

STUDENT NONVIOLENT COORDINATING COMMITTEE
8 1/2 Raymond Street NW
Atlanta, Georgia

PROPOSAL FOR
A DOCUMENTARY PROGRAM IN PHOTOGRAPHY

INTRODUCTION: It is a surprising fact in this age of instant communication that the process of social change going on in the South today is not really being recorded. Beyond the standard news coverage of scenes of violence, an occasional television documentary, a book or magazine article, there has been no comprehensive attempt to register the real images of change--to fix in photographs and print a way of life that has remained stable for more than a century and is now rapidly dissolving.

Such a record would be of incalculable value to future generations, not to mention the perspective and understanding it might bring to contemporary Americans trying to solve the imponderable problems of race.

In the absence of any serious effort at documentation, the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee is undertaking a pilot project in photography that will go far beyond the immediate needs of the organization. The project will attempt to document the struggle of Negroes for civil rights in the South, and to record the effects of segregation on both whites and Negroes. In its broadest conception, the project will attempt to record the manner of life that is southern before it changes beyond all recognition.

The documentary project will coordinate closely with SNCC's well established research program. The entire structure of southern life will be reviewed and a list made of those particular aspects which may best be revealed through photographs. Here are some examples of the type of essays that may be undertaken:

1. A portrait of Negro family life in the South done through a series of intimate documentary essays on Negroes living under different conditions in different parts of the South. Every attempt would be made to avoid the sensational in favor of a painstaking study of life as it exists.

2. The same approach to lower income white families. In both cases, SNCC would send a photographer to live for several weeks with a family, to become as much as possible a part of the fabric of their lives and to photograph them exactly as he sees them.

3. A documentary on labor conditions in the South-- automation in farming, patterns of unemployment, the effects of industrialization, unions, etc.

4. An essay on a Negro family moving North, starting in their home community in Mississippi, and following them into a ghetto community in Chicago, Philadelphia or Detroit. The photographer would follow in their faces and actions the anxious search for a place to live, a job, a place on the relief rolls, the uprooting of family patterns that occurs when a Negro family is forced to migrate.

It is our hope, when the documentary project has proved its worth, that it will be merged with efforts already under

their necks and living under conditions of hardship in order to complete their assignments. They must, moreover, be men who see supremely well--and have the insight to interpret and understand the events that unfold before their cameras.

This is a big order. It demands a great deal more than mere technical proficiency from those who undertake it. It requires that they become visually expressive, emotionally lucid individuals totally committed to a professional as well as a social ideal; that they learn the elements of the craft of communication so thoroughly that the images they produce will have significance long after the struggle for civil rights has passed into our history books.

In keeping with SNCC policy, all photographers associated with the program will be paid a forty dollar per week subsistence wage, out of which they must provide their food and lodging. Additional expense money for travel and photographic materials will be provided.

The training program will be no academic exercise in photography. The classrooms will be the fields of Mississippi, Alabama, Louisiana and Georgia. The students will be asked to perform their assignments under the most arduous of conditions. Hardship and commitment will play an important role in developing exceptional photographers, but field training will be supplemented by a carefully worked out course of visual and technical instruction.

Photographers who receive their training in the SNCC documentary project will be thoroughly qualified to move on to responsible jobs in the communications field. They will

be able to photograph and function visually under adverse conditions. They will understand the dynamics of a picture story sequence and have the editorial knowledge to translate a given action into a meaningful series of photographs. Moreover, their training will take place in the midst of a social revolution--a period of great significance in our national history. It will test their strength, resolution, and integrity as no academic program could ever do. The men who emerge from such an experience may well have a profound effect on the whole medium of picture communication. Such was the experience of that remarkable team of Farm Security Administration photographers who recorded the bitter struggles of dust bowl farmers during the thirties. The development of magazine photojournalism during the following decade reflected in large measure the new vision they brought to photography. One of those photographers, the only Negro in the FSA project, is among the top ten photographers in the nation today. His name is Gordon Parks.

The training program should not be looked upon as a formal course conducted by the project director for the photographers, but rather as a mutual searching in which everyone participates. The teaching and learning will be done by all. Here is a rough outline of some of the specific steps that will be taken.

The basis of the teaching program will be intensive analysis of actual assignments. Each photographer will study his own work with three goals in mind--to improve his picture vision, to expand his technical competence, and to broaden his understanding of the picture story as a form of communication.

Picture vision: Photographers will practice specific exercises designed to develop habits of concentration and visual awareness until they can enter a state of mind where they see more, and thus photograph more, perceptively than normally.

The cornerstone of this study will be the photographer's own work. In the darkroom he will learn the art of printing in order to become intimate with his work in a way that does not happen when other people print from his negatives. Under the guidance of the project director, he will spend long hours contemplating and analyzing his best photographs, seeking to develop a sense of form and content so ingrained that it will function intuitively when he has a camera in his hands.

Once a month, the entire photographic staff will gather in Atlanta to analyze the month's work, criticize each other's photographs and plan future assignments. The project will invite outstanding teachers, editors and photographers to conduct seminars in their special areas of competence.

Technical proficiency: Technique is always an adjunct, never a substitute for inspired seeing. It will always be discussed in the context of the whole act of making a photograph. Photographers will learn the Zone System of exposure, not only because it gives them greater technical control over their medium but because in the process they become more aware of tonal values in their photographs.

Special attention will be given to the technical problems attendant on photographing in a hostile environment--use of long lenses, infra-red photography, concealed cameras, etc.

Understanding the picture story: It is not enough to photograph with clarity and emotional power. The SNCC documentary project will be organized around coherent groups of photographs--extended picture essays which depend upon relationships between photographs to communicate meaning. The editorial understanding necessary to photograph with a coherent theme in mind will be an important part of the education of SNCC photographers.

The project director and the photographer will analyze each assignment in terms of: what the potential of each situation was; pictures the photographer missed and ways he might have improved the ones he got; unusual elements in the story that might be used interpretively. Typical story situations will be analyzed visually and the photographer will practice mentally translating ideas into pictures. For each assignment, a shooting script will be prepared in advance. In the field, the photographer will keep in constant touch with the project director and proofs of his daily shooting will be mailed to him so he may evaluate the story as it develops.

In addition to training project photographers, the director will give technical guidance in photography to ten SNCC field secretaries, the most promising of whom may be recruited for the project.

THE BUDGET: When the project was discussed before the American Society of Magazine Photographers a few weeks ago, individual photographers responded with gifts of equipment and money totalling nearly a thousand

dollars. Promises of more equipment, money and significant trade discounts have been given, and a number of leading photographers have indicated their interest in taking part in the educational aspects of the projects. Nevertheless, the project will have to depend for its main support upon foundation grants.

THE BUDGET

ESTABLISHMENT OF OPERATION

Purchase of equipment: TOTAL: \$4,640

for darkroom:

\$350	used Pace or Bessler dryer
\$75	enlarging lenses
\$100	trays, timer, tanks, reels, etc.
\$100	dehumidifier
\$75	dry mount press
<u>\$700</u>	TOTAL

camera equipment:

\$600	6 Nikon F camera bodies and 6 Nikor lenses
\$180	3 strobe units (100W/sec)
\$240	6 light meters
\$200	accessories
\$200	10 inexpensive cameras for field personnel
\$300	traveling field lab, with Durst enlarger in kit
<u>\$1720</u>	TOTAL

office equipment:

\$240	4 file cabinets
\$350	typewriter
\$500	2 desks
\$180	4 office chairs
\$60	4 folding chairs
\$175	light table
\$60	2 lamps
\$80	metal storage cabinet
<u>\$75</u>	misc. (stapler, pencil sharpener, etc.)
<u>\$1720</u>	TOTAL

construction of facility:

\$150	carpentry
\$100	plumbing
<u>\$250</u>	lumber and other materials
<u>\$500</u>	TOTAL

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Continuing expenses: yearly total \$29,415

Lab and office supplies:

\$300 film
 \$75 chemicals
 \$150 paper
 \$100 office supplies
\$50 telephone
 \$675 MONTHLY TOTAL

Travel:

\$400 rental of 4 cars
 \$600 gas, etc., for cars
 \$500 open fund for rail and air travel
\$600 personal expenses for traveling photographers
 \$2100 MONTHLY TOTAL

Salaries: (yearly)

\$8000 project director
 \$12,480 6 photographers (SNCC subsistence, \$40 week)
 \$2080 lab chief (\$40 week)
\$2080 assistant editor (\$40 week)
 \$24,640 YEARLY TOTAL

Emergency fund:

\$2000 legal expenses, bail, etc.

Budget for establishment of operation	\$4,640
Operating expenses per year	\$29,415
TOTAL BUDGET	\$34,055