R E P O R T R E S U M E S

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VISTA VOLUNTEER

NOVEMBER, 1967
VOL. 3, NO. 11

GANGS IN THE GHETTO...
Page 10

Cover photo and photos accompanying the story on page 10 were taken by VISTA Paul Sentner in the Southeast Bronx and on the Lower East Side of New York.

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VISTA VOLUNTEER

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Miami, like any large city, has its ghettos, its enclaves of deprived and depressed people. In this city of glitter there is a sharp contrast between the leisure society at play and the places

Where People Go Lack

Story by Ellen Urvant
Photographed by Bob East, Jr.

CONTINUED

There is a certainty that things will always be this way—that there is nothing one can do

The sun, sand and magic aura of the ocean make Miami, Fla., a year-round vacation land, attracting vacationers and tourists whose money and credit cards support the city's economy.

The same things attract the poor, who come looking for better luck—for a bit of the magic. People from harsher climates to the north continuously come to Miami, thinking life will be easier. Over the years there has been a steady migration of Negroes from places like Bermuda and Georgia, many of whom are unskilled and ill-equipped to live in a competitive urban environment or to take ad-

vantage of the job opportunities that are beginning to open for Negroes in the area.

Migration from Cuba and Puerto Rico has swelled the city's population with thousands of Spanish-speaking people who, trained or untrained, educated or illiterate, vie with Miami's own poor for jobs and housing.

The words of a neighborhood worker for Economic Opportunity Program, Inc., (EOPI), an umbrella organization that covers the 25 OEO programs in Dade County, point to some of the problems of the area:

"The teenagers need something to keep them from sitting around idle. . . . They need to be in a group and to learn the need of culturing themselves.

"If the mother seems to be careless in the way she does, the children will catch the same habit and the home will just go lack. But the home can become a place where the individual will want to be—or a place that is not even appetizing. . ."

The problems touched on by the EOPI worker are those common to the poor in most large cities. In addition, there are the young people who go unbelieving through the mumbo jumbo of asking for a job, unfortified by confidence or ability; shacks or apartment tenements where warm intimacy can't make up for the rats, the leaks and the lack of a place to think; young girls who jump on each other's stomachs to stop the babies from coming; and a certainty that things will always be this way—that there is nothing one can do.

The poor's attitude of defeat is understandable to anyone who has ever encountered the too prevalent feeling that a generous welfare pro-

CONTINUED

VISTA Terry Klaft:

"Everything is taken in stride . . . eviction, serious physical injury, loss of the breadwinner . . ."

Where People Go Lack *CONTINUED*

gram encourages idleness and dependency. The aged, the permanently disabled, the blind, the mothers with dependent children, the people who comprise the majority of welfare recipients are overlooked in an effort to find welfare cheaters.

Dade County, which includes Miami, has a limited emergency fund which is used to supplement the regular state welfare payments. Even so, $120 a month is the maximum combined welfare sum any family can be paid. And to qualify, the family must have lived in the state for a year. Once a month, poor families get free surplus food supplies—flour, corn meal, peanut butter, canned meat. What they get varies according to what happens to be surplus that month and the supplies must be picked up in one trip.

Beggars cannot be choosers, and for people who have been taught that their role is the equivalent of beggar, the choices are not many.

"People see no use in contacting public officials, such as the police or health department," said VISTA Terry Klaft, assigned to EOPI. "Sometimes, when they call for a service—to have accumulated garbage removed from the street—nothing happens. So they get the idea these services are not for them."

An abrupt dismissal is enough, in many cases, to get the poor person to withdraw his complaint—to live with the problem instead of asking help in solving it. And an angry, accusing landlord is enough to make a slum dweller draw back and accept, if bitterly, his environment.

The slum dweller will look with curiosity and tolerance at his friend and neighbor, the young VISTA, who is outraged at the rats—at the lack of official action.

"If we call about garbage pick up, we get courteous attention, if not immediate action," said Miss Klaft. "The poor person often gets insults. It is as much in the tone of voice of the authority they are talking to as what they say. It is a tone of disrespect."

When a VISTA does the calling in the presence of the person in need, the person is sometimes able to identify with the aggressive, confident VISTA and put the sound of self-confidence in his own voice. Once he does that and gets results, he is never the same again. If he seems a little over-aggressive about his new-found strength and sureness of his rights, it is to be understood.

A block club in Miami's Larchmont Gardens area was successful in petitioning the city for a fence along a canal that was a hazard to children. Getting a thing like a fence can stimulate a desire to press for additional improvements. But while the poor are encouraged by middle-income people to improve their condition, they are at the same time discouraged by those with whom they deal directly—such as a landlord.

Although the housing code in Miami is a rigid one—roofs must be tightly secured because of hurricanes—the Department of Code Enforcement and Rehabilitation has neither the money nor the staff to cope with the two-room, shotgun shacks (if you shoot a bullet through the front door it will go out the back door) that house hundreds of families, or the run-down ghetto apartment buildings owned by out-of-town real estate corporations.

VISTA Ralph Hergeat, who lives in a Negro ghetto apartment building in Miami's Liberty City area, said, "Mention the word block club and nobody here will talk to you or come around. They are afraid." One tenant organization was successful in getting the landlord to make repairs on a deteriorating building but along with the repairs came a raise in the rent. Unable to get people to organize around the need for housing improvements, Hergeat now plans to try to bring people together to create a food cooperative.

VISTAs Suzanne Chopot and Virginia Bradley found that a small day-care center so appealed to a slum landlord that he lent them a room free

CONTINUED

Where People Go Lack CONCLUDED

for that purpose. But when the VISTAs talked about making a survey of housing code violations in the building where they lived, across from the center, they were evicted and the center closed.

Taking care of children is fine. But encouraging people to complain about backed up sewage is making trouble. The VISTAs could not rent another apartment in that area. They moved to a nicer and cheaper apartment on the fringe of the ghetto—where their former black neighbors could not rent.

Unable to accept defeat in their attempt to help the housing situation, the VISTAs are making surveys and helping to inform people about meetings for the Liberty City Community Council (LCC), which is an organization run by three people with a Negro man, experienced at community organizing, at its head. Although the LCC has not been able to directly influence the actions of the big absentee landlords, it has been effective, through rent strikes, in getting smaller landlords to make repairs.

Through programs in special education for both adults and children, job placement and training, home management, consumer education, recreation, day care and community organization, EOPI is trying to instill a feeling of pride in the community —to teach the people the skills necessary to survive in an urban environment. In addition, through nine multi-service centers, it is bringing various city services closer to the neighborhoods.

The neighborhood center is not meant to be a last recourse for people in trouble but a first recourse for people who plan and want to work their way out of poverty. The poorest don't plan. They don't have the confidence or the knowledge necessary to formulate and carry through a plan for the future.

"Education" or "Learning a skill" are dream matters —fine sounding words. . . . The poor have had experiences that have taught defeat—not success

People are ashamed to talk to strangers about their problems. And sometimes they don't know what to ask for. To many people in need, money or a job or a place to live is the answer. "Education" or "learning a skill" are dream matters—fine sounding words. For the words to mean more it is necessary for a person to believe he can learn and that he has a right to learn—beliefs most of us gain from successful experiences with parents and teachers. The poor have had experiences that have taught defeat—not success.

VISTAs Dian Huff and Terry Klaft visited a woman in the Central District who had no income but had taken eight grandchildren into her home when their mother, who was their sole support, was convicted of robbery and sentenced to eight years in prison. "She had no idea of how to apply for welfare or how to find out about public housing or help with relocation," said Miss Klaft. "She had a very limited idea of how to cook with the surplus food. Yet, she took the eight grandchildren in as a matter of course.

"The incredible thing is the way everything is taken in stride," said Miss Klaft. "Eviction, serious physical injury, loss of the breadwinner—no one gets excited, even when the police come around. It happens too often."

Visiting with the woman on the porch of her house, a fragile-looking structure crowded in with other houses on the same lot, the VISTAs watched small boys playing in the narrow, grassless space between the house and the fence and noticed a gash on the foot of a toddler.

When they mentioned the cut, the woman said defensively that she hadn't noticed it, but that she would put Mercurochrome on it. "You have to

let her see that you know she is trying," said Miss Klaft. "At the same time, you can't forget the baby's foot."

The Miami VISTAs feel that if more people from middle-income areas could meet and talk to the poor, the ghetto dwellers, they would see people who have dignity and pride, and who don't want to be dependent on others all their lives. They would see that there are people who want help badly, but who don't want to beg. But the VISTAs have found it hard to share the experiences they have had. They keep looking for new ways.

VISTA Jenny Stark is seeking the help of radio stations in broadcasting "voices from the ghettos" to let middle-class listeners get some idea of what life in the ghetto is like and how people feel.

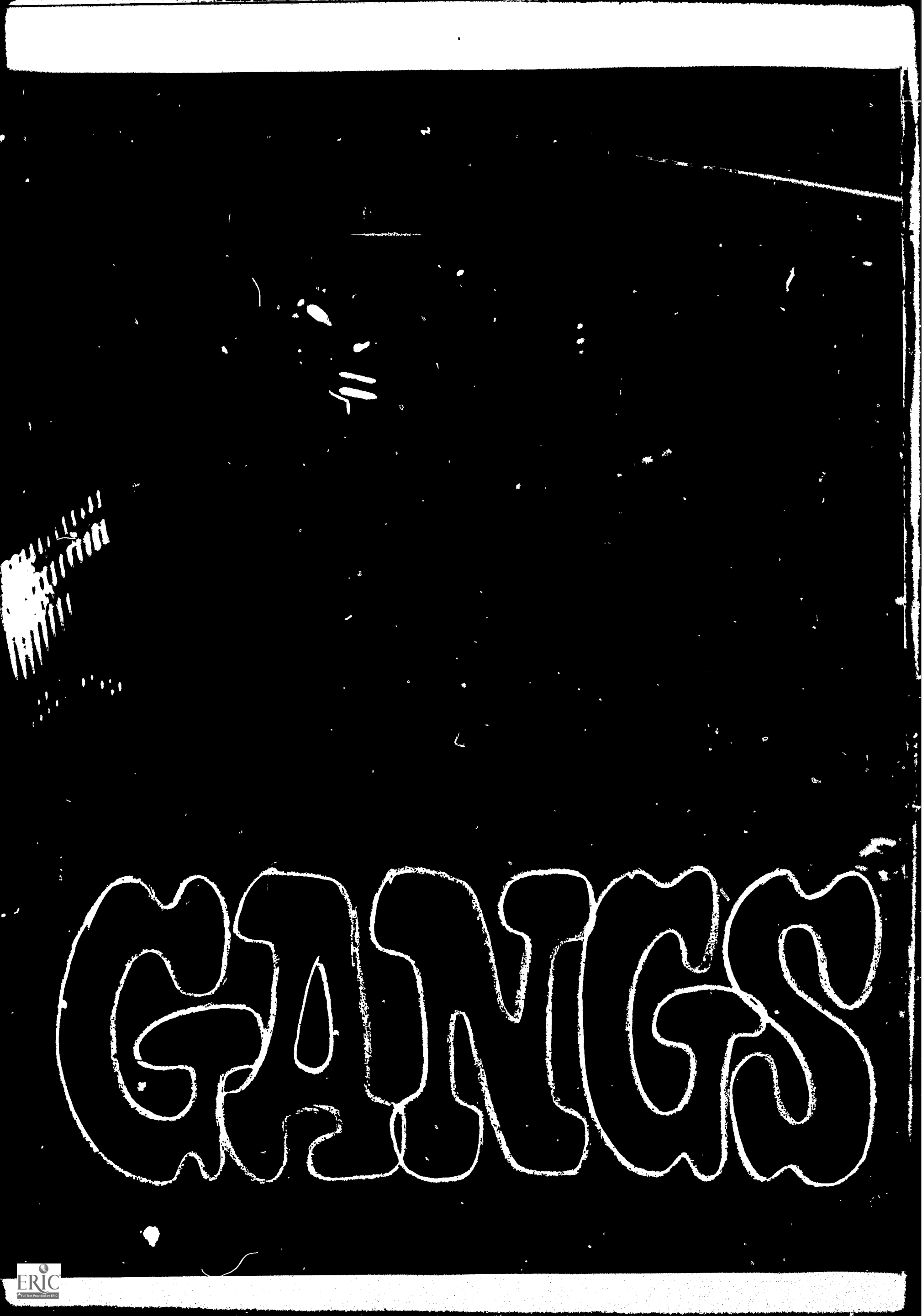
VISTAs Jim Stophel and Virginia Bradley have been successful in getting area women's clubs, citizens' groups and a music school to help out with such projects as music lessons for deprived youngsters, a playground in a poverty neighborhood and a drama group for children.

On a Saturday night at a VISTA house you might meet a policeman, a woman in charge of recruiting for Job Corps, a priest, a man released from jail through the VISTA Bail Bond project, a bail bondsman, a city official, a public defender, an EOPI official, a social caseworker and some young people from the neighborhood. The VISTAs find that their guests usually leave with less stereotyped ideas about people.

The Miami VISTAs have seen many homes in the ghetto where "an individual would want to be" and many that "go lack."

"The people are so proud," said the EOPI worker. *"They've got to learn to work together."*

VISTAs feel if more people could meet the poor they would see people who don't want to be dependent on others.


CRAIGS

The children of these disillusioned colored pioneers inherited the total lot of their parents—the disappointments, the anger. To add to their misery, they had little hope of deliverance: For where does one run to when he's in the promised land?

Claude Brown—
Manchild In The Promised Land

STORY BY
KATHERINE ZIHLMAN DAVIES

PHOTOGRAPHED BY
PAUL SENTNER

CONTINUED

GANGS CONTINUED

In the world these boys know, nothing is stable, not family or school or employment. . . . They join the gang to find the stability the world has not given them

The "promised land" is an empty phrase for much of today's youth.

Those whose parents immigrated to the United States from Puerto Rico, from Mexico, whose families left their small Southern towns to move to the Northern metropolis, who live in ghettos throughout the country, see only too clearly that society's standards have failed for their family and for them.

They see the painful contrast between their hungry, filthy, crowded lives and the America portrayed on television, in movies or visible on the other side of town.

And so the youths reject the standards of a society that has rejected them. Instead, they form their own sub-society, in which success or failure is determined by their own criteria— criteria within their reach.

They band together in teenage gangs and choose names with the same intent that Detroit christens its newest sports car—names that imply power. In the world these boys know, nothing is stable—not family or school or employment. With nothing else to grab onto, they join the gang to find the stability the world has not given them.

The gang also provides its members with a code of ethics which is stringently enforced. Thus the members look to the gang for the discipline that would normally come from family, church or school. In one Philadelphia gang, the leaders and members held a kangaroo court session for a member who drank wine instead of participating in a gang fight. The court found him guilty and sentenced

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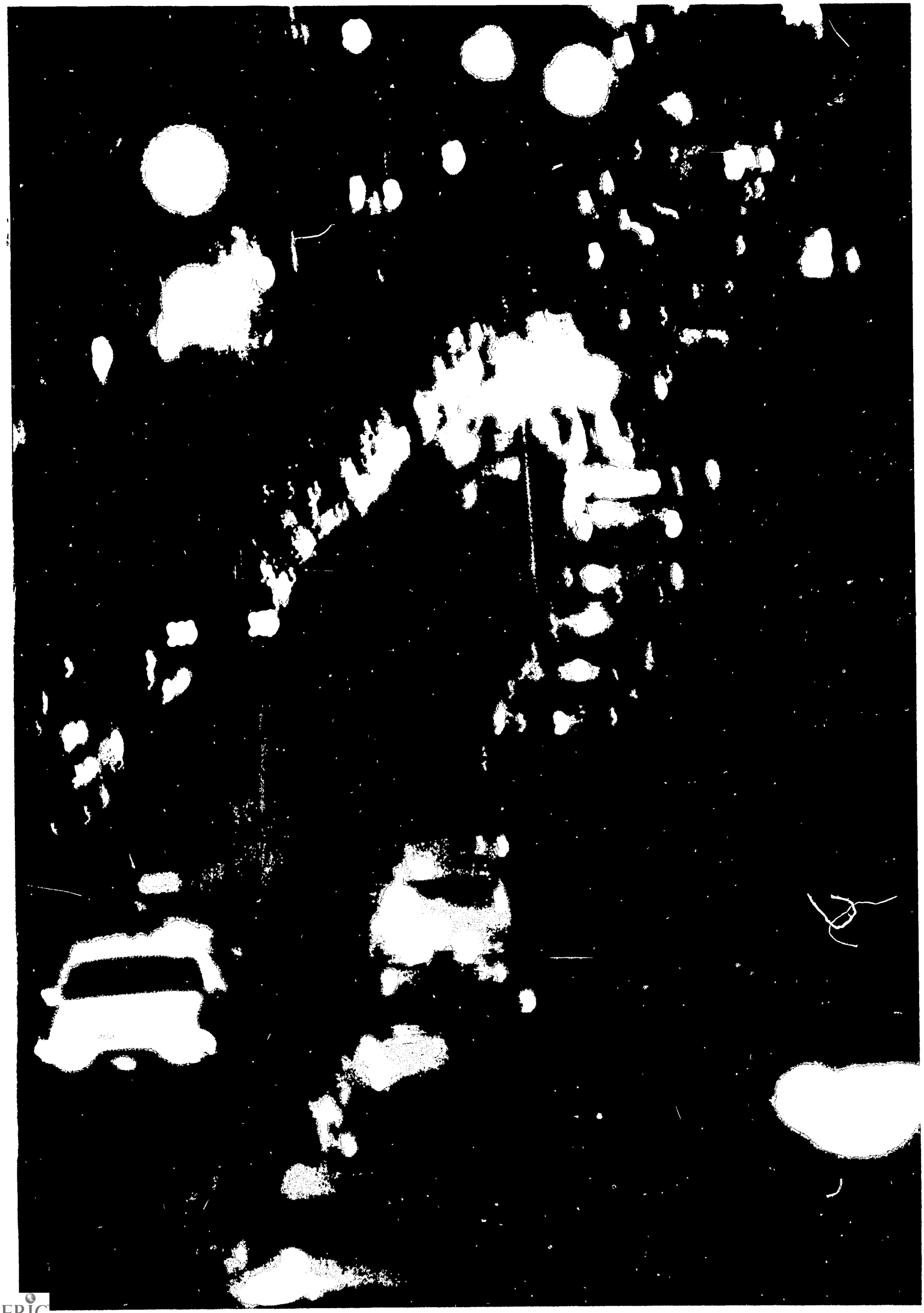


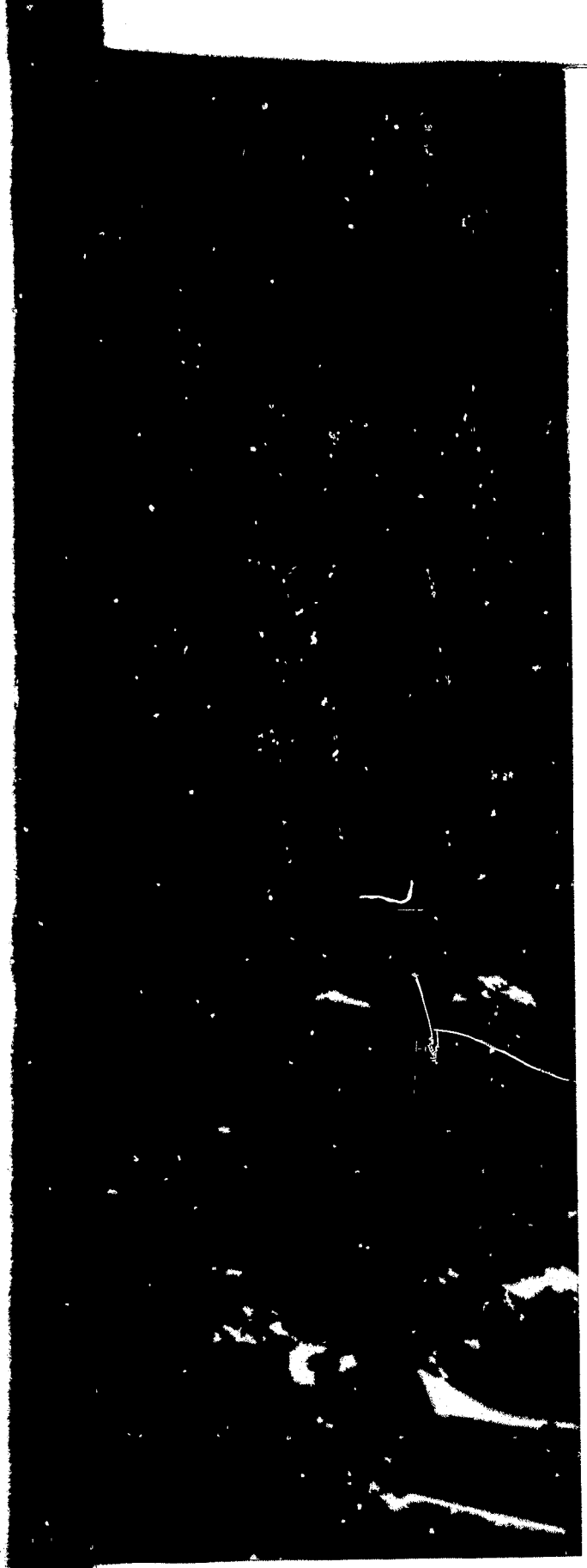
VISTA Stephen Delinsky:

"Violence was the only way they could tell society at large they were unhappy."

him to the "line." As he passed through a line of his peers, each administered physical punishment.

A VISTA working with gangs in Chicago said "Most of the boys in the gang have little or no security in the home. There's no place he feels he wants to go home to. That's the reason he's on the street—he doesn't dig what home he has.

"Last fall, the gang was recruiting and the exception was the kid who was the right age in the neighborhood and wasn't in. If the kids don't join



they have to leave—or they can't walk down the street safely."

Rolland Michael serves as a VISTA in Santa Fe, New Mexico, a tourist town where even the state capitol is built in a Spanish adobe style. Yet, said Michael, "At one time Santa Fe was literally 'gang land' with gangs 200 members strong."

Michael works with Young Citizens for Action, an organization formed by Brother Godfrey Reggio, S.S.C., a former high school teacher in Santa Fe. "Brother Godfrey broke the gangs

GANGS CONTINUED

down into smaller groups so that the youngsters could be reached," said Michael.

The dozen boys Michael has tried to help are 14 to 18 years old. All are from families who have incomes of $2,000 to $3,000 a year and have an average of six to seven children. In explaining why the boys band together, Michael said, "They have no self-confidence and the group gives them personality."

"Most kids were forced to join gangs," said Stephen Delinsky, a VISTA who served for a year in New York City working with youths from 21 to 23 years old. "But," he continued, "a lot really enjoyed the violence."

However, after completing a two-year study of 700 members of 21 gangs, The President's Commission on Crime found that only 17 percent of the offenses recorded by observers included an element of violence. About half of these were committed against rival gang members. Most observers might find the offenses meaningless but VISTAs working with the youths felt that it was an emotional reaction.

"Seemingly meaningless violence may have meaning to the kid in his emotional state," said the Chicago VISTA. "It's associated with feelings of power."

"They have no feeling of family or self-worth," said Michael. "They harbor strong feelings of guilt. They hold it in until they explode and this usually results in violence. The group is negative and the boys are a negative influence on each other. When you see them walking together, a feeling of panic runs through you."

"There were a lot of fights for no reason," said Delinsky. "But the violence pointed up the internal turbulence in the ghetto. Violence was the only way they could tell society at large they were unhappy."

The growth of gangs seems to run in cyclical patterns. There was much inter-gang violence in Chicago during the summer of 1966—very little in the summer of 1967. At the height of their power, the Blackstone Rangers in Chicago had mass meetings, a police squad and their own system of justice and punishment.

In 1963, when Brother Godfrey first began to work with the gang leaders in Santa Fe, he said, "Few people knew how structured the gang system was in town. There were gangs numbering in the hundreds. The largest gang, and the one stimulating the violent activities, had a core group of 35 to 40 members; then an inner sanctum of four that really called the shots. These four could pull together 150 boys in an hour for a fight."

At one point, gangs in New York City had not only leaders but "war lords," who planned the gang's fighting activities. Gang members took submachine guns to school and members of other gangs were forced to withdraw from school for safety.

The Chicago VISTA feels that the civil rights movement has been a major factor in the lessened interest in gangs. "When you speak of gangs, you're writing about past history in Chicago," he said. "Inter-gang activities are of minor interest now. The change is a consequence of being black and living in a black area. It's more important to be a brother to black people now than to quarrel with them."

Delinsky feels that the main change in the New York City gang structure has been brought about by the increased use of narcotics. "If a kid gets high on narcotics," he said, "he's

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GANGS

CONCLUDED

not interested in fighting. Instead of gangs, there is narcotics. It's hard to believe how far down it seeps into ghetto life."

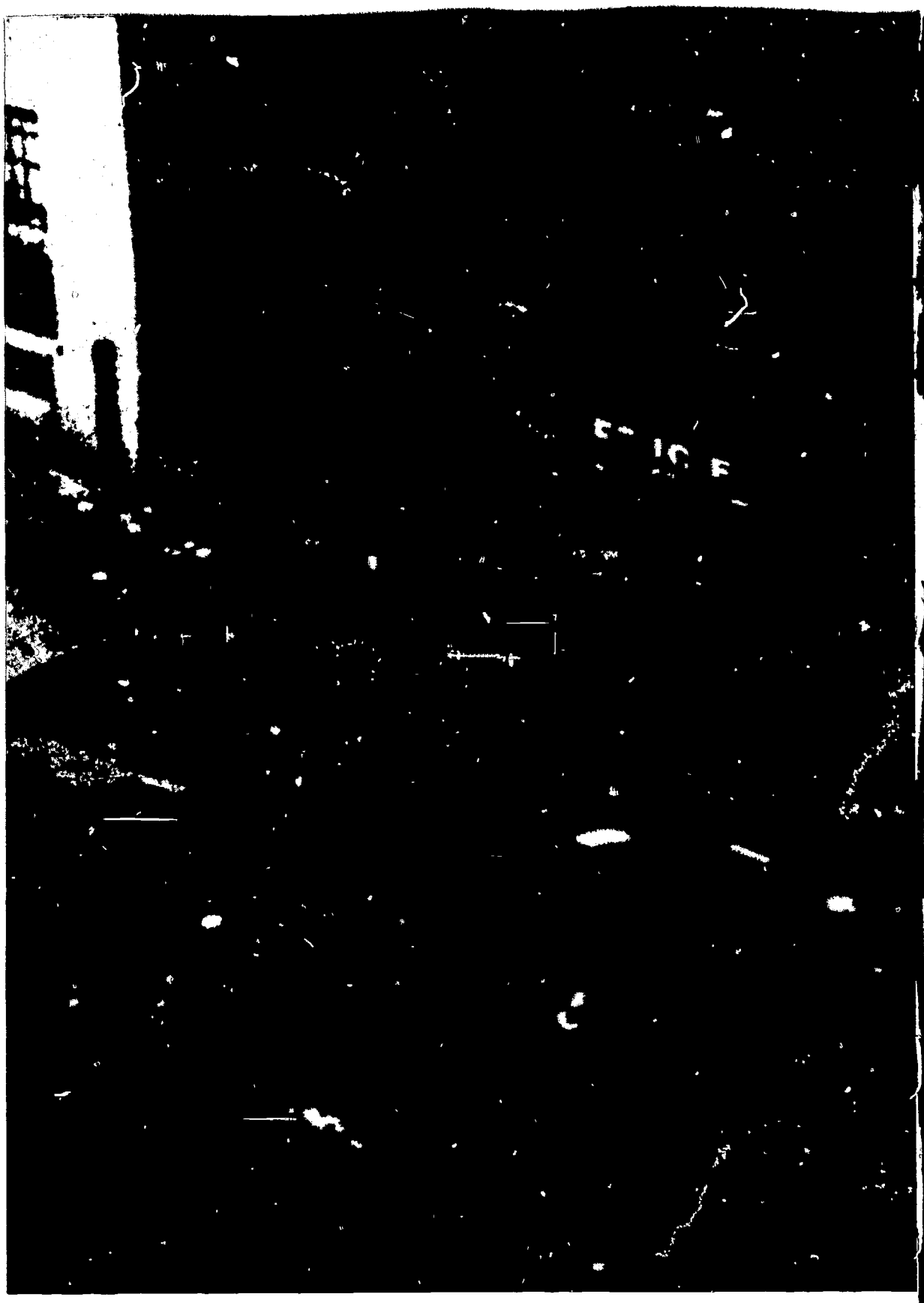
Most of the youthful gang members are school drop-outs. Some left at 16, the age when a youth can legally withdraw in most states; but one 16-year-old boy in Santa Fe had been a drop-out since he was 8 years old.

There are few jobs available for the unskilled and uneducated, so the youngsters spend their day at the local meeting place, usually a street corner. Often, not living at home and unable to find a job, they hustle for a living —maybe picking pockets of subway passengers on a crowded train or pushing narcotics to children 10 or 12 years old. Most of the youths have criminal records.

Their reasons for leaving school are not the old ones—supporting a family or taking a laborer's job to make their way in the world. There are few jobs available to unskilled youth. They leave because they cannot keep up with the schoolwork; because the language of the ghetto and the language of the school are different and there is little communication.

"Schools have convinced him he's dumb," said Michael. "And as far as academics go, he may be. But he knows what he's thinking. I'm tutoring one boy in English secretly. He thinks the others will laugh at him. The school system doesn't welcome problem kids. If they're a problem, they try to get rid of them. I'm trying to get one 16-year-old boy into special education classes. When school officials found out he was 16, they said that he should get a job. But he wants to go to school.

"The kids are bitter toward school," Michael concluded. "It's a matter of



"You may work for six months," said the Chicago VISTA, "and if they think you betrayed them once, that's it."

re-educating them to the value of it, no matter how bad it is."

The VISTAs become involved in gang life by meeting a few members on the street, talking to them, meeting their friends. "Because we were the same age, we had much in common," said Delinsky, "the same yearnings, the same questions. But it was difficult to work with the gang members. A lot of it is just trying to relate to them that all white people aren't monsters.

"They see the worst parts of our society and they adopt the very things they hate. The tragedy is that that's all they see on a day-to-day basis. We're breeding an element of youthful criminals, and you just can't put them all in jail."

"Except for me, all white people they see are in positions of authority," said the Chicago VISTA. "Every time they've had a bad experience, they can point to a white person. Knowing one white person who doesn't treat them nasty can make a difference. Before they could correlate color with lack of virtue."

Michael found that to work into the group he had to demonstrate a genuine interest in them as a group first and then as individuals. "It boils down to a way of loving," he said. "They put up a fight because they're afraid to trust me, afraid to respond to a genuine emotion. Once you really convince them that you're for them and they're worthwhile, they're with you. They want something to hold on to. They don't want to be violent, but violence is a means of expression. If you put them into a creative setting, they're surprised at themselves and suddenly a fight is distasteful to them."

There are as many techniques for working with gang members as there are VISTA workers. "I used honesty for both a defense and an offense," said Delinsky. "I was honest for selfish reasons—if they caught me lying, they might kill me. I admitted I had weaknesses. Guys who were respected on the street were guys who outhustled others verbally. They finally called me a hustler because I couldn't be talked out of what I wanted to do."

"You just can't put them all in jail"

"You may work for six months," said the Chicago VISTA, "and, if they think you betrayed them once, that's it."

Most of the VISTAs agreed that to work effectively with the gang, the individual and not the gang organization must be stressed. "You've got to always debunk, play it down," said the Chicago VISTA. "When some cat comes up to you to tell about a fight, you've got to say, 'Yeah . . . yeah . . . tell me about it later. First tell me if you made it to the job interview.' That cat knows then that the only way he'll get recognition is by working or staying in school and passing up trouble."

Delinsky feels that the gang members could be helped most effectively through a form of the Job Corps—extended over a longer period. "Over two or three years—with the youth out of his old environment—you could be successful," he said. "And VISTAs could ideally be front-line recruiters on the street. But you can do a disservice in this work. You can't increase their aspirations, give them pie-in-the-sky dreams and then have them go on job interviews and fall flat on their faces."

"Street workers have often succeeded in their immediate objective of averting gang violence," wrote the President's Crime Commission in their report. "But with little more permanent to offer than bus trips and ball games, they have rarely managed to convert boys from total gang involvement to more socially acceptable pursuits. Indeed, there are indications that street work has in some places had negative effects by creating a vacuum too likely to be filled by such destructive activity as using narcotics."

"We need to open new jobs, provide funding for counseling, improve police-community relations," said the VISTA in Chicago. " 'If you try, you can succeed' doesn't work here. When you're 15, have been out of school for three years and have a record—try to get a job."

All agree, though, that it is important for the worker to retain his standards. "The pitfall of youth workers is to try to adopt the standards of the group," said Delinsky. Michael agreed. "You always have someone in the group mad at you because you won't concede to them."

The VISTAs know they're playing with dynamite. "The testing is continual," said Michael. "They wait to be rejected. They test you to see if you'll let them down."

"There have been times when I thought I was going to be sick, I was so scared," the Chicago VISTA said. "I got jumped three times when I first came. There was one fight I couldn't walk away from. I beat him. He was drunk. The most important thing is not to show your fear."

The VISTAs who have worked with street gangs are concerned about other Volunteers taking on the same job. "We needed skills and training," said Delinsky. "I got them involved with a therapist and it was damaging to some because they weren't ready for it. Once they began recalling the horrors of their lives, it terrorized them."

"VISTAs are so idealistic," said the Chicago VISTA. "If you can't open yourself up to these kids, they'll use that and use you. You can't come into this work in any escaping way or use it to clear up personal hang-ups. These boys have more hang-ups than we'll ever have."

ARTICLE 7A:

A Weapon for Tenants

STORY BY SHARON DENNIS

PHOTOGRAPHED BY JAMES PICKERELL

The Architect's Renewal Committee in Harlem is teaching tenants how to use legal means to improve housing

A tall young man in a business suit made his way down New York's E. 131st St., bending his head now and then to listen more carefully to the middle-aged Negro woman who walked with him. She was describing the poor plastering, leaky roof and bad plumbing conditions in her apartment building that had prompted her to seek help at ARCH (Architect's Renewal Committee In Harlem). The man, 24-year-old David Pravda, a VISTA Volunteer and lawyer assigned to ARCH, was going to the woman's home to speak to other tenants in her building. The tenants had decided to force their landlord to make needed repairs. Pravda was going to tell them some of the ways they could do it.

The case was not unusual for Pravda. Since June, he has worked with ARCH, an organization in which lawyers and architects combine their efforts to get new housing and rehabilitate old buildings in Harlem.

Since ARCH was founded in 1964 by the American Institute of Architects, the 15 lawyers and architects who comprise its staff have worked out of a skinny, brown office building

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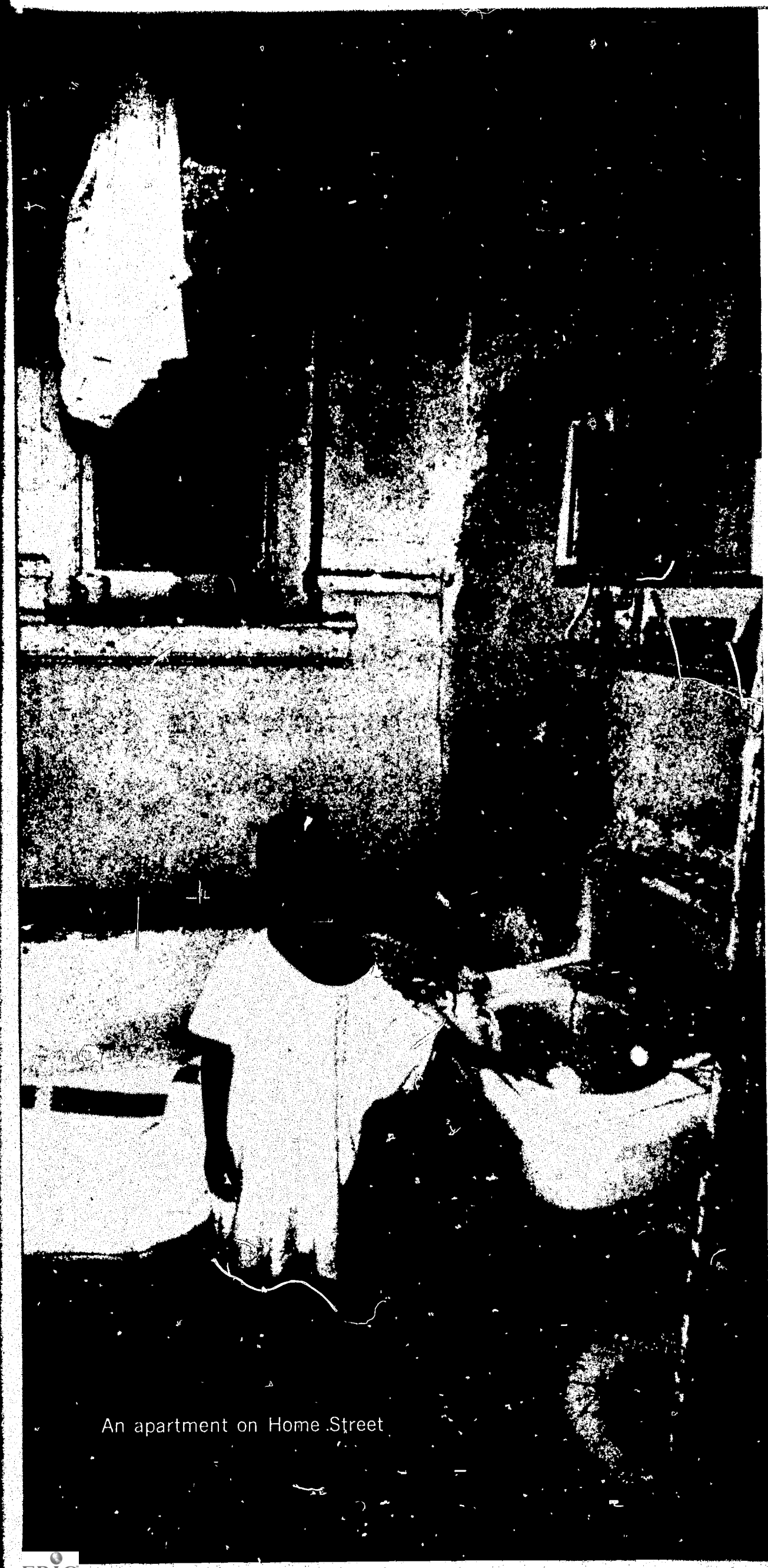

An apartment on Home Street

A Weapon for Tenants *CONTINUED*

on Lenox Ave. The architectural and legal services they provide enable residents to take advantage of city laws to solve their housing problems.

ARCH is mainly concerned with the enforcement of Article 7A of the Real Property Actions and Proceedings Law. Unique to New York City, Article 7A provides that, given proof of conditions in a building which are dangerous to life, health or safety, a court may order that rents be paid to an administrator instead of to a landlord and that the administrator use the rents only for the purpose of making repairs to the building.

Although the 7A provision is one of the most effective weapons against the slumlord, its complicated and costly procedure has prevented many tenants from enforcing it.

In presenting a 7A case, tenants must first petition the court to set a hearing to establish whether hazardous conditions really exist and whether they are due to the landlord's negligence. In conjunction with this petition, however, an official inspection of the building must be made by an architect, an engineer or a contractor. The inspector must make an itemized list of needed repairs and their estimated costs, which he must submit to the court on the day of the hearing.

Court action is usually immediate, since under 7A there cannot be an adjournment of longer than five days without the tenants' consent. At the hearing, if the court is convinced that hazardous conditions do exist in a building, he will appoint an administrator, who collects all rents until the itemized repairs have been made and who is under order to use the money to make the repairs. 7A stipulates that a public accountant, an attorney, a real estate broker or anyone having an economic interest in the building may be appointed as an administrator.

ARCH's role in the 7A proceedings is to provide the free architectural and legal services to Harlem residents who could not otherwise afford them but need them in order to take advantage of the law.

Funded by OEO, the relatively small ARCH staff has come to rely greatly on volunteer architects and lawyers in New York City to meet the growing demand of Harlem residents who are aware of 7A and want to use it.

Pravda, who has recently taken over the coordination of 7A cases in ARCH, explained that 7A proceedings are even more difficult in practice than they are in theory.

"Courts tend to look kindly on

Courts tend to look kindly on property owners —a judge will often appoint the landlord as the administrator

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A Weapon for Tenants

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property owners," Pravda said. "A judge will often appoint the landlord, himself, as the administrator, since the law says that anyone with an economic interest in the building may be appointed.

"This gives the landlord time for stalling, since the tenants must wait 20 days in order to establish that no effort has been made to make repairs and that a new administrator should be appointed."

One group of tenants working with Pravda is now seeking to have the Court appoint their third administrator. The first two administrators, the landlord and the mortgagee, had made no effort to even start on the estimated $10,000 worth of repairs needed in 800 Home St., the building in question.

"It is hard for people to understand why it is taking so long to get results," Pravda said. "Even Alice Delk, a tenant leader who lives in the building, is beginning to voice her doubts of the procedure."

"We've gone to court and gone to court and still he (the landlord) ain't done nothing," Mrs. Delk said. "It's bad enough that some people were afraid to sign a petition the first time, three months ago. Now a lot of them don't think it makes any sense. I guess I'll just have to keep knocking on doors, telling them not to be afraid of the landlord, to sign another paper."

According to Pravda, the situation at 800 Home St. has gotten progressively worse. "The roof is worthless and each time it rains the entire building is flooded," he said. "People have holes in their ceilings and most toilet facilities are broken. The 'super' has declared himself on a strike, even though his union is not striking, and refuses to service the boilers or collect the garbage. He has even prevented residents from entering the boiler room so that they could light the boiler themselves.

"The rats in the back of this building are a foot long," Pravda continued. "They can rip a cat in two and chew a child's leg off."

All 7A cases are not as long and as difficult as the one pending at 800 Home St. The Addie Mae Collins Community Center in Harlem, working with architects and lawyers from ARCH, has forced action in 7 out of 10 buildings they have taken to court

as 7A cases. With the rents they have collected, the administrators of these buildings have done painting and plastering jobs and, in one instance, replaced the entire boiler system.

Pravda has found that in many cases landlords would not have been able to take advantage of tenants if the tenants were more aware of their rights under the law. "Many buildings in New York City are rent controlled and have a maximum rent price," Pravda said. "Some landlords have been overcharging unsuspecting tenants for years."

According to Pravda, many tenants do not know about rent control or that they may obtain a confidential statement from the Rent Commission telling them the maximum rent their landlords can charge them. Furthermore, tenants can also obtain decreases in rent if they can show that there have been decreases in services and facilities in their buildings.

"I'll have to keep on telling them not to be afraid of the landlord, to sign another paper."

Pravda also sees the tenants' lack of knowledge of their rights as one of the major contributors to the creation of slums. "In many instances, when a landlord sees people accustomed to being downtrodden—like the many Southern Negroes who come to Harlem—move into his neighborhood, he immediately begins to milk his building and the people in it dry. Instead of helping to educate tenants to the ways of urban living, he takes advantage of their inexperience and concerns himself only with getting the most money he can immediately get out of the building. He starts to cheat

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"We want action and rapid change, our ultimate goal being to rid Harlem of the poverty and other conditions that insult our humanity."

A Weapon for Tenants *CONCLUDED*

on the maximum rent clause and cuts corners on the upkeep of the building.

"For example, a landlord who cares about the state of his boiler system five years from now pays to have someone service it regularly. A landlord who is interested only in getting money out of his building today never has his boiler serviced. It is often things like this that can assure a slum neighborhood."

To inform Harlem residents of their housing rights under this law, ARCH has published *Tenant Action*. "It is the bible of the tenant associations," Pravda said. "I used it before I came to ARCH." *Tenant Action* not only tells tenants what they can demand of the landlord but what the landlord can demand of them. It lists housing laws and the procedures for following them through. In addition, it lists places like ARCH, where tenants may get assistance in bettering their housing conditions.

ARCH staff members become as involved as possible in the Harlem community. "The ultimate effectiveness of ARCH can only be felt if the community accepts the organization and takes advantage of the professional abilities here," Pravda said. "This can only come by working with grassroots people."

Pravda works closely with MEND (Massive Economic Neighborhood Development), an association of local people who head sub-community organizations. He also works with the heads of tenant associations.

"There is nothing ARCH likes more than to be used by the community," the VISTA said. "When people come to us with cases that are not directly involved with massive housing rehabilitation, ARCH does not turn them away.

"One woman who came to the office wanted to sue her landlord for injuries she had suffered from a falling ceiling," he continued. "Even though I did not take this case myself, I took the tenant to another lawyer, outside of ARCH, and I am following the case through.

"When I visited this woman in her building, I met some of her neighbors, who also have housing complaints. Now they are thinking of bringing a 7A case against their landlord to force repairs."

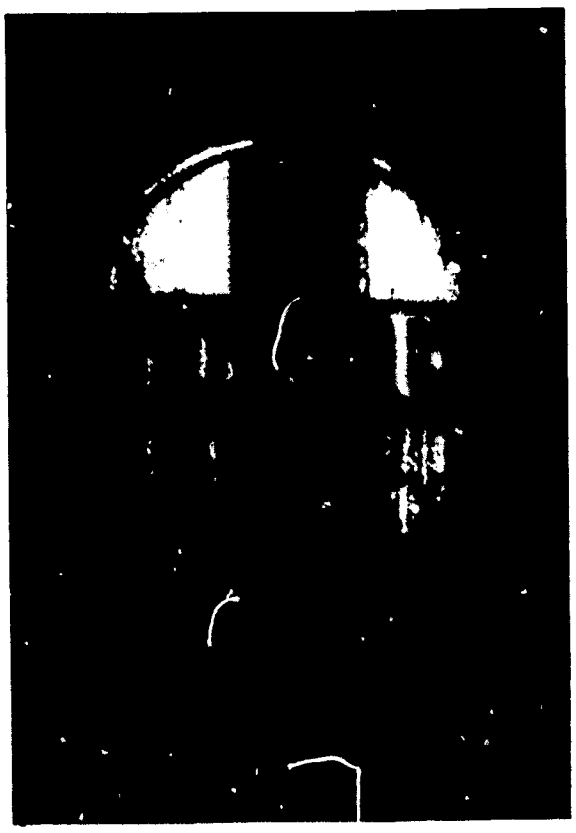
To ascertain the housing needs in Harlem as a whole, ARCH is planning a survey of the entire community. Staff members hope to learn through the survey not only the housing inadequacies but the results of all 7A cases that have been tried in the community. Furthermore, the survey will pinpoint the needs of certain neighborhoods according to their populations; i.e., neighborhoods with a high concentration of elderly or young people. This information will be useful in planning future housing in Harlem. In addition, Pravda hopes that this survey will give ARCH the evidence they need to petition the city and state governments to broaden existing housing laws.

In order to reach the Harlem community, ARCH publishes the *Harlem News*, a monthly newspaper which gives local people and organizations a chance to express their ideas. This fall, ARCH is undergoing an expansion and reorganization that will identify it even more fully with the community. The majority of the present ARCH staff, who are white professionals, will move to another office outside of Harlem and maintain their affiliation with ARCH as a research branch of the organization. A Board of Directors, expanded to include Harlem residents, and a larger staff, comprised mostly of black professionals, will remain in the office on Lenox Ave., and will work more closely with the community. Pravda is one of the few white staff members who will remain at the Lenox Ave. site.

Max Bond, a Harvard educated architect who just returned from Ghana, where he taught architecture for three years, will be the new ARCH director. He explained the new context in which ARCH is to function as part of "the emergence of a new form in the struggle for freedom."

"We want action and rapid change, our ultimate goal being to rid Harlem of the poverty and other conditions that insult our humanity," Bond said. "We want to work with these issues and develop a combined approach consistent with the new forms of the black community's struggle.

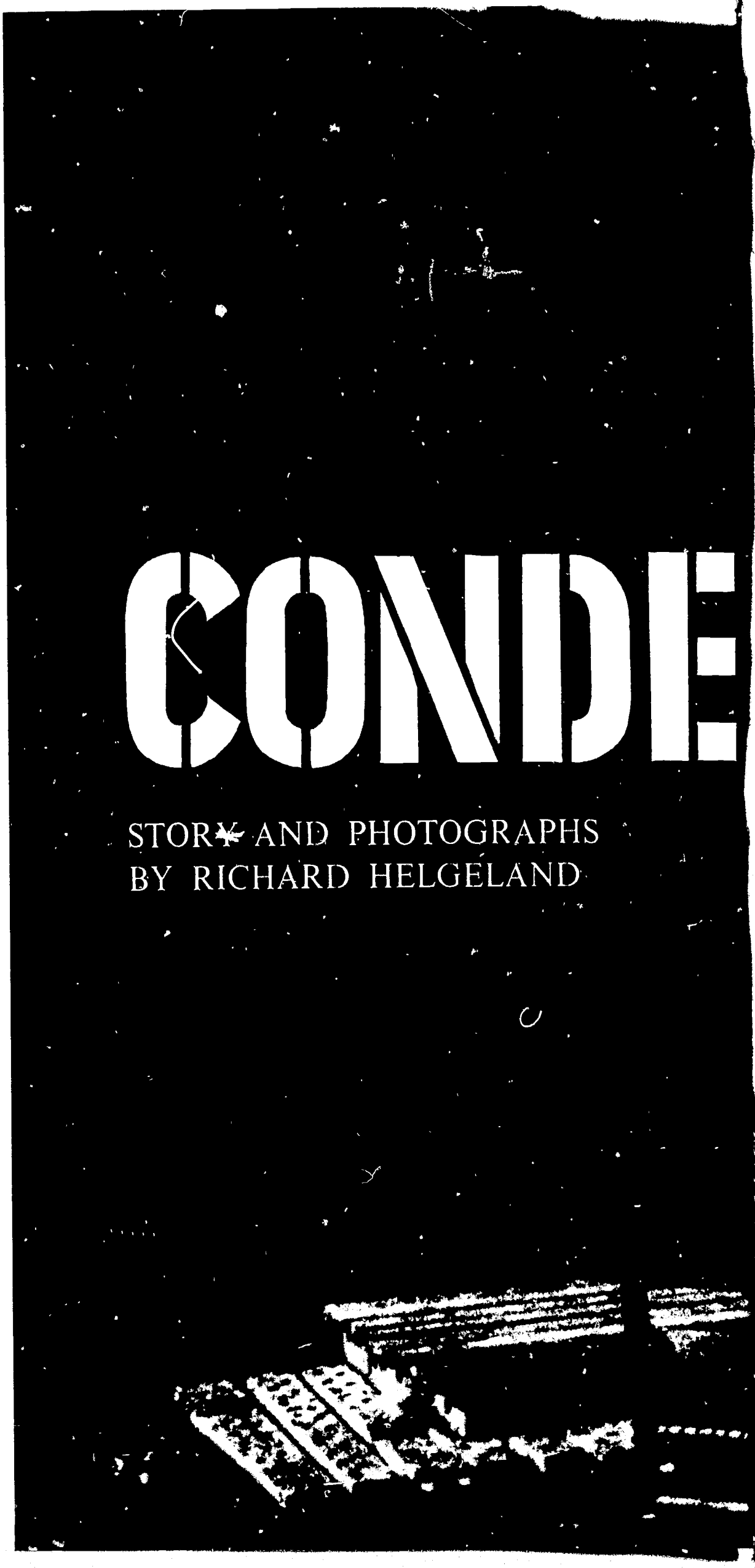
"We will not dictate these forms but rather work with the community in discovering them and the solutions they suggest."



Richard Helgeland, 21, is a VISTA assigned to New Mexico's Home, Education and Livelihood Program (HELP) to work with Navajo Indian migrants in the town of San Jon. Every autumn for the past six or seven years, 500 to 1,000 Navajos have come from their reservation to harvest San Jon's major crop, broomcorn, a grass used for broom bristles. The Indians remain about four months, working 10-hour days and living in old farm houses, turkey barns and occasionally box-cars in farm labor camps.

A farmer's son, Helgeland understands many of the problems of a rural community and is sympathetic with the San Jon farmers. They need cheap labor, since broomcorn is selling at only $300 a ton, but he thinks that some of them could improve their migrant camps.

Recently he prepared an elaborate report on four different camps housing Navajo workers. The statements on each camp were documented with photographs. Following is a report on one of the camps Helgeland visited, the one which he found to be the worst of the four. *CONTINUED*

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"Somebody has to come here—see how people are living here. It has to be changed."

CONDEMNED

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An Indian farmhand voiced his discontent with the general living situation the Indian faces in the San Jon area during the broomcorn harvest. He was particularly disgusted with the living quarters he and his wife were given to stay in for two weeks. He repeatedly made the statement, "It must be changed."

The farmhand left San Jon and returned to Brimhall (the Navajo Reservation) two days after I had talked to him. His reasons for leaving were that there were inadequate housing and facilities; the farmer he worked for was mistreating him and the days were too long and the work too hard for the amount of pay he was receiving.

The following is our discussion. I attempted to keep it as close as possible to the actual questions I asked and the answers he gave me. The conversation lasted nearly four hours in total, much of the time being lost by me trying to make my questions understood or by the farmhand trying to make himself clear in broken English.

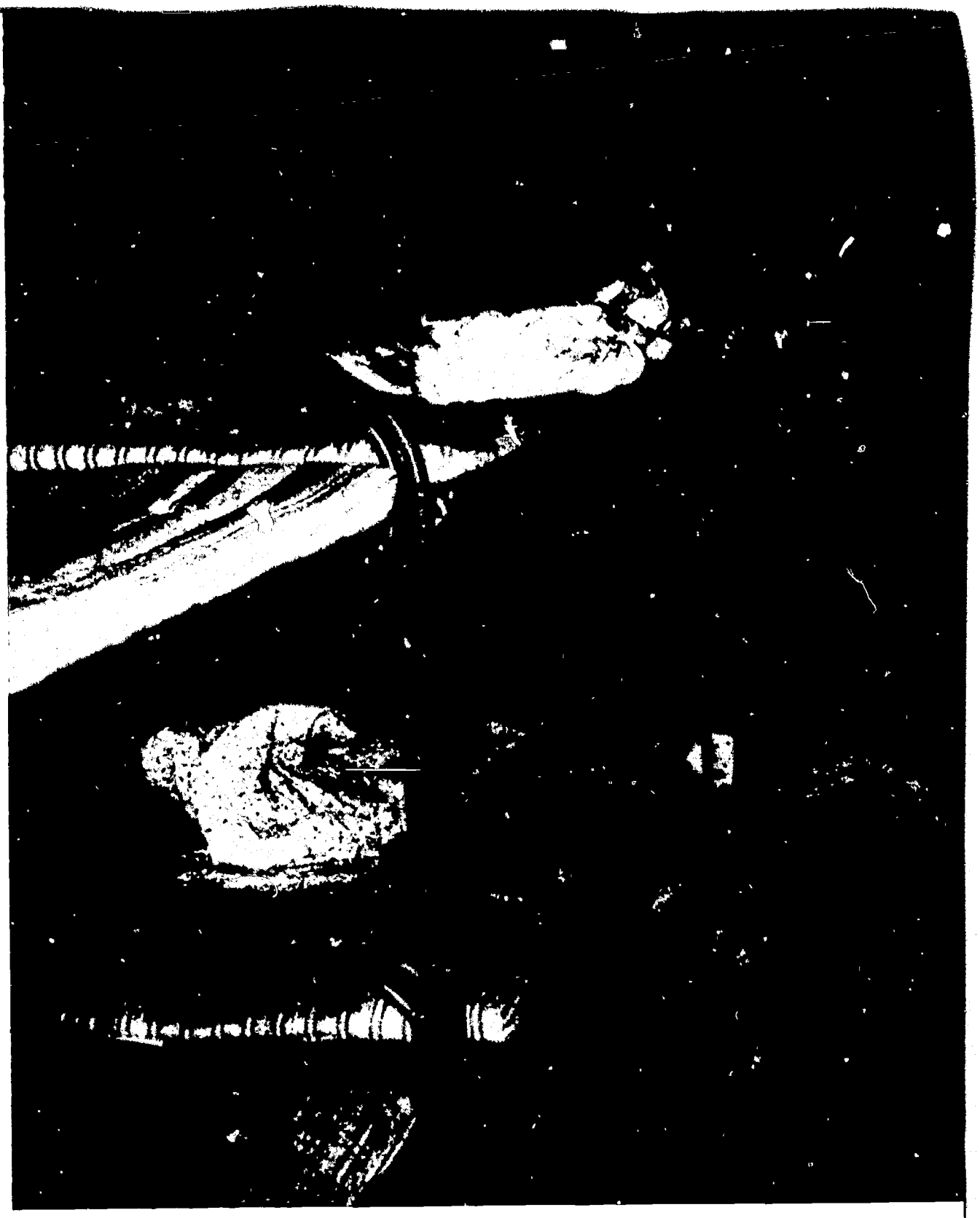
I did not influence answers to particular questions. The conversation was quite free.

VISTA: Tell me about your living quarters.

FARMHAND: I live in a boxcar. It's cold—no refrigerator, no stove, no electricity. Just two single beds. What I say? I been mistreated. Just got a kerosene lamp.

VISTA: What do you mean when you say you've been mistreated?

FARMHAND: The way we're living there—it's just like a chicken house. Outside—about fifteen yards away—there's a pipe for water, no warm water. We had to buy our own bucket and carry the water into the boxcar. We were given two old quilts,



me and my wife. They were all torn up. There's nothing there—no sink, no shower, nothing. We've stayed here about two weeks.

I would be ashamed to keep my people in there. They should put that boxcar on the tracks and send it someplace. Yes, they should.

VISTA: Where are the toilets?

FARMHAND: About fifty yards away—full of flies. In the Navajo way, it wouldn't be like that. There's no doors. There's too many mice.

VISTA: Did you tell the farmer that you were working for about the mice?

FARMHAND: Yes, he said we would have to buy a mousetrap. They eat our cheese, potatoes, bread, meat —everything. Next door it's the same way. I borrowed the mousetrap from next door. That's all. That's it. I'm mad. It's got to be changed.

VISTA: What about your work? Tell me what you do?

FARMHAND: I pick the pile. Start work at 6:30—that's too early. We work until 2:15. We make 86 to 100 bales a day. No break during the day.

VISTA: How much do you get paid an hour?

FARMHAND: $1.25 an hour. No overtime. We are paid by the week—on Saturday afternoon. Sometimes we have to work until night. We have to do what the farmer says. Too much work for $1.25 an hour.

VISTA: Do you think the prices are high in San Jon?

FARMHAND: Yes, a little high—not as high as on the reservation. Lard is cheaper there, so is meat. A lot of things are higher.

VISTA: Do you plan to do anything about what you've seen?

FARMHAND: My grandfather is a councilman. I'll tell him. On the reservation we don't live in a hogan. We live in a house. We got a ranch. We got horses and sheep. Our ranch is about 16 miles square. It's not like here. The living is not good here.

VISTA: What are you going to tell the council?

FARMHAND: Everything I told you. I don't like to live in a boxcar. It must be changed. We don't like it.

VISTA: Do you think these people can do anything about the way it is here?

FARMHAND: Yes. I'll tell them the same thing I told you. They'll get mad. Write report. Someone will have to investigate here. It has to be changed by next year.

VISTA: Do you want an investigation?

FARMHAND: Yes. Somebody has to come here—see how my people are living here. It has to be changed. Right now. The Tribal Council will do something. I'm trying to help my people. All my people are being mistreated.

VISTA: Getting back to the Indian camps, is there any garbage disposal? Does anyone pick it up?

FARMHAND: No. It's just outside—in a can.

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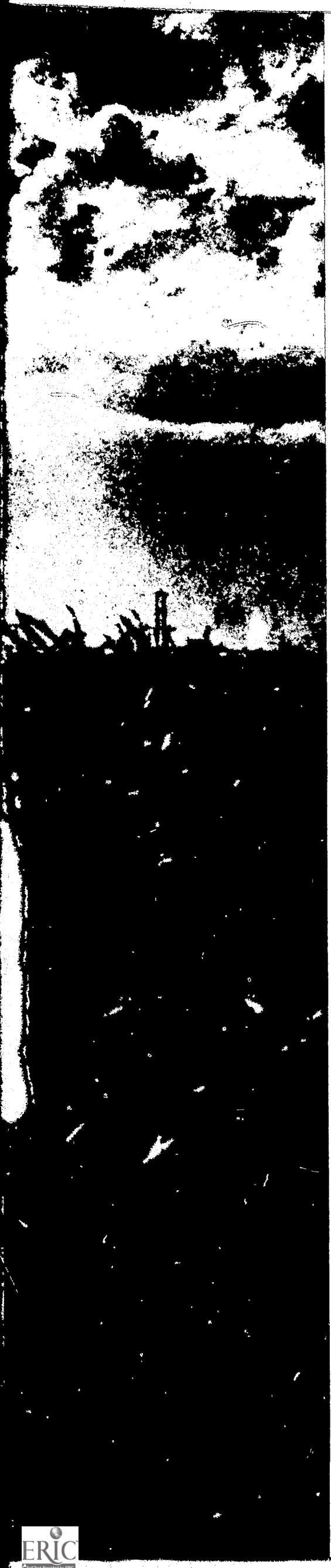

CONDEMNED CONCLUDED

VISTA Richard Helgeland with Indian workers, who, after ten hours in the fields, return to old farm houses, turkey barns or boxcars

VISTA: How far is it from the boxcar?

FARMHAND: It's about five yards away, on the west side of the door.

VISTA: Does it smell?

FARMHAND: Yes. That's where all the flies are and the mice. If I had a shovel I'd dig out a hole—push it in there—cover it up.

VISTA: What do you do about the garbage back on the reservation?

FARMHAND: We got a place. We keep it about 150 yards away. I dig a hole. I push it in—push dirt over it. I burn the paper with kerosene. This way there are no flies—no flies and no mice.

VISTA: In the camps, how do you wash?

FARMHAND: No. Don't. You mean clothes?

VISTA: I mean your clothes and yourself.

FARMHAND: I wash my clothes here at the HELP Center. It's good here. I took showers in Tucumcari.

VISTA: Where do you shower in Tucumcari?

FARMHAND: At one of the motels.

VISTA: How would you compare the living conditions of the camp you were at in San Jon to all the other places you've lived?

FARMHAND: That boxcar is the worst place I've been in. I've had it. It should be investigated by our own tribe. In Arizona, they gave us mattresses and blankets. It was a lot better there. That boxcar had no windows—there was no fresh air. The mice came in from a hole in one end and run all the way through—every night.

VISTA: Would you and your wife swear by everything you've said. Would you put your name on this report?

FARMHAND: I'll sign it. I'll tell people everything I told you. You can get me back on the reservation. If anyone comes to see me, I'll talk the same way.