

A Brief Guide to Sites of the Chicago Freedom Movement

Prepared July 2006
by Jim Ralph
Middlebury College



Cover Photo courtesy of the Chicago History Museum

**American Friends Service
Project House, 3543 W.
Jackson Boulevard, East
Garfield Park (presently, it
is an abandoned lot)**

This is where Bernard LaFayette led AFSC's Urban Affairs program; the work of this program was one reason why the organizing effort of the Chicago Freedom Movement in the fall of 1965 and through 1966 was concentrated on the West Side.



**Chicago Urban League,
4500 South Michigan
Avenue (This is not the
current location of the
headquarters of the Chicago
Urban League, but the
property is owned by the
Chicago Urban League.
The original headquarters
was built by the Swift meat packing family in the 1890s and
is currently on the National Register of Historic Places.)**

Under the leadership of Bill Berry, the Chicago Urban League was one of the strongest Urban League chapters in the country. The Chicago Urban League was a charter member of the Coordinating Council of Community Organizations. Its South Side office was where many important strategy sessions took place, including during the open-housing campaign in July and August 1966.



Christ United Methodist Church, 6401 S. Sangamon Englewood (presently Greater Englewood Methodist Church)

The Reverend Kwame John Porter turned this church into a movement church. Martin Luther King, Jr., spoke here twice and met here three or four times. Scores of meetings and rallies for civil rights took place here. The church served as the headquarters for the first Chicago SCLC chapter. There is as well a vintage historical mural featuring leaders of the struggle for African-American freedom.



Fellowship Baptist Church, 4543 S. Princeton Avenue (A new edifice was built on the site of the old church in the 1970s.)

The Reverend Clay Evans opened his church to civil rights activists. Jesse Jackson was an associate pastor, and he oversaw the development of Operation Breadbasket which ultimately became Rainbow/PUSH Coalition. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s only major address in the fall of 1965 was delivered at this church. And early weekly meetings of Operation Breadbasket were held here. Reverend Evans had difficulty completing a new edifice because of his connection with civil rights forces.



Greater Mount Hope Baptist Church, 6035 Princeton Street, Englewood (presently Mount Hope Baptist Church)

The Reverend William Lambert was part of the Chicago delegation to Albany, Georgia, in 1962, and then was a leader in the Clergy Alliance of Chicago which advocated a selective buying campaign by blacks. Not surprisingly, the Reverend Lambert supported the development of Operation Breadbasket in Chicago. In August 1966, this church became the South Side Action Center of the Chicago Freedom Movement. Bert Ransom was director of this action center.



Headquarters of the Coordinating Council of Community Organizations, 366 East 47th Street (The Wells Building, presently boarded up, but across from a new park and the Harold Washington Cultural Center and in the Chicago Blues District)

This was one of the command posts of the Chicago Freedom Movement; the Coordinating Council of Community Organizations (CCCO) had emerged in 1962 and had fashioned a strong local civil rights movement. It merged with the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) to form the Chicago Freedom Movement. Al Raby was the convenor of the CCCO.



St. Gall's Catholic Church, 5511 South Sawyer, Gage Park

Gage Park was one of the first communities that Chicago Freedom Movement activists targeted in its open-housing campaign. Its testers of real estate offices in this Southwest Side neighborhood showed that realtors would not show property to African Americans. On Sunday, July 17, 1966, 200 Chicago Freedom Movement activists held a prayer vigil outside of St. Gall's where they were heckled by a group of local teenagers. One week later they staged another prayer vigil. This time they were jeered by onlookers and pelted with eggs. This hostile reaction would later erupt into more intense violence on the Southwest Side during the open-housing marches of late July and August.



Marquette Park, Chicago Lawn

The site of the most violent reactions by local white residents toward open-housing demonstrators. The cars of demonstrators were set on fire on July 31, 1966. Martin Luther King, Jr., was struck by a rock on August 5, 1966.



New Friendship Baptist Church, 854 West 71st Street, Englewood

This church served as the first major staging area for Chicago Freedom Movement rallies and marches on the South Side. The Reverend Stroy Freeman had helped lead a Chicago delegation to Albany, Georgia, to aid Martin Luther King's and the SCLC's civil rights campaign in 1962. He was also one of the early supporters of Operation Breadbasket. Martin Luther King delivered his famous speech, "My place is in Gage Park," on August 4, 1966 in this church.



Warren Avenue Congregational Church, 3101 West Warren Boulevard, East Garfield Park (presently New Greater St. John Community Missionary Baptist Church)

This was the headquarters of the SCLC team as it sought to organize West Side black Chicagoans to "end slums." James Bevel and Bernard LaFayette were the critical leaders in devising a plan of action.



1321 South Homan Avenue Apartment Building, North Lawndale

This building was seized by SCLC, CCCO, and the West Side Federation when activists learned of the mistreatment of its tenants. It was taken into “trusteeship” to send a message that the exploitation of ghetto residents was not acceptable. Al Raby, Martin Luther King, and other activists spent time cleaning the decrepit building.



Soldier Field, Lakefront (The stadium was recently renovated.)

Two major civil rights rallies featuring Martin Luther King, Jr., were held here. The first took place in June 1964; the second on July 10, 1966, and it represented the kick-off of the action phase of the Chicago Freedom Movement. After the rally, the audience marched to City Hall.



Roosevelt Road, Chicago's West Side

Two days after the Freedom Rally on July 10, 1966, African American youths on the Near West Side, sweltering because of the 90-degree temperature, squared off against Chicago police over the refreshing waters of opened fire hydrants. This confrontation escalated and led to civil disorder, which spread into Lawndale and also East and West Garfield Park. The National Guard was needed to restore order. The uprising fortified Martin Luther King, Jr.'s and the Chicago Freedom Movement's determination to show that nonviolence could bring about positive social change.



Cicero

On Sunday, September 4, 1966, Robert Lucas of Chicago CORE led marchers into Cicero, a white ethnic, working-class city bordering Chicago's West Side. Cicero, the site of a fierce race riot in 1951, was known not to welcome African Americans. The Chicago Freedom Movement had declared its intention to march into Cicero, but it suspended those plans with the Summit Agreement of August 26, 1966 that brought an end to the open-housing marches. Lucas and other civil rights activists were dissatisfied with the Summit Agreement and decided to carry out the Cicero march despite efforts by the Chicago Freedom Movement leaders to not do so.



City Hall, 121 N. LaSalle Street

This was where Mayor Richard J. Daley had his office. On July 10, 1966, Martin Luther King, Jr., posted a set of demands by the Chicago Freedom Movement on the doors of City Hall in a manner reminiscent of Martin Luther's posting of his famous theses.

