Chicago activists challenge segregation (Chicago Freedom Movement), USA, 1965-1967

U.S. Civil Rights Movement (1950s-1960s)

September 1965 to May 1967

Country: United States
Location City/State/Province: Chicago, Illinois
Location Description: The SCLC chose to target Chicago due to high levels of institutionalized discrimination, particularly in housing.

Goals:
Desegregation of housing and schools in Chicago. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr often referred to this as an "opening" of the city. For a list of the 1966 demands Dr. Martin Luther King Junior nailed to Chicago City Hall see http://www.luc.edu/curl/cfm40/issue1.html

Methods

Methods in 1st segment:

- 003. Declarations by organizations and institutions
- 009. Leaflets, pamphlets, and books
- 038. Marches
- 048. Protest meetings

Methods in 2nd segment:

- 038. Marches
- 048. Protest meetings
- 073. Policy of austerity
  January, 1966 Dr. Martin Luther King Junior moves into a decrepit apartment on the West Side of Chicago to protest racially segregated slums in the city.

Methods in 3rd segment:

- 001. Public speeches
- 003. Declarations by organizations and institutions
- 006. Group or mass petitions
- 037. Singing
- 038. Marches
- 047. Assemblies of protest or support
- 063. Social disobedience

Methods in 4th segment:

- 038. Marches
  - September march on Cicero was led by CORE and was not approved by Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.
  - Violence erupted between white residents and protesters.
- 063. Social disobedience

Methods in 5th segment:

- 009. Leaflets, pamphlets, and books
  - SCLC activists led by Hosea Williams organize a get-out-the-vote campaign in Chicago

Methods in 6th segment:

- 003. Declarations by organizations and institutions
- 015. Group lobbying

Classifications

Classification:
Change
Cluster:
Democracy
Economic Justice
Human Rights

Group characterization:

- Chicago community members
- church groups

Leaders, partners, allies, elites

Leaders:
Martin Luther King Junior, Al Raby

Partners:

External allies:
Not known

Involvement of social elites:
Not known
Joining/exiting order of social groups

Groups in 1st Segment:

- American Friends Service Committee
- CCCO
- Chicago Catholic Interracial Council
- Chicago NAACP
- Chicago Urban League
- Congress of Racial Equality
- SCLC
- The Woodlawn Organizaation

Groups in 2nd Segment:

- Operation Breadbasket Chicago Chapter organized under Jesse Jackson

Groups in 3rd Segment:
Groups in 4th Segment:
Groups in 5th Segment:
Groups in 6th Segment:

Additional notes on joining/exiting order:
It is unclear whether or not CORE’s participation in the Cicero march in segment 4 led to their exit from the movement.

Segment Length: 4 months; 6th segment is 1 month in order to be inclusive

Opponent, Opponent Responses, and Violence

Opponents:
City of Chicago, Real Estate Board in Chicago, Mayor Richard J. Daley

Nonviolent responses of opponent:
None known

Campaigner violence:
During the September march in the white neighborhood of Cicero, some protesters are known to have responded violently to the crowds attacking them.

Repressive Violence:
White residents and observers threw rocks, bricks, and other debris at protesters during almost every march, particularly when the SCLC and CCCO began targeting non-integrated, middle class, white neighborhoods in housing equality protests.

Success Outcome

Success in achieving specific demands/goals:
3 points out of 6 points

Survival:
1 point out of 1 points

Growth:
2 points out of 3 points

Notes on outcomes:
Though Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. declared no demonstrations necessary after the Chicago Leadership Council for
Metropolitan Open Communities launched “Project Good Neighbor” in May 1967, tangible success in desegregating housing in Chicago was difficult to measure and appears limited.

In 1962, in response to growing recognition of de facto segregation of public schools and housing availability, the Coordinating Council of Community Organizations (CCCO) was founded in Chicago. This council included the Chicago Urban League, the Chicago NAACP, and the Woodlawn Organization. CCCO elected Albert (Al) Raby, a local teacher, to organize and convene the group. In 1965, Mr. Raby invited Dr. Martin Luther King Jr and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) to tour Chicago and witness the spatial segregation of this northern city.

In July of 1965, the SCLC and the CCCO marched together on Chicago’s City Hall, demanding a more open city for African Americans. In September 1965 the SCLC formally announced the intent to target Chicago for their next campaign. Together with the CCCO, the SCLC began the Chicago Freedom Movement.

SCLC staffers, with James Bevel and other Chicago civil rights activists, began organizing in Chicago’s West Side. At this time the West Side was an incredibly poor and intensely racially segregated area.

In January of 1966 the SCLC and CCCO formally activated the Chicago Freedom Movement. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr moved into a dilapidated apartment in the West Side to emphasize his commitment to end slums in Chicago. In February 1966, Reverend Jesse Jackson organized a Chicago branch of Operation Breadbasket, and aligned with the Chicago Freedom Movement.

Throughout this time the CCCO and SCLC hosted a number of marches through African American neighborhoods, seeking to spread awareness of the horrendous housing discrepancies. In the summer of 1966 CCCO and SCLC organizers decided to increase visibility of the movement, and specifically target housing discrimination.

On July 10, 1966 the SCLC and CCCO held a huge rally at Chicago’s Soldier Field. Approximately 35,000 activists and community members were in attendance. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. spoke and appealed to activists to remain nonviolent. Floyd McKissick, a chief proponent of black power and president of the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE), asserted that CORE supported the Chicago Freedom Movement’s decision on that point.

After the rally, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. led a group of approximately 5,000 people to the Chicago City Hall where he posted a list of demands to make Chicago a more open city for African Americans. His demands included a call to cease discrimination in mortgage and loan assessment, and to invest in improving public housing. (A list of all demands can be found here: [http://www.luc.edu/curl/cfm40/issue1.html](http://www.luc.edu/curl/cfm40/issue1.html) )

During this time the SCLC and CCCO chose to hold more marches in all-white neighborhoods. White residents were resistant to protesters and violence ensued. During a march of 200 civil rights protesters in the white community of South Deering on August 21, 1966 some 1,500 white residents lined the streets. Protesters threw bricks, stones, bottles, and obscenities at protesters. A police force of approximately 450 sought to keep order and arrested some 16 white residents. Shortly after the South Deering march, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr addressed a group of students and identified Cicero, Chicago as the SCLC and CCCO’s next sight for a march. He announced that “Not only are we going to walk in Cicero, we’re going to work in Cicero and we’re going to live in Cicero.” Cicero, a community of approximately 70,000 white middle class residents, had been targeted as a march site due to incredible violence that erupted there in 1951 when an African American bus driver attempted to buy an apartment.

Fearing the possibility of violence, Christy S. Berkes, the town attorney of Cicero sent messages to civil rights leaders and legislators with a desire to meet before the planned march. Though by some accounts King was originally resistant to the meeting, a summit between the mayor, governor, legislators, and civil rights leaders was held on August 26, 1966.

At the August 26, 1966, meeting the civil rights leaders and local politicians arranged the Summit Agreement. King agreed to
halt marches into all-white neighborhoods and to postpone indefinitely the planned march in Cicero. In exchange, the city agreed to supply far-reaching guarantees for open housing for African Americans. Governor Otto Kerner announced that he had canceled plans to mobilize the Illinois National Guard for the Cicero march.

Despite Dr. Martin Luther King Jr’s appeal to cease marching, a group of about 1,000 activists proceeded to march on Cicero over Labor Day Weekend in September 1966. The march was formally led by CORE. White residents again threw debris and attacked protesters. Some protesters responded violently. Governor Kerner called in 2,250 National Guardsmen. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. was said to be disgusted by the violence.

Following the September violence, action by the SCLC and CCCO diminished. Notably, SCLC activist Hosea Williams headed a get-out-the-vote campaign in January 1967.

In May 1967 the Leadership Council for Metropolitan Open Communities, a product of the August 26 Summit Agreement, launched “Project: Good Neighbor,” a massive fair housing education campaign. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr declared that no more demonstrations were necessary and the SCLC and CCCO formally ended the Chicago Freedom Movement. This policy had incomplete success, and much spatial housing segregation remained.

Research Notes

Influences:

The CCCO was influenced by the increasing success of SCLC in drawing media attention and government action to the greatest examples of segregation in the South. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. was influenced by the nonviolent teachings of Gandhi. (1)

Sources:


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