

\$300,000 payroll for 'Catfish'



At a work call (above), Pride Inc.'s Board Chairman Catfish Mayfield inspects a sweep-up crew. With squad leaders looking on at right, Catfish warns, "If you men sneak away, you're gonna get docked for the time you miss! You dig, right?"

One of the most extraordinary efforts to reach the people of the ghetto is a \$300,000 federally financed program in Washington, D.C. called Pride Inc., headed up by a 20-year-old Negro delinquent turned straight, who goes by the name of Catfish Mayfield.

Pride Inc. was set up earlier this month as a belated effort to create summer jobs for young people in the Washington slums. Its planners could hardly have chosen an unlikelier candidate than Catfish for the imposing title of Chairman of the Board, though his slum credentials were imposing enough.

With two years in reformatories already on his record, he might have ended up as faceless and anonymous as any other Washington slum kid, had it not been for the death of his closest buddy, Bug Brooker. The youth was shot by a policeman last May 1 during a scuffle when the officer tried to arrest him for disorderly conduct. The coroner's jury called it justifiable homicide. Catfish witnessed the shooting—which he insists was not justifiable—and it turned his own life around. He decided not to "wind up like Bug—dead."

Catfish, whose real name is Rufus, is bright and a natural leader. He led marches to the police precinct station protesting the killing of his friend. He and other young Negroes held a shouting, angry meeting with a district commissioner and later Catfish staged a sit-in in the man's office. The protest marches were observed by Marion Barry, a local antipoverty agency worker and a former district chairman of the Student Non-violent Coordinating Committee. Barry noted in particular that some youngsters in the marches were bent on starting trouble—there was a plan to bomb a fire truck with a Molotov cocktail and start a riot—and that Catfish cooled them off.

From that point on, events developed quickly. Barry hired Catfish as a part-time consultant to the local antipoverty agency and together they developed an idea Barry had been kicking around: a neighborhood service co-op to be run by young people. Barry presented the idea to the U.S. Department of Labor, which was already entertaining an Urban League suggestion that late summer jobs would be needed for 14- and 15-year-olds. Out of this, Pride Inc. was born with \$300,000 from the Labor Department to back the four-week venture. Thus far it has put more than a thousand youngsters to work. Fiscal details are supervised by three adults but all the rest—policy, management and discipline—is handled by slum cadres who are presided over by Catfish. The kids themselves organize salaried squads to clean alleys, sweep sidewalks, stalk rats and carry out beautification projects in their neighborhoods. Board Chairman Catfish hops around town troubleshooting and giving pep talks to Pride workers. He is brimful of ideas about work that needs doing, and he can articulate the grievances of the ghetto. He insists that Negro youth—given the money and the independence and the chance—can run a successful self-help program. And all the "dudes"—the name Washington's slum kids apply to themselves—know Catfish. He's their "general."

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