional concepts of femininity and womanhood. So while it is evident that Truth was capable of appealing to and using some of the qualities labeled traditional feminine form—biblical authority, personal story and vivid metaphors—Truth embodied the idea that she was not being treated as a woman. This illustrates one way in which black women converged to and diverged from traditional feminine rhetoric in the public sphere.

However black women chose to speak before the public, they always did so in a context dominated by white men. Many rhetorical strategies and forms would converge to and diverge from appeals to this particular context, this particular audience. Campbell introduces Mary Church Terrell’s 1906 speech, “What It Means to Be Colored in the Capital of the United States.” This speech, Campbell points out, “is a sharp reminder of the gulf between Afro-American and white women.” Her speech evaded any appeals to a white, male audience, and instead focused on an appeal to higher ideals shared by the society. Her speech was “an attempt to make whites understand just what it was to be Afro-American, particularly Afro-American woman, in the nation’s capital, that symbol of national values,” and illustrated “the experiences of Afro-Americans [as] proof of the gap between America’s proclaimed principles and their application to those with ‘a fatal drop of African blood . . . percolating somewhere through [their] veins.’”

Campbell's analysis offers an avenue for a critique for what happened at the 1964 Democratic National Convention. Fannie Lou Hamer, then, emerges as the most defiant of traditional convention rhetoric, and most notable in this struggle between "traditional feminine rhetoric" and the Afro-American rhetoric that Sojourner Truth and subsequent women like Mary Church Terrell had begun to define centuries earlier. Because Hamer's rhetorical form breached the well-established, traditional convention rhetoric and toggled between "traditional feminine rhetoric" and an evolving black rhetoric, the nation identified her as the "most dramatic" of the testifiers.<sup>12</sup> She was not someone and her rhetoric was not something that the public expected in this traditional context, and that made her testimony shocking, even though it was not new to the public scene.

Traditional convention rhetoric embodied traditionally masculine form because it existed in a context that was predominately male-dominated. Hamer was in stark contrast to traditional convention rhetoric. Her rhetorical abilities and mere presence deviated from the traditionally masculine form of convention rhetoric. The forty-six year old, two-hundred pound, black female sharecropper was a shocking visual on the television set. Her faded, floral-printed dress, her limp, even her diction, was out of place in a room full of white, male politicians. Unlike her fellow Freedom delegates—predominantly black men adhering in both physical appearance and rhetorical strategy to the traditional convention form—Hamer did not employ strategic organization or lay out carefully crafted arguments for why the Mississippi regulars should be unseated and replaced by the Freedom delegates. As opposed to Henry's presentation of statistics in

Mississippi to King's historical summary of the discrepancies between the Mississippi Democratic Party and the National Democratic Party, Hamer's only argument was deduced from the horrific tragedy of her personal experience trying to vote. Employing "traditional feminine rhetoric," Hamer narrated her own personal experience attempting to vote.

Hamer toggled between this "traditional feminine rhetoric" and her own evolving rhetoric of a black woman. Eleanor Holmes Norton, "who heard virtually all of the civil rights orators, maintained that Fannie Lou Hamer may have had no equal, save only Dr. King."<sup>13</sup> But why? Hamer was not eloquent in the sense that she possessed a strong command of the language. Her diction reflected six years of on-again-off-again schooling, as she missed most days to tend the land with her family. She had a few workshops at the Highlander Folk School, but her public speaking experience was limited to small groups of people when she traveled around and attempted to register black voters.

Hamer's very lack of formal education disposed her manner of speaking favorably to a paternalistic public. Mike Thelwell, a SNCC organizer, remembers that Hamer's "unlettered voice gave her words a power that no amount of grammatical correctness could have infused." She did not use a grand style or create strategic arguments. Yet it was this grammatically incorrect style that infused the Freedom Party's case that day with strategy.

Her language was simple and direct—perhaps best described as rustic. But Hamer's image and words connected with what the majority of the nation labeled as a



black, female sharecropper. With a voice that evoked memories or images in the minds of her audience members of the sounds of biblical hymns in a Southern church, Hamer's testimony identified with the stereotypes that the nation was expecting from a person from this economic, social and racial class. Hamer testified along side Civil Rights leaders like the logical and articulate Aaron Henry and the passionate and poetic Martin Luther King.

Structurally, much of her testimony appealed to the traditional feminine rhetorical form. She presented a narrative of the brutal beatings that she endured on June 9, 1963. She told a story. She told *her* story. The structure of her testimony shadowed the requirements of the traditional feminine rhetoric, as it moved "from example to example," and was "grounded in personal experience." Yet like Truth, Hamer's speech defied traditional feminine rhetoric; she was a woman and employed feminine form, but the world was not treating her as a woman. This fact made her rhetoric diverge from traditional feminine form, and draw attention to this divergence.

Her testimony evaded any use of statistical evidence in order to "demonstrate that personal experience is not atypical," but Hamer used evidence.<sup>14</sup> Her story told the facts as she remembered them. While her presentation gave the testimony an emotional nature, the majority of her statement was the recollection of a series of events as they happened. Hamer's testimony, then, simultaneously converges to and diverges from traditional feminine form.

Through the details of the events leading up to and then throughout the imprisonment, Hamer evoked vivid imagery of the violence of that day and led the

audience through a dramatic plot. This plot follows the prescribed traditional form of rhetoric. Campbell writes, “Consistent with their allegedly poetic and emotional natures, women tend to adopt associative, dramatic, and narrative modes of development, as opposed to deductive forms of organization.”<sup>15</sup> Framing the civil rights workers as victims and the Patrolmen as villains, Hamer also adopts another characteristic of traditional rhetoric: she strategically personalizes the parts of the story to which she wants the audience to relate. She doesn’t detail the faces or tones of the Highway Patrolmen. Instead, they remain so cruel and distant that they appear machine-like. The pain experienced by the civil rights workers, on the other hand, was disturbingly descriptive. She repeatedly refers to the “sounds of licks and screams” from her fellow civil rights workers. In the most detail, she describes her own beating—the two black men beating her until they were exhausted, her own efforts to protect her left side that was weakened from polio. . . on and on.

Her choices of what information and details to include and which ones not to include impacted the way her message was received. In a sense, by choosing not to focus on the way the patrolmen looked, or the specific way they spoke (albeit the description of their crude, foul-mouthed manner), Hamer denies them their humanity, and demonizes them. While obviously the patrolmen were acting inhumanely toward Hamer and the civil rights workers, there were those in her audience who would not automatically feel sympathy with her plight, but instead feel that she got what “any Negro ought to get.” By choosing to focus on the pain of others and herself, she addresses the varying degrees of moods that her diverse audience is in, and seeks to have

them all understand her feelings on the issue. Listeners could not help but be captivated by her story, to move with her emotionally through what the *New York Times* describes as “outrage to resignation to hope.”<sup>16</sup> Her narrative forces listeners to imagine the trauma—to experience it with her.

Furthermore, Hamer employed traditional feminine rhetoric along with the nation’s paternalistic attitude toward black women to establish a moral authority. She invokes notions of martyrdom, recalling hearing the prayer of a woman, asking God not to save herself, but to have mercy on the officers. Appealing to the Christian values of her audience, Hamer describes the prayer of the woman being beaten to death in a nearby cell. Alluding the woman to Christ, Hamer states, “They beat her, I don’t know how long, and after awhile she began to pray, and asked God to have mercy on these people.”<sup>17</sup> This is a Biblical appeal to Luke 23:24, which states, “Then said Jesus, Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do.”<sup>18</sup> It is crucial to emphasize that Hamer demonstrated that the black woman had more moral power and righteousness than the white men.

This moral power within Hamer’s rhetoric extends further, culminating at the end of the testimony in what possibly is Hamer’s strongest appeal—toward the political and social consciousness. She questions the Democratic Party’s adherence to its espoused platform. She questions the discrepancy between law and practice. She appeals to the Constitutional right of freedom and America’s concept of a citizen. Her final paragraph illustrates her exceptional and heroic testimony, and warrants another full, direct quotation:

All of this on account we want to register, to become first class citizens. And if the Freedom Democratic Party is not seated now, I question America. Is this America the land of the free and the home of the brave where we have to sleep with our telephones off the hooks because our lives be threatened daily because we want to live as decent human beings in America?<sup>19</sup>

By employing several key characteristics of traditional feminine rhetoric, Hamer was able to develop her ethos into the traditional, paternalistic context in which she spoke. But by diverging from traditional feminine rhetoric—her personal story documented the fact that there were major inconsistencies between law and practice—Hamer was able to shock her audience and establish legal as well as moral legitimacy.

Well-known for what the *New York Times* described as a “husky, powerful voice,” Hamer’s voice and presence evoked images of cotton fields covered in unbearable heat, cooled by the biblical hymns sung by slaves. When Reagon recalled that Hamer “looked like all the black women I knew . . . she was hefty, she was short, she had a signing voice much like the women who came out of our church. . . she looked like a real regular,” Reagon highlighted the fact that Hamer embodied, in physical appearance and rhetorical style, what white America considered to be a “real regular black person.”<sup>20</sup> Yet although Hamer looked “real regular,” she was far more than regular. Her station in life lent her to the stereotypes. Her presence, albeit shocking in the formal political arena that was dominated by white upper-class men, appealed to the paternalistic, and consequently racist, feelings that the majority of the public held toward a black, female sharecropper.

Why had she been chosen? Was it just chance that *this* particular black female sharecropper had been selected to speak before the entire nation? Hamer added to the strategy of the Freedom Party. She defied traditional convention rhetoric and employed traditional feminine rhetoric only to establish a connection with the audience. After that, her testimony explored the evolving rhetoric of black women, reaching to redefine reality for the rest of the country. Hamer was exceptional and charismatic—a leader capable of utilizing her rhetoric to reflect a reality that the majority of the nation had not been willing to see before. *This* was precisely why Hamer had been chosen to represent the Freedom Party at the Credentials Committee.

Hamer offered something to the power of the Freedom Party's rhetoric that the others who testified could not. The only other female to testify on behalf of the Freedom Party was Rita Schwerner, whose husband had been one of the three volunteers that captured the nation's attention with their disappearance and subsequent discovery, murdered during Freedom Summer.

Schwerner was the exact opposite of Hamer, both physically and rhetorically. She was white, thin and frail looking. Her speech was short and without an emotional appeal. She stuck to the facts of her husband's death, her failed attempts to speak with Governor Wallace and her inability to obtain her husband's death certificate from Neshoba County. Schwerner's rhetoric was not entirely without traditional feminine form, as she appealed to the white, male audience. Her words appealed to conscience of her audience, though she never directly stated a course of action or offered a definitive statement of morality. Instead, her use of examples of her experience with Governor

Wallace framed her rhetoric as submissively circuitous. Because Schwerner's speech embodied some of the forms of traditionally feminine rhetoric, her presence did not shock or threaten the convention or the national audience. Hamer, on the hand, shocked and threatened the convention.

Although she did incorporate some of the traditional feminine form into her testimony, Hamer transcended this genre in the same utterance that she transcended the convention genre. Her identity as a woman lent her rhetoric to a dramatic, narrative mode of development, grounded in personal experience and seeded with "consciousness-raising" appeals. But Hamer was not appealing to a male, white audience, nor was she appealing in a submissive manner. Her physical presence defied such an appeal. Her weight and stature conveyed strength and pride. Her "husky, powerful voice" commanded attention.<sup>21</sup> In truth, when Reagon remarked that Hamer "looked like all the black women [she] knew . . . she was hefty, she was short, she had a singing voice much like the women who came out of [a Southern] church . . . she didn't look like [a] teacher; she looked like the usher on the usher board . . . she looked real regular," Reagon offered a snapshot not just of how the nation saw Hamer, but how the nation understood Hamer.<sup>22</sup>

This introduces an important rhetorical form ingrained in Hamer's every word. Hamer gained more attention and was more effective than the other Freedom Delegates not just because she defied traditional convention rhetoric, or because she toggled between traditional feminine rhetoric and black rhetoric, but because she exhibited a

rhetorical form called “enactment.” The idea of enactment presents an important point in understanding the rhetorical crisis between the Freedom Party and the Democratic Party.

According to Campbell and Jamieson, “enactment” occurs when “the speaker incarnates the argument, *is* the proof of the truth of what is said.”<sup>23</sup> Campbell uses Sojourner Truth as an example of the power of the rhetorical form of enactment because Truth embodied the discrepancies between societal concepts of “femininity” and the reality of a poor, slave woman.<sup>24</sup> In her article with Jamieson, Campbell introduces Representative Barbara Jordan of Texas as enactment at the 1976 Democratic Convention. Jordan acknowledges her reflexive form when she says, “And I feel that, notwithstanding the past, my presence here is one additional piece of evidence that the American dream need not forever be deferred.”<sup>25</sup> As a woman, and more particularly as a black woman, Jordan embodied her argument that the espoused American dream can come true for *every body*.

Similarly, Hamer embodies her argument. Listen to her trials and tribulations as she attempted to claim the espoused right to vote—the democratic process is not working. Listen to her horrific experience in jail—the Constitution is failing. This rhetorical form was often employed by women who were socially or economically restricted from engaging in the deductive arguments of white men. Hamer was just a sharecropper to these politicians. She was a woman. She was a black woman. Her knowledge of statistical evidence and facts was minimal, and would have been belittled and scoffed at by the white politicians had she attempted to engage them in it. But she did engage in factual evidence. Through her personal narrative—classified as traditional

feminine form—Hamer presented a knowledge of facts that when said out loud, before the entire nation, shocked the white politicians.

Hamer's ability to enact her argument surpasses the fact that she was her own evidence. Hamer also enacted the role of a "real regular black woman," and then used this role to shock the nation by presenting herself as so much more. In the simplicity of her sentences, she came across as being honest and sincere; fulfilling that expectation of how a woman, and even more so how a "real regular black woman," would speak and act. She fulfilled the expectations of maintaining a sincere style and an emotional commitment to her delivery. Mills notes that Hamer had an "ability to capture the essence of the struggle in Mississippi in compelling language that all could understand."<sup>26</sup> Her conversational tone spoke to the committee members as if they were friends and neighbors. Through this appeal—because Hamer was what the nation expected a black woman to be like—she was able to catch the entire country off guard by the moral power of her message.

Yet she did not submit to the rhetorical traditions of the context. The fact that this was a convention and had traditional methods of engaging in debates did not cause Hamer to hesitate. The fact that her audience was predominantly white did not cause Hamer to become submissive. Instead, she embodied her argument and bluntly told the nation that the American dream *had* been deferred. Like Terrell, Hamer's examples "were an ideal vehicle for evoking empathy" and that "each was presented in sufficient detail to allow the listeners to imagine themselves in such circumstance."<sup>27</sup> Both Terrell and Hamer made "an attempt to make whites understand just what it was to be Afro-



American.” Hamer transcended all traditional rhetorical forms by appealing to higher values of humanity. Her appeals echoed the references to President Kennedy that were woven throughout the rhetoric at the 1964 convention. She appealed to the responsibility of the nation to protect and propagate freedom and good will for everyone.

This moral enactment behind her rhetoric infused Hamer with symbolic power that differed from the rhetorical forms of the other Freedom Delegates. In the breach of traditional convention form, Hamer’s rhetoric also breached the vision of reality as the nation had previously understood it. Hamer demonstrated the “power of constituting the given through utterances, of making people see and believe, of confirming or transforming the vision of the world and, thereby, action on the world and thus the world itself.”<sup>28</sup> During her testimony, Hamer used the power of symbols, including herself, to transform the reality of her audience.

Yet Hamer could not maintain the legitimacy of her reality, and consequently the legitimacy of the Freedom Party. Simons writes that “the primary rhetorical test of the leader—and, in directly, of the strategies he employs—is his capacity to fulfill the requirements of his movement by resolving or reducing rhetorical problems.”<sup>29</sup> Hamer managed to reduce the gap between her reality and that of the nation, yet the Freedom Democrats were not seated. The moral power behind Hamer seemed to falter and fade away over the next four days of the convention . . . or perhaps it was never established.

The “racial project,” as Omi and Winant would call it, of the Freedom Party was to challenge not only the traditional rhetorical form of the Democratic National Convention, but develop a rhetorical form that would represent and explain the current

racial dynamics in an effort to “reorganize and redistribute resources along particular racial lines.”<sup>30</sup> Thus the importance of the rhetoric that was developed and employed by the Freedom Democrats during this convention should be seen as challenging the discrepancies within the national law, and in so doing, challenging the legitimacy of the national reality—a reality embedded with hypocrisies and propagated by the facade of a rhetoric of equality. The rhetorical goal of the Freedom Party was to transform reality through testimonies that illustrated these hypocrisies and illuminated a new vision of reality. But their rhetoric, no matter how much it assimilated to, toggled between, or transcended above traditional convention form, could not obtain and maintain the symbolic power needed to accomplish this goal. Perhaps there is more to their failure than just their rhetorical strategies. Before this is explored further, it is important to finish the fight.

The next chapter wraps up the historical account of the 1964 Democratic Convention. Chapter IV also wraps up the rhetorical situation, and uses key concepts from previous chapters to explore how shifts in heresthetic control and rhetorical strategy, combined with media reconstruction of the event, created a tug-of-war between the Freedom Party and Johnson as they toggled between power and constraint.

## CHAPTER V

### THE FIGHT FOR REALITY

Ask not what your country can do for you, but what you can do for your country.

–JFK

The day after the credentials committee hearing, as the public waded through the murky waters of their reality, Johnson and his staff initiated strategies to calm the stirred waters of the country's conscience. This chapter offers a historical account of the remaining four days of the convention, and traces the events that lead up to the compromise. The purpose of this chapter is to give a historical account of the four days of convention politics. More than that, however, this chapter seeks to examine how the rhetorical situation concluded. Specifically, this chapter explores Johnson's response to the exigence, an exigence that included the symbolic power of the Freedom Party's racial project, and the continued struggle over that symbolic power. This chapter also examines the media's rhetorical construction of the events, and suggests that the media's role, combined with Johnson's rhetorical strategies and heresthetic control, caused the dissolution of the Freedom Party's legitimacy. What follows is an account of the remaining four days, and the rhetorical struggle for symbolic power.

The day after the Credentials Committee hearing, Bill Moyers wrote in his political news summary, "Sentiment that the upcoming convention was going to be placid continued to be expressed."<sup>1</sup> Moyers's statement reflected a public image of the convention and of the Democratic Party that the White House desperately tried to maintain. Kotz writes, "If the Mississippi issue reached the convention floor, Johnson

knew the deep schism already dividing the Democratic Party would be exposed—in all of its bitterness—to a national television audience, as would the conflicting loyalties within the president himself.’<sup>2</sup> In order to propagate the public perception of unity within the Democratic Party, Johnson had to counter the Freedom Party’s testimonies that had suggested otherwise. But he had a lot of work to do.

Inside the convention hall, behind the probing eye of the media, all was not placid. The Credentials Committee was unable to reach a decision. Johnson had proposed a plan to seat the white-regulars, with the stipulation that they sign a loyalty oath to the Democratic Party, platform and presidential nominee. He offered the Freedom Delegates seats as honored guests and vowed to end discrimination at future conventions. Both the regular and the Freedom Delegates rejected this plan.<sup>3</sup> Rauh was no help to Johnson. The young attorney had recruited more than enough votes to ensue a floor fight at the convention, and encouraged the Freedom Delegates to refuse any and all compromises. Kotz writes,

The morning after the [credentials committee], an optimistic Rauh counted seventeen committee members who would support the Freedom Party, as well as ten state delegations willing to call for a vote on the convention floor. Fannie Lou Hamer and her fellow Freedom Democrats were now celebrities, mobbed by reporters and welcomed as they presented their case at various state delegation meetings. On the boardwalk in front of the convention center, crowds gathered at MFDP rallies to hear Hamer, in her strong alto voice, lead the delegates in singing “This Little Light of Mine.”<sup>4</sup>

Rauh was convinced that the testimonies had achieved enough legitimacy and power to redefine the reality of the Democratic National Convention, and consequently the political and social reality of the entire nation.

On Sunday evening, as CORE and SNCC held an all night vigil outside the convention hall, the preoccupied president sat behind his desk in the White House. Determined to find a compromise before the issue caused chaos on the floor, he made phone call after phone call to his staff—Humphrey, Reuther and Mississippi Senator James Eastland. Senator Eastland served as a liaison between Johnson and the “regulars” of Mississippi. His voice moved across the line precariously, wavering between fits of frustration and threats to periods of pleas and suggestions. Eastland and Johnson would exchange a number of phone calls throughout the next few days; Johnson dictating a loyalty oath for Mississippi Governor Johnson’s consideration, Eastland reporting that the Governor had told his delegates to vote however they felt. Constrained, Johnson order the Credentials Committee to procrastinate.

On Monday, the credentials committee created a five-member subcommittee. David Lawrence designated Tom Finney (White House Staff Director), Reuther, Humphrey and himself to serve on the subcommittee. Mondale was appointed chairman. The strategy was ingenious. By taking the issue out of the media’s spotlight, Johnson took some of the urgency out of the rhetorical crisis. In doing so, the president regained some heresthetic control. The Freedom Party felt the constraint of the president’s shift in strategy, as they needed to gain the media’s attention—a difficult task when they were

no longer involved with the convention proceedings. But Johnson had only masked the crisis, not dispelled it.

The media was still very much interested in the potential walk-outs of delegations at the convention. Claude Sitton with *The New York Times* wrote that the Alabama and Mississippi disputes “threatened” to cost support not only in those two states but in Arkansas and Louisiana as well. Senator Humphrey attempted damage control with the Democratic Party’s public image, and told an NBC-TV Audience that he thought they would all “have some good news” in the Mississippi dispute very soon.<sup>5</sup>

In reality, however, the ominous threat of walkouts by southern states loomed. The Alabama State delegation had rejected the requirement of a loyalty oath as a condition to be seated 32-4. The subcommittee knew that the Mississippi regulars would not sign a loyalty oath. They also knew that the Freedom Democrats would not be satisfied with seats “as honored guests” but not as delegates. There was a meeting called to obtain support and compromise from the Southern states, but it too failed to reach an agreement.<sup>6</sup>

Meanwhile, Humphrey sought compromise on the other side of the ring. Acting as liaison between the Freedom Democrats and Johnson, he began meetings with Rauh, Henry, Moses and other members of the Freedom Party. Convinced that his stand on civil rights issues would give him more weight as a mediator between the contesting parties, Humphrey was surprised when Hamer challenged his devotion to the racial issue. Ed King remembered sitting in the “smoke filled rooms” and listening to Humphrey talk about how his vice presidential nomination depended on his settling this

issue, and about all the good things he could do if he were vice president. King recalled an exchange between Humphrey and Hamer:

She left in tears and Senator Humphrey was in tears as he talked about losing the vice presidency and all he wanted to do. . . She said, “Well Mr. Humphrey, do you mean to tell me that your position is more important to you than four hundred thousand peoples lives?”. . . Mrs. Hamer basically said if you sell your soul you will not be able to do any good. To Mr. Humphrey she said, “Senator Humphrey, I know lots of people in Mississippi who have lost their jobs for trying to register to vote. I had to leave the plantation in Sunflower County. Now if you lose this job because you help the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party, everything will be alright. God will still take care of you. But if you take it, the vice presidency, *this* way, why you will never be able to do any good for civil rights, for poor people, for peace, or any of those things you talk about. Senator Humphrey, I’m gonna pray to Jesus for you.”<sup>7</sup>

Hamer was so emotional during her encounter with the Senator that both Humphrey and members of the Freedom Party, worried that she was a live wire during the dialogues, did not allow her to come to any further meetings with the Senator.<sup>8</sup>

On Tuesday, as the president eclipsed his seven-lap record by running the nine laps around the South grounds, the subcommittee met for breakfast to discuss their options.<sup>9</sup> They had outlined four possible options to resolve the Mississippi challenge. They could recognize the Freedom Party as the legitimate representatives of the state of Mississippi and seat them as the true delegates from Mississippi. Or, they could

recognize the all-white regulars as the legitimate representatives of the state, and allow the regulars to retain their seats. The subcommittee's third option was a compromise proposed by Oregon representative Edith Green. The Green Compromise proposed seating both delegations and dividing the votes equally between delegates willing to take the loyalty oath.

The final option was the subcommittee's revision of Johnson's early proposal. The subcommittee suggested that they seat the regular all-white MDPs as the legitimate Mississippi delegation with sixty-eight convention votes, and grant the Freedom Party two at-large voting delegates and sixty-six honorary, non-voting seats. In his interview, Humphrey stated, "We added a new recommendation to symbolize the party's commitment to integration and to affirm the justice of the Freedom Democrat's cause, we urged the convention to seat Aaron Henry and Ed King of the Freedom Party as one black and one white as delegates at large with full voting rights."<sup>10</sup> This final option passed in the subcommittee by a vote of three to two—the two southerners said no. Rauh found out that Mondale was about to present the compromise to a closed session of the Credentials Committee for consideration, and asked Mondale to delay until Rauh could confer with the Freedom delegates. Humphrey and Rauh scheduled a meeting to present the proposal to the members of the Freedom Party, including Martin Luther King, Jr., Bayard Rustin, Farmer and Wilkins.

With the compromise on the table, the Freedom Party began to argue. Major civil rights organizations had declared the compromise a victory. They urged the Freedom delegates to accept it. Yet not all of the party's members felt that the compromise was a



victory. In fact, the vote to accept or reject the compromise was split fifty-fifty.<sup>11</sup> For the most part, it appeared as though the civil rights leaders were in favor of accepting the compromise whereas the sharecroppers were opposed to it. Although there is some debate as to whether or not Martin Luther King, Jr. was in favor of accepting the compromise immediately, he eventually told Ed King, “So being a Negro leader, I want you to take this, but if I were a Mississippi Negro, I would vote against it.”<sup>12</sup> Henry explained the debate that took place behind closed doors,

When they decide you are going to have two votes and one of them is going to Aaron Henry and the other one is going to Ed King—not only did they tell us we had two votes, they told us who they were going to. So it was just too heavy-handed a situation and none of us could buy it. . . You see, in getting before the Democratic Party, any of us who are naive enough to believe that just because sixty-four country bumpkins from Mississippi go to Atlantic City and they let us in, that they open the door you know, you ain’t with it. It took. . . Roy Wilkins and Martin Luther King and the church clergy and the power of this nation, to open that door. Once the door was open I felt, still feel, and hopefully I will always be of this opinion, that the people that helped us open the door had a right to at least have something to say about what the decision ought to be. . . We were all opposed to the compromise, you know, two votes—no question there. But in terms of using the influence of the people we had used, and then that they are no longer useful to you now—throw them away to me it was burning your bridges behind you.<sup>13</sup>

Like Henry, Ed King and Bayard Rustin also argued that to accept the compromise was better than burning bridges—particular during election time. Hamer was the member most outspoken against the compromise. “We didn’t come all this way for no two seats, since all of us is tired,” she shouted.

Constrained by the pressures of prominent civil rights people, half of the Freedom Party decided to protest in the hopes that they would regain public attention and support. They decided to occupy the seats of the regular MDP inside the convention. Henry recalled

We took a position that the seats on the floor were illegally occupied. And if that were true, then the illegal occupants might as well be us or them. And that there was no greater crime committed by either and consequently conscience did not bother me in this area, because it had been clearly defined that the Mississippi delegation had refused to compromise at all and had gone home; there weren’t but about three of them left, and Mississippi had sixty chairs. Somebody needed to sit in them.<sup>14</sup>

Michigan Professor of Economics and sergeant-at-arms at the convention, Walter Adams, wrote a letter detailing the events that followed his orders from Mr. Marvin Watson, supervising sergeant-at-arms, to remove the Freedom delegates from the seats that Tuesday afternoon. Adams wrote

In response to Mr. Watson’s orders, I asked the FDP people to vacate their seats, but they ignored my request and instead locked arms while continuing to remain seated. Mr. Watson renewed his orders, whereupon I suggested to the FDP

members—as politely as I could—to step into the aisle so that the sergeant-at-arms could check their credentials. When they refused, insisting (politely) that they had a right to sit in that section, Mr. Watson ordered me to remove them by force. By this time, a sizeable number of news, radio and television men had gathered around us, and I thought that precipitate action under the circumstances was both unwise and silly. I pointed out to Watson that the FDP people go limp on us and that we would have to drag them out under the eyes of the TV cameras.<sup>15</sup>

Watson disappeared to search for orders from his superiors. When orders came, they were to allow the protestors already seated to remain seated, but to refuse entrance from any other members of their organization to join them. Robert Dunphy, deputy sergeant-at-arms in the senate, said, “Maintain the status quo.”<sup>16</sup>

That evening, Rhode Island Senator John Pastore delivered the convention’s keynote address. According to Kotz, Pastore “roused the 5,200 delegates and alternates by declaring the Republican Party captive to “reactionaries and extremists” and calling Senator Goldwater’s candidacy a “Trojan horse” that would threaten American security and prosperity.”<sup>17</sup>

By Wednesday, Rauh had lost his eleven and eight, and with it, his ability to compromise. It turned out that when push came to shove, Johnson knew how to push back—and whom to push. Some of the delegates believed the compromise adequately alleviated the problems presented by the Freedom Party, and withdrew their support. Many delegates, however, were blackmailed by their state governors or White House

aides. Mondale noted, “Johnson wanted this issue settled and he leaned hard on the Freedom Democrats supporters to go along with him.”<sup>18</sup> One of those supporters was Verna Canson. She had been threatened that if she continued her support of the insurgents, her husband would lose his candidacy for a position as state judge. She withdrew her support. Her husband still did not receive the appointment.<sup>19</sup>

Rauh was cornered. Reuther demanded that Rauh accept the compromise on behalf of the Freedom Party, but the young attorney procrastinated. Consensus meant everything to the Freedom delegates. He had to have the approval of his clients—most notably the Chairman of the Freedom Party, Henry—before he could officially make a decision on the offer.<sup>20</sup> But when he learned that Mondale’s delayed meeting with the Credentials Committee had been rescheduled for that afternoon, he left his clients and attended the closed session. His only hope was to stall their decision.

Back in a conference room, Humphrey and Reuther sat with the members of the Freedom Party and tried to get the group to accept the compromise. Ed King suggested that Hamer replace his seat in the proscribed two-seats of the compromise, to represent the grassroots leaders of the organization. Humphrey replied, “The president has said that he will not let that illiterate woman speak on the floor of the Democratic convention.”<sup>21</sup>

As the men sat debating their options, Mondale stood before one hundred and ten Credential Committee members and presented the compromise. In 2000, former vice-president Mondale reflected back on these events. He recalled

I acknowledged that our proposal didn't go as far as either side wanted, but I said it recognized the problem of discrimination in the party and put in place a plan of action to end it. . . Joe Rauh then asked for a recess to allow him to discuss it with the Freedom Democrats. But at that point, Chairman Lawrence pushed for an immediate vote; the committee was demanding immediate action, and I'm sure that the White House was behind that because they were fearful that Rauh would use this time to stir up further pressure. In any event, after four days an impatient committee adopted our proposal on a voice vote. Rauh later tried to get signatures for a minority report but he couldn't get enough of them to qualify under the rules. I then walked straight from the committee room to the largest news conference I had ever seen in my life, where I announced the committee action.

Mondale's appearance before the press was seen by the Freedom Democrats, who were still debating whether or not to accept the compromise. Mondale continued,

To make matters worse, some of the news reports suggested that the FD supported the proposal. In fact they hadn't decided what to do about it. I wish we had given Rauh some time to caucus with the Freedom Democrats before we acted. But we didn't. Certainly the Freedom Democrats were entitled to a decent interval to consider our proposal. I am not proud of how this was handled, but I do believe the proposal itself was a good resolution of the issue.<sup>22</sup>

According to the nation, the Freedom Party had accepted the compromise and the Credentials Committee supported it. Bob Moses turned to Humphrey and yelled, “You cheated!”<sup>23</sup>

That afternoon, all of the seats in Mississippi’s section were occupied. There were only three members from the regular delegation who had taken the loyalty pledge, despite death threats from Mississippians. The remainder of seats was occupied by sergeant-at-arms. Because they could not sit, the Freedom delegates stormed the row in front of the Mississippi seats and simply stood. The sergeant-at-arms reenacted the events from the previous day, debating how to remove the protestors and eventually, under the probing eye of the media, simply allowed them to remain but blocked any further joiners. Adams remembered the Freedom Democrats accusing him of “serving as an agent for the ‘closed’ society of Mississippi,” “of treating people like the segregationists in Mississippi,” and “of discriminating against the Freedom Democratic Party.” Adams replied, “I am merely serving the will of the convention.”<sup>24</sup> Eventually, the protestors were offered seats by the neighboring sections like those of North Dakota and Michigan.

Despite Henry’s belief that the Freedom Party should accept the compromise, he told reporters, “It took the personal hand of President Johnson to keep this vote from our group. The issue within the Administration was purely political . . . our victory on moral and legal grounds was overwhelming.”<sup>25</sup> But was it a “moral and legal victory”? Was it even a victory?

Newspapers and journals fluctuated between hailing the decision as an awesome achievement of the Johnson administration, and conceding that it was the best option available. The *Washington Star* wrote that while they “did not agree that the compromise was a stroke of genius, it probably [was] the best that could be done with a very sticky situation.” The *Washington Post* said that the compromise “represents peace and honor,” and that “it is indeed a spectacular victory” for the Freedom Party. Slowly, the media’s interpretation of the Freedom Party’s case shifted, and their shared vision of a reality of race relations morphed back into a paternalistic portrait. This is evidenced by comments such as *The New Republic* author Murray Kempton’s who captured the public’s verdict in his article, “Conscience of a Convention.” He wrote,

When Joseph Rauh finished his rebuttal, even the reporters rose and applauded. For just that moment, the moral claim rose supreme; as the week went on, it sank closer to its proper place without ever quite being restored there. . . None of the 68 moral delegates accepted the decision at all. They had won, largely by their own eloquence, an extraordinary victory. An ordinary Negro is seldom granted something more than his legal right by any institution. They had forced themselves farther than anyone could have imagined upon the conscience of a political party. But they are very simple people. . . To them their victory was a defeat.”<sup>26</sup>

Kempton’s interpretation of the rhetorical situation was shared by many. Illinois National Committeeman Jacob Arvey said of the compromise, “To seat the 68 regular Mississippi delegates takes care of the legal problem, and to seat the two Negroes takes

care of the emotional, I could even say, the moral problem.”<sup>27</sup> It seems as though when the testimonies forced America to question itself, the compromise was the answer that restored reality to its original state: the rhetoric of equality once again reverberated across the country.

The media’s rhetorical construction of the compromise marks an important moment in this rhetorical situation. As the media began to sing the shared story of success, the Freedom Party began to lose their symbolic power to redefine reality. While they had successfully disturbed the still waters of the public’s perception of race relations, their “racial project” could not maintain the sense of urgency and legitimacy needed to “reorganize and redistribute resources along particular racial lines” in the face of the compromise.<sup>28</sup> When CBS newsman Eric Sevareid said, “Like Solomon, the Credentials Committee decided to divide the baby. . . [the Freedom Party would be] not quite separate and not quite equal,” he captured the public perception that things had been resolved as best as they could be.<sup>29</sup>

The media’s rhetorical reconstruction of the crisis distinguished two separate issues on which the public had to judge: legal and moral. For example, Gould Lincoln with the *Washington Star* wrote, “Legalistically, the advantage is all with the regular delegation. Emotionally and morally, the sympathies of many convention Democrats from North and West are the Mississippi Freedom Party group.” *The New York Times* wrote, “The compromise settlement . . . was a triumph for moral force and a credit to all party leaders who worked it out, despite its ill-considered rejection by both sides.”<sup>30</sup>



Wednesday evening, Johnson accepted his party's presidential nomination of him. By Thursday, there was a dramatic drop in public interest of the Mississippi challengers. The moral power established in the Freedom Democrats' testimonies only three days earlier now seemed to have lost its power with the public.

Even still, those members of the Freedom Party who did not accept the compromise would not surrender the fight. Sergeant-at-arms Adams recalled, "At one point, about seven FDP members formed a circle in the middle of the aisle near an intersection and stood there silently as if in prayer. Each carried a black plaque inscribed with a likeness of President Kennedy and the famous 'Ask not...' quote from his Inaugural." Adams was instructed to seal off the section, but permitted one newsperson at a time to conduct interviews. He wrote, "As far as I could tell, the TV cameras remained focused on the rostrum and, aside from the inconvenience of some aisles being sealed off, the demonstration caused no untoward incident."<sup>31</sup>

That night, Bobby Kennedy delivered a moving speech about his brother. The entire nation was still so consumed with emotion from the assassination of their former president, that when Bobby took the stage, the convention hall erupted in applause. The applause continued for ten minutes before the Senator even began. The harmonious sound interrupted virtually every line of Kennedy's speech. No one seemed to notice the quotes on the plaques that the Freedom Democrats clutched tightly to their chests.

On Friday, Johnson stepped out of the Atlantic City convention hall to a crowd of people singing "Happy Birthday." The fifty-six year old Democratic presidential nominee declared Humphrey his running mate and delivered "the first impromptu

exclusive presidential interview ever seen on national television before.”<sup>32</sup> Everything seemed to have returned to traditional political convention form.

Beneath the pomp and circumstance, however, some news reporters detected a crack in reality—a crack in the Democratic Party. Despite Johnson’s attempts to guise the controversy, the media had seen enough to know that there was a schism in the party. The *Chicago Tribune* wrote, “The efforts of the devious and designing man in the White House to keep the battle of the explosive mixture at Atlantic City corked up tight failed.” The article continued, “The contradictions of Lyndon Baines Johnson and the Democrats were brought out in the open for all to see.”<sup>33</sup> Conservative columnists Rowland Evans and Robert Novak added that “the underlying theme in this wholly unique Democratic National Convention is the vague and voiceless spirit of rebellion, rigidly suppressed by the strong arm of Lyndon Baines Johnson.”<sup>34</sup>

The media’s rhetorical reconstruction of the events at the Credentials Committee as well as at the convention reflects an awareness that something had happened to the Democratic Party. There was not, however, the definite shift in the social and political consciousness that the “racial project” had sought. The nation’s rhetoric of equality resumed its role in defining reality.

In fact, the hypocrisies of the rhetoric of equality picked up where they had left off; the public pronounced “fairness” and “justice” in the case of the Freedom Party. Shared tears did Hamer virtually no good, as in the moment when the Freedom Democrats rejected the compromise, even the most liberal Democrats seemed to scoff. *New York Times* liberal columnist Anthony Lewis declared that the Freedom Party

“could have accepted a rule that they did not altogether like, instead of slipping into unauthorized seats . . . They could have made a point not of their demand for total victory but of their loyalty to the national Democratic Party and to President Johnson.” Evans and Novak dispensed their distaste not just to Johnson but also to the Freedom Party, writing that the compromise “was far better than [the MFDP] had any right to expect,” and that the protestors’ actions were a direct result of the “Communist influence” in the civil rights movement.<sup>35</sup> Aside from a few supporters, like Delegate Green of the Green Compromise, the public had returned from their deliberation of definitions of reality and the verdict was clear: in one swift move, the media declared those blacks from Mississippi as “uppity,” and the public returned to their world of paternalistic pandering. The *Wall Street Journal* summarized, “The ’64 protestors achieved little beyond TV publicity for their cause.”<sup>36</sup>

The State of Mississippi, on the other hand, seemed to have never even strayed—not even momentarily—from their original definition of reality. Mississippi Governor Johnson adamantly advocated the Southern way of life. He told reporters that the “Mississippi walkout was carefully planned and executed to embarrass the Administration.”<sup>37</sup>

Johnson won the November election with an unprecedented sixty-one percent of the popular vote, and on January 20, 1965, he was inaugurated as the country’s thirty-fifth president.<sup>38</sup> On August 6, with the support of Congress, Johnson signed into legislation the Voting Rights Act, which abolished literacy tests and other requirements designed to handicap blacks’ voter registration. Five days later, the Watts uprising

initiated a surge of black riots in Los Angeles, California.<sup>39</sup> The disparity between law and practice continued to leave much desired.

This chapter offered an account of the closing chapter of the rhetorical situation at the convention. This chapter explored the rhetorical struggle between the president and the Freedom Party over the four days of the convention. By integrating the media's rhetorical construction of the events into the historical account, this chapter suggested that the media's role, combined with Johnson's rhetorical strategies and heresthetic control, caused the dissolution of the Freedom Party's legitimacy.

## CHAPTER VI

### CONCLUSION

Sometimes it's worse to win a fight than to lose. –Billie Holiday

At the close of the convention, Carl Sanders called the president to complain on behalf of several prominent Southern leaders. He told the president that the South interpreted the decision to seat two-delegates-at-large from the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party as Johnson giving the Democratic Party to blacks. Sanders made it clear that no one in the South wanted to sit next to the “Negroes.” Johnson replied,

What they ought to be. . . honestly between you and me, with their population fifty percent, they ought to be delegates of the Mississippi group. . . They are Democrats and by God they tried to tell the convention. . . They lock ‘em out. . . I think you got a good legitimate case to say that the state of Mississippi wouldn’t let a Negro come into their damn convention and therefore they violated the law and wouldn’t let ‘em vote, wouldn’t let ‘em register, intimidated them and by God they ought to be seated!<sup>1</sup>

Despite his perceptive evaluation of the situation, in the end Johnson found it easiest to rationalize that no one would vote anyway, so it did not matter who sat where. He accused Sanders and the South as acting “like a dog in the manger.” “What’s the damn difference?” he exclaimed. The Freedom Party was not seated, and would not take any votes away from Mississippi or any other Southern delegation, so what did it matter that he had given two seats and two badges to two Americans? “It’s just a pure, symbolic, pussyfootin’ thing to try to keep from splitting the party like Goldwater would like to see

it split,” he told Sanders.<sup>2</sup> To Johnson, this was merely a symbolic gesture, but did not hold any symbolic power.

The concept of symbolic power emerged as a dominant theme during the rhetorical exigence. While Johnson seemed to shrug off the two at-large seats that the compromise gave to the Freedom delegates as purely a “symbolic pussyfootin’ thing,” he was well aware of the struggle for symbolic power, and engaged in this struggle through rhetorical acts throughout the convention. This thesis highlighted this struggle for symbolic power by tracing the rhetorical situation as it evolved; the struggle became a tug-of-war as rhetorical strategies shifted in response to emerging constraints such as heresthetics, the media, and the rhetorical acts, which include the testimonies that were delivered, the political bargaining that went on behind the scenes and the sit-ins on the floor of the convention. This thesis looked at the symbolic power within the rhetorical strategies of the key players—from the regular Democrats to the Freedom Democrats to the public. By tracing the precipitation of events throughout the convention, I hoped to expose the historical crisis for what it really was—a debate over reality. The chapters offered detailed accounts of the social and political context in which this struggled progressed, and attempted to highlight the role of rhetoric in precipitating each event during the struggle.

In Chapter I, I introduced Omi and Winant’s concepts of racial formation and racial projects. Their theory of racial formation highlights the importance of language in creating, propagating, and redefining the reality of race and racial issues. It is with the creation of a racial project, or an organized group seeking to represent and explain race

in an effort to “reorganize and redistribute resources along particular racial lines,” that reality is questioned and can be redefined.<sup>3</sup> By engaging in the sociopolitical process, racial projects attempt to illuminate the hypocrisies of the rhetoric of equality, and the discrepancies between law and practice that this rhetoric creates. So the Freedom Party, organized as a racial project, attempts to redefine reality through rhetorical acts. Their goal is to rock the boat—to question America and in doing so get the public to question America. When people are confronted with the crisis of a discrepancy between what they thought was real and what they are being told is real, the opportunity to redefine reality is created.

But Chapter I explores the difficulty in creating this opportunity by introducing the concepts of rhetorical form and symbolic power. In the rhetorical crisis at the 1964 Convention, the Freedom Party was confronted with the constraint of an established traditional form of political convention rhetoric—a form that was inextricably linked to the pervasive power of the Democratic Party. Like Bourdieu’s definition of symbolic power, the Democratic Party’s form held the powerful position capable of “constituting the given through utterances, of making people see and believe, of confirming or transforming the vision of the world and, thereby, action on the world and thus the world itself.”<sup>4</sup> The Freedom Party, on the other hand, held little symbolic power. They had to be careful not to appear too extreme; they needed to appeal to form and power that supported the current reality.

Consequently, the Freedom Party had to develop a strategic form that would work within the previously established rhetorical framework of the convention, for this

was the best way in which they could achieve the desired ends—the symbolic power needed to redefine national connotations of race and racism, and to redistribute social and political resources along racial lines. Hence Chapter II presents their rhetorical strategies by presenting their testimonies before the Credentials Committee. It quickly becomes apparent that their strategy to integrate their arguments into the established, traditional rhetorical form of the political convention constrained their opponents' strategies: it would be easy to dismiss irrational protestors, but it was virtually impossible to dismiss a case presented in their own terms, particularly in front of the judging eye of the public.

Yet this thesis is particularly interested in the testimony of Fannie Lou Hamer. As seen in Chapters II and III, it was this woman's testimony that elicited the greatest response—a deluge of support from the public, and an emergency impromptu speech from the president. It is interesting to note Hamer's powerful effect because, unlike the rest of the Freedom delegates to testify, Hamer was the farthest removed from all notions of traditional political convention form. Chapter III offers a close reading of Hamer's testimony to unveil the effectiveness (and shortcomings) of her rhetorical strategies.

Chapter III explores the manner in which Hamer physically defied traditional convention rhetorical form, employed traditional feminine rhetorical form, and established an evolving rhetorical form of black women. But beyond her ability to toggle between rhetorical forms, Chapter III suggests that it was her ability to enact the Freedom Party's case that established the symbolic power of their argument. However, Chapter III also comments on the fact that while Hamer managed to reduce the gap



between her reality and that of the nation, the Freedom Democrats were not seated. The moral power behind Hamer seemed to falter and fade away over the next four days of the convention . . . or perhaps it was never established.

Chapter IV presents the next four days of the convention in the hopes of illuminating the reason that the Freedom Democrats were not seated. Once the Once Hamer secured symbolic power through her testimony, however, she altered the rhetorical situation. Like Burgess wrote, “The scene becomes what it was not before because of personal power to fill symbolic space with a conceived world of decision and action.”<sup>5</sup> Her decisions and actions achieved her goal, if only temporarily. Her decisions and actions had altered reality for the public, if only by questioning it. But her decisions and actions also established a different exigence for Johnson. After Hamer’s testimony, the schism in the Democratic Party was exposed. Hamer’s testimony had placed the president in a precarious position: with the party’s nomination only a couple days away and the public’s election only a couple months away, Johnson did not want to lose the support of either the South or the North.

Chapter IV traces the shifting components of the rhetorical situation over the next four days of the convention. In particular, this Chapter focuses on Johnson’s response to the shift in symbolic power. The convention that had empowered him with traditional political convention form had shifted to constrain his actions—with Northern delegates pressuring him to seat the Freedom Party, Southern delegates threatening to walk-out and over to Goldwater, and the presence of the press watching his every move. Faced with this set of constraints, Johnson developed a new rhetorical strategy to counter

the symbolic power gained by the Freedom Party's rhetorical act: the development of a subcommittee.

Out of the immediate eye of the public, the subcommittee could draw out a decision, postponing possibilities of a floor fight and focusing the media's attention on the rest of the events at the convention. Johnson used heresthetics to regain symbolic power: by controlling what the press could see and consequently what the press had to focus on, Johnson was able to return to the political hardball that went on behind closed doors. He threatened Northern supporters and bargained with the Southern segregationists. Without the presence of the press, the Freedom Party began to lose the public's attention, and with it, the restless waters of a reality waiting to be redefined.

In an attempt to regain the urgency of their cause, the Freedom Party tried to protest by sitting in the seats of the regular Mississippi delegates on the convention floor. By this time, however, the press was caught up in the nomination of Johnson. In another heresthetic move, Johnson postponed the announcement of his running mate, creating a publicity stunt. The final blow came when the compromise was accepted by the Credentials Committee on television—without the consent let alone awareness of the Freedom Party. The exigence was conceived with the Freedom Party's dramatic testimony before the press, and it was declared over with the Democratic Party's acceptance of the compromise.

The media's rhetorical reconstruction of the events reflected a restored reality: the legal and moral issues, in the eye of the public, had been resolved. Reality returned to the rhetoric of equality: the South maintained their legally appointed seats (whether or

not they choose to sit in them), and the Freedom Democrats were given the opportunity to partake in the political process (whether or not they chose to do so). Chapter IV suggests that the role of the media, combined with Johnson's rhetorical rebuttal—his ability to regain heresthetic control and sell the compromise to the public—caused the dissolution of the Freedom Party's legitimacy. The Freedom delegates had lost the sense of urgency that propelled the public to speak up on their behalf.

In this thesis I have attempted to illuminate the rhetorical struggle for symbolic power, and how this struggle developed as components of the rhetorical situation evolved. At the conclusion of this rhetorical situation, it seems as though the South, the Freedom Democrats, and the Democratic Party had been unable to redefine reality on their own terms. The South felt their symbolic power in the convention and in their states slipping away with the very presence of blacks in their political party. The Freedom Party felt as though they had never truly gained any power at all; after all, just like a plantation owner ordering about his "Negroes," so Johnson had appeared to dictate the number of seats they could have and who could sit in them. And the Democratic Party felt their symbolic power in the political arena shrinking with the growing of the schism that had been seething beneath their rhetorical form of unity.

But to return to Burgess's point once more, when a rhetorical crisis occurs, "the scene becomes what it was not before because of personal power to fill symbolic space with a conceived world of decision and action."<sup>6</sup> In the aftermath of the rhetorical crisis of the 1964 Democratic National Convention, America became a place it had not been before.

In 1968, the Democrats seated an interracial delegation from Mississippi, and by 1972, all state delegations had to include minorities in proportion to their population within that state.<sup>7</sup> Political scholar Theodore White wrote,

There was a historical struggle in American politics at the 1964 Convention and that changed America more than the advent of television. The campaign would have been memorable enough if only for its illustration of television's power. But history that year was to put on another demonstration that far out did TV's impact on American politics. . . It was considered an interim compromise but it was to change the entire character of American politics from then on. Somehow this ban on exclusion would become an insistence on inclusion.<sup>8</sup>

This insistence on inclusion widened the growing schism within the Democratic Party. As Zietz noted in his article in 2004, "Nobody knew it then, but that 1964 Democratic National Convention would be a turning point for the party. It was Atlantic City that sowed the seeds of the internecine wars that tore apart the Democratic coalition four years later in Chicago and that have left it wounded ever since."<sup>9</sup>

But that is a topic for another thesis. The purpose of this thesis has been to contribute a rhetorical dimension to a historical case study in the hopes of offering a more thorough understanding of the decisions and actions of the key players at the 1964 Democratic Convention. In the introduction, I referred to Zarefsky, who explained the contribution of a rhetorical scholar's analysis of social movements on the scope of history. He wrote, "History has many dimensions," and "like other phenomena, a historical movement can be studied from different points of view; the rhetorical historian

complements the efforts of other scholars who examine the political dimensions, or the economic, or the cultural.”<sup>10</sup> By offering a rhetorical description to what has previously been analyzed predominately through a historical lens, I hope I have contributed a more thorough understanding of the rhetorical struggle to define (or redefine as the case may be) reality at the 1964 Democratic National Convention. It was the rhetorical interplay in the specific context of the Committee, the subsequent political bargaining behind the scenes during the next four days of the convention, and the emerging and evolving constraints as a result of this bargaining that illuminate the symbolic power and limitations behind a rhetoric aimed at redefining race in the nation’s social and political consciousness.

## NOTES

### Notes to Chapter I

<sup>1</sup> Joshua Zeitz, “Democratic Debacle,” *American Heritage*, July 2004, [http://www.americanheritage.com/xml/2004/3/200\\_3\\_feat\\_0.xml](http://www.americanheritage.com/xml/2004/3/200_3_feat_0.xml) (accessed July 26, 2004).

<sup>2</sup> Zeitz, par 5.

<sup>3</sup> For more on crisis rhetoric, see Parke Burgess, “Crisis Rhetoric: Coercion vs. Force,” *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 59, no. 1 (1973), 61-73.

<sup>4</sup> Lloyd Bitzer, “The Rhetorical Situation,” in *Readings in Rhetorical Criticism*, ed. Carl Burghardt, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (State College, PA: Strata, 1995): 63-4.

<sup>5</sup> Bitzer, 62.

<sup>6</sup> Bitzer, 64.

<sup>7</sup> Bitzer, 64.

<sup>8</sup> Bitzer, 65.

<sup>9</sup> Malcolm O. Sillars, “Defining Movements Rhetorically: Casting the Widest Net,” in *Readings on the Rhetoric of Social Protest*, ed. Charles E Morris III and Stephen H. Browne (Pennsylvania: Strata Publishing, 2001), 121.

<sup>10</sup> David Zarefsky, “A Skeptical View of Movement Studies,” in *Readings on the Rhetoric of Social Protest*, ed. Charles E Morris III and Stephen H. Browne (Pennsylvania: Strata Publishing, 2001), 143.

<sup>11</sup> David Chalmers, “‘A Tremor in the Middle of the Iceberg—from a Stone that the Builders Rejected’: Black and White in Mississippi,” *Reviews in American History* 23.3 (1995):538.

<sup>12</sup> See Susan Weill, “Hazel and the ‘Hacksaw’: Freedom Summer coverage by the women of the Mississippi Press,” *Journalism Studies* 2, 4 (2000): 545-561. Her content analysis of seventeen of the weekly issues printed during Freedom Summer reveals that “eleven established an agenda of resistance toward the civil rights movement in their editorials and four disregarded the issue completely, both in news reports and editorials...the only Mississippi newspapers [that advocated support for the movement] were those of Hazel Brannon Smith,” who was nationally recognized for this support several years later. Weill found little correlation between the “amount and type of editorial opinion allocated to Freedom Summer” and the news coverage, although she did discover that the most resistant editorials tended to be in newspapers with the least amount of news coverage. In other words, many of the local newspapers “adopted a policy of playing down or suppressing incidents relating to the battle for civil rights.” Perhaps there is no better evidence of the South’s use of symbolic power than that of how the Mississippi news handled the disappearance of the three Freedom Summer volunteers, Michael Schwerner, Andrew Goodman, and James Cheney. Most local coverage of the issue was nonexistent, as editors remained silent on the issue. Others “blamed the organizers of Freedom Summer for the incident and suggested their disappearance was a hoax.” When the three bodies were found, newspaper coverage was not much different—they either remained silent or, like the Morton *Progress-Herald* for example, offered “sincere regret” immediately followed by the statement that the victims “should have stayed home.” It is difficult to

label which action was more destructive for the movement. Sarah Schulman believes that “false representation is ultimately a lot more destructive than no representation at all.” Controlling the media is a source of heresthetic control, as will be explained in Chapter One. In this instance, the control of the media allows the South to maintain and legitimize its symbolic power.

<sup>13</sup> Nicholas Mills, *Like a Holy Crusade: Mississippi 1964—The Turning of the Civil Rights Movement in America* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 1992): 166, quoted in Neil R. McMillen, “Book Reviews,” *The Journal of Southern History* 61,1 (1995): 188.

<sup>14</sup> Doug McAdam, “Gender as a Mediator of the Activist Experience: The Case of Freedom Summer.” *American Journal of Sociology* 97, no.5 (March 1992): 1211-40.

<sup>15</sup> Kenneth T. Andrews, “The Impacts of Social Movements on the Political Process: The Civil Rights Movement and Black Electoral Politics in Mississippi,” *American Sociological Review* 62, no. 5 (Oct., 1997): 815.

<sup>16</sup> Andrews, 805.

<sup>17</sup> Sally Belfrage, *Freedom Summer* (New York: The Viking Press, 1965), 80.

<sup>18</sup> R. Edward Nordhaus, “SNCC and the Civil Rights Movement in Mississippi, 1963-64: A Time of Change,” *The History Teacher* 17, 1 (Nov. 1983):96.

<sup>19</sup> Nordhaus, 98.

<sup>20</sup> Akinyele O. Umoja, “1964: The Beginning of the End of Nonviolence in the Mississippi Freedom Movement,” *Radical History Review* 85 (2003): 203-204.

<sup>21</sup> Kay Mills, *This Little Light of Mine: The Life of Fannie Lou Hamer* (New York: Plume, 1993), 105.

<sup>22</sup> Mills, 109.

<sup>23</sup> Mills, 115.

<sup>24</sup> Nick Kotz, *Judgment Days: Lyndon Baines Johnson, Martin Luther King Jr., and the Laws that Changed America* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2005).

<sup>25</sup> Nordhaus, 98-100.

<sup>26</sup> Janice D. Hamlet, “Fannie Lou Hamer: The Unquenchable Spirit of the Civil Rights Movement,” *Journal of Black Studies* 26, no. 5 (May 1996): 560-77.

<sup>27</sup> McMillen, 188. Ella Baker, a key leader in the civil rights movement, particularly in organizing student activism, might have pointed to other issues. Critical of the leadership style of the movement, Baker advocated a group-centered leadership, rather than a leader centered group pattern of organization. She believed that “it is important to keep the movement democratic and to avoid struggles for personal leadership.” See Carol Mueller, “Ella Baker and the Origins of ‘Participatory Democracy,’” in *Women in the Civil Rights Movement, Trailblazers and Torchbearers, 1941-1965*, ed. Vicki Crawford, Jacqueline Anne Rouse and Barbara Woods (Bloomington, Indiana: University of Indiana Press, 1993), 79-90.

<sup>28</sup> Mills, quoted in McMillen, 188.

<sup>29</sup> Nordhaus, 100.

<sup>30</sup> It should be pointed out that the references in this paragraph offer a simplistic explanation of the concept of black power and of the black power movement. My intent in this thesis is to explain how previous scholars have understood the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party only in its function as a catalyst in a major shift in civil rights ideology. This research does not reflect major conceptions of black power and the black power movement.

<sup>31</sup> Charles J. Stewart, "The Evolution of a Revolution: Stokely Carmichael and the Rhetoric of Black Power," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 83 (1997): 429.

<sup>32</sup> See also Parke G. Burgess, "The Rhetoric of Black Power: A Moral Demand," in *Readings on the Rhetoric of Social Protest*, ed. Charles E Morris III and Stephen H. Browne (Pennsylvania: Strata Publishing, 2001), 180-191.

<sup>33</sup> See Zarefsky, 137, in which he explains that rhetorical scholars who approach the study of social movements from a historical perspective do so under the assumption that we can learn more about persuasion in efforts to mobilize or resist social change. It should be noted that Zarefsky believes that rhetorical scholars have not been productive in establishing the uniqueness of movement rhetoric, and advises the contribution of a rhetorical element to a historical analysis.

<sup>34</sup> Nan Robertson, "Mississippi Relates Struggle of Negro in Voter Registration," *New York Times*, August 24, 1964, p. 17.

<sup>35</sup> Robert S. Cathcart, "Movements: Confrontations as Rhetorical Form," in *Readings on the Rhetoric of Social Protest*, ed. Charles E Morris III and Stephen H. Browne (Pennsylvania: Strata Publishing, 2001), 102.

<sup>36</sup> See Thomas B. Farrell, "Political Conventions as Legitimation Ritual," *Communication Monographs* 45, no. 4 (1978): 293-306.

#### Notes to Chapter II

<sup>1</sup> W. Stuart Towns, *Public Address in the Twentieth-Century South: The Evolution of a Region* (Westport: Praeger Publishers, 1999), 81.

<sup>2</sup> Melba Pattillo Beals, *Warriors Don't Cry: A Searing Memoir of the Battle to Integrate Little Rock's Central High* (New York: Washington Square Press, 1994), xvii.

<sup>3</sup> Michael Omi and Howard Winant, *Racial Formation in the United States: From the 1960s to the 1990s* (New York: Routledge, 1994), 55.

<sup>4</sup> Omi and Winant, 54.

<sup>5</sup> Omi and Winant, 65.

<sup>6</sup> Omi and Winant, 55.



<sup>7</sup> Omi and Winant, 56.

<sup>8</sup> The term “heresthetic” was coined by William H. Riker, *The Strategy of Rhetoric: Campaigning for the American Constitution* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 1996). This term and its use in this thesis will be explained in Chapter One.

<sup>9</sup> Farrell, 293.

<sup>10</sup> Farrell, 293, 297, 301.

<sup>11</sup> Karlyn Kohrs Campbell and Kathleen Hall Jamieson, “Form and Genre in Rhetorical Criticism: An Introduction,” in *Form and Genre: Shaping Rhetorical Action*, ed. Karlyn Kohrs Campbell and Kathleen Hall Jamieson (Virginia: The Speech Communication Association, 1978), 18-19.

<sup>12</sup> Pierre Bourdieu, *Language & Symbolic Power* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991), 181.

<sup>13</sup> Transcript of Hearing held 8/22/64, “DNC Credentials 1964—Mississippi Credentials Committee, Atlantic City, NJ, August 22, 1964,” Records of the Democratic National Committee, Series II, Box 102, LBJ Library.

<sup>14</sup> Farrell, 293.

<sup>15</sup> Campbell and Jamieson, 20.

<sup>16</sup> Kotz, 190.

<sup>17</sup> Henry also served as the President of the Mississippi State Chapter of the NAACP from 1960-1993. In 1979, he was elected to the Mississippi House of Representatives, and reelected for this same position in 1983 and 1987.

<sup>18</sup> Interview with Ed Cole, Jackson, Mississippi, Apr. 24, 1990, qtd in Mills, 109.

<sup>19</sup> Joseph L. Rauh, Jr. was an attorney in Washington, D.C. Along with Hubert Humphrey, he founded the Americans for Democratic Action (ADA). He served as general council for the Leadership Conference on Civil Rights and for several labor unions, including the UAW. He was chairman or vice chairman of the Democratic Party of the District of Columbia for twenty years. Joseph L. Rauh, interview by Paige Mulhollan, July 30, 1969, Oral History Interview I, page 1, transcript, LBJ Library.

<sup>20</sup> Rauh calls this his “magic numbers theory.” In an interview, he explained, “Eleven members of the credentials committee is more than ten percent, enough for a minority report, and eight state delegations are enough for a roll call. . . You could lose a voice vote, but you couldn’t lose roll call.” Joseph L. Rauh, interview by Paige Mulhollan, August 8, 1969, Oral History Interview III, page 12, transcript, LBJ Library. The Freedom Party needed ten percent of the committee (eleven votes) to bring the discussion about seating to the convention floor. Assuming this was accomplished, they would then need the backing of eight states to force a roll call vote. Before entering the convention, lobbying had secured them support from several key delegations, including California, Minnesota, Michigan and New York.

<sup>21</sup> Joseph Rauh notes, Joseph L. Rauh, Jr., papers, Library of Congress, quoted in Kay Mills, *This Little Light of Mine: The Life of Fannie Lou Hamer* (New York: Plume, 1994), 112.

<sup>22</sup> Rauh, Oral History Interview III, page 14.

<sup>23</sup> Rauh, Oral History Interview I, page 13.

<sup>24</sup> Lyndon B. Johnson and Willard Wirtz, August 20, 1964, 11:19 AM, Citation #6408, Recordings and Transcripts of Conversations and Meetings, LBJ Library.

<sup>25</sup> Lyndon B. Johnson and Hubert Humphrey, August 14, 1964, 11:05AM, Citation #5045, Recordings and Transcripts of Conversations and Meetings, LBJ Library.

<sup>26</sup> Political News Summary, 8/13/64, "DNC–Political News Summary," Office Files of Bill Moyers, Box 19, LBJ Library.

<sup>27</sup> Rauh believed that with himself at the helm of this legal matter, the administration would be dealing with someone who was reliable, sensible, and willing to negotiate, whereas a "communist," or more extreme liberal lawyer, would be prone to less negotiation, more "all or nothing" thinking, and perhaps violent demonstrations.

<sup>28</sup> Memo, Moyers to the President, 8/11/64, "DNC–Political News Summary," Office Files of Bill Moyers, Box 19, LBJ Library.

<sup>29</sup> Rauh Oral History Interview I, page 16.

<sup>30</sup> Memo, Fred Dutton to Bill Moyers, 8/10/64, "DNC–Political News Summary," Office Files of Bill Moyers, Box 19, LBJ Library.

<sup>31</sup> Memo, Moyers to the President, 8/19/64, "DNC–Political News Summary," Office Files of Bill Moyers, Box 18, LBJ Library.

<sup>32</sup> Lyndon Baines Johnson, *The Vantage Point: Perspectives of the Presidency 1963-1969* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1971), 101. Numerous writers and historians point out that Johnson does not mention the crisis between the Freedom Party and the Democratic "regulars." On page 114 of *This Little Light of Mine*, Mills writes that "Publicly he [Johnson] pretended that the challenge from Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party did not exit."

<sup>33</sup> Aaron Henry to the President, August 22, 1964, "Executive PL 1/ST 24," WHCF, Box 81, Telegram, LBJ Library.

<sup>34</sup> Memo, Paul Popple to the President, 8/22/64, attached to Henry telegram to the President, 8/22/64, "Executive PL 1/ST 24," WHCF, Box 81, LBJ Library.

<sup>35</sup> William F. Ryan, August 20, 1964, "General PL 1/St 24," WHCF, Box 81, Telegram, LBJ Library.

<sup>36</sup> L.C. Lowe to the President, August 1, 1964, "General PL 1/St 24," WHCF, Box 81, Telegram, LBJ Library.

<sup>37</sup> Joseph Rauh, interview by Kay Mills, 6 January 1990, quoted in Kay Mills, *This Little Light of Mine: The Life of Fannie Lou Hamer* (New York: Plume, 1994), 116.

<sup>38</sup> Riker, 9.

<sup>39</sup> Lyndon B. Johnson and Walter Reuther, August 21, 1964, 8:56PM, Citation #5112, Recordings and Transcripts of Conversations and Meetings, LBJ Library.

<sup>40</sup> Johnson and Reuther, Citation# 5113.

<sup>41</sup> Mills, 117.

<sup>42</sup> Leslie McLemore, *The Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party—A Case Study of Grass-Roots Politics* (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Massachusetts, 1971), 140, quoted in Kay Mills, *This Little Light of Mine: The Life of Fannie Lou Hamer* (New York: Plume, 1994), 117.

<sup>43</sup> Bitzer, 65.

### Notes to Chapter III

<sup>1</sup> Langston Hughes, *A Dream Deferred*.

<sup>2</sup> PBS, *Eyes on the Prize*.

<sup>3</sup> “DNC Credentials 1964—Mississippi Credentials Committee, Atlantic City, NJ, August 22, 1964,” Records of the Democratic National Committee, Series II, Box 102, Transcript of Hearing, LBJ Library.

<sup>4</sup> “DNC Credentials 1964—Mississippi Credentials Committee, Atlantic City, NJ, August 22, 1964.”

<sup>5</sup> Mills, 115.

<sup>6</sup> “DNC Credentials 1964—Mississippi Credentials Committee, Atlantic City, NJ, August 22, 1964.”

<sup>7</sup> “DNC Credentials 1964—Mississippi Credentials Committee, Atlantic City, NJ, August 22, 1964.”

<sup>8</sup> “DNC Credentials 1964—Mississippi Credentials Committee, Atlantic City, NJ, August 22, 1964.”

<sup>9</sup> Aaron Henry, interview by T.H. Barker, September 12, 1970, Oral history Interview I, page 5, Transcript, LBJ Library.

<sup>10</sup> “DNC Credentials 1964—Mississippi Credentials Committee, Atlantic City, NJ, August 22, 1964.”

<sup>11</sup> Kotz, 206.

<sup>12</sup> “DNC Credentials 1964—Mississippi Credentials Committee, Atlantic City, NJ, August 22, 1964.”

<sup>13</sup> Hamer’s testimony was labeled most dramatic in the *New York Times* article by Robertson, 17.

<sup>14</sup> Interview with Bernice Johnson Reagon by Bill Moyers, public television, 6 February 1991, on “Moyers: The Songs Are Free, with Bernice Johnson Reagon,” quoted in Mills, 116.

<sup>15</sup> The Tuckers were housing Hamer after she was ordered to leave the plantation where she and her husband worked.

<sup>16</sup> “DNC Credentials 1964—Mississippi Credentials Committee, Atlantic City, NJ, August 22, 1964.”

<sup>17</sup> Medgar Evers was a member of the NAACP and was shot in the back by a member of the White Citizen's Counsel as he was entering his house late at night. Also, Mills, p. 120, notes that Hamer took a slight pause after this statement and tears were welling in her eyes.

<sup>18</sup> Lynne Olson, "We Didn't Come All This Way for No Two Seats," *American Legacy: Celebrating African-American History & Culture* 7:1 (Spring 1001): 55-61.

<sup>19</sup> Mills, 122.

<sup>20</sup> Fannie Lou Hamer, interview by Dr. Neil McMillen, April 12, 1972, Ruleville, Mississippi.

<sup>21</sup> Olson, 57.

<sup>22</sup> Kotz, 205.

<sup>23</sup> "DNC Credentials 1964—Mississippi Credentials Committee, Atlantic City, NJ, August 22, 1964."

<sup>24</sup> "DNC Credentials 1964—Mississippi Credentials Committee, Atlantic City, NJ, August 22, 1964."

<sup>25</sup> "DNC Credentials 1964—Mississippi Credentials Committee, Atlantic City, NJ, August 22, 1964."

<sup>26</sup> "DNC Credentials 1964—Mississippi Credentials Committee, Atlantic City, NJ, August 22, 1964."

<sup>27</sup> "DNC Credentials 1964—Mississippi Credentials Committee, Atlantic City, NJ, August 22, 1964."

<sup>28</sup> Mills, 121.

<sup>29</sup> "DNC Credentials 1964—Mississippi Credentials Committee, Atlantic City, NJ, August 22, 1964."

<sup>30</sup> "DNC Credentials 1964—Mississippi Credentials Committee, Atlantic City, NJ, August 22, 1964."

<sup>31</sup> "DNC Credentials 1964—Mississippi Credentials Committee, Atlantic City, NJ, August 22, 1964."

<sup>32</sup> Bitzer, 65.

#### Notes to Chapter IV

<sup>1</sup> See Robert S. Cathcart, "Movements: Confrontation as Rhetorical Form," in *Readings on the Rhetoric of Social Protest*, ed. Charles E. Morris and Stephen H. Browne (Pennsylvania: Strata Publishing, 2001), 102-111. Cathcart distinguishes between managerial rhetoric and confrontational rhetoric. He writes that managerial rhetoric comprises most communication, as it seeks to work within the existing system (so, Martin Luther King). Confrontational rhetoric, on the other hand, is rarer, in that it questions the legitimacy of the existing system, threatening to alter it. In other words, confrontational rhetoric is radical and revolutionary, whereas managerial rhetoric is reformatory.

<sup>2</sup> Hamer initially ran for Congress against Jamie Whitten in 1964, ran for state Senate against Robert Crook in 1971, and for U.S. Senate against James O. Eastland in 1972. She never won.

<sup>3</sup> Hamer initiated the pig bank and farm cooperative, which eventually dissipated due to a lack of funding. She then created Freedom Farm, which, according to Mills, “made only the smallest, temporary dent in the Delta’s economic blues” (Mills, 267).

<sup>4</sup> Hamer-McMillen interview.

<sup>5</sup> Hamer-McMillan interview.

<sup>6</sup> Karlyn Kohrs Campbell, “Style and Content in the Rhetoric of Early Afro-American Feminists,” *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, 72 (1986): 434-445. In this article, Campbell explores the similarities and differences between Afro-American Women’s rhetoric and what was considered traditional women’s rhetoric during the feminist movement.

<sup>7</sup> Campbell, 434.

<sup>8</sup> Campbell, 441.

<sup>9</sup> Campbell, 440.

<sup>10</sup> Campbell, 440.

<sup>11</sup> Campbell, 436.

<sup>12</sup> Robertson, 17.

<sup>13</sup> Mills, 85.

<sup>14</sup> Campbell, 440.

<sup>15</sup> Campbell, 440.

<sup>16</sup> Robertson, 17.

<sup>17</sup> “DNC Credentials 1964—Mississippi Credentials Committee, Atlantic City, NJ, August 22, 1964.”

<sup>18</sup> Luke 23:34.

<sup>19</sup> “DNC Credentials 1964—Mississippi Credentials Committee, Atlantic City, NJ, August 22, 1964.”

<sup>20</sup> Mills, 116.

<sup>21</sup> Robertson, 17.

<sup>22</sup> Mills, 116.

<sup>23</sup> Campbell and Jamieson, 9.

<sup>24</sup> Campbell, 434-436.

<sup>25</sup> Campbell and Jamieson, 9.

<sup>26</sup> Mills, 85.

<sup>27</sup> Campbell, 441-442.

<sup>28</sup> Definition of symbolic power according to Bourdieu, 181.

<sup>29</sup> Herbert W. Simons, "Requirements, Problems, and Strategies: A Theory of Persuasion for Social Movements," in *Readings on the Rhetoric of Social Protest*, ed. Charles E Morris III and Stephen H. Browne (Pennsylvania: Strata Publishing, 2001), 35.

<sup>30</sup> Omi and Winant, 56.

#### Notes to Chapter V

<sup>1</sup> Political News Summary, 8/23/64, "DNC–Political News Summary," Office Files of Bill Moyers, Box 19, LBJ Library.

<sup>2</sup> Kotz, 208. Johnson's conflict arose from his loyalty to the South, who had seen him into his political career, and the power of the North, whose substantial black populations could carry him into his future political career. Half of the Democratic Party thought he was moving too fast; the other half thought he was moving too slow.

<sup>3</sup> Kotz, 208.

<sup>4</sup> Kotz, 206.

<sup>5</sup> Political News Summary, 8/24/64, "DNC–Political News Summary," Office Files of Bill Moyers, Box 19, LBJ Library.

<sup>6</sup> Political News Summary, 8/24/64, "DNC–Political News Summary."

<sup>7</sup> Walter Mondale. "Lectures on Public Service" Series, 2000, University of Minnesota. Available online through the Minnesota Public Radio at: <http://news.minnesota.publicradio.org/collections/special/2004/campaign/president/dnc/>

<sup>8</sup> Mills, 125.

<sup>9</sup> Political News Summary, 8/25/64, "DNC–Political News Summary," Office Files of Bill Moyers, Box 19, LBJ Library.

<sup>10</sup> Mondale.

<sup>11</sup> Henry Oral History Interview, page 7.

<sup>12</sup> Edwin King interview, quoted in Mills, 129.

<sup>13</sup> Henry Oral History Interview, page 7.

<sup>14</sup> Henry Oral History Interview I, page 8.

<sup>15</sup> Walter Adams to Walter Jenkins, September 1, 1964, "Executive PL 1/ ST 24," WHCF, Box 81, Letter, LBJ Library.

<sup>16</sup> Letter, Walter Adams to Walter Jenkins, 9/1/64, "Executive PL 1/ ST 24," WHCF, Box 81, LBJ Library.

<sup>17</sup> Kotz, 212.

<sup>18</sup> Mondale.

<sup>19</sup> Kotz, 217.

<sup>20</sup> Transcript, Joseph L. Rauh Oral History Interview III, August 8, 1969, by Paige Mulhollan, page 20, LBJ Library.

<sup>21</sup> Kotz, 216.

<sup>22</sup> Mondale.

<sup>23</sup> Mondale. Moses was convinced that the timing of the Credentials Committee meeting was malicious. He believed that Humphrey and Reuther had called the Freedom Democrats to a meeting at the same time as the Credentials Committee meeting so as to keep the Freedom Party from rallying more support.

<sup>24</sup> Adams to Jenkins letter.

<sup>25</sup> Folder—DNC Credentials 1964 Mississippi.

<sup>26</sup> Murray Kempton, "Conscience of a Convention," *The New Republic*, 5 September 1964, 7.

<sup>27</sup> Kempton, 7.

<sup>28</sup> Omi and Winant, 56.

<sup>29</sup> Political News Summary, 8/26/64, "DNC—Political News Summary," Office Files of Bill Moyers, Box 19, LBJ Library.

<sup>30</sup> Political News Summary, 8/27/64, "DNC—Political News Summary," Office Files of Bill Moyers, Box 19, LBJ Library.

<sup>31</sup> Adams to Jenkins letter.

<sup>32</sup> Political News Summary, 8/27/64, "DNC—Political News Summary."

<sup>33</sup> Political News Summary, 8/27/64, "DNC—Political News Summary."

<sup>34</sup> Political News Summary, 8/27/64, "DNC—Political News Summary."

<sup>35</sup> Olson, 58.

<sup>36</sup> Clipping, *Wall Street Journal*, 6/13/68, “Mississippi Freedom Party, [Clippings],” Records of the Democratic National Committee, Series I, Box 36, LBJ Library.

<sup>37</sup> Political News Summary, 8/28/64, “DNC–Political News Summary,” Office Files of Bill Moyers, Box 19, LBJ Library.

<sup>38</sup> Kotz, 227.

<sup>39</sup> Two twenty-one year old black males, Marquette Frye and his brother Ronald, were pulled over by a policeman who suspected that Marquette was driving while intoxicated. After refusing to let Ronald drive the car to the men’s home two blocks away, a verbal argument ensued between the men and the police officer. A crowd formed. When the Frye’s mother arrived on the scene, the fighting escalated and resulted in the arrest of all three Frye family members. The crowd, which had grown to over a thousand people, began to riot. The riot spread throughout LA.

#### Notes to Chapter VI

<sup>1</sup> Lyndon B. Johnson and Carl Sanders, August 25, 1964, 4:32PM, Citation #5183, Recordings and Transcripts of Conversations and Meetings, LBJ Library.

<sup>2</sup> Johnson and Sanders.

<sup>3</sup> Omi and Winant, 56.

<sup>4</sup> Pierre Bourdieu, *Language & Symbolic Power* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991), 181.

<sup>5</sup> Burgess, 62.

<sup>6</sup> Burgess, 62.

<sup>7</sup> Olson, 58.

<sup>8</sup> Mondale.

<sup>9</sup> Zeitz, par 5.

<sup>10</sup> David Zarefsky, “A Skeptical View of Movement Studies,” in *Readings on the Rhetoric of Social Protest*, ed. Charles E Morris III and Stephen H. Browne (Pennsylvania: Strata Publishing, 2001), 143.



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Johnson, Lyndon Baines and Walter Reuther. August 21, 1964, 8:56PM. Citation #5112.

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