

MAY 11, 1966
SNCC STAFF CONFERENCE

ASSUMPTIONS MADE BY SNCC

1. We are all equals, no matter our background or training. This generated the problem of people desiring to solve questions thru consensus. During the 1964 Freedom Summer many of the decisions were made by so called consensus.
2. We were going to cause a revolution; like basic political and economic changes in the country thru the non-violent method.
*3 We didn't speak about integration.
4. We spoke of the "redeemed society". In 1961 this was the minority position of Bernard Lafayette, Charles Sherrod and others.
5. We would send people into communities to stay and to gain the trust of the local people.
6. SNCC was basically composed of young college students who would work for SNCC aims; whites in the white community and blacks in the black community.
7. People in the communities could not afford to support us because they are too poor.
8. Demonstrations were in conflict with the ~~xxxxx~~ white racists who would maintain public accommodations.
9. Our work would be done in the black belt. We would embarrass the country more by throwing up the dregs that were there. The effect would be national and international.
10. Militancy want no salary. That people would live on subsistence. was an assumption. People on the staff should not get more than the people in the community. By limiting the amount of money people could earn, corruption would be prevented
11. We learned that direct action and voter registration were one.
12. We would support black candidates because they would help motivate people.
13. If we raised money, we would be corrupted--that should be left to other organizations. This thought prevailed until 1964.

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1964.

14. Sherrod decided in the summer of 1962 tht we should live summer projects. The issue of blacks and whites working together was faced and Sherrod decided whites could be used as a political weapon. They would make visible the terror. For two years there would be no whites in Mississippi because the state was too difficult for them to work.

15. Courtlnd Cox said that th sit-ins and freedom rides were to break down the barriers whites had established; interpreted nationally this was an attempt to get into that society we were kept out of.

16. We asked the federal government to hand us solutions to the problems in civil rithts. Our projection to the press and agencies of the government such as the Justice Departmmt was an attempt at visibility.

17. John Lewis and others talked of "redemptive suffering". Howard University students had contrary ideas about suffering.

18. We qualitatively accepted the governmrt's suggestion tht we work in voter registration. Still the motion was to get into the established system. Our recourse was always to publicize our actions and contact the federal government. The March in Washington symbolized everything we had worked for up to that point--integration.

The first break in our desire to integrate came when Bob Moses started developing parellel structures in Mississippi. The Micssissippi Freedom Democratic Party asked the question: was there any room for Negroes in the Demo ratic party. The answer was: "There is room for two, but the rest must sit in the balcony."

*Between 1961 and 1964 we always asked the people who were brutalizing us to make the changes. We never looked to the black community for direction. For example, May 3, 1966, when elections were taking place in Alabama, some people felt they had to stay in the Atlanta office. This was so they could contact the press.

1964 -- 1965 people tried to be individuals. But they were beginning to realize there is no room for individual black people in the movement. The essential question is; How do we as technicians and organizers develope the black community.

19. In 1963 Charles Sherrod felt we had to free men's minds. Courtland Cox agreed with this.

20. Ralph Featherstone spoke on the underlying assumptions to SNCC work in the South. In the early sixties we felt that Southern politics ruled the country. This was a mistaken assumption. During counter revolution after the Civil War the Southern poweres were, in fact, the tools of the Northern industrialists.

21. Southern blacks could be more easily mobilized.

22. Many of the SNCC staff stay because of personal reasons-- heroism, etc.

23. People have to recognize that cities are esential.

24. Charlie Cobb said * We sought ourselves responsible to the country. It was assumed that if the country was informed, there would follow certain reforms. Our problem was that the country was ignorant. The problem, we felt, was that the country couldn't see 15 black workers in the South. The question became how to increase the visibility of the group of volunteers. Thus people were recruited from Stanford and Yale.

25. We must build strength in the black community so that it can sustain its own legitimacy.

26. John Lewis said that SNCC was born out of the situation in the South. In 1960, SNCC had no program; it was simply a temporary committee for communication between protest groups. Sncc must not be involved in rhetoric. There is nothing radical about encouraging people to register to vote. We must create pockets of power, support on the international level because this country doesn't decide to do things because they're right, but because the international climate demand that. For this reason, we have to begin to relate to groups in Africa, Asia, Latin America and Europe.

27. Bob Fletcher At first, we fought for the right to demonstrate. People got their heads beat and the people saw clearly the same power structure which the leftest intellectuals had spoken of theoretically. The 1964 summer project went beyond the emotionality of the demonstration.

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had spoken of theoretically. The 1964 summer project went beyond the emotionality of the demonstrations, but even in that gesture, we demonstrated. Out of all the protests, there developed the "individual" thing in which people said; "I'm going down South to lay my bodies on the line." Now, the demonstrations have become legitimized, as in the Selma march, and are done in an orderly, civilized way, with T.V. cameras, etc. We have become "certified heroes". There is the question now of other forms of expression, such as riots, but if we stir up riots, then what do we do after the riots?

27. Monroe SNCC thinks it knows what work is, but WORK must be defined . We can no longer deal with a half-assed SNCC, with the excess of uselessness with funds and people.

28. Stanley We make the assumption that all people in SNCC are in agreement with our public stances.

29. We assumed that the government will act to accomodate us, by laws, the courts, etc. We have never really lost confidence in the government, although we have no historical reason to believe that the government will accommodate us.

30. Also, we assumed that we must keep the mass media on our side. Therefore, we projected our image to them more than to the black community.

30. We assumed that is was our responsibility to show morality to America

31. We worked on the assumption that it was not necessary to support the struggle of Black Africa --until, perhaps, after our integration into America.

32. We assumed that the old "snickers" who have been in it since its inception, by definition, know most about politics, economics and history.

32. We assumed that when we went into a community, we did not assume leadership (Camus period).

33. It is false to assume that the Lowndes County Freedom Organization effort is over now and not to look at the possibilities of subversion, violence, etc.

34. We assume that we are in the forefront of the movement. We aren't. Most Northern cities have surpassed us.

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35. Marion Barry We assumed that we should exclude college students from us, since we were working in the communities. But we have a real need for their technological skills.

36. We assumed falsely that we were the perfect society and that those who had problems "out there" should come in with us and they would be all right. SNCC would solve all problems.

37. We assumed that we, as SNCC, could do no wrong.

38. We also assumed that poor people were good and could do no wrong ("mystique of poor people").

39. We assumed that such things as leadership, money, power, etc. were by definition wrong and were things that SNCC people should avoid.

40. We assumed that we could forget history, because we were different. We also felt that what we did had no relation to time. We felt that we could take our time and do what we wanted when we wanted. (e.g. discussion of the "outside world and SNCC")

41. We assumed that since we were pure, then that which we organized would be equally good, pure, incorruptible and durable, and that we could let it go to move on its own. Therefore, we lost "ships" by setting them afloat without a captain, or even a crew.

42. Matthew We assume that the movement was started by us in 1960 and forgot about the whole history of the freedom struggle in this country. We don't have to go back to Africa to find that heritage.

43. We pretend that we alone are the movement. We have closed ourselves in in a haven and the movement has passed us by.

44. Mike Miller We have made assumptions about fundraising which were erroneous and have had a bad effect. These were:

a. If people in the North really knew what we were doing, we wouldn't be able to raise money.

b. there is a fixed amount of money that SNCC can get.

45. Fred Meely We assume that we ourselves have not been affected by racism, and that certain people do not have skills.

46. We assume that blacks, poor whites and Mexicans will be able to solve this problem alone.

47. We assume that people who are not field people are escapist and are irrelevant.

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48. Stokely We assumed that we could organize around ideals, such as goodness, justice, etc.

49. We assumed that this country is really a democracy, which just isn't working. We had no concept of how brutal it could be if we started messing it up.

50. Frank Smith We assumed that once blacks and whites got together that everyone would be equal (and comfortable).

51. We say all of the things which have to be done in the community and then we say that the government has to do it. This attitude perpetuates the problem of thinking that the white folks will do things for you and that something is only worthwhile if the white folks do it. Negroes must do it for themselves. We must find that stick that frightens the man-and he can't give it to you.

52. We assumed after 1964 that there would be a force left in Mississippi that hold together all those concepts that we had developed there.

(We know see how far the government is willing to go to perpetuate white supremacy and the idea that Negroes are inferior.

53. Porter--We assumed that we can't fire staff

54. We assumed that the leaders in the community should come on staff.

55. Bob Smith We worked under the assumption that good college students would come to us.

56. Mitchell Zimmerman We assume sometimes that since revolutionary change is desirable, that it is possible. We must ask ourselves "can we?" and "how?"

57. John Lewis We assumed that we have a monopoly on truth and that we are per se the best organizers.

58. We assumed that the way to operate is through nonviolence.

59. Black people have assumed that they can gain power in any particular county, city, etc. in the country. But this will not change the basic structure of the nation.