

MEMO

TO: SNCC STAFF

FROM: JANET JEMOT, BOB PARRIS, DONA RICHARDS, DOUG & TINA HARRIS

RE: "BLACK CONSIIOUSNESS"

Man has constantly searched for his past. For it is his past which he uses as a foundation for his present and future. "Rootlessness" which grows out of a lack of understanding and misinformation "strips him naked" by depriving him of an historical frame of reference that comes out of knowing that antropologists have discovered a "Negroid" skull dating back to 600,000 b.c. in what may have been the "Garden of Eden" in the fertile valleys of Kenya in East Africa. The course of history is an unbroken stream, flowing steadily from obscure or unknow sources in that distant age when the race of mankind was young. The earliest sources of that broadening are to be found in Africa in the fertile valleys of the Nile, Tigris, and Euphrates rivers, and in the Aegean islands off the coast of East Africa. Both Mesopotomana and Egypt enabled themselves to support growing populations by the use of intensive irrigation--an irrigation economy demands intensive social organization as well as technological knowledge. When both civilizations emerged with the invention of writing into the full light of recorded history, about the year 3,000 b.c. they possessed complex urban centers and intricate religious and governmental systems. Most historians accept that the highly developed Egyptian civilization laid the foundations of art, writing, mathematics, engineering, astronomy etc. out of which emerged Greece, and Rome--an extension of the contributions of an African culture whose "Great Pyramid" is considered to be one of the seven wonders of the world. When Octavious Caesar and his armies, bent on conquering North Africa, arrogantly turned over statues as they marched into the capital; he was met by "Candice" the 7th in line of the "Warrior Queens" who had ruled Ethiopa for 2,000 years who removed her "War" veil and had her interpreter tell him that she would not speak to him until he had replaced every statue.

In history there are no sharp breaks. There is no place where one may say; here history changes, here an age ends and another begins. The rise of the Christian church, the spread of Islam, the settling down of the German and Scandivanian peoples in their permanent dwelling places, out of which grew a feudal society and feudal kingdoms on one hand, and a united Catholic Church were the result of the tangled chaos of the barbarian conquests. Meanwhile in Africa, great independent states flourished in affulence with mighty armies that maintained peace. In 1492 when Columbus was re-discovering the new world (Africans had been sailing to the America's for some time--it was no great feat to travel 1600 miles with island stop-offs all along the coasts and most geologists believe that a land bridge existed across the Atlantic) Askia, the "Great" came into power of the mighty Songhay empire--he ruled for 36 years an empire larger than Europe--and whose capital the "golden" city of Timbuctoo--was considered to be a great citadel of higher learning. In Europe the years 1520-1660 saw a transition from the medieval to the modern world. Forces were set in motion to destroy vague remnants of a vague empire and to break

up the universal church into warring sects, the development of modern forms of state governments, the expansion of European commerce throughout the world and the planting of permanent colonies. In 1591 the Moors from North Africa invaded the Mali kingdom. This was significant because the breaking up of the social structures of the west African states of Ghana, Songhay, and Mali, and the internal strife and chaos made the slave trade possible. Just as the dark ages in Europe was ushered in by the chaos and destruction caused by the invading Barbarians, so a divided Africa became prey to the colonist powers who needed her enormous untapped wealth with which to expand her industries. Africans helped to build Liverpool, England and Wall Street, New York. They helped to finance the industrial revolution in England. They helped to clear the forest in America, but they protested every step of the way. Protests began in Africa, where mutinies on ships were common, and continued in America, where revolts were common. There were so many mutinies that a special form of insurance was issued to cover losses arising specifically from insurrections. The great Haitian revolution took place before the slave trade in the north American colonies was in significant operation. The slave registered his protest in other ways than by open revolt, i.e. slowing down work, a calculated misuse of implements which have almost never been recognized as modes of slave protest. It is not necessary here to detail the revolts which became most famous in the south--those of Gabriel in 1800 and of Nat Turner in 1831, in Virginia and the South Carolina uprising led by Denmark Vesey in 1822. The slave trade left a blood stained legacy. During the four centuries the trade was pursued it wrecked the social and economic life of Africa, set tribe against tribe, and kingdom against kingdom. Finally one of Africa's children decided to strike a blow for liberty and his "bastard" country and becomes the first martyr of the American revolution. After the American revolution, many slaves both men and women decided to become the instrument of their own liberation. One slave revolt followed another until there was no question that the slaves wanted to be free. The north desperate to keep the south a tenant farmer for her factories and to maintain her position as middleman and foreign markets was finally forced into war. It is a matter of recorded history that thousands of black men and women provided the balance of power to liberate themselves. The nineteen century freedom was shortlived. In 1870 the 15th amendment guaranteeing the right to vote to all citizens was passed. In 1875 a civil rights bill with a public accommodations clause was passed. In 1876 the reconstruction was betrayed. During the last quarter of the 19th century, lynchings, Jim Crow laws, re-cultivation of racism was vigorously opposed by Afro-americans. Such organizations as the National Association of Colored Men publicly opposed Washington's policies and relentlessly petitioned the national, state, and local governments to stop the "lawlessness." The Invincible sons and Daughters of Commerce initiated a "Buy Black" campaign, and tried to form cooperatives to aide Negroes who wanted to establish their own businesses. The "second abolitionist movement" was started by W.E. Dubois



at Niagara in 1906. Make no mistake Dubois was a giant, in 1911 he said, "The coming world man is colored. For the handful of whites in this world to dream that they can ever inherit the earth and hold the darker millions in perpetual subjection is the wildest of wild dreams. Humanity is the goal of all good, and no single race, whatever its color or deeds, can disinherit...the peoples."

What we must have is a "Black Consciousness" which will destroy the slave mentality of Africa's children. We must discover and understand our "Non-slave" pasts if we are to emerge as normal healthy human beings. Everyday enterprising "corporate" psychologists dream up "instant whiteness" which comes in the form of wigs, bleaching creams, hairstraighteners, the "Black Bourgeoise" and then they diagnose us as being schizoidprenic!!- When we fight becoming these psychologically crippled, rootless, black-faced robots we are accused of becoming black nationalists---a term which has been villinized by the press and those forces who are desperately afraid of the "truth." What we need is a polarization of understanding, an historical perspective, of the various protest movements out of whose womb the present "Freedom Struggle" cries, screams, and whimpers. What we must have is a "Black Consciousness."

Since the first SNCC trip to Africa was made, several people in the organization have talked about the possibility of establishing an African bureau within SNCC. Although this idea has not materialized into an ongoing program, and has along with many other SNCC proposals received only lip service, it is very important, if not mandatory, that we re-examine that idea in light of recent political developments that have a direct bearing on the movement, in general, and upon SNCC in particular. The problem now arises as to how we translate our feelings about the fact that we have brothers and sisters in Africa, and the information that we have into a meaningful program which is relevant to our work here, and to the cry, UHURU, in Africa. I think that the first step was made when 11 Sniggers went to Guinea in '64 and Bob and Dona went to the conference in Accra a few months ago. I feel that we cannot minimize either the political or psychological significance of the fact that by these trips we were, on one level, giving a reality to the idea of there being ties between the movement in this country and in Africa. The second step was made when 15 African nations invited Julian Bond to the UN in order to discuss, and to get information about the whole thing with the Georgia legislature, and expressed support for Julian.

The programmatic possibilities of such a project are limitless. Dona has presented some of these in her paper on an African Bureau. Some of her suggestions include an African-Afro-american newsletter which would contain information about the movement here, about political developments here and abroad which affect the movement here and in Africa. A representative from one of the African missions stated that he could get articles, poems, etc. by movement people here published. Research, needless to say would be very important.

#### AFRICAN CULTURAL PROGRAM

The purpose of an African-Afro-american cultural program is to awaken a positive "Black consciousness" that comes out of knowing one's history dating back to 600,000 b.c. To that end we decided to get together a number of "Black" intellectuals, scholars, writers, historians, poets,

teachers, artists, etc. at a CONFERENCE to be held in Atlanta in "Peoples Hall" the weekend of April 8th or April 15th.

We have also met with some African students--and together we are working out a program whereby they will be able to come south this summer to teach in the "Cultural Program" Some of them will be coming to the conference.

WHAT WE HAVE DONE AND PLANS

We have begun to contact people to speak at the conference. We already have tentative commitments from J A Rogers, a prominent historian who has published his own books such as "Africa's gift to America," "Nature knows no color line and others." John-Henrik Clarke, Associate editor of Freedomways, Director of African-Afro-american Heritage Program at Haryou, writer, historian. Jim Campbell, teacher, consultant to Haryou's Heritage Program, has given lectures at Yale, Harvard, Columbia, etc. We also plan to see people in Boston, Philadelphia, Washington, within the week to try and interest them in including a "cultural program" along with their other activities in their community organizing. The following is a list of research people whom we have or will be contacting.

1. St. Clair Drake  
Prof. Sociology at Roosevelt U in Chicago, has taught in Ghana, and written "Black Metropolis."
2. Richard Moore  
Writer--"New approach to African history and how it relates to our struggle. Owner of the Frederick Douglass store in Harlem.
3. Sterling Stuckey  
Consultant for Encyclopedia Britannica has written "Northern influence on southern freedom movement."
4. Keith Baird  
Lecturer, teacher, consultant Haryou Heritage program.
5. Lerome Bennett  
Senior editor, EBONY magazine, has written several books, Before the Mayflower, deals with Africa before the slave trade, and the racial conflict in America.
6. Chuck Hamilton  
Prof. political science at Lincoln U
7. Nicholas Ayewo  
Prof political science at Maryland U an astute lecturer on the relationship of the Afro-Afro-american movements.