



END SLUMS AND DISCRIMINATION

OPEN COMMUNITIES

A prospectus for a non-violent project to achieve open occupancy throughout the Chicago area

INTRODUCTION

During the past six years, concerned people of the Chicago area have been contributing to the civil rights movement in the South with their food, their money, or their active presence there. Unjust laws have been overcome and just laws have been enacted, although the South is still not a free society.

In 1966, however, we of the Chicago area find ourselves in a peculiar position. Dr. Martin Luther King, and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) of which he is head, have chosen our own city of Chicago for their current major effort, and Dr. King is now living here. This choice was made in part because Chicago also is a closed community. The most obvious evidence is its wide-spread but closely confined Negro slums. Accordingly, SCLC has chosen to concentrate its efforts on the elimination of slums. This effort will not be limited to eradication of physically degraded or degrading neighborhoods. It will be pointed toward ending the forces of exploitation that keep people in a condition of slavery and that cause slums to expand. It will involve the people themselves in ways that give them a sense of dignity and make them largely the establishers of their own freedom.

One of the primary objectives of the “end the slums” movement is “open occupancy.” Freedom to live where one chooses is a basic necessity for a free democratic community. Many of the forces of exploitation depend on the continuation of the power to compel Negroes to live in a crowded ghetto, and an end to the ghetto will be the end of much exploitation.

The fair housing movement is already about ten years old. It has utilized many traditional methods: education, petition, pledge, interracial meetings, and even helping pioneer Negro families to find homes. Yet it has little concrete progress to report, and the slums are enlarging far more rapidly than fair housing efforts are opening new areas.

The SCLC intends to broaden the attack. The breadth and intensity of its plans present as much of a challenge to liberal Whites and liberal Negroes as they do to the forces of exploitation. The program calls for invoking the same non-violent philosophy and method which Northern liberals enthusiastically supported when used in the South. It intends to use the force of truth itself to challenge the practice of discrimination by realtors. It may require legal and sometimes supra-legal means to raise the truth to the real estate system and the society at large, just as truth was raised in restaurants in Tennessee, Georgia and Alabama.

THE PROBLEM

The real estate office is the last business which is on the one hand open to the public, and licensed to operate by the state, yet which on the other hand demands to know the race and religion of a customer before giving service. A typical example occurred in Oak Park on Saturday, February 12, 1966, Lincoln's birthday. Members of eleven Negro families went separately to eleven different real estate offices. All were refused the services offered to White home seekers. Only one family was shown a house by a realtor – the house was located next door to one of the few Negro families now living in Oak Park. Because nine of every ten sales of houses are made by real estate offices, realtors, in a sense, are the gatekeepers of neighborhoods and communities.

This practice was established in April, 1917. At that time the Chicago Real Estate Board passed a resolution stating, "it is desired in the interest of all, that each block shall be filled solidly (with Negroes) and that the present method of obtaining a single building in scattered blocks be discontinued. Today, in 1966, in modern America, this policy of rigid segregation is still the normal operating practice for every real estate office in the Chicago metropolitan area. In Alabama, Governor Wallace stood in the doorway of the University of Alabama to deny Negroes the opportunity to go to school. In Illinois realtors stand in the doorway of thousands of homes being offered for sale or rent and prevent Negroes and other minorities from choosing freely where they may live. The real estate industry is America's ghetto-maker and ghetto keeper, and has been for almost fifty years.

THE KIND OF SOLUTION NEEDED

Ghetto-making and ghetto-keeping must stop. It will stop when its practitioners – the realtors – undertake to render equal treatment and equal service for all home seekers, and when no significant segment of the public any longer supports their discrimination. It is our goal to establish the following standard practices among realtors:

- 1. Realtors must show all multiple listings and all their own listings to all home seekers who express interest in them, and make every effort to complete the transaction without regard to race, religion or national origin.**
- 2. Realtors must refuse to handle any listings which indicate that the owner wishes to discriminate on account of race, religion or national origin. If a property owner wishes to discriminate in the sale or rental of his property, he should not be allowed to effect his prejudice through a real estate office, which is open to the public and licensed by the state.**
- 3. Appointments to show properties to home seekers must be made without mentioning their race, religion or national origin to the seller or listing broker.**

To accomplish this goal, a new project is proposed to achieve “Open Communities” and it invites everyone to participate.

METHODS OF ACHIEVEMENT

The specific purpose of the methods to be described are two:

- 1. To raise and expose the truth about the discriminatory practices of the real estate offices in such a way that the public – churches, government and individuals – will demand that realtors change their practices; and**
- 2. to combine the efforts of all individuals and organizations throughout the metropolitan area who are interested in open occupancy into a single force with a focused program. Many people are tired of meetings and projects which do not relate directly to the problem. Many people are tired of going to the same meetings and seeing the same faces and talking around the real issue. This activity is for those who want to work on a focused action project.**

There are sound reasons for establishing these purposes. Most social injustices have been made complex by myth, fear and tradition. The good people of America have permitted blatant injustices to exist because they have been confused by myths

and filled with fear by rumors. These can be dispelled non-violently by the force of truth and love. One of the purposes of the non-violent method is to reduce a social problem to its basic truth so that the public can understand it and respond to correct the evil. In directing its efforts toward real estate offices, this project will apply the philosophy and techniques of non-violence.

Before proceeding further, an illustration will be presented. The situation in Chicago and the appropriate means of resolving the problem is analogous to the segregation of facilities in the South prior to 1959 and the events that ended it.

NON-VIOLENCE AND THE RESTAURANT

In the South, in 1959, restaurants were segregated. The issue was very complicated in the minds of people across the country. Although most people felt that segregation was wrong, they also thought that it was the “way of life” in the South and that it did not “harm” Negroes. Besides, don’t Negroes like to eat with “their own” and Whites with theirs? Negroes had not yet refined their table manners. Doesn’t the owner of a restaurant have the right to serve whomever he pleases at his place of business? Property rights! Owners often argued that although they themselves were not prejudiced, they could not possibly serve Negroes because they would be forced out of business for violating local tradition. They were merely doing the will of the customers. Many liberal Whites and liberal Negroes opposed the sit-ins for fear that they would cause such commotion and unrest that they would turn the masses against the “Negroes’ cause” and hinder the progress in race relations that they said was being accomplished slowly, but surely, behind the scenes. What about changing local discriminatory laws? Some people suggested that students educate the people first to convince them to accept Negroes at their restaurants, keeping restaurant operators out of the middle.

The non-violent movement refused to debate these questions; it reduced the problem to its simplest truth – Negroes were not given equal service by a business which was open to the public and licensed by the state. Negroes went to the counters and waited for equal service. In many localities this meant abuse by local White citizens. Often the sit-ins were in violation of local laws. Sometimes it upset entire communities. But always the students waited for equal service and retained an attitude of love and understanding for their oppressors. They tried to win them over rather than win over them. The truth was that Negroes were not given equal service, and this truth was raised up so that the people, the churches, the city government and the nation had to respond.

NON-VIOLENCE AND THE REAL ESTATE

In many respects a real estate office in Illinois is similar to a restaurant in Georgia. Both are businesses open to the public and licensed by the state. However, many

people have the same reservations about a direct action program in the real estate office that people had concerning the restaurant sit-ins. The realtor is merely an agent of the home seller; the community at large must come first; the realtor will lose business. However, the problem reduced to the simplest truth is that Negroes are not given equal service in real estate offices.

The basic principles of non-violence remain the same regardless of where they are applied. Only the details of strategy and tactics change as the action is transferred from restaurants to real estate offices. The main effort must be to ask for equal treatment and service so insistently and continually that the public finally becomes clearly aware that a basic right is being denied. For such an effort, two types of demonstrators are needed: prospective home seekers, and a support group.

PROSPECTIVE HOME SEEKERS

Every week Negro families have been going to real estate offices in Oak Park seeking equal service. Every family has been turned away by realtors who say, in effect, that their services are for Whites only. The home seeker will continue indefinitely their efforts to get served each Saturday.

SUPPORT GROUP

Massive support is needed from individuals and groups, city and suburbs, White and Negro. In the South, violence by local Whites and brutality by police helped raise the issue before the public and made it even more clear. In the Chicago area violence will probably not occur, so the presence of masses of supporters will help raise the issue and thereby replace the role that violence played in the South.

The specific kinds of supportive action will grow out of the circumstances of the movement so that the details cannot be specifically stated at the time of the writing of this prospectus. However, all groups and individuals will be called upon to "put their bodies on the line," human relations committees, clergymen, social workers, other organizations, and all individuals from every part of the metropolitan area. The supportive activity may range from talking with a discriminatory realtor to ask him to serve the home seeker to various kinds of supportive activities at the real estate office or elsewhere on Saturday mornings. It is hoped that a freedom center will be opened in Oak Park where volunteers can learn what they can do.

INVITATION TO PARTICIPATE

The time is long past for achievement of freedom, when all Americans will find it possible to choose their homes or communities freely. You are invited to join this effort.

If you are a Negro prospective home or apartment seeker, you can join the home seekers group. There are approximately 700 new Negro families in Chicago every month. As the Negro population expands it is herded into the “next block” like cattle instead of people. In 1966, Negro home seekers are standing tall and acting like first class citizens we are asked to be. We are using the front door to America – the real estate office.

If you are not a Negro prospective home seeker you can join the support group. You can enlist your friends and organizations as volunteers. The specific requirements will change from week to week. If you are interested, please write or call the temporary contact for this movement:

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This document was written by William Moyer, with the assistance of Elbert Ransom, Jr., in March, 1966 from the results of a Chicago Real Estate Testing Program done under the direction of HOME, Incorporated, an initiative within the Housing Opportunities Program of the American Friends Service Committee. It was shared with Martin Luther King, Jr. and the SCLC for considering Chicago as a northern campaign.