

January 11, 1966

Kacial

35.26

Rev. Fred L. Shuttlesworth, President
Alabama Christian Movement for Human Rights
B'ham, Alabama

Mr. Hosea Williams
Southern Christian Leadership Conference
Atlanta, Georgia

A REPLY TO CITY AND COUNTY OFFICIALS AND A STATEMENT OF THE NEEDS OF THE HOUR.

The statement on "Equal Rights-Equal Responsibility", published in Tuesday Jan. 11th Birmingham News over the signatures of five City and County Officials is a well planned piece of high sounding phraseology which begs the questions more than stating the answers necessary for peace, harmony, and racial good-will in this area. To use the mottos over the Court House and City Hall of "Equal and exact justice to all men of whatever state or persuasion", and "Cities are what men make them", would amount to officials, and others with them, are now pledging to go all out and pull out all stops to atone for the decadent and incorrigible sins of themselves and their predecessors before them, who built and maintained an unjust system which relegated Negroes down, below, and behind white people for over 200 years.

It is not the hallmark of intelligence to equate voter registration lines to temporary traffic jams, grocery, theater, or ticket-purchase lines. Buying a tag or going to a football game is a personal privilege; not a fundamental basis of Citizenship as is Voter Registration. These Honorable Officials did not attempt to explain that 90,000 Negroes in this County are unregistered, and that the Voting Rights Bill requires their immediate registration-infact provide that Federal Examiners should have already been appointed here.

These august officials believe in "local leadership" encouraging people to register and vote, they say. They cannot deny that for years "local leadership" has pled, begged, and petitioned in vain to deaf ears at City Hall and the Court House. They cannot deny that local leadership has been bombed, mobbed, murdered-much of it with unofficials sanction of their predecessors. These present officials cannot deny years of "behind the scenes talks" with "local leaders" which have amounted to practically less than nothing in the way of civic progress for Negroes. Nor can they deny that the gains made-all of them-have been because of the militant push of these who dared challenge the status quo; even to the point of going to jail by thousands, facing fire hoses, dogs, and brutality of many police officers.

B'ham and Jefferson County have not learned that the day is past when whites in the power structure can name or pick Negroes and call them "local leaders" of the Negro Community. The traditional method of white-Negro dealing is outmoded. The leadership must now include those who lead the masses into action; for only they can call off demonstrations once they are begun. No decisions or agreements made otherwise will stand or have effect. And it makes no difference whether they are from San Francisco, New York, Cincinnati, Atlanta, B'ham, or some backwoods hamlet. The phrase "outsiders" has no meaning any more in Civil Rights.

Simply stated, Negroes insist upon residential or neighborhood, evening and night registration six days per week. They insist that Negroes be immediately added to the Police Force, Clerical, and other Civil Service positions in the City and County. They insist that Police brutality must cease.

The local version of "Equal and exact justice" means justice for white men-not Negroes. The phrase "Cities are what men make them" has been used to mean "cities are what white men make them and keep them". Forty percent of this population will no longer be satisfied with zero percent of its privileges and opportunities.

Our officials call for "Equal Rights- Equal Responsibilities". Negroes call for equal rights for all with unequal responsibilities on the part of elected officials. More responsibility should rest upon the shoulders of those who govern to make the government accessible- and not just when campaigning for selection. Governing Officials must bear unequal responsibility for atoning for the aggravated denials of justice and rights in the past. If Negroes are uneducated, whites are responsible; if Negroes are poverty stricken, again the whites are responsible; for a white controlled system has taught and demanded it of them for 200 years.

Negroes are increasingly accepting responsibilities as they are allowed. They are now crusading for further opportunities to make their contribution to the total Society. If "Cities are what men make them", then let the Negro man help to shape the destiny of the city on which he lives. If justice is color blind, then let colored men help to dispense justice.

If B'ham and Jefferson County would have traffic flow orderly, schools to operate calmly, buses to run smoothly, and Negroes to be quiet, and demonstrations to subside; if the City and County would not let marches to take place in white and Negro Neighborhoods, then let them show faith by doing the elementary things asked for. Negroes in this age and this hour could demand and accept no less than every evening and nighttime, neighborhood and weekend registration. It is not right to expect Negro Leaders and organization to spend thousands of man hours and hundreds of thousands of dollars trying to round up Negroes like stray cattle and bring them to the Courthouse. We want the Courthouse brought out to the people. This will both encourage and help them to become good Citizens. It is not irresponsible to ask and expect so little in a time when so much is needed.