

As a result of Julian Bond's unseating, SNCC has formed an Atlanta Project. Working within Atlanta's black community, the Atlanta Project is being designed to stimulate people to talk about issues and problems, and to organize themselves around these issues. Essentially, it is the next step after Julian Bond's initial campaign for office.

To date, the Atlanta Project has begun action against a notoriously powerful slumlord in the Markham Street area and directed Julian Bond's second campaign for office, which was seen as a vote of confidence for Julian and a vote protesting the House action on January 10th.

The Atlanta Project is the first time SNCC has begun working seriously within a southern urban ghetto. The decision on SNCC's part to move into Atlanta will have significance for other southern cities where there has been little or no "movement" up until now. Cities such as Memphis, Nashville, New Orleans, Knoxville, Greenville, S.C., Montgomery and Birmingham will all begin to benefit from what is done and what is learned in Atlanta.

Already the Atlanta Project is generating pressure of a sort not experienced before in a southern city. It represents just another effort on the part of SNCC to return to local politics, an effort which began with the formation of the Freedom Democratic Party in the summer of 1964, which was organized on a state-wide basis, and has continued in Alabama as county political parties are being formed in the winter and spring of 1966.

Reprinted below are affidavits which reveal some of the conditions which the Atlanta Project is aimed at correcting:

My name is Elotse Daniel, and I live on 412 Markham Street, Markham Street Hotel. I am 13 years old.

We have been living in the hotel two and a half years. My mother, father, brother, and sister live there with me. George Daniel, my father, is 45. My mother, Grace Daniel, is 43. My sister Linda is 15 and my brother Mark is 8. We pay \$8 a week for rent.

My father works part time. He earns about \$40 a week. Some days he don't cause of the weather being bad. My mother's sick. She can't work. She's been sick for two years. She is going to have an operation pretty soon. My mother gets welfare checks. She gets \$79.80 a month. Linda, Mark, and I are in school.

We have one room, he should pay us for staying there. We have a wood heater. Its just like no heat though. There is a bathroom, but it's so nasty don't hardly nobody use it. One other apartment with 6 people are suppose to use it. The water is cut off. The e is no wash basin. The e is a nasty bathroom. Paper and clothes and everything n it. Mary Alice Edwards is the on one who used it. She used it once and someone called the Health Department, and they made her report to the Health Department. They tested her blood and everything. They thought she might have a disease. They just wanted to be sure. They called my sister and I and they said they were glad to see we were healthy. They said our place wasn't decent enough for a rat to live in even though they do. It's their house. The rats are almost bigger than my doll.

The toilet hasn't worked since we've been there. There is no water in the bathroom. We use to go to the neighbor for water until her water was cut off two weeks ago. Now we get it from Mrs. Anne, who lives in a house in back of the Hotel. We use the bucket for a toilet. We dumpt the bucket in the toilet, then we pour a lot of water in. Sometimes it goes down and sometimes it doesn't.

We have holes in the floor, holes in the windows and holes in the door. When it rains the water comes under the door like a river and you have to mop it up.

We have no gas.

The wind blows in ever where it can. Last night a rat knawed through the cover and woke me up biting my ear. My mother's been bitten on the leg. We don't have an icebox to put food in and we put it under the metal tub, but there is some kind of way the rats get it and rip it open. They tear holes in the clothes at night. When it is quiet in the room they come out and run around. We've been having trouble with ants and roaches but I ain't never seen no roaches.

Joe Shaffer told me and my mother never to let civil rights workers in our house. He calls my mother sister. He said if Mr. Black comes near our door to have him locked up and call the police. He told us if we talk to Mr. Black or the other people he would put us out of doors.

My name is Jacqueline Louise Dewberry. I am seventeen years old and live at 360 Foundry Street, rear apartment number four. I live with Mrs. Josephine Turner, who is thirty-one, and my baby, who is eighteen months old. I don't work, but I get fifteen dollars from my father every week. Around the end of September of last year, I went down to try to get welfare. They asked me a lot of questions and told me that if I wasn't telling the truth, I would go to jail. That first time, they gave me a check for eight dollars and forty-five cents, but since then I haven't gotten any more checks. Every time I go down there, they tell me: "Well, you go back home, Miss Dewberry, and we'll send someone over to talk to you." But nobody ever comes.

I moved into 360 Foundry Street on June 12, 1965. We live in two rooms and pay twenty-five dollars a month, but hardly get anything for our money. We don't have any plumbing. The toilet is inside, but the wall has holes and window isn't right; the wind comes in through it. Lots of the wal's have holes in them. There are holes at the foot and the head of the bed. The ceiling is okay, but the floors are rotten. The kitchen floor has holes, and the floor in the front room is so rotten that it's unsafe. I'm afraid that it might cave in if somebody walks heavy on it. The window pane in the front room is too small, and the window in the kitchen doesn't close all the way. When it's cold, the wind and cold come in through the windows and the holes in the floor. You can't keep the apartment warm.

My house is own by Joe Shaffer. We lived in other houses owned by him. Once before, about seven years ago, he put us out of a house on Northside in the middle of winter. That house is torn down now. If you ever get late with the rent, he keeps coming around and saying he's going to put you out. Sometimes he gets a warrant that says he's going to evict you in three days. After that, he'll come in any time he wants, just like nobody lives there anymore, but you still have three days.

I don't think we should have to pay rent for that kind of house. In the winter it gets so cold that my bab, David Bernard Dewberry, got sick and died. He was born on September 1, 1965. After he was born, there was a broken window in the room he slept in; Sheaff r took about two weeks to fix it, but we had told him about it onths before. So my baby got sick and I took him to Grady. They said he just had a cold and told me to use a vaporizer. But when I took him home, he kept getting sicker and skinnier. I took him back to Grady, and they said it was just a cold. He died on December 27, and they told me he died of pneumonia. I feel he got sick because of the house. There are holes in the floor, cracks up under the building, and all. You couldn't keep too much heat in. But Shaeffer never did anything about

it, and so my bab got sick, and he died.

Shaeffer, he talks nice to people, until they're late with their rent. And he doesn't fix up his houses. I tried to get into public housing, but they say I'm not old enough. I think Shaeffer should be locked up because people keep getting sick and dying in his houses.

My name is Willie Williams. I am 40 years old, and live at 42 Markham Street, SW. I rent from Joe Shaffer. I pay \$17 a week. He never gives me a receipt. I asked him for one and he said he'd come directly and give it to me, but he never did and I just quit asking. I rent three rooms.

I did maintenance for Schaeffer and he paid me \$50 a week. I quit January 31st when he locked up Mr. Black. My wife and three kids and I live in the apartment. Lisa Williams, my wife is 47. Willie Jr. is 5, Renay is 2 and Sammy is 13 months old.

The on y heat we have is a fireplace we burn wood and coal in. It is about freezing. I spend about \$9 a week for wood and coal. We have no hot water. I fixed it up myself so the water wouldn't freeze. Mr. Schaeffer didn't pay me for it. I spent \$20 fixing up. People tote water from my house around the neighborhood all day. There is a bad window in the bathroom. The sash won't fit and a lot of wind comes in. There are holes in the floor in every room. The plaster is falling. The windows were all broken out when I moved in but they are good now cause I did my own repair work. Schaeffer furnished the window panes but he never paid me. I asked him to pay me and he just said he would furnish the rest of the materials if I need any more.

Schaeffer pays for the electricity and water. I cook on a wood stove. I don't have any kind of lease.

Rain leaks into the house in two of the rooms. Wind blows in too. The house was condemned February 2 or 3rd.

Before I lived here I lived at 214 Northside Dr. That was much better. I paid \$50 a month for it. It burned down and that is why I moved. I didn't rent that from Schaeffer.

I went through 6 years of school. I just do construction work.

Schaeffer cashes the welfare checks for two ladies who live next door to me.

Schaeffer told me to keep civil rights workers away from my property, to not let them come in my house.

When I asked Schaeffer to make repairs, he said "Go to work as you is, why don't you do it?"

My name is Robert Lee Edwards and I am twenty-three years old. I live in two rooms at 413 Markham Street with my sisters, Mary Alice Edwards, 19, Pamela Denise Edwards, 8, Christine Edwards, 6; my brothers, Wyman Lee Edwards, 16, Michael Lee Edwards, 10; my nephew, James Lamar Edwards, 15 months, and my mother, Georgia Edwards. We all live in two rooms (except when it gets cold and one room you can't stay in, it's so cold) and we pay \$10 rent a week. I'm the only one that works. I work at Southern Hide Company and earn about \$55 a week. My mother used to work at Howard Johnson's, but she got burned badly there and she can't work anymore. She never got anything from them for the burn.

In the winter, it gets real cold and the coal and wood heater hardly keep the place warm. We have to wear coats. When it rains, the water leaks up under the windows and down from the people who

live above us. The cold comes in from the holes in the floor. Last winter, my nephew got double-pneumonia. I think it was partly because it was so cold in there.

We have a bathroom in the hall. The other people in the apartments on the first floor share it with us. There are six apartments. The toilet works, sometimes, but you can't use the bathtub because it leaks. There's plaster falling off the walls (like in our apartment); the windows are out, there are roaches, and rats, and everything else coming in to use the bathroom. Sometimes they use the bathtub instead of the toilet. The door is torn down half-way so it doesn't shut right. One day, I had to kill a snake in there. In my apartment there are rats and roaches too. The floor has holes and it is partly rotten. I'm afraid it will fall in. The windows are fallen out and you can't close our door. The fire in the heater or the fireplace smokes up the whole room. You can't close the front door to the building. The electricity was turned on about Wednesday of this week. Before, the Fire Department inspector said to shut it off because it might start a fire.

Shaffer once came to our apartment and told my mother not to let Hector Black come to visit her.

I think the building should be torn down because it is so bad. We pay too much for that place, and I don't make that much. Sometimes I have to work over seventy hours a week. It would be better if we could get our own apartment, because the place the city would find for us wouldn't be any better. I tried to find another place, but couldn't find anything better. Shaffer is robbing the people because he charges so much for those real bad places. I would like to bring my friends over to meet my family sometimes, but I can't. I'm too ashamed of where I live.

These affidavits come from people living in a roughly five square block area almost in the heart of Atlanta, in the shadow of the city's modern, glistening skyscrapers. The area, called the "Markham Street Area" after the street where most of the movement to-date has centered, forms a small enclave, set off by major thorough-fares. Almost all the houses in the area are owned by a single landlord, Joe Shaffer.

Shaffer's father made his start in the area with a small grocery store many years ago. Gradually he and his son began buying up the surrounding property for practically nothing (most of the houses Shaffer owns are valued at less than \$1000). Today the son, Joe Shaffer, owns not only most of the property in the Markham Street Area, but extensive slum properties in several other parts of the city.

Shaffer makes exorbitant profits by renting houses with five or six rooms to three, four, and even five families and collecting \$20 to \$40 a month from each. In this way he collects as much as \$200 a month from a house that would normally rent for no more than \$70. And he almost never makes any repairs on his houses. All this is done in direct violation of the city's housing laws which, inadequate as they are, provide certain minimum requirements for dwelling units. (For example, that no more than two families can share one bathroom.)

Worse still, Shaffer has established a plantation-like system in which he acts as landlord, employer, grocer, creditor, sheriff, judge and jury over the people who live on his property. He cashes their welfare checks (taking out whatever he thinks is owed him); controls their credit (he has been known to lend money at 50% interest); gives them work at oft-times (at abysmally low wages); and above all determines whether they will

have a roof over their heads (many people are convinced that if they clash with Shaffer they will have no place to live). He is seen in the area at five in the morning and sometimes as late as mid-night collecting rent or debts; and on more than one occasion he has evicted people in the middle of the night.

To many of the people who are caught in his money-making web, Shaffer appears as the embodiment of the law. Those who have recently become involved in the movement are convinced that the housing inspectors and county marshalls are on his payroll. And it is even suspected that he has the power to write out his own eviction warrants. At any rate, it is clear that he has been able to operate all these years with complete immunity from the law.

Recently Shaffer has been going house to house warning his tenants that if they have anything to do with civil rights workers he would have them put out into the street. Often these threats work. Most of the people in the area have been living in fear of Shaffer for years. They have never known any legal relief from his rule; they have never known that his power could be restrained.

But a movement has begun in the area. As a result of a severe cold wave which hit Atlanta in late January, workers from SNCC and members of the Vine City Council, a grass roots organization in another poor section of Julian Bond's 136th district, moved into the area to distribute blankets and to provide any other kind of immediate relief that they could. One of the members of the Vine City Council was arrested by Shaffer for trespassing. This incident triggered off a protest demonstration the following day. Reverend M.L. King jr. and James Forman visited the area and publicly expressed their outrage at the conditions they found. The next day, housing inspectors came into the area and condemned the houses which had been picketed and the Markham Street Area became known throughout the city.

During the next few days, a large group of the residents of the area began a series of nightly meetings. By the end of the week the people decided to go on a rent strike. A delegation went to City Hall where they met the Mayor and presented him with a petition calling for his public support of their rent strike. Their only response from the Mayor was that "rent strikes were not in the American Way."

At the moment, several families are facing evictions. Legal efforts are being made to stay the evictions, but it is expected that they will be unsuccessful. Some of the people on strike have begun to talk about moving into tents set up on federal property in the event they get thrown out of their present houses. Most important, those who have become involved in the movement feel free from Shaffer's and determined to carry out the fight against him until the entire community is liberated.

In addition, the pressure of the movement in the Markham Street Area has had city-wide effects. Within a week or so of the first picket line in the area, the city's two major newspapers, the Constitution and Journal were acknowledging that slums were a major problem in Atlanta (something of a discovery for them) and a Negro legislator had introduced a slum clearance bill in the State Legislature.

Among the project staff, discussion has begun of launching a city-wide tenants rights movement to assault the immense powers of the city's landlords. The campaign would be directed against the municipal government with the objective of getting tougher laws against landlords and more adequate enforcement.

Finally, it is expected that the housing battle will have a significant influence on the elections to the State Legislature this Fall.

PROSPECTUS FOR AN ATLANTA PROJECT

The startling ouster of Julian Bond from his duly elected seat in the state legislature has dramatized the urgent importance of SNCC intensifying its involvement in the major urban centers in the South and especially in Atlanta.

Political expediency of the seven other Negro assemblymen in this whole affair suggests that unless SNCC steps up its political activity in Atlanta, the benefits of years of struggle may well fall to the politically ambitious and the ward hack.

Time is very short. Atlanta is the first city in the South where Negroes have achieved a significant breakthrough in political representation. It may become the testing ground for the future course of politics in the south.

The Supreme Court's one man, one vote decision makes possible profound changes in the political life of the South. Georgia is the first state in the south to reapportion its legislature. In the next year or so the other southern states will be forced to reapportion their legislatures. Georgia then can set the tone for so much that happens in other states.

It is therefore critical that SNCC mount a major political program in Atlanta, a program which will bring community people together to discuss basic problems and to see common solutions, a program which can enable community people to gain a significant measure of control over the public decisions which affect their lives. If this is not done there can be little doubt that Southern Negro communities like that in Atlanta will succumb to the fate of most of the Northern ghettos: a welfare and patronage system will be established and the new voting power of Negroes will work to the benefit of a small few. In Atlanta, this direction is already well advanced and the small established Negro leadership is now working rapidly to solidify still further its political control.

However, the controversy surrounding Julian Bond, his strong stand based on moral conviction, opens the possibility of developing an alternative political model to the conventional politicians. It raises a symbol of a new type of political representation not only in the South, but the entire nation. It raises a symbol of a politics of youth and integrity. It strengthens the possibility of introducing civil rights and morality into politics where as many say it does not belong.

How often have we heard the cynics who say that politics has rules and if you seek membership you must play according to these rules? But our experience suggests that this is the argument of the politically ambitious and not of the representative who is sincerely committed to the aspirations of his constituency. Julian Bond suggests the symbol of a humanitarian politics, a politics based on principle, a politics identified with and grounded in the hopes and needs of the very poor.

The Atlanta Project is based on still another promising possibility because Atlanta poses a new situation for the Southern civil rights movement.

For the first time, it has become possible in the South to shift the movement's focus away from the federal government as major agent of change.

Systematic intimidation is not a problem in Atlanta. Negroes in fact already have made a major breakthrough in political representation.

As a result the emphasis can now be directed to achieving a real voice over the conduct of local government - on the municipal, county and state levels. The State Assembly district and the municipal ward are small and politically viable units in which the possibility of grass-roots expression is in reality much greater than it is in the federal government. It is on this level that we suspect politics can be made most relevant to the ordinary citizen and as a result more susceptible to democratic control.

The Atlant program then s more than one of voter registration - the majority of Atlanta Negroes are already registered. It is a program of political organ zation and education. It is a program to demonstrate to ever the poorest person in the Negro community that politids holds out the possibility of achieving human dignity and economic justice.

The project has already selected a number of as-embly districts and municipal wards in which it will concentrate its efforts. Through house to house canvassing, block organization, small political education workshops, and the establishment of a new community newspaper - and perhaps eventually, even a small community radio station (citizens band) the Atlanta staff will attempt to raise the issues of segregated and slum housing, inadequate medical care, overcrowded and inadequate education, low wages, job discrimination, punitive welfare relief, and even the war in Vietnam. Together, with community p-ople it wil' explore the various channels for the political solution of the basic problems which affect their lives. The Atlanta Project will work to break down the mystery surrounding the workings of governmental machinery and to overcome the fear which most Southern black people and especially those who are poor feel toward established political authority. Workshops and the newspaper, for instance, will discuss in detail, the operation and powers of various agencies, departments, and boards of municipal, county, and state government.

Staff workers will try to encourage every possible contact between community people and government officials, always drawing the connection between immediate problems and those who are politically responsible. Wherever possible, the project will support action programs - picketing, sit-ins, rent strikes, and boycotts - by community peo le. But the primary emphasis will be to work for the emergence of a series of political candidates of Julian Bond's caliber and integrity in the many important state and county elections this fall.

PROJECTED BUDGET FOR THE ATLANTA PROJECT

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|--|---------------------------------|--------------|
| Subsistence for 20 workers (\$20/week for 12 mths) | | \$20,800 |
| Office rent (4 offices @ \$50/month for 12 mths) | | 2,400 |
| Telephone (4 telephones @ \$30/month for 12 mths) | | 1,440 |
| Gas and Elec. (\$20/month for each office for 12 mths) | | 960 |
| Auto gas (\$100/month for 12 months) | | 1,200 |
| Paper (\$150/month for 12 months) | | 1,800 |
| Equipment: | | |
| | 16 mm film projector | \$300 |
| | Slide projector | 100 |
| | Stenorette | 200 |
| | 3 sound trucks (@ \$100) | 300 |
| | 2 mimeo machines (@ \$200) | 400 |
| | 3 typewriters (@ \$100) | <u>300</u> |
| | | 1,600 |
| Office furniture: | | |
| | 6 desks (\$50 each) | \$300 |
| | 4 sofas (\$50 each) | 200 |
| | 4 file cabinets (\$75 each) | 300 |
| | 4 conference tables (\$50 each) | 200 |
| | 40 chairs (\$6 each) | <u>240</u> |
| | | 1,240 |
| Food and petty cash (\$40/week for 12 months) | | <u>2,080</u> |
| | TOTAL | \$33,520.00 |
| *Looking toward the political campaigns this summer, it would be of great benefit to our efforts to have a fund for radio and t.v. spots ... | | \$ 5,000.00 |

**We are also investigating the possibility of establishing a neighborhood radio station operating on a citizen band. While not nearly the expense of an F.M. or A.M. station, this project wil' probably require a substantial capital outlay.