

REPORTS BY THE STAFF OF THE CHICAGO SNCC FREEDOM CENTER

MAY 1965

Position paper.....	1
Summer 1965 Project.....	3
The War on Poverty in Chicago.....	5
Housing in Chicago.....	7
Direct Action Projects in Chicago.....	9
SNCC Youth Council and Problems of Police Brutality.....	10
Christmas at the SNCC Freedom Center.....	13
Poems by Eloise Clark.....	14

SNCC Freedom Center
4212 S. Cottage Grove
Chicago, Illinois 60651

Monroe Sharp, Director

POSITION PAPER

by the Staff of

the CHICAGO SNCC FREEDOM CENTER:

The Staff of the Chicago SNCC Freedom Center has come to the conclusion over the past few months, that band-aid programs will only lead to SNCC acquiring the reputation of being a new small-time NAACP in Chicago. The SNCC philosophy demands that we come to grips with the total problem of ghetto life, with the broadest possible frontal attack, at once.

The unexamined fact that there are more Negroes in Chicago than in the entire state of Mississippi, coupled with the data brought out by the Chicago School Boycotts, that over 50% of all grade school children enrolled in the public schools are Negroes, shows clearly the immensity and scope of the problem. In a few short years, Negroes will be in the majority in this and other Northern cities and yet have as little control over their lives as the exploited Mississippi share-cropper. The Negro child in Mississippi at least has fresh air and enjoys a loving, close family or community relationship. Not so the ghetto child in Chicago.

The Mississippi Summer Project led to the MFDP, in which local leadership evolved in that state. The pitfalls that lie ahead for the soon to be enfranchised Mississippi Negro have not as yet been examined. They are here in full force in Chicago. They must be considered in the light of their importance to the whole national problem.

Getting the vote means nothing if by devious means the power structure contains an almost majority population, sets up a few Toms to make things look good and then exploits even further the masses of people who are never allowed to become dignified human beings. Several dozen jobs disappear hourly in the Chicago metropolitan area due to automation. The birth rate in the ghetto is astronomical since the politicians and church people are still arguing about giving women and girls free access to birth control measures. As the noose of segregated housing - schools - and jobs increases day by day, the only out offered by the government (outside the phony War on Poverty - the latest political pork barrel) is to have a few hot wars going to increase jobs in the military-machine field, kill off some of the excess population, and of course focus attention away from "internal problems."

Position Paper by the Staff of the Chicago Freedom Center
continued:

As yet, no Negro mother in Chicago can guarantee that her daughter will not grow up to scrub Miss Ann's toilet bowl despite savings accounts, homes bought in a just-turned-Negro, ghetto-to-be, middle-class neighborhood, or status of some bourgeoise job. The various attacks upon the separate bricks in the wall of segregation have not even dented it, as it is held together by the mortar of the political machine, and padded by tokenism, put-off committees, and garbage can-lid human relations groups.

It is time to reappraise what SNCC is and what SNCC is doing. The time is now, waiting will only strengthen the hand of the enemy: entrenched, sugar-coated segregation. Have we been lulled into thinking that we are not involved in an all out war? The enemy is not wasting time, but is spending his money on a wide-spread campaign to insure the status quo remains just that. SNCC alone has the people with guts and the know-how to attack the whole problem. SNCC alone has the answer if there is ever to be one.

The March from Selma to Montgomery was the modern counterpart of that historic opiate of the people of Roman times, the Circus, complete with Christian martyrs. A "B" movie script with the good guys, the bad guys, and right triumphing in the end - at least this is how it was scheduled to appear and be swallowed whole-hog by the worlds watching millions. With all this planned propaganda it is time we did some counter propaganda of our own and made America look into the mirror and see that it really isn't the fairest of them all, the land of the free and the home of the brave.

Millions are trapped in a living death as we meet and have discussions. A very real effort is now being made to splinter SNCC and destroy it. Do we dare stop, while the real problem lies untouched, the crying need of our people to be free men?

SNCC can take its small begining in Chicago, and build now, as we did in Mississippi but we cannot afford to loose time. The establishment is nervous, red-baiting, and busy putting on ritual performances. Lets push now for a total confrontation, for the truth. Let those who are not already committed to a project in the South this summer come to Chicago, where the problem must ultimately be solved, and help do the job we set out to do: win uncompromised total freedom-now for all our people.

SUMMER 1965 PROGRAM - CHICAGO SNCC FREEDOM CENTER

During the past year, the Chicago SNCC Freedom Center has been developing a natural follow-up to the Mississippi Summer Project in which the seeds of democracy could be further transplanted from the minds of men into meaningful existence.

Now that we are firmly established in this Northern ghetto community, and the staff has acquired a thorough understanding of how to deal with local problems and conditions, we can proceed with four basic points of orientation:

1. The War on Poverty excludes local participation in planning and administration. It is the plan of the Center to develop its own "peoples" committee to plan a program for this area, with liason between other community groups who will proceed in the same manner in their respective areas. When these plans are completed, they will be sent direct to Washington, with as much publicity as possible for a public debate between the "official" WOP group and the real "peoples" WOP group.
2. The present Housing Program of the Center is to be expanded and teams will be assigned designated areas to work during the summer. Emphasis is on building close personal relationships beginning with a stepped-up door-to-door leafleting campaign. It is intended that a variety of proposed new means of putting pressure on landlords and official agencies to correct conditions will be fully explored leaving final decisions for action up to the specific tenant group in each area.
3. Community Issues (which are broken down into two sub-groups):
 - A. Direct-action projects will be handled by a team of persons who specifically wish to work in this area, closely aided by our legal advisors. They will develop action in three areas:
 - a. Action in connection with Freedom Center projects.
 - b. Action coordinated with other local civil-rights groups with joint aims
 - c. Action coordinated with SNCC in other areas on antional or general civil-rights issues.

Summer 1965 Program - Chicago SNCC Freedom Center continued:

- B. The quasi-social activities of the Center have naturally evolved in this impoverished area. When people come to us with needs we will first try to educate them to the real causes of their specific problems and how this relates to SNCC. Second we will promote self-help rather than forms of charity and refer people to other agencies when this is indicated by their needs.
- 4. The SNCC Youth Council, which is still in formation will seek to enlarge this summer and develop programs of their own as well as working with ongoing SNCC Center projects. The Youth Council is made up primarily of young people aged 16 to 21 who are school drop-outs or have been unable to adjust to the "system" and are seeking their own answers to the problems in their lives, i.e. police brutality.

THE WAR ON POVERTY IN CHICAGO

Since the grass-root Negro hard-core Ghetto community in Chicago is excluded from participation in the planning and administration of War On Poverty programs both through direct participation and through having planners and administrators who are sensitive and responsive to the needs of these people, the SNCC program could help fill this void.

For example the workshop could train a group of people to become a committee to plan a WOP program for their area. Mass meetings, canvassing, etc. could be used as a dialog between the community and the committee (drawn from the community plus others who are sensitive and responsive in cases where extreme technical skills are needed) in the development of the WOP Proposal. The idea being that only through participation of the community (meaning common every day poor folks) in the development of the program and its execution and in having sensitive, responsive planners and administrators can any war win over poverty.

The SNCC Freedom Center would serve both as a meeting and office space for the committee but also as a locus of dialogue with the community in the development of the proposal. With the opening of Alderman Metcalfe's WOP Opportunity Center in the area, the SNCC Center would serve as a PEOPLES Center for WOP Planning (as the first stage.) This bears some analogy to the Freedom Vote in Mississippi ...although in the initial stage the Center would be what those offices in the Loop are...planning and research centers ...but in SNCC the people have a voice.

This campaign should get city-wide publicity, although the SNCC Center must concentrate on working in the immediate community. Possibly other groups in the city would be interested in doing grass root WOP planning and mobilizing in their areas. Perhaps a debate between WOP administrators in Chicago and members of the SNCC Center WOP Planning Committee could be held. Certainly we can do a PR job on it, especially when we submit our proposal to Washington.

The discussions which the preparing of the Proposal would cause to take place in the community might be a step towards mass understanding of the real problems which poor people face and what their causes and cures are...even beyond the scope of the present WOP.

The War On Poverty in Chicago continued:

The concept of people working out the solution to their own problems would be injected into the community and brought before the WOP and the Country. The development of sensitive and responsive Negro planners and administrators to deal with problems of poor Negroes, rather than having machine hacks and people from downtown and middle-class Negroes of the type who have escaped from poverty and look down on the poor, running programs to help people like those living near the Center is also a crucial concept to be brought forward. Qualified planners and administrators of the type described above exist but they have been stifled by the machine and they must be found and brought into a program where dialog with the community is in the forefront.

HOUSING IN CHICAGO

In the neighborhood of the SNCC Freedom Center in Chicago the census figures show 2,200 housing units dilapidated and 7,500 more deteriorating. Ten thousand families are living in squalor. The City of Chicago Housing Authority program consists of tearing down old housing, pushing the tenants into another already overcrowded area, and putting up project buildings at a cost of \$17,000 per new apartment. The fact is CHA has the right to buy and rehabilitate existing housing but has never done so. At a cost of \$2500 to buy and \$5000 to bring to code standards this totals \$7500 per apartment. The people in the community would much prefer rehabilitated housing to the stigma of project living, but the taxpayers money is thrown away to the tune of \$9500 per apartment because community people have no voice in making these decisions.

Another interesting fact about existing housing is the average rental is \$75 per month (average for the entire city) while family income is a mere \$3000 a year (half the city average) so our families pay twice as much out of their inadequate incomes for the worst housing in the city. No pressure is put on landlords by the city to make necessary repairs, or even provide basic needs like heat and hot water. Court proceedings drag out for years with no results.

The conspiracy of the real estate board and political machine to maintain segregated housing allowing absentee landlords high profits is well known. Segregated schools producing high school graduates who cannot read or write evolve as a natural part of this system. Despite the mass turnout for school boycotts and intense public outcry over the years, nothing has ever been improved.

There is a direct relation between the deplorable housing conditions and health problems. The density of the population is only equalled in Harlem it must be remembered. A higher percent of Negro children die in their first year in Chicago than in Mississippi, and the mortality rate for Negro adults is from 50 - 400% higher than for whites from strokes, heart disease, and cancer. The city of New York for example, spends six times as much per resident on health as Chicago. Negro life expectancy is still 7 years shorter and the hospital shortage is scandalous.

Housing in Chicago continued:

As for parks, recreational facilities, libraries, etc., again the Negro ghetto dweller is shortchanged leaving the only place for children to play in the streets and empty lots filled with tons of broken bottles, garbage and of course rats. The lake front has not been developed as in nearby white areas, and a walk across the sole access bridge over the outer drive is like making a trip to the city dump.

Although one of the local Negro aldermen is the Chairman of the permanent City Council Committee on Building and Zoning, his ward is the most flagrant in violations in the city. The sidewalks are a maze of po-holes, and patches. Repairs must by law be done voluntarily at a cost to city and owner of 38¢ per square foot. This is not expensive but it is obvious our area will get no such repairs. Street lighting is all but nonexistent and garbage collection is far less frequent than in other city communities.

In short, there is no segment of the lives of the residents of this community in which they are not made to suffer day in and day out for the crime of being born with a black skin.

DIRECT ACTION PROJECTS IN CHICAGO

When the SNCC Freedom Center opened in Chicago one of its first acts was to relieve the office of any responsibility for direct action projects.

During August 1965. the Center provided some guidance, and a program for the residents of the area of the Dixmore-Harvey riots.

The Center staff furnished the logistics for a prolonged school boycott at the Robert Taylor Homes. Freedom schools were set up, teachers provided, books, food, picket signs and manpower were dispatched to the area. This action was done in cooperation with ACT and the tenants group.

On Jan. 4,5,and 6th several hundred neighborhood residents picketed the local police station, marched throughout the entire area and attended a large rally arranged by the center in connection with the death of Richard Gardner.

Several dozen picket lines were held at the local Federal building as well as marches through the crowded loop area once with a coffin protesting the Selma situation. Silent vigils were held, protest meetings, and the tactic of sitting in in the elevators of the Federal building was very successful. Local landlords and real estate offices have been often picketed, and large groups turned out to cooperate with picketing against the war in Viet Nam and the Good Friday march about school conditions in connection with other groups.

SNCC staff was asked to arrange details for the Wilson, Jr. college and Chicago Teachers college picket about Selma. This was a very large group that had never been in any direct action before. This was done again for another group in Harvey about conditions in the schools.

At least 25 persons participated in the sit-in in front of the White House in Washington from Chicago SNCC and many others marched from Selma to Montgomery.

Action projects are continuous with SNCC here in Chicago and we are fortunate to have expert legal advisors, who spend great lengths of time aiding our efforts.

SNCC YOUTH COUNCIL AND PROBLEMS OF POLICE BRUTALITY

It is an actual fact that the residents of the community in which the SNCC Freedom Center is located as a whole feel that they reside in a "police state" where the police operate like a conquering army occupying defeated enemy territory. Montgomery is not the only city that uses dogs to "protect" its citizens.

The Mayors Human Relations Commission here as well as the Police Dept. Human Relations unit act only in the capacity of garbage can lids to help keep the stink down. Currently the local police districts are holding community conferences as a part of a public relations drive to improve their image. They have not and will not reach a single member of the community outside of a blue-ribbon panel of citizens from a business, social or economic level far above the average citizen of the community. They meet and discuss how to improve relations when their relationship is already working in perfect accord. The day to day problems of the man in the street are totally ignored. The only "protection" provided by the police is to insure the merchant (who lives outside the community) that his money gets safely to the bank at night when he licks up. If "paying off" so you can continue to sell dope, run a policy wheel, sell stolen goods, or peddle human flesh is "protection" we still do have plenty of that.

The fact is, it is doubtful if with diligent searching of months you could find even one member of this community who has not personally experienced police brutality or at the very least observed his family, friends, and neighbors being unjustly treated upon numerous occasions. Even at the tender age of three, a ghetto child has learned to run when "the cops are coming."

Of a group of young teens, that consisted of 30 last year in our area, only 16 remain. These 16 formed the SNCC Youth Council this year. One drowned accidentally, one was shot in the back and killed by a policeman in an alley and 12 more are in various jails and reform schools for the crime of having no where to go and nothing to do.

The case of the youth shot in the alley, Richard Gardner, is a good one to elaborate on. A group of about 12 youths aged 17 to 24 were on a back porch early last Jan. 4 dancing to records. Three of them left to go to a friends house a couple of buildings to the east to borrow some new records. Just prior to this, a woman two doors west phoned the police to complain about noise. The cops ran into the

SNCC Youth Council and Police Brutality continued:

alley with their guns out and the youths ran. The first cop shot at one of the youths and missed. The second shot at Richard and killed him with a bullet through his heart. At the inquest (blasted by a TV comentator here as a complete farce) the cop claimed he was investigating a burglary in process report at a location 4 houses west of the alley and said he had to shoot Richard because he attacked him with what he thought was a gun. In actual fact a screw-driver was planted in Richards hand after his death and this was offered in evidence. If we are to believe the police version (which was changed three times) Richard would have traveled over 300 feet with a hole completely through his chest and heart from a magnum bullet. The youths on the porch were all eye-witnesses but are afraid of police retaliation if they talk. They ones that did go to the inquest have been as well as Richards younger brother. The killer cop spent the night bragging to all and sundry "I just killed a punk." Richard was no punk. He was employed, had money on his person (which was never found) and came from a close family. Teh store front church the police claimed he was trying to rob contains only a couple of dozen fold-up chairs. There are over 30 such churches in the area surrounding the site of the killing. Richards crime was that of being poor and black and living in a ghetto. The finding of the coroners rubber-stamp jury was "justifiable homicide."

What future lies ahead for the friends of Richard? No jobs or education, maybe join the army and get sent to Viet Nam like another community youth who went because this was the only "job" available to him and he wanted to help his sick father and crippled sister. He was killed a few short weeks after arrival. Maybe these youths can join the Job-Corps and learn how to put out forest fires. That will help them a lot back on 43rd Street. Society as it is now structured offers no solution to these problems. At present what we have is a sort of balance of fear.

Three Chicago high-school principals have called the police over minor incidents in the past two months and the cops ran through the schools in the best esprit de corps of the Nazi S.S. troops. "Better put on your head-rag, boy, or your mops going to get messed up," one student was told.

A visit to our local 48th Street police station fudal courtroom is a revelation. The friends and cohorts of

SNCC Youth Council and Police Brutality continues

the reigning Alderman pass in and out as through a revolving door smiling and joking while the more lowly ordinary citizens get sent up for long terms for the most minor infractions. Dignity and human rights are unheard of commodities.

O.W.Wilson has improved the police department by modernizing equipment and communications. He has done nothing to weed out the high percentage of mentally perverted men he send into the streets with loaded guns to play with each day. No psychological testing is done, nor are there any educational standards to get on the force. For a small fee, anyone can be coached to answer the test correctly to qualify and this is the very job the sadist will take to satisfy his perversion.

We cannot stand by and see this evil continue to perpetuate itself daily with no recourse available. Picketing the police is covered by a news blackout of course, and Wilson denies brutality exists. The community must be allowed to make the decision for itself concerning who they want to protect them and how they want to be protected and then their decision must be put into practice.

CHRISTMAS AT THE CHICAGO SNCC FREEDOM CENTER

Early Christmas morning, at least one bitter and disillusioned man decided he could not face his little ones emptyhanded when they awoke. The fact that there was not going to be a Christmas dinner either, because he had no money, was preying on his mind. Sleepless, he hit the streets.

He had borrowed from all his friends, his unemployment compensation had long ago run out, the job at the Post Office lasted only three days and of course the Welfare was holding an investigation. He had nowhere to turn.

The laughing celebrating people he passed along his lonely way did not give him a second glance. He was just another guy with a twisted ugly look on his face. Near 42nd Street he paused at the SNCC Freedom Center window where gayly decorated trees and a few presents stared back at him.

"Why can't my kids have a tree, some toys, and a decent meal for Christmas," he thought. "What kind of a world is this anyhow?" It was then the compulsion struck him. Straight to the rear of the center he marched; not caring at this point what the consequences might be. With a demented determination he tore off two heavy wire grills and broke through the rear window.

Inside he found some popcorn, candy, apples and home-baked cookies unbelievably left behind by the 77 children who celebrated with a party and a movie on the life of Frederic Douglas several hours before. Some of this he ate in his hunger and the rest, along with a few gifts set aside for the children who had not been able to attend he placed in a bag.

Again he paused. He had broken into the center and stolen some small items for which he could be caught and sent to jail and yet his kids would not even have a decent meal. In a blind rage he turned over the nearest desk, spilling papers, phones, supplies all over the floor. He then discovered an electric typewriter inside and another small portable on another desk where popcorn had been made earlier. These he could sell for cash. Passing through the broken window, he disappeared nameless into the night with his heavy burden and heavier conscience.

The Center needed those typewriters very much, but let him remain nameless, we know he was hungry. What kind of a world is this anyhow?

POEMS BY ELOISE CLARK:

THE BOTTOM

If you were on the bottom, and I was on the top
Then all this evil mess would soon have to stop
If half our government was run by colored folks
Then all the niggers in the South could go to town and vote.
We wouldn't have to live in fear of jealousy and hate
Because we'd have our civil rights in our country and our state
There wouldn't be no ADC or charity or relief
Then someday we'd have a chance to live our lives in peace.
They hate us more than all the people that are on the earth
They never spare no mercy and count us for our worth
When will they ever get down to the bottom of this mess
Because we're getting tired and I think we need a rest.

IT COULD'DA BEEN YOU

If you were black and I was white
Then you'd see what it was like
Because my skin is dark and my hair is nappy
And some of your folks could'da been my pappy
Now we all know that this is true
Who mixed us up, it could'da been you
They call us nigger, is that our name
With half white babies, well, ain't that a shame
Some of us are black and so near white
You gettin outa your race now that ain't right
If you hate us so bad then let me tell you brother
You wouldn't get no where if a nigger was your mother.

WHO DID - YOU DID

You drug us through the street and hung us by the neck
You beat us with your clubs and made our life a wreck
There is a little group down South they call the Ku Klux Klan
They tell me that they are the baddest people in all the land
They bombed a church in Birmingham somewhere you know
And took the lives of little kids, its time for them to blow
I tell you of another thing way down in Mississippi
About a boy named Emmett Till now isn't it a pity
Those civil rights workers were killed and hid away
Nobody knows who did it but we'll find out someday
The land of the free and the home of the brave
Set us niggers free or dig your own grave
You did it, You did it, You did this to me
And God is going to fix you, just you wait and see.