

MINUTES FROM STATE MEETINGS

Citizenship Education  
Workshop  
July 20 - 24, 1966  
Frogmore, South Carolina

Distributed by:  
Scholarship, Education & Defense Fund  
for Racial Equality  
150 Nassau St.  
New York, New York

SOUTH CAROLINA - James T. McCain, Discussion Leader

The participants in the South Carolina group discussed thoroughly the state political situation.

Twelve counties in South Carolina had a total of 24 Negroes running for public office during the first primary of the Democratic Party election. Several went into the second primary. None made the general elections.

Reasons given for the inability to win were:

1. Not enough Negroes registered
2. Lack of political education in Negro communities
3. Division among leading Negro political organizations
4. Lack of knowledge in campaign organizing

One of the major goals of the South Carolina delegation is to remove from public office those officials with seniority who are fighting legislation that will benefit Negroes.

Their immediate program toward achievement of that goal is to correct the above-mentioned weaknesses before

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the general election in November. They decided to concentrate their efforts in the Sixth Congressional District.

MISSISSIPPI - Lawrence Guyot, Discussion Leader

The Mississippi delegation (22) thoroughly discussed the political structure of the state beginning with the precinct level. The function of all public officials was explained.

Negroes ran for Congress in the Democratic primary in each of the five Congressional districts. No one made it to the second primary. The main reason for this was the lack of Negro registered voters.

Most of the candidates were aware of this dilemma before they qualified to run. Therefore, the candidates concentrated on several other goals. These were:

1. To stimulate Negro voter registration
2. To increase Negro political education
3. To stimulate Negro political organization
4. To raise issues of importance to the Negro community

In order to take full advantage of the opportunity offered by the 1966 elections in the state, the delegation discussed means of qualifying candidates to run as independents in the November general election.

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The remainder of the discussion was on how to begin to prepare people to run for public office in 1967.

SOUTHWEST GEORGIA - Bernice Robinson, Discussion Leader

All of the delegates from Georgia have had experience in political work in the state. They are presently conducting political education workshops in the state. This delegation felt that the major problem confronting Southwest Georgia was the myth of "liberalism" that the state is presently projecting to the nation. They pointed out that many public accommodations are closed to Negroes in areas surrounding Atlanta. They feel that this myth has caused much complacency among the Negro people. To illustrate this complacency they pointed out that in Liberty County the Negro registered voters outnumber the white registered voters. Yet, major positions are held by whites even though Negroes have run against whites. The sheriff died while whipping a Negro.

Similar situations exist throughout Southwest Georgia. Some of the methods used by whites to split the Negro vote or dissuade them from making any major attempts to become

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politically active are:

1. To spread false rumors about Negro candidates
2. To buy off some influential Negroes
3. To use economic pressure

In discussing the major question of how to combat these activities the following suggestions were made:

1. Prior to an election do a thorough job on political education about the offices open
2. Begin now to develop political organizations from the precinct level
3. Begin to do research on the major issues confronting the community

FLORIDA - Spiver Gordon, Discussion Leader

The Florida delegation discussed the personalities and platforms of the candidates in the present Florida gubernatorial race.

The problems confronting Negro candidates in Florida are similar to those of Negroes in Louisiana and South Carolina.

LOUISIANA- W. W. Harleaux and Murphy Bell, Discussion Leaders

The Louisiana delegation had the largest number of former and present political candidates. Therefore, they spent most of the session analyzing particular cases involving their campaigns.

Four areas were used as prime examples for case studies: West Feliciana Parish, Iberville Parish, Orleans Parish, and Madison Parish.

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West Feliciana Parish

In this parish Negroes registered to vote for the first time in 1962. No one in the parish has had experience in political organizing and very few people are aware of the functions and obligations of the elected official in their area. Negroes are afraid to run because they do not feel qualified. Negro registered voters are in the majority.

Plaquemine, Louisiana in Iberville Parish

Negro voter registration is only approximately 30% of the total registration. Negroes have been running for public office for over ten years without success. The major reason for this has been racial conflict in the city. The land area of Plaquemine is structured somewhat like a distorted donut; a large number of Negroes live in the center (hole) which is outside the city limits. The major problem confronting the leaders of Plaquemine is how to best use the voting power of the majority.

An example was given: They are presently involved in an election for a representative on the school board. The present representative from Plaquemine is a racist who wants the current chairman of the board removed. Many white

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people in Plaquemine are disturbed by this and therefore want to run another candidate (white, supposedly moderate) against the incumbent. The Negroes want to run a Negro whom they feel is qualified. In a recent meeting between white and Negro leaders, the white leaders asked the Negroes to support their candidate. The Negroes pointed out that they had been compromising for years and that they would like the white leaders to support their Negro candidate in this election. The white leaders refused.

In this situation the incumbent will probably be re-elected. The Negro leaders ask what they should do. Some people thought they should compromise in order to beat the incumbent which would illustrate that the Negro community is important and at the same time get a better man into office. Others felt that they should back the Negro because even though the segregationist incumbent might win it might force the white power structure to compromise and back a Negro in future elections.

Tallulah, Louisiana in Madison Parish

This city's Negro voting population is in the majority also. This year for the first time, they decided to become involved in the political process of their community. Three

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Negroes ran in the first primary of the Democratic Party election. Two ran for city council and one for the school board. The Negro candidate for the school board went into the second primary, but the two candidates for city council lost by less than 200 votes. The following caused the defeat of the latter:

1. Over 200 ballots cast by Negroes were voided because they were improperly filled out.
2. Several hundred Negroes did not vote

The delegation felt that there was a need for more political education, especially on how to use the ballot, and better campaign organization for election day.

New Orleans, Louisiana, in Orleans Parish

The delegates from Orleans Parish used the campaign of Attorney Nils Douglas to illustrate the problems of Negro candidates in an urban Southern area where there are no Negro elected officials.

Attorney Douglas was running for state representative in the 9th Ward with a voting population of approximately 15,000 Negroes and 26,000 whites. In the first primary he was one of approximately 12 candidates. He ran first in



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that primary. In the second primary his white opponent had no qualifications; he refused to make public appearances or speeches. Attorney Douglas had sound qualifications; he appeared on television and radio and made campaign speeches to both white and Negro audiences. Two days prior to the election Attorney Douglas' opponent distributed literature and made speeches accusing him of being a black nationalist, and a slave of civil rights movements. Attorney Douglas' opponent won the election by a count of 16,500 to 8,500. 8,200 of those who voted for Attorney Douglas were Negroes. The question was raised as to how, in such an area, a Negro candidate can appeal to white voters.

Participants concluded in the case study of the Douglas campaign that none of the faults of Attorney Douglas' campaign was that the campaign did not make an effort in the white community other than through television, radio and newspapers. The main reason for this was that no one knew how.

The above examples represent a majority of the communities in Louisiana. The delegation also concluded that the state does not have an organized Negro political base, but that there is a need for one.

Maryland and Alabama delegates integrated with delegates from other states.