

SELECTED SECTIONS FROM THE FIRST ANNUAL REPORT OF THE VOTER
EDUCATION PROJECT OF THE SOUTHERN REGIONAL COUNCIL, 1962-63

ECONOMIC RETALIATION

...Mississippi planters rely upon the U.S. Government for financing their farming operations through the crop loan programs. Negroes working on these plantations are threatened with the loss of their only means of livelihood if they register to vote. In a number of instances, Negroes have been driven off plantations where they had sharecropped for years after having registered to vote, or having participated openly in registration activity.¹

...White segregationists are in effective control of the southern economy in precisely those areas where abuses of voting rights are most flagrant. Injunctions restraining registrars from discriminating are not likely to have much effect in areas where Negroes know that to register means to lose even the pittance they earn working for the white man. Furthermore, injunctions themselves will accomplish nothing without the proper enforcement procedure.²

VOTER REGISTRATION PROGRAMS

...Thus, what the registration programs in these areas boil down to is this: Gallant and fantastically committed young men and women live month after month under the constant threat of physical violence from the police and thugs alike, while they coach, cajole, entreat, demand, instruct, and encourage the Negro to brace the white man's wrath at the courthouse, in pursuit of his political birthright. And they do this in the full knowledge that the literacy tests, the character tests, the entire registration machinery is specifically designed, not to insure a qualified electorate, but to insure a white electorate. Thus at the very time registration workers are helping Negroes prepare to meet present state registration requirements, they have every reason to expect that if they are successful, the state requirements will promptly be changed and they will have their work to do all over again. The patience of a Job would wear thin on such a political treadmill, and there seems little reason to doubt that, without some assurance of relief from some quarter, the younger participants in the civil rights movement will begin to question the feasibility of voter registration as a means of achieving their objectives in these maximum resistance areas.³

- 1 First Annual VEP Report, 10; traditionally Southerners have been prominent in those House subcommittees concerned with agriculture and crop allotments (e.g., Jamie L. Whitten [Rep., 2nd C.D., Miss.] and Thomas George Abernathy [Rep., 1st C.D., Miss.], both of whom were subcommittee chairmen of House groups controlling cotton allotments and other agricultural matters in the 1960's).
- 2 Ibid., 11-12; during the 1960's large numbers of Negroes were evicted from Delta plantations for civil rights activities, among them Mrs. Fannie Lou Hamer.
- 3 Ibid., 12-13; see documentation of changes in Mississippi laws in Mississippi: Subversion of the Right to Vote and The Mississippi Legislature, 1964.

ORGANIZING IN HIGH-RESISTANCE AREAS

...The second type program has been conducted in rural or small town areas where resistance on the part of the whites is heavy and Negroes lack confidence in both the utility and the practicability of political participation. Its immediate emphasis is on stimulating the potential leaders in the community, providing advice and counsel with regard to a wide variety of personal and community problems, bolstering the confidence of the people in their ability to solve many of their problems through effective use of the ballot, and training them in the skills and techniques of political organization and action. The registration of Negroes is, of course, the ultimate objective of such programs, but experience has shown that an enormous amount of groundwork must be laid in these communities before registration can even be attempted.

The methods of communication in these programs is in marked contrast to those used in the first type (urban projects). In these programs, a worker will often go into a community where not more than a handful of persons are willing even to be seen with him in public because of the fear of reprisals from the whites. Then he begins the painstaking task of building up the community's confidence, first in him, and then in themselves. The worker usually finds quarters with someone in the community, and lives with them as he slowly acquires a circle of acquaintances. He puts himself at the service of the community in meeting any problems of any nature that arise. Sometimes this is a process of months, during which the worker is continually harassed by local authorities. Frequently, he has to move from house to house to avoid implicating any one person too deeply. In several instances, workers have had to commute daily into a community at first because no householder could be found who was willing to brave the wrath of local authorities and give him quarters. When sufficient groundwork has been laid, a schedule of meetings is set up and persons are urged to come and discuss community problems. Invariably, the discussion comes around to voting and voter registration, as the community begins to understand that the solution to many of their problems lies in the effective use of the ballot. From a series of such meetings, sometimes held in homes, sometimes in churches or other community facilities, grows a trickle of registration applicants. As the registration begins, the harassment by the whites increases. It is directed not only against the worker, but against all who have any connection with him. Frequently, this harassment will severely set back or stall the progress of the movement and call for infinite patience from the worker as he tries to cope with the fear of the community and the hostility of the authorities.

This type of program provides a maximum of political education for those who participate in it, for they learn over a period of months, not only the skills necessary for registration, but they become a part of a functioning political movement, each with his responsibility for the effective progress of all.

Needless to say, this type of program has not produced a great number of registered voters, but it has brought political awareness, hope, and the real possibility of self-betterment to some of the most socially, economically, and politically deprived communities in the South.

1 Ibid., 21-23; cf. Charles McLaurin, Notes on Organizing and Martin Oppenheimer and George Lakey, A Manual for Direct Action (Chicago, 1965).

SELECTED SECTIONS FROM THE SECOND ANNUAL REPORT OF THE VOTER
EDUCATION PROJECT OF THE SOUTHERN REGIONAL COUNCIL, 1963-64

Background Statement

The Voter Education Project is a non-partisan program under the supervision of the Southern Regional Council, Inc., and is engaged in a research study of the causes of low voter registration in 11 southern states, the methods and techniques being used to increase registration, and the development of educational programs to provide voters with the will and knowledge to register and vote. Contributions to the project are deductible from federal income taxes, pursuant to a ruling by the Internal Revenue Service dated March 22, 1962, and the first public announcement of the project was made on March 29, 1962, and carried the endorsement of the Chairmen of both the Republican and Democratic national committees, in addition to other leading Americans. The First Annual Report of the Voter Education Project covers the VEP fiscal year, April 1, 1962, through March 31, 1963, and describes: (1) Formation and purpose of VEP; (2) Operation, including methods and objectives; (3) A description of selected projects; (4) Formula and criteria for grants; and other pertinent information.

This Second Annual Report covers the period April 1, 1963, through March 31, 1964. Due to the fact that the method of operation and other activities follow the same general pattern as was followed during the first fiscal year, we will not undertake to repeat this information in this Second Annual Report. VEP will publish a detailed account of the entire project following the end of the registration in November 1964. The final report is planned for release in 1965. program

Participating Agencies

Five major organizations work actively with the Voter Education Project and have been a part of the program since its inception. They are the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, Congress of Racial Equality, National Urban League, Southern Christian Leadership Conference, and the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People. In addition to these five, VEP works with several local organizations in each of the 11 southern states.

Staff Changes

VEP continues to operate with a very small staff even though the actual registration work is done by the participating agencies. Jack Minnis, Director of Research during the fiscal year, left the project in December 1963. It was then decided that this position would be abolished and the position of Research Assistant created. Mrs. Barbara Whitaker, a graduate and former faculty member of the Atlanta University School of Social Work, was employed as Research Assistant in January 1964. Mrs. Barbara Stewart joined the staff as Receptionist and Clerk-Typist during the year. The other staff members include: Wiley A. Branton, Project Director; Randolph T. Blackwell, Field Director; Mrs. Jean Levine, Administrative Secretary; and Mrs. Janet Shortt, Office Secretary. Vernon E. Jordan serves in the capacity of Acting Assistant Director of VEP in addition to his duties as Assistant to the Director of the Southern Regional Council, Inc. John D. Due, Jr., a young Florida lawyer, joined the staff as an intern in human relations under the Eleanor Roosevelt Foundation Intern Program. [Leslie W. Dunbar is the Executive Director of the Southern Regional Council, Inc.]¹

¹ Second Annual VEP Report, 1-3; all additions made by the writer are in square brackets.

MISSISSIPPI

This state presents more resistance to would-be Negro voters than any other state and offers more intimidation and violence to Negroes than all the others combined. VEP has only been able to add 3,871 voters to the rolls in Mississippi during the past two years, a figure lower than the results from a single small city like Brunswick or Decatur, Georgia, or Winston-Salem, North Carolina. The total Negro registration in the state is approximately 28,000, representing only 6.6% of the Negroes 21 years of age or older. But here, as in Southwestern Georgia and Dallas and Wilcox Counties in Alabama, the success of the VEP program cannot be measured solely in terms of new registrants.

Mississippi has a long history of intimidation and violence against Negroes who seek to register, and with the rather large number of cases of injury and death to their persons and destruction of their property, it is little wonder that Negroes developed a fear of attempting to do anything which the white people of that state were opposed to. The First Annual Report of VEP carried seven pages on the Greenwood Project which was described there as being "in many ways considered to be one of the most successful of the VEP supported programs." Despite the massive jailing of citizens, shooting of registration workers, burning of property and other acts of violence and intimidation of Negroes in Leflore County, more than 2,000 Negroes have gone to the courthouse in Greenwood to attempt to register. Many were never permitted inside and the majority of those who made it inside were rejected by the registrar. The same story has been repeated in Hattiesburg and other cities. VEP has expended more than \$50,000 in Mississippi and feels that valuable research materials have been gathered from the project and that we have truly helped "to develop educational programs which will be most effective in providing voters with the knowledge and will to register," one of the major objectives of the Voter Education Project.

The work in Mississippi was under the sponsorship of the Council of Federated Organizations (COFO), a Mississippi organization made up of the local representatives of NAACP, SNCC, CORE, SCLC and local organizations. VEP suspended all operations in Mississippi in the fall of 1963 with the exception of an NAACP project in Jackson. Several factors were taken into consideration in reaching this decision. A sizeable portion of the VEP budget had already been spent in Mississippi and the registration results were minimal. Sufficient research data had been gathered to more than serve the purposes of the project. No meaningful registration could be expected in the state until the Justice Department is able to win an effective decree in the long-pending broad-purpose suit filed in UNITED STATES v. MISSISSIPPI. The delay in the hearing of this very important suit leaves much to be desired, but if it can ever be decided favorably in accordance with the position of the government, and is then vigorously enforced, it may be possible for registration to move in that state. Until this happens, it does not appear to be wise for VEP to put any more of its already limited funds into Mississippi. We only hope that the situation improves before VEP goes out of existence, but it will not change appreciably without massive federal action.¹

1 Ibid., 9-11; see Jack Minnis diary notes for an insight-which is different-into why funds from the VEP for Mississippi were cut off.

Plans for Third (Final) Year of VEP

When the voter project idea was first discussed, the plan was to operate it for approximately two years. When it became apparent that the idea would become a reality and would get started in the Spring of 1962, it was also obvious that a two-year program would end well up into a presidential election year. In order to take full advantage of all of the motivation for registration which an election year brings, the planners of VEP decided to run the grants-in-aid program for approximately 2 1/2 years. VEP will therefore support voter registration programs in each of the southern states up until the deadline for registration for voting in the November General Elections. This will mean until the first week of October in most of the states, with the exception of Texas where the deadline passed last January 31.

In addition to active registration programs, VEP will support some voter education projects which will be designed to help in a number of ways to serve the total purposes of this project. Among those are: (1) support of literacy programs to aid applicants in passing registration tests; (2) programs to explain the use of voting machines or the marking of ballots; (3) classes in government to acquaint voters with an understanding of public officials and their duties and responsibilities; and (4) some pilot "get out the vote" programs in a non-partisan manner.

Anticipated Income 1964-65

In order to conduct the final year of the project, VEP has been assured of the following terminal grants from foundations:

Edgar Stern Family Fund-----	\$ 75,000
Taconic Foundation-----	80,000
Field Foundation-----	<u>75,000</u>
Total-----	\$230,000

Final VEP Report

At the conclusion of the active registration programs in October, VEP will immediately set in motion selected projects to study the effect of increased Negro voter registration in the November General Elections. As soon as the general elections are over, the staff will then begin to sift through the large quantity of data and material which has come into the project office during the life of the project. Dr. Leslie W. Dunbar, Executive Director of Southern Regional Council, Inc., will devote a major share of his time at that stage toward the writing of the FINAL VEP REPORT. The final report promises to be a most interesting document which should be of great value for years to come to persons interested in voter registration, political action, human relations and other areas.

Future Plans

Many of the participants in the VEP program bemoan the announced end for VEP. They praise the great gains made under the program, but point out the fact that less than 50% of the Negroes of voting age will

be registered in the South by November 1964. There is no question about the need for continue registration programs, but we feel that we must pause and review our past activities very carefully before suggesting that the program continue. For this reason, there will be no recommendation regarding the future of VEP until after we have studied and analyzed our previous program and written the final report. At that time, we will be prepared to make some recommendation of the future of VEP, but it is not contemplated that the final report will be ready before 1965.¹

RESULTS OF VEP PROGRAMS, April 1, 1962 to March 31, 1964²

State	VEP Results 1st Yr.	VEP Results 2nd Yr.	VEP 2 Year Total	Est.Total Negro Reg.4/1/64	Est.No.* Unreg.N. 4/1/64	% of Elig- ible Neg- roes Reg.
Ala.	5,598	9,777	15,375	104,000	377,320	21.6
Ark.	4,952	3,804	8,756	80,000	112,626	41.5
Fla.	22,790	30,651	53,441	240,616	229,645	51.1
Ga.	27,156	31,963	59,119	240,000	372,910**	39.1
La.	2,765	3,545	6,310	162,866	351,723	31.6
Miss.	1,592	2,181	3,773	28,500	393,756	6.7
N. C.	9,838	18,713	28,551	248,000	302,929	45.0
S. C.	7,357	24,783	32,140	127,000	244,104	34.2
Tenn.	16,269	22,500	38,769	211,000	102,873	67.2
Tex.	20,590	267,984	288,574	375,000	274,512	57.7
Va.	6,100	10,420	16,520	121,000	315,720	27.7
Total	125,007	426,321	551,328	1,937,982	3,078,118	38.6

1 Ibid., 19-21; the footnote is for the above page and the preceding one.

2 Ibid., iii.

* Based on 1960 Census figures.

**Voting age in Georgia is 18.