

Box 9
Folder II B
UCLA

Memo II
To: SICC Staff
From: Dona Richards
Re: Report on the beginnings of the African Project

"For the third time in four months, the South African government has gone out of its way to pick a quarrel with the United States. The above is the lead sentence from an article in the Washington Post (Sept. 25, 1965). The article says later "...South Africa withheld permission for American planes from the carrier Independence to use airport facilities without a U.S. guarantee in writing that no Negro crewman would be aboard the planes. The United States cancelled the carriers visit." And again later the article quotes the South African press as saying that Verwoerd had put a "ban on any Negro personnel at American Tracking stations in South Africa" What was the American response? The article says that the word from "American officials" is that "everyone knows that neither the Navy nor NASA would dream of sending Negro personnel into South Africa" and therefore it was embarrassing and unnecessary for Verwoerd to make a public issue out of what has been a "gentlemen's agreement" between two countries.

In short the United States finds it expedient (good for big business investments) not to stand on principle, and as far as South Africa is concerned, condones and supports its racist policies (economically with business investments and politically with silence). This fact may not be surprising to SICC people who have time and time again come face to face with the hypocrisy of this government, but what is, if not surprising, very depressing is that the U.S. government has only been allowed to get away with its South African policy because there has not been one substantial voice in this country opposing it. "The Movement" has been almost completely silent, and the very insignificant, mostly ineffective protests which have occurred have been organized by a handful of whites in the North.

Those who were aware of the situation were not the ones who could be expected to act on it, (Whitney Young, Wilkins, etc.). And those of us (mostly SICC-types) who are given to action have never really had access to information about Africa.

Assuming that we are the people who are most capable of generating enough momentum and activity to force the issue on the government - then we've got to do some "homework."

Some suggestions and some things already started:

African Library:

A letter has been sent out by Gwen Robinson (in N.Y.) and myself asking publishers to donate books to us about Africa. The idea is that in the Atlanta office we could set up a room to house these books as they come in. Hopefully a larger percentage of these books will be relevant ones that we are interested in, then the ones that are usually sent down. The library would be for mainly staff use and we could have a librarian and cards so that everyone would get a chance to read the books there. (We already have 1 copy of "The Wretched of the Earth"). The books have already started to come in at a good pace and it looks like it won't be long before we have a substantial library.

Developing African Primers:

Some of us could begin to write simple facts in a form that was easy for people to understand about different African nations, with pictures and drawings (maybe by Frank), so that they would be easy to read. This work would be important because there are virtually no books on Africa for children in this country. We could develop our own, print them ourselves, and distribute them in communities around the country.

SICC African Conference:

This is perhaps the most concrete idea affecting us in the near future, because we can read and read but probably the thing which will effect us most will be personal contact with Africans. Churek Hamilton, at Lincoln University, and myself are planning a small conference for SICC people to be held at Lincoln in the Spring break there. It will only be three or four days, but with 30 SICC people and about 10 Africans as resource people the ratio will allow for an awful lot of contact and concentration. The conference will have cultural, historical, and "movement" aspects, in which we can talk about the independence movements and how they were organized, present liberation movements in countries that aren't yet free, and particular emphasis on South Africa. Perhaps we can have intense

discussion of how we can relate to the South African situation.

African students in the past have faced reprisals for coming south or making contacts with civil rights groups. If this were to happen in connection with us we could publicize it and demand that the government reverse its action.

This would only be the first in a long series of such conferences until we had reached all of the staff and much of the Negro community.

African Trips:

Bob and I will be attending the Organization of African Unity Conference in Accra, Ghana. While we are there we want to try and arrange things so that other SNCC people can make similar trips. There is probably nothing comparable as a learning experience to people actually going to Africa themselves. And it would be good if more and more SNCC people can get to go there. One of the things that we want to do is to follow up on the very good contacts John and Don made on their trip last year.

Personnel:

From talking to various people this is what the Personnel for the project seems to be so far:

Atlanta - Sharon Jackson
Mississippi - Doris Derby
Philadelphia * Fred Meelcy (at Lincoln)
New York - Gwen Robinson and Prathia Hall

Silas Norman is very concerned about the African Project and has done some exploratory work on his own. There are probably a lot of other people who fall in his category.

The people that I named above are those who have a particular interest in the project and who have said that they would like to spend part of their time making contacts and being liaisons with the Africans in this country. Sharon is taking care of the work in the African Library. When I come back (early December) I will spend all of my time working on the project. I will be living in Birmingham and will be in Atlanta on the weekends. I think that with this personnel we can get off to a good start, and that as time goes by other people will want to work on the project full time.

The staff should talk about what they see as the main function of the project. One of the things which I thought was most important was for us to make materials available to the staff in the field - so that people could hold their own workshops. We have made contact with some African students who say that they are willing to come down to the projects in the south and talk to people. In New York we made contact with a South African who heads the Unity Movement of South Africa, Mr. Tabata.

A small group of us had some preliminary talks in Atlanta about the project which I think were very good. At the staff meeting we should discuss some of the questions of "security" which were raised in Atlanta, with regard to the African Project.

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