

STAFF
MAILING

[September, 1965?]

Memo

To: SNCC staff

From: Dona Richards

Re: A SNCC African Project

Proposal: That we immediately put into effect the often-made SNCC proposal to have an African Affairs Department

Purpose: It would function as both an educational and a politically programmatic project. Its projected goal would be to broaden the political concerns of the overall SNCC activity and to make the long overdue link between the struggle for self-determination of black peoples abroad and the struggle of black people in the United States against exploitation.

Explanation: What I want to do is to remake the proposal which has been made many times in the past and to begin to coordinate such a project.

Outline of Specific areas of the project as I see it;

1. Research:

Eventually we would develop a research team whose job would be to dig out relevant facts about the African nations (their political and economic development), and facts concerning U.S. involvement on that continent and U.S. policy there. The uses of the material collected could be two-fold. (1) Its educational value would be in the form of an African Affairs newsletter which could be mailed

mailed out to the staff and would help to keep us informed of the current international situation from the point of view of the African nations. (2) Such information could help us to plan actions in this country urging the government to take certain actions in Africa (such as economic sanctions against the South African government) and protesting other actions that it has taken (such as the action in the Congo). At the beginning we wouldn't have the resources to have much of a research project, but I have begun reading what I can find and would be willing to write up short synopses, possibly each week, for the staff newsletter already in circulation.

2. Education:

I would like to arrange for African diplomats, students and cultural groups to visit our projects in the South, and to be available at staff meetings to talk to us and to hold workshops. Lincoln University in Pennsylvania has a very extensive African Student Program and Chuck Hamilton, who is very close to the program is also very close to the movement. I have talked to a trio of dancers and musicians from Nigeria who want very much to tour our projects and bring their culture to the young people in the South.

In addition, I would like to get staff people who have either been to Africa or who have a lot of information about Africa, to both write about their experiences for the staff and take time to talk to them. (Gwen Gillon is back from an African trip she made this summer.)

3. Political

An important aspect of the program would be to try and develop relations with either individual in African nations or with parts of the African governments themselves. Don Harris, John and Jim have probably already made substantial beginnings in this direction which simply need our interest to make them develop into something permanent.

The above is only a brief outline of what I think the program could involve. I think that within this skeleton there is lots of room for further possibilities. I need very much to hear from people who are interested in such a project, and to get their suggestions.

Finances:

It seems to me that the funding of such a project can be done almost without cost to us, so that instead of viewing the project as extravagant at a time when we have no funds, we can see it as an addition to our overall program without addition to our overall budget. Much of the program could be financed with tax exempt funds because of its educational nature, also there are people who for a long time have been waiting for such bridges of communication to be built between the African Freedom Movement and ours, and who have money to give for just that purpose. At any rate, I would be willing to draw up a proposal and to approach people for funds. As I see it, we would initially not need money at all. I could begin communicating with African embassies, Students, and

performers, and I could also begin getting information to pass on to the staff.

Some personal views as to why we should begin the project as soon as possible:

When I have met young African students and various leaders in Guinea I have often felt that they had something which we have been taught not to have..... a cultural heritage to learn about and to be proud of. It seems to me that American Negroes (or Afro-Americans), including most of those in the movement, have real problems of identification. Johnson is now trying to tell us that our family structure is the cause of our exploitation and what we need is to have a father like his. The result of this propaganda (a premeditated result, I'm sure) is that we lose what little pride we had in ourselves as Negroes, as we desperately try to emulate white cultural habits as much as possible. I believe that through identification with the African heritage we can find the strength with which to fight Johnson's plan, and we can find out what it really means to be American Negro in the positive sense (the sense of the culture we have developed because of our African and American history combined). I watched Mrs. Hamer come alive as she discovered the ground where her ancestors had stood, and as she heard names which she knew to belong to those she met in Guinea in a way that our family names will never belong to us. Those of us who went to Guinea were proud and felt a kind of belonging that most of us had never felt in this country.

Just as many of the SNCC people and others who began the southern student movement were greatly inspired by what they knew of the young rising African nations and leaders, we now can gain strength from an identification with the African movement towards independence. Young Negroes in the Freedom Movement are badly in need of such inspiration at a time when they are being made to feel obsolete by the country's administration, and when many of their friends are content to leave the movement for high-paying government jobs.

When I have spoken to young Africans who have been active in the movements for independence in their countries, I have often felt that they were blaming American Negroes (they would say "Afro-Americans" and perhaps I should) for not identifying with them more and recognizing them as brothers. We, as organizers, are the ones who can begin to change that situation. What we can also gain from the Africans is a different and more satisfying approach to our problems. Africans are not defensive about whites as we are, and that is because they are not threatened in the way that we are. We are threatened because we live in a country which is predominately white,

because we have, in the past, failed to see the international ramifications of our work in terms of the world's colored people, and, sadly, because we have always found ourselves forced to couch our goals in terms of "integration" - a term which has become, for us, meaningless. It would be much more meaningful if we were to think as the Africans do, in terms of how western civilization (in which I include the Soviet Union) has always related to the colored peoples of the world.

By following African affairs we can begin to touch on other broad and international questions as they are raised by the African leaders. We can view issues of Economics, Peace, Culture and international questions in general. In a country like Guinea or Ghana, their organizational and economic problems of independent survival in a "bootstrap" operation are closely related to those of the large exploited Negro population of the southern United States and the northern ghettos.

Finally, I think that we must seriously face our responsibilities as Americans who are in basic disagreement with the international and national policies of our country. What will happen when the South Africans organize a revolution and American arms and men are used to put it down? Will we do what we did when the U.S. intervened in the Congo to save 75 white people? I was in New York at that time and I felt deep guilt. I'm sure many others did. I listened to a radio program that was receiving phone calls from Harlem. I heard voice after irate voice repeat the same screaming protest, "America, get out of the Congo!!" But it was a handful of white students that picketed in front of the UN. We weren't there. In Guinea when we went to the market place and the people looked at us and knowingly said, "American?", we were ashamed, and answered in very broken French, "Oui, mais revolutionnaires".

It is becoming both psychologically and politically impossible for us to continue to raise questions of our own exploitation in this country without also raising the question of American international attitude and policy. We must expand our borrowed cry of "ONE MAN, ONE VOTE" to "SELF-DETERMINATION and DIGNITY, throughout the world!!!".

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(this proposal was written early September - sense then I have made many contacts and begun concrete projects - a full report these beginnings will follow soon)