

CORE

ORLEANS PARISH VOTER REGISTRATION PROJECT

FROM: Steven N. Rubin  
TO: Richard Maley  
DATE: March 27, 1964

THE SETTING

Our VR Project was initiated in the 11th Ward of Orleans Parish (New Orleans). The 11th Ward had a 1960 Negro population of 21,449, which accounted for 65.2% of the ward's 32,874 total population. Of the Ward's 21,449 Negroes, only 3,636 were registered voters in 1960 -- 17% of the total Negro population -- as contrasted to 5,670 registered white voters out of a total of 11,425 whites living in the ward. In 1960, then there was obviously a great disparity between the potential voting strength of the ward's Negroes and their actual number of registered voters. I have not been able to up-date the above statistics with any accuracy; it would be interesting to know just how effective the Coordinating Council's VR efforts in the ward's housing project have been. (The Council did not engage in door-to-door canvassing save in that project.) But whatever the Council's effect, it is clear that the 11th Ward represents an area in which if every single eligible voter were registered, the Negro vote would command a 2-to-1 edge over the white vote. (See Appendix A.)

PRESENT EFFORTS

Personnel: At present there are 10 canvassers with varying amounts of time and enthusiasm doing door-to-door work, with 2 more likely to begin in a week or so. I have a line on 3 additional prospects. The canvassers are working in pairs, with each pair assigned 2 or 3 blocks to cover; since the vast majority of volunteers are students, their efforts are of necessity part-time. They are working in the 13th and 14th Precincts. Our first 2 pairs hit the streets approximately 3 weeks ago.

Clinic: A VR Clinic is scheduled to open on the evening of March 31 at the New Zion Baptist Church on Third Street. The Church is readily accessible to residents of the 13th and 14th Precincts. Two of our regular canvassers will conduct the clinic on Tuesday evenings, with other canvassers encouraged to attend and lend a hand where needed.

Materials in Use: Canvassers are supplied with copies of all the forms used in the registration process, and are leaving them with prospective registrants after their intricacies have been explained. In addition, a "Useful Information" sheet and a form for recording the results of each attempt to register are supplied to all candidates. It is the canvasser's job to ensure completion and collection of the latter. Finally, canvassers have been asked to fill out "Weekly Tabulation" reports, both for our own information and for their value as stimulants to sustained effort. (See Appendixes B and C.)

#### PHYSICAL NEEDS

Materials: Oretta Castle assures me that a considerable quantity of the attached Appendix B forms are stored at the Dryades Street "Y" and are available to us, so they are not a problem. I'll have to see just how considerable that quantity is, though. The remaining forms can easily be mimeographed as they are needed. As a rough guess, I would estimate additional costs of mimeographing the above cited Appendix C forms at \$15 for the rest of our efforts in this ward.

Buttons: On order from N.Y.C.

Promotion: Considerable promotion and publicity can be achieved at no cost at all simply by establishing favorable relationships with the churches and organizations in the ward. (See "OTHER NEEDS" below) In addition, it seems to me that if we can afford posters and hand-out sheets, we should utilize them. Press releases and letters to newspaper editors can be sent out, and should be as soon as possible.

Canvassers: I can always use more.

#### ADMINISTRATIVE NEEDS

Lines of authority and responsibility should be clearly established and made known as soon as possible. In addition, I would urge that we agree upon ~~when and where~~ decisions affecting the Project be discussed and decided. (Decisions of an administrative or policy-making nature should be <sup>made</sup> in private.)

I am already starting to feel the pinch of supervising the Project with neither an office to work from nor secretarial assistance. If the project gets no larger, we'll get by; if and when our activities or personnel increase, I'm going to need help. I anticipate problems, and if relief is possible earnestly request it.

## OTHER NEEDS

The Project's chances for success will be immeasurably increased if we can enlist the co-operation of those civic, fraternal, social and other organizations already existing in the ward. Cretha has said that she would look into this. I have in mind (a) assistance in baby-sitting, to free prospective registrants for their trip to City Hall, (b) assistance in transporting them to City Hall, (c) publicity at group meeting and endorsement of our Project, (d) the possibility of recruiting further workers, etc.

As we move into a specific area, I think it wise to act on Annie Moody's suggestion that we approach every church in the area we're working. The sort of support outlined above may be obtained, and the individual clergymen may provide us with platforms (literal or figurative) for exhorting their congregations. Selected canvassers can handle this.

## IMPROVEMENT OF PROJECT TECHNIQUES

As I have it thus far set up, our VR Project is disquietingly similar to other VR Projects that this city has seen. It is commonly believed that no past attempts at widespread VR have succeeded to any significant degree, and certainly the evidence on hand would seem to substantiate that. So that, on the face of it, prospects are somewhat discouraging. But before being discouraged, I think we need to determine a number of things.

1. In terms of time, energy (manpower hours), and money expended, just exactly how have other projects fared? In line with this, can we learn from their mistakes (if any)?
2. If the failure of other projects has been an internal affair (i.e., something they did wrong or failed to do, some critical shortage of personnel or money, etc.), we can perhaps benefit from an analysis of their experience. But we must also explore a possible external problem, the frequently-heard charge that as soon as a VR drive gets 50 Negroes registered, the Registrar of Voters purges 49 of them. I plan to discuss this with the Coordinating Council people once I am able to determine the Council's status and future. (Dr. Walter Young has volunteered to act as a liaison in this area, and attorney Lolis Elie thinks that Dr. Young would be a good person to so act.) And I plan to get together with a local woman who has had some access to the Registrar of Voter's records, as well as with representatives of the Justice Department and the Civil Rights Commission when I can.

3. Can CORE use the Project for other purposes?  
(See POST-PROJECT MATTERS, below)

PROJECT TIMETABLE

The Registrar of Voters' office will be closing on approximately June 25. It will open for a scant 3 days or so a month later, and will then be closed again until approximately August 29. Tentatively, I think we should complete our work in the 11th Ward in the time between now and the first closing of the office on June 25. If that's not possible, we can work on through July, and attempt to have dramatically long lines outside City Hall throughout that 3-day reopening period.

POST-PROJECT MATTERS

Once an area has been worked by CORE VR people, whether it by merely a few precincts or an entire ward, it may be possible to capitalize on the residents' familiarity with CORE. Mary Hamilton has suggested that CORE give serious thought to follow-up activities, and that if it is decided that specific activities are possible and desirable, they take place during or not long after VR work. Organized protests over the disrepair and incompleteness of streets, inadequate garbage pick-up or street lighting, rent strikes against slumlords, etc., are all possible. Our VR work will help in softening up an area, and follow-up projects would have the advantage of not having to enter it "cold." Mary is already involved in the necessary research on this. The northern part of the 11th Ward appears admirably suited for such nefarious purposes.

The most likely area into which we might move after completion of work in the 11th Ward is the 2nd Ward. Until contact with the Coordinating Council has been made, I'll be unable to determine how much (if any) work has been done in that Ward. (See Appendix A for 1960 figures) If we decide to move into the 2nd Ward, I will need an assistant to appraise the area, explore its possibilities, and help make out a plan of attack. (If the tentative timetable for the 11th Ward, as outlined above, is followed, we might start our research approximately July 1 and move in in mid-August.)

cc: Oretha Castle  
Mary Hamilton

SIR

# APPENDIX A

## 1960 POPULATION FIGURES

<u>WARD</u>	<u>TOTAL POPULATION</u>	<u>WHITE</u>	<u>NEGRO</u>
2	16,985	2,993 (17.6%)	13,992 (82.4%)
11	32,874	11,425 (34.8%)	21,449 (65.2%)

## 1960 REGISTRATION FIGURES

<u>WARD</u>	<u>WHITE POPULATION</u>	<u>WHITE IV</u>	<u>NEGRO POPULATION</u>	<u>NEGRO IV</u>
2	2,993	1,933 (64.6%)	13,992	1,680 (11.9%)
11	11,425	5,670 (49.6%)	21,449	3,636 (17.0%)