

SOUTHWEST GEORGIA VOTER-REGISTRATION

PROJECT

The problem of effectively influencing national votes involves the relative weight given the rural vote in both the electoral college and the state legislatures. Historically, the South has suffered from the "rotten borough" system of apportionment whereby the rural vote in some instances approached three times the value of its urban counterpart. Of course, in Georgia the problem is being resolved. The long range answers to the problems of law enforcement, education, and public welfare must rest in the hands of the state government. Therefore, a campaign producing a significant Negro influence in the state-wide political machinery could lead to the changes desired in the South. This means winning control of a number of county organizations and influencing a number of others. Direct Negro control is not probable in a single state, the highest percentage of voting-age Negroes to total population being 36.1%, in Mississippi. However, Negro control of the 137 rural counties in the deep South in which there is a Negro majority, and registration of a very high percentage of Negroes in the other counties, could give the Negro a political influence of greater significance than its mere numbers would suggest. Only 16.5% of the total Southern Negro population lives in the "black belt counties" but these counties constitute nearly one-fourth of the total number of counties in the "solid south" states of Alabama, Georgia, Louisiana, North and South Carolina, Mississippi and Virginia. Negroes might easily have the determining voice in state-wide political life in a state like South Carolina where Negroes are in the majority in 21 of 46 counties, or in Mississippi where the Negro is a majority in 31 of the 82 counties, or in Alabama, where 14 of the state's 64 counties have Negro majorities. The Negro's voting potential is significantly powerful in Georgia; he could control 40 of the state's 159 counties.

The rural areas are important politically and represent the area of most critical human need resulting from civil rights deprivations: (1) In most instances there are few if any popular and respected leaders in the rural counties. (2) There is a much more vicious system of sanctions set up against the exercise of the franchise by Negroes. (3) Historically, violence and intimidation have threatened the widely dispersed and economically dependent Negro in the farming areas. (4) In addition there is the problem of producing social change in the agrarian south which is so sharply different from the cities: these areas are immune to the picket, the sit-in and freedom ride, and are also less dependent on the Negro as a consumer. Hence politics offers the only viable avenue toward amelioration of their condition. However, the efforts of rural registration need not be considered as antagonistic to that in the cities. They are complimentary: (1) The current events of a rural registration drive shall serve as the most dramatic "neon light" imaginable to highlight the kinds of conditions the vote seeks to change. (2) The atrocities likely to accrue from a rural campaign will add stimulus to the urban people to turn out in indignation. (3) Hopefully the open communication between the Negro communities of the country and the cities will inspire recruits to come from the cities to help. Finally the point should be made that it is only in a campaign in the rural South that the truly revolutionary aspects implicit in the nature of the project can be realized. The problem is one of massively winning the ballot -now or never- for the unschooled, economically dependent, property-less, unsophisticated, Negro of this generation. The revolt must be their own; we are only agents of stimulation. Without an immediate prospect of hope to these people, they shall continue to migrate to the North and lose once and for all the chance of building democracy in the South.

Our prospectus outlines certain political, sociological and psychological reasons for working in proposed areas. It deals with certain considerations which we hope will reveal the coordinated relationship between the cities and the rural areas. Means for finance must be created.

PURPOSE:

- (1) To set up contacts in every county of the second and third congressional districts for next year.
- (2) To work actively in eight central counties during the summer - Baker, Dougherty, Worth, Early, all of the 2nd congressional district and Terrell, Lee, Peach, and Marion of the third Congressional district.
- (3) To confront the segregationists and the Negro community with a realistic attempt in the deep South of intergroup cooperation and assimilation.

MODE OF OPERATION IN ALBANY FOR PROJECT:

- (1) The volunteer workers will include both black and white living together, initially, in Albany.
- (2) We will report to the office at 8 o'clock Tuesday through Saturday.
- (3) We will be in our lodging at 11 o'clock p.m. unless the group is engaged in some activity after that hour.
- (4) We will be relatively free on Sunday and Monday which is to say there will be church gatherings, mass meetings, and staff evaluation for the past week and proposals for the coming week.
- (5) At some point this summer "whites" will be living in other counties.
- (6) On Mondays, the whole staff will come to Albany.
- (7) The project will be self sustaining.

INDUCTION:

June 10th, participation will be in the Atlanta, SNCC office for introduction to staff and general instruction. They will be in Albany on the 11th where a working schedule will be drawn up for the week's instruction. A syllabus, which would be basically the same as the details earlier in a proposed program, will be enlarged and mimeographed along with the Albany Story acting as an introduction. The Terrell Story should also be included.

BASIC POINTS IN THE ORIENTATION:

- (1) Historic development of fear in area - (a) Police brutality in this area
- (b) Our efforts in Albany (c) Our efforts in Pike, Amite, and Walthall counties in Mississippi (d) Criticism and evaluation
- (2) Our purposes as SNCC (a) We are not an "organization" (b) We are concerned with community mobilization and identification with "The Movement" (c) We are committed to sacrifice and teach the people through this challenge.

PHILOSOPHY OF REVOLUTION:

- (1) Ground rules (a) Define objective (b) Be honest (c) Love your enemy (d) Give your opponent a way out
- (2) Strategic steps (a) Investigate (b) Negotiate (c) Educate (d) Demonstrate (e) Resist
- (3) Personal Conduct (a) Be creative (b) Be firm (c) Be humble (d) Be forthright (e) Be calm (f) Be helpful (g) Be forgiving (h) Be friendly.

STAFF DECORUM: (Confirmation by group consensus)

(1) There will be no consumption of alcoholic beverages. (2) Men will not be housed with women. (3) Romantic attachments on the level of "girl-boy friend relations" will not be encouraged within the group. (4) The staff will go to church regularly. (5) The group shall have the power of censure.

STATISTICAL EVALUATION:

(1) Evaluation of court decision for reapportionment. (2) Evaluation of non-white voter strength and its potential in the State, and especially the 2nd and 3rd Congressional Districts.

METHOD OF REVOLUTION:

In Georgia the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee proposes to accept two heavily populated congressional districts as the object of its efforts, initially.

Out of these districts, several counties have been chosen as beach-heads:

- (1) Terrell County. It is located in the third congressional district; the southern boundary of Terrell separates it from the second congressional district. This places it in a central location and it serves as the symbol of oppression in southwest Georgia; another symbol must be substituted. It was also here that the first court action was brought under the Civil Rights Act of 1957. The county is presently under a court injunction against further discriminatory conduct in the registration process. The Negro composes 67-7% of the total population. If we are able to cut through the fear in the minds of the people there, the gate will have been opened to southwest Georgia as "Terrible Terrell" is infamously known all over the area.
- (2) Peach County. The strongest point for activity in this county, initially, lies in its importance as the resource for college students. It could serve as a training area also. Negroes outnumber whites two to one, but out of 8,000 only 679 are registered in 1958 - only 21.16% of qualified number. From Peach County, Houston, Macon, and Taylor are easily accessible.
- (3) Marion County. This is the beach-head to the northeast. Having 62.5% of the population only 3% of the Negroes are registered. It will serve as the example of the possibility for progress in the northeast.
- (4) Lee County. This will be the jumping off spot in the southeast section of the district. We have tremendous support for a summer voter-registration campaign. 67.7% of the population is Negro so that it will certainly be illustrative of the power of the ballot, opening eyes of other counties throughout the district.

In the second congressional district, four counties have been chosen:

- (1) Dougherty County. Here is the crossroads of people in the rural areas for miles and miles. From this center we will disseminate data to surrounding counties and coordinate all activities in the southwest. It will serve as one of the training stations for student participation, Negro and white. It hides tremendous potentials for future contracts since the college there is people presumably be students who live in south Georgia. As a unit the county has great importance. In the first place, 38.1% of the population is Negro. Secondly, prominent leaders of the community filed a suit against the county and city officials, for enforcing segregation in voting facilities. The suit was upheld.

This produced a greater awareness of the voter-registration process as it may be connected with the destruction of segregation. Thirdly, it is the home of the Negro lawyer in south Georgia. And finally, it is in Albany that the potential for instructors studying and evaluating our gains in registration through statistical analysis is great. Class projects may be planned to include studies by students in various associated areas such as housing, education, employment, etc.

(2) Early County. On the northeastern border of the second congressional district is Early County, with a Negro population of 9,300 - 54.7% of the total in the county in 1959. It lies on the Alabama line and has a record of atrocities against Negroes. Only 226 Negroes of the 4,790 men over 18 were registered in 1957. We must have contacts there.

(3) Baker County. This is another symbol in Georgia which must be shattered - "no hope for Baker County". We feel that when Negroes register in Baker, the spell will be cast across south Georgia. People in this area will receive an unequalled motivation to register. Baker is another county among the forty where over fifty per cent of the total population is Negro. The percentage in Baker of Negroes was 63.3% in 1958. At that time no Negro had been allowed to register. Yet, there is a federal injunction against discrimination of persons in voter-registration on grounds of race, color, or previous condition of servitude. Baker is said to be worse in police brutality and judicial injustice than Terrell County. A psychological victory in Baker will do more for the three districts involved than a thousand man canvass team; a psychological victory must precede the "door knock".

(4) Worth County. Only 4% of eligible Negroes in this county are registered - 296 - while they compose 50.8% of the population. Contacts are available for voter-registration in this county.

In Georgia, the methods used to systematically disfranchise the Negro have been founded on this hypothesis - the obliteration of motivation toward suffrage. Whatever the apparent procedure, purging or inflating of voting lists, economic warfare, police brutality, etc., all attempts to nullify the right to vote among Negroes have aimed at a psychological enslavement which has increased in effectiveness through the years.

The Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee intends to deal with this grand historical strategy on the same level which causes it to be effective. We propose to engage in a battle for minds. Our considered opinion is that interest among the people in the pursuit of happiness exists under the most atrocious conditions of servitude. When we lift the veil of fear from the eyes of the people and provide in its place, the motivation to become responsible citizens, the people will rally among themselves in the direction which we propose to channel their energies.

Using the county as the smallest unit of our concern, we propose two areas of emphasis - the strictly rural as opposed to the urban area.

At the initial stage, we feel that it is necessary to have two persons in each county for a period of not less than two months, living with the people and sharing in the joy and suffering of the total community life.

RURAL AREA:

The strictly rural area stands as a challenge to us. First, because of its isolation and political virginity, as far as the Negro is concerned, and secondly, it is the source of political strength in the South and in national politics. The population of deep South counties is largely rural of necessity since the economic framework, both historically and presently, out of which the people live, is agricultural.

METHOD:

(1) There will be a series of surveys of the community.

A. The first survey is done by two persons stationed in the field who are SNCC field secretaries.

(1) The standing leadership (leading Negroes) must be approached - ministers, physicians, students, masons, ladies clubs, etc.

(2) The subordination of organizational interest must be clearly stated in no uncertain terms.

(3) An explanation must be given for the intended efforts.

(4) The opinion of what is needed most in the community must be known. If there is a symbol of discontent for the whole community, it should be known. An appraisal of the community should be made by leading persons in the community.

(5) Personal relationships should exist between leading Negroes and staff.

B. The second survey should be done by students of the community who will generally be on the high school level.

(1) It is announced in the churches and other public places that a voter-registration drive is in process in the county.

(2) Students will go from one home in their particular community to another explaining who is in the community, what is hoped to be accomplished, and how each person can help.

(3) Various sessions will be held with the students, interpreting and re-interpreting the methods we use and why they are necessary.

(4) Names will be solicited of persons immediately interested in active participation. Leaders indeed, begin to emerge.

(5) At this point, a meeting of interested persons in the community is called through students, by way of mouth.

C. The third canvass is done by the emerging leadership, that is, those who aspire to lead, along with the standing leadership.

(1) The mass meeting announcement is made public in the churches.

(2) The need for the meeting is cited as the area is canvassed, reviewing all that has been said in the past.

(3) The canvass is made with forms, thereby making the process uniform and formal.

(4) Fears are talked about with the people in their homes.

(5) A meeting for evaluation of past events is called for those who have been active so far. Plans for the mass meeting are drawn up in a joint effort.

(2) There will be channels of communication.

A. The mass meeting is most important.

(1) In the rural areas there is a sense of isolation and the meetings bring people together physically, mentally, and spiritually. It is here that we hold soul searching sessions. It is repeated over and over again that it is not shameful to admit fear but rather, a sign of maturity - the first step. This is done in the group and each person understands in time (intellectually or by per-

sonal identification and acceptance of being free to admit the developed fears from their youth. This develops to be a point of group identification and acceptance and later solidarity. The acknowledgement of fear, separation and inaction among the Negro population, becomes the first step for courage, unity, and action.)

(2) In the mass meetings there is a canvass for unregistered persons, homes for classes in Voter-Registration requirements, and canvassers. Everyone will have a unique function. We have found that people will respond more readily if it is suggested that they go to register in a group. This is of course in line with the new motivation-group action, a sense of direction in belonging to each other, and a sense of disciplined urgency. It is at the mass meeting alone, that we initially ask people to register.

(3) There is an attempt to relate the relevance of the Christian gospel in these meetings. The people are usually highly sensitive to values termed religious. We present the historical dista toward nonviolence as manifested and interpreted by the church and challenge the people to follow in comparable action of today.

(4) The most constant communication in these meetings is related to the role of the Justice Department. We project the idea of total dependence on the alertness of the department as a further stimulus for action. The Justice Department is a magic phrase and in the deep South holds an unbelievable position of confidence, presently, in the minds of the oppressed.

(5) In the mass meeting, we keep the people aware that they are not alone in their local efforts. Pictures are shown of what other communities have done and are doing to help themselves. Tapes are played and songs are sung to promote a sense of belonging to the "MOVEMENT" of people for their rights both now and in the past.

(6) After a core of responsible persons whom the people respect are observed we drop slowly from the public leadership to a position of strict advisorship (on a peer level). Then the people form a workable structure of their own design, for the most part, including a representative from every social unit of identifiable group status in the county. This would mark the point in the development that a general pattern of operation within the community would have been established by those who have been active. We could then leave the area.

B. The high school transportation system in the county is used as a means of communication.

(1) The county is divided up into cities, towns or villages. There students in every geographical division and all ages can be used.

(2) The bus system can be utilized. The responsibility for disseminating information in a bus is delegated to eight students, who receive information from four students who receive their information from one main student who receives his information from the SNCC staff workers. There is one person for each bus. All information is written out and folded neatly into the hand. We have found opposition in many counties, though Negroes drive their buses and own them in some cases. Students are warned to stay away from us so we have found a way to come to them unseen. This has proved effective in Terrell County.

(3) This is in many counties the only means of literary communication. The papers, which are for the most part weeklies, are for the most part weeklies, are segregationist and carry only news which depict the Negro as a bastard man and a villain.

C. We publish a communication sheet called the Student Voice each week and sometimes more often, depending on the situation.

(1) We reach the religious populace for the most part, but this is not the extent of our distribution.

(2) In some places, we have gotten insurance persons to carry our literature.

(3) It is shocking to observe, as we deliver them to mass Meetings, how people scramble for a copy.

The second point of emphasis concerns itself with the urban area. Generally the same principle applies here but the method varies. Although there is a definite advantage in having "crash drives" when the deadline for registration or voting nears, we believe that Voter-Registration should be a continuing process.

1. Block workers are assigned to each block, apartment, or road.

A. A worker is not given more families than he has time to contact, not more than 25.

B. Each worker is given a map of the block for which he is responsible.

C. Workers are stationed in the business district of the area and if possible in the court house where people can be directed to register who come to buy car tags, or pay taxes.

2. Each worker uses an information sheet.

A. The top of the form is filled by the worker- name, address, and block working.

B. The name, address and telephone number of persons canvassed; whether or not he is registered should be indicated.

C. The worker must know if the persons need transportation and if so, how many people they can get to go to register along with them.

D. It must be known if a registered person has voted within three years.

E. Baby sitters are provided.

F. Car pools are organized.

3. Included in the Voter-Registration program is the get out the vote campaign.

A. A list of registered voters must be gotten along with their telephone numbers which are placed on a master sheet from which are derived a set of cards, one for the block worker and one for the poll watcher. On each card would appear a name, address and telephone number.

B. The poll watchers pull cards as voters come to the ballot box and inform the office about tardy voters.

C. The telephone workers call the voter once the week before the election, once the day before the election, and the day of the election.

D. Each voting district should have a headquarters (somebody's home), cars for transportation, baby sitters, poll watchers, and telephone workers.

Our operations are based on the premise that we cannot do the work ourselves. The people must and should do the foot work. The people should include student, ministers, the man on the street, businessmen, maids, the housewife, and so on. They must be motivated to feel it is their responsibility. They must further understand that each individual is needed to such an extent that one person's loss will damage the project. Each is vital to the success of the campaign.

The second and Third Congressional Districts in Georgia, offer, potentially, the greatest stimulation for Voter-Registration in the state, and the counties named are the first step in a systematic attempt to move to other counties as conditions warrant. We do not feel limited for other counties will be stimulated and appeal for help.

PERSONS OPENING HOMES TO STUDENTS FOR THE SUMMER:

Mr. A. C. Searless, Albany, Georgia - - - - - One whole house
Bobby Burch, 1005 River Rd., Albany, Georgia - - - - - " " "
Mrs. Caroline Daniels, 601 1st. Ave., Dawson, Georgia - - - - - " " "
Mr. & Mrs. Edwards, Sasser of Terrell County - - - - - One or more
Mr. & Mrs. Hall, Bronwood of Terrell County - - - - - One girl
Mr. Pullum, Bronwood of Terrell County - - - - - (?)
Mr. Lucious Holloway, Dawson, Georgia - - - - - One
Mr. James "Ays & Bros., Leslie, Georgia of Lee County, Rt.1-Four or more
Mrs. Viola Hicks, Albany, Georgia - - - - - Two

And lots more