

MEMORANDUM

TO: BOARD MEMBERS, STAFF AND REGIONAL REPRESENTATIVES OF THE
SOUTHERN CHRISTIAN LEADERSHIP CONFERENCE

FROM: ANDY YOUNG

RE: REFLECTIONS ON YEARS PAST AND YEARS TO COME

It was just a little over five years ago that I joined SCLC. The Freedom Rides were just winding up, and the first massive community action on the part of local citizens was grinding to what seemed then like a tragic halt in Albany, Georgia. Time Magazine was ranting and raving about a split between SCLC and SNCC and proclaiming the end of Dr. King's influence. That was the way we brought in the New Year in 1962.

I had come to SCLC because I felt that SCLC was the only existing organism which could bring freedom to the Negro and "Redeem the Soul of America." (remember, that was the motto printed on our stationary.) At that time we only had a paid staff of about ten persons, but I saw four U. S. Senators as symbols of all that was racist, reactionary, isolationist, and imperialist about America. It was my hope that an educated, organized Negro vote in the South could free Congress and the nation from many of her social ills. For these men were your powerful committee chairmen in the Senate who by their guile and seniority dominated every aspect of American life. I am referring to Eastland of Mississippi, Russell of Georgia, Byrd of Virginia and Ellender of Louisiana. This I thought must be accomplished within five years if our nation was to have a chance to meet the problems of rising hopes and aspirations in Africa, Asia, South America and among our brethren here at home.

Basically, I am a preacher, so I saw these structural reforms in the body politic as a means of saving men's soul through the creation of a social order which helped men to know and love their brothers regardless of race, class or national differences.

A lot has happened since then. The Movement soon bounded back with Birmingham and Selma. Many voters were registered, many people trained through our citizenship schools; thousands of new jobs obtained through "Breadbasket", and the staff has grown to more than 150 full time persons. But it seems as though every increase in our size and ability brought with it an increase in problems.

Now, five years later we still have Eastland, Russell and Ellender and it took God himself to remove Senator Byrd by calling him to his just reward, "bless his soul." The job of political reform of the South has just begun, as Lurlene and Lester so painfully remind us.

In the meantime the natives have gotten restless at home and abroad. Riots in Watts and Revolution in Viet Nam let us know that the hour of judgement rapidly approaches. The children of God have seen the good life on TV, in movies and in advertisements around the world, and no longer will they remain content with poverty, disease and misery.

What started out as a simple matter of political reform has now emerged as a total fight for economic justice and world peace as well.

However, the American Negro is still the key to salvation for America and the world. Political reform of the South is still the number one priority, but the economic exploitation of our Northern cities is a close second.

There have been moments when I was ready to give up and conclude that mankind is hopelessly lost. Viet Nam, Chicago and Grenada can lead you to that conclusion, especially with white folks electing the likes of Ronald Reagan and Lester Maddox and Lyndon's Great Society becoming the Great Catastrophe. But then I realize that life is a constant struggle and that SCLC is one of the few institutions in the world with even the potential for waging a massive social struggle. I just don't see anybody with the vision, the skill and the leadership resources to even approach the job ahead.

This job is so great that we have just begun to see the top of the iceberg. The deeper moral, political, economic and international implications are still hidden from us. I can see at least 10 years of work for a team of 100 committed persons who will work, study, think and pray to redeem the soul of America.

We have begun to master certain organizing skills. We know how to stir up a town, turn out a school, and arouse the energies of our suffering brothers. These are important lessons, and before we are through we must be able to do in a dozen or more major cities simultaneously what we did in Birmingham, Savannah, Selma and Chicago.

But the main challenge to us as a family is the creation of a community among ourselves which is a demonstration to the world of God's redeemed community. I was interested that Vince Lombardi of the Green Bay Packers said that the key to their success was the respect and love that they had for one another. I might add that the desire for perfection and the willingness to build up one another was also important. It struck me as quite a contrast to SCLC that everyone gave credit for their victory to their team mates. God moves in mysterious ways. The Movement and the church no longer make witness to a brotherhood community, so God cries out through a football team.

SCLC cannot function without a total team approach from the tenant unions in Chicago to the print shop and office in Atlanta; from Grenada and the Alabama Black Belt to the fund raising office in New York; Everyone must see his role in the total movement as unexpendable. There is no room for those in the field to envy those in the office or for Breadbasket to complain that Citizenship Education has a foundation grant. Each task is important to the overall struggle.

The public has invested their confidence in us through millions of dollars over the past years. We need to do the best job possible with these funds.

God has blessed us with the friendship and leadership of one of the great men of our time. To Dr. King has been entrusted the burden and blessings of leadership but to us has been given the job of service and the gift of a meaningful life.

Let us put aside the personal "hang-ups" and face the challenge of this new year with a renewed dedication to perfect our work as a team and push our society one step at a time toward justice, peace and brotherhood.