

SCLC's Chicago Plan

Following the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965, Martin Luther King Jr. and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) targeted the chronic economic problems African Americans faced after decades of limited access to equal education, employment opportunities, and housing.

Beginning in 1915, hundreds of thousands of African Americans migrated north to urban centers in search of a better life. By moving, they escaped the Jim Crow laws and *de jure* (by law) segregation of the South, but the struggle for equality moved with them. In cities like Chicago, more subtle forms of discrimination and *de facto* (in fact) segregation isolated African Americans from the very opportunities they sought.

Between the 1920's and the 1960's, Chicago's black population surged, and with the increase in population came an increase in the demand for affordable housing. The Chicago Housing Authority built subsidized housing, but was criticized for concentrating the black population in an eight-square-mile overcrowded community of housing towers (considered slums) on Chicago's South side. With limited access to transportation and employment, African Americans were relegated to low-paying jobs at best and sub-standard housing conditions. In the 1940's, an effort to integrate Chicago's neighborhoods ended when white resistance triggered racial violence.

By 1966, housing conditions for Chicago's black community prompted Dorothy Gautreaux and 40,000 African Americans to file a class-action lawsuit against the Chicago Housing Authority, arguing that the CHA intentionally violated the Civil Rights Act by practicing discrimination in federally funded housing. The American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) defended the plaintiffs.

That same year, Martin Luther King Jr. and the SCLC launched the Chicago Freedom Movement. King knew that exposing discrimination in Chicago could draw national attention to the problems and demands of African Americans. Together with a local civil rights organization, the Coordinating Council of Community Organizations (CCCCO), King and the SCLC staged marches and demonstrations to mobilize the black community and articulate the goals of the movement. On July 10, 1966, 5,000 people marched to Chicago City Hall. King posted eleven demands, including construction of public housing outside of the black ghetto, an end to discriminatory hiring practices, and an end to real estate agents selling property not available to all races.

On August 5, during a march through southwest Chicago to protest the lack of adequate housing for African-Americans, a mob of 5,000 whites attacked the demonstrators. The march ended in violence, fueling a rising black militancy. Race riots, fires, and vandalism engulfed the city. Three weeks later, Mayor Daley and city officials agreed to strengthen and enforce regulations prohibiting

discrimination in housing. The city agreed to seek public housing sites and banks agreed to offer housing loans to black and white customers on an equal basis. However, city leaders were not legally compelled to enforce the agreement, and many civil rights activists considered it a failure.

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