

HOW TO LOSE AN ASCS ELECTION RIGHT AND LEFT

SUBTITLED SOMETHING LIKE AN OUTLINE OF ELECTION PROCEDURES, PROBLEMS ENCOUNTERED, AND SUBSEQUENT RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE '67 ASCS ELECTIONS IN HINDS COUNTY.

1966 marked the first concerted efforts by Negroes and movement people to elect candidates in the heretofore white dominated agricultural elections in Hinds County, Mississippi. Each year the Agricultural and Stabilization Service holds elections in every farm county across the country. This agency under the Agricultural Department which deals most directly with farmers for matters such as price supports and farm improvement programs. And through these elections, local participation is insured in federal farm programs. To do this, county committees are chosen by the farmers to establish their crop allotments and disseminate information on the multitude of improvements and conservation programs.

BACKGROUND

Hinds County, lies in the West-central part of the state. It's eastern end includes the city of Jackson which makes up 5/6th of the total population of 187,000 and dominates the politics and economy of the area. Yet urban life abruptly stops at the Jackson city limits, and is replaced throughout the greater part of the county by an older and traditional pattern of rural living.

Thus, outside of Jackson, Hinds County is farm country. Spotted about this farming area are six towns averaging about 1,000 people. Each town serves its farming area as a center for banking, commerce, and local politics. But because of the county government scheme, the boundaries of influence between towns are vague and fluid. Consequently, vast tracts of

open farm country lie interspaced between these centers. Officially, this unincorporated area is dependent upon the county government seat in Jackson for its roads, electricity, and other governmental services.

The picture of political and economic influence in the rural portion of the county is, however greatly complicated by Southern racial patterns. Mississippi Negroes have been excluded from governmental participation on all levels. Existing political units and their boundaries were established and continue to operate largely according to geographical distribution of the white population. An increase in civic participation among rural Hinds County Negroes had resulted in their erecting an informal (but increasingly rigid) and separate political framework for their own use.

The county's towns are white controlled and the business and cultural apparatus is operated solely for the benefits of the white population. Consequently, the county Negroes have centered their political activity not in the towns and within the existing formal structure, but have moved their base of operation away from the white's views and into the Negro farm communities. As mentioned above, these farming communities lie within the expanse of unincorporated land between the towns and have no official local government other than the Jackson based and white oriented county administration. Historically the farmers have organized their civic life around the county churches. It is these county churches, today, which form the political centers of county Negro life.

However, the consequence of this church grouping is that these centers do not correspond to any official political units within the structure of state, county or municipal

governments. There may be anywhere from one to a dozen such communities within a voting district or ASCS county community. Often each community is aware of the activities of its neighbor and may share some feelings of loyalty. But for the most part each community loyalty lies toward its own interest and programs. This extreme localizing of loyalties has up to now determined the nature of community activities and their success in carrying through improvement programs which directly effect that particular community. One farming community near the western edge of the county named Mt. Olive recently won FHA approval and assistance for a local water system. Two others, St. Thomas and Morningstar, have independently initiated and are operating volunteer headstart programs for community children.

On the other hand, efforts to work beyond these geographic boundaries and extend the communities' loyalties have been failures as these larger and more exclusive units such as supervisory and judicial districts have been, in the past for rural Negroes, largely meaningless abstractions, part of the white man's world.

However, with the political thaw coming to Mississippi, together with its rapidly increasing Negro participation, people are beginning to have the new experience of projecting their loyalties beyond their immediate communities. Such was the situation with the 1966 ASCS elections this fall.

LOCAL ASCS SITUATION

Hinds County has approximately 3500 farmers registered for farm programs at the local ASCS office. Of these, 1880 are Negroes, or about 53%. In spite of a slight majority, Negroes to date have been unable to gain representation on the ASCS

county committee, the board ⁷ with any actual power in the
 county. A few seats have been thrown to the Negroes by
 putting them occasionally on the communities committees,
 essentially an honorary post responsible for electing the
 county committee.

UNEQUAL REPRESENTATION

The reason for this unequal representation are at least two-fold.

First, if we look at the nature of the ASC communities, we will begin to understand why no Negroes have been elected to the county committee. Of the ten communities making up Hinds County five have Negro majorities. Although the state office fixed the community boundaries, advice from the county committees is needed. Past exclusion of Negroes means that white county committees have structured the community boundaries to suit themselves. However, the slight majority of Negroes meant that the best the whites could do for themselves was an even split in the number of communities ⁱⁿ which they would have a voting majority, (see map).

However, dividing up the county to ensure at least an even split took quite a bit of doing for the whites. The heaviest distribution of white farmers lies in the South-east quarter of the county and the areas directly bordering Jackson. Negroes are distributed heavily throughout the Northern and Western parts.

Quite a bit of jerry-mandering is evident, particularly in this South-east quarter where whites live. For instance, boundary lines of Communities F and H deserve some attention. Both F and H swoop into Negro areas and absorb their population inside these much larger white communities. This leaves Community G with a slight majority in favor of the whites.

Much the same thing was done in the case of Community D. To ensure a slight white majority here, Negroes were safely isolated up in Community C. Pulling Community D out of the bag was a particularly shrewd piece of work, since the population of the general area has a 2 to 1 majority in favor of Negroes.

Community A, too, is worth some notice. A is almost twice as large as the average community. Here the population runs as heavy as 5 to 1 in favor of Negroes, and an opportunity to tuck away so many apparently couldn't be passed up.

A second determinant for little or no Negro representation on the county committees is the power of nomination by the outgoing committee. Here it's a matter of who got there first with the most. Whites for obvious reasons have controlled Southern county committees since their inception during the 1930's.

Working to the continuing advantage of whites is the committee's great power to nominate incoming members. Now, in areas with minority populations, the committee is required by ASC rules to nominate minority group members according to their numbers within the communities. This nomination by racial proportion would suggest a good method for ensuring equal representation^{at} both community and county levels. To meet any threat of such equal representation white farmers depend basically on two tactics.

First, white committeemen select "safe" Negroes. That is, Negroes who will cooperate with whites and do as little ASC business for the Negro community as possible.

Secondly, in areas with Negro majorities, whites nominate no more than five whites (the number of committee posts) and large number of Negroes. This tactic ensures a split in the Negroes' vote, among their several candidates, almost always resulting in the defeat of all the Negro candidates. Whites, on the other hand, vote for their five and win all five posts in the face of large Negro majorities.

And finally, any stray Negro, fortunate enough to win election is "straightened away" immediately concerning who he is and what

his powers are on the committee. His white committee "fellows" let him know that unless he cooperates, he won't be informed of committee business. This goes so far as his not being informed of time and place of meetings.

1966 Elections

First we started late--far too late to organize a thorough and efficient county campaign.

As is often the case we had no real idea of the time, organization and money needed to launch a campaign for even such a single purpose election.

About the 20th of October the Community Development Agency began talking with the Hinds County Farmers Association (a Negro farmers group) about ways to help Negro farmer candidates in Hinds County. At that time our ignorance led us to believe we had a good chance to elect a majority of communities across the county. On this assumption we offer^{ed} to organize across the county rather than put all our efforts into a few communities.

To do this we drew up a step-by-step program of procedures to be followed in each community. This included establishing a temporary committee of farmers to nominate strong candidates, organize their campaign, hold general meetings, oversee election procedures including watching the ballot count.

The plan, as a plan, was good. We began to run into trouble however, in carrying it out.

First, we greatly overestimated our ability to organize throughout the county. Until then we hadn't realize the extent to which the Hinds County Farmers Association (F.A.) membership was limited to just one community.

Initially we blissfully thought the F.A. would organize itself into the necessary committees to cover each community. Those in which the Association were weak, would be organized by teams from the F.A. and CDA.

We felt that we knew enough militant farmers spotted throughout the county. These farmers with our assistance would form nominating and election committees in their areas. They would nominate their candidates and run their campaigns. The CDA would in turn supply each community election committee with posters, maps, and literature explaining ASOS elections.

As we began to follow this procedure we ran head long into three problems.

First, In several communities we found we didn't know any farmers.

Second, in some instances, those few farmers we did know were so closely tied to the whites in their neighborhood to make them unacceptable or just plain unwilling to organize and support a slate of Negro candidates.

This was the case in the four South-eastern communities (Raymond, Chapel-Hill, Forest Hill and Terry). Neither of the two organizations involved had had dealings with people in this area with the exception of Raymond. In general, people here are very reluctant to meet for any purpose smacking feintly of civil rights. And not by coincidence the little clan activity in Hinds No. was active here. Contributing to this hesitancy was a population majority heavily in favor of the whites. In general, all efforts at any kind of organizing here produced little results.

In one notable instance we fell into a real mess. We had no Farmers Association members in Hubbard-Newman Community in the South-west portion of the county, although this area had considerable

movement activity in some neighborhoods. By talking with the people we knew we got together a list of leading farmers the people had confidence in and said they would support. Mr. Hatches and I from the CDA drove through the neighborhood talking to the farmers and asking if they would run. Everything went well until we contacted the last man, T. D. Burks.

First Mr. Burks was very vague about the whole thing and unwilling to sign petition for his fellow candidates. Finally after a great deal of beating around the bush we found that he was already a committee member for this last year and had been encouraged by the whites to run again. Further, he had been asked to nominate six other cooperative Negro candidates. This he had quietly done.

Suddenly we were faced with two conflicting slates of Negro candidates, ours and Burks. One way or another we had to whittle down the list to five to avoid splittling up the vote. This meant meeting with all the candidates and asking some to withdraw.

By general ^y bunling on our part, the meeting resulted in all our candidates being withdrawn and our being left to support Burks' nominees. It should be further noted, the nominees agreed to withdraw their candidacy and failed to do so, and stay^{ed} on the ballot. This meant of course, what vote came was split among seven instead of five candidates.

And it is my guess, and at the risk of harsh judgment, that the nominees just went home and conveniently forgot about withdrawing.

Withdrawing involved confronting the white ASC officials. Being questioned by those whites would have implicated him in the movement. Such confrontation often ends with that kind of acid-sweet remark, "Now Willie you all know you shouldn't be fooling around these kinds of people."

But what is more important here is that whites fully realize the reluctance of many Negroes, ^{to} either decline nomination or withdraw la

The whites capitalize on this reluctance and feel free to nominate at pleasure, often without bothering to inform the Negro that he has been put on the ticket. What finally resulted from the Hubbard Newman jumble was a complete unwillingness on the part of the candidates to campaign as a group. Mr. Burk felt confident of re-election and let his fellow Negro candidates be damned. Recall, he was responsible for their being put up for election. He proved partly right, for he won enough votes to sit as an alternate, but lost his position on the committee. In fact he was the only Negro to be elected in the face of a whopping 68% Negro majority.

Mallet, another Negro, ran well and might have beaten out the trailing whites for the second alternate seat except for the split vote.

The third and final problem found in organizing here -to-fore unorganized communities was the unwillingness of nominees to meet together and campaign. We found that canvassing communities for nominees was no real problem. But here I would say my being white might have been something similar to the power of the Southern White in nominating hesitate Negroes. Perhaps negroes felt they just couldn't say no to a white man regardless of whether he was a local white for a movement worker. The honesty factor is always a question until the parties know and trust one another.

At any rate, in most communities the candidates stayed home and any campaigning done was done by outside workers. This proven largely ineffective in overcoming large white turn-outs.

Finally we experience one additional difficulty which plagued us through^{gh} out the campaign. This was the inability of the farmers Assoc. members to cooperate among themselves for purposes of the election. Before developing this further, the readers should be drawn back to the section on historical background. Recall that loyalties

are expressed primarily with-in the local community and cooperation among communities is a new experience.

The farmers Assoc. membership lies withⁱⁿ the Northwest quarter of the county. However it is further restricted to the area around 4 rural communities (St. Thomas, Orange Hill, Mt. Olive, Brownsville and the town of Bolton). This strength, by chance, corresponds with the boundaries of community A.

Within this community the farmers were able to cooperate because the vast proponderance of its membership came from there. Each area successfully organized and conducted a campaign headed by its candidates. Considerable cooperation took place in both candidate meetings and general assoc. meeting. The community was divided up for the purpose of campaigning and collecting ballots. When one of the candidates fell ill, others from adjoining towns took over his campaign. Gas money was collected at a general meeting to help the volunteers. In general, considerable interest and loyalty was generated for the ASC community campaignⁿ and most of the discussion of the general meetings turned on this effort. At the same time, Mr. Carter from I and Mr. Bradley (Both FA members) from Community B undertook campaigns for their communities.

However, the assoc. was inclined to see itself in terms of community A solely. And only with repeated prodding from Carter, Bradley or myself ~~was~~ willing to consider the needs of the other 9 communities. No gas money was collected for these campaigns, no volunteers came forward to help Carter and Bradley. Offers were made by the officers to assist them which repeatedly didn't materialize. The president (Mr. Anderson) abandoned whatever stance he had assumed initially as county coordinator. Instead he concentrated on his own campaign first and the other community A campaigns second.

Whatever became of the efforts in the nine other communities was left largely to fate. And, I might add, to whatever activity the staff

of CDA would rustle up. Which in the face of what happened proved to be damned little.

THE CAMPAIGNS AND THE RETURNS

Community A: To summarize from the general materials above, Community A, ran the best campaign. By the population it enjoys 69% Negro majority, the largest in the county. As I mentioned, the farmers assoc. took considerable interest in this community and saw itself reflected by its success and failure.

Not surprisingly, then, it won by a landslide. Because of the intensive and coordinated campaign, the Negro farmers voted in blocks for the Assoc.'s five candidates. Each of the five candidates got about 205 votes (approx. 48% of the eligible Negro voters.). This block voting pattern is of particular interest because of all the ten communities, Community A showed the only example. Also of interest, it seems to me, is that the idea of block voting, although talked of considerably by Negro leaders, (and so some extent instructed to the public) has produce little results, except here.

The Negro candidates nominated by the whites fared badly. Their vote averaged 27 or about 6% of the eligible Negro vote. The whites on the other hand averaged 109 votes apiece and pulled in about 60% of their eligible voters. So in terms of percentages, the whites voted in heavier proportion (60%) than did all the Negroes (54%). However, the whites here ran much poorer than the best white showing (Community B with 34%)

COMMUNISTY B

Community B proved trouble from the beginning. Here we confused responsibility for organizing with Delta Ministry, and only much later learned that nothing had been done. One FA member, Mr. Bradley, took over the job and worked hard getting up a slate of nominees.

We found too late that most local people didn't know how to fill out a petition properly. This problem was to haunt us through other

areas where the FA was weak and didn't closely supervise the petitioning procedure. We had given out petitions and instructions for their use to organizing. Often they came back incorrectly filled out. In-eligible farmers had signed, even though master lists were given out to individual organizers responsible for the petitions. A farmer would often sign for several friends. Also it was common for wives to sign for husbands. I mention this problem here, because ineligible petitions destroyed the good campaign organization Bradley had built for community B. At the last moment he found that all but one candidate had been disqualified. With this disappointment everybody but Bradley assumed that it was business with the whites as usual and went home and forgot about it all. Only at the last minute before ballots were due did I reach Bradley (communications is the eternal number one problem) and help get up a make shift campaign committee. But results were as bad as could be expected. Interest was low throughout the Negro community and the association candidates (supported only at the last minute and with no posters) pulled only 28% of the eligible vote. On the other hand the whites apparently had become excited and polled 79% of their eligible vote.

However, this figure is inflated since it includes considerable Negro votes. As we listened to the voting tally, we could see Negro splitting up their ticket on the basis of 2 votes for Negro candidates and three for whites. Further it should be added that this seems to reflected common voting habits for Negro farmers (and tactly encourage of course by the whites). Something like two votes for friends, one vote for a "good" white and the other votes going to whites owed money.

The whites won all five position handily without serious contention from any Negro candidates.

Community C

Earlier I mentioned our inability to effectively organize the community around a Negro slate due to "uncle tomming" by T.W. Burks and company. Our candidates lost badly in spite of a whopping Negro majority (68%). Whites turned out in droves and carried their community by polling 84% of their eligibility. Burk rode in on their coat tails, as mention above, gaining an alternate seat. No other Negro candidate offered serious contention. Here I should mention this community had in the past shown considerable ability to organize itself. Yet it has always been on particular village on the eastern edge on the Community which as shown spirt. Add this village just couldn't drag along the other villages. This came as a bit of bad news to us.

Community D

I include this community for document because it is the other district where we have much drag. Yet the movement has been active here only within the last year and thus far hasn't come to much other than a rally and a temporary funded headstart program. Meeting places are hard to come by, and activity, from any but a handful, is nil. However through this handful we organized a campaign and the participants followed it through with determination. Yet the results were disappointing; the whites won by a breeze. This seemed to prove conclusively that even enthusiastic organizing on a temporary basis isn't enough.

Other Communities

Some good work was done in two other communities, notably I and J by Henry Carter. But even in Carter's home community, Negroes only pulled 14% of their eligibility vote. Whites also pulled poorly (38%) but with a good majority they couldn't have worried much. Community J went the same way. As I and J went, so went the other communities.

The final results shows no other Negro Committeeman or alternate other than our five in Community A and BURK in Community C.

Conclusions

At first appearance our initial venture into ASCS elections proved a flop. Of the thirty committee seats across the county, we won 3, and 3 alternates seats. For the several hard-working local organizers through out the county, it must have been discouraging to see so little results from so much work.

And with the clarity of hindsight we seemed to have made all the mistakes.

1. Our greatest error was overestimating our county wide contacts and to organize effectively community-by-community.
2. We wrongly thought that our staff could "plug in the holes" by temporarily organizing communities in which we had no contact with existing organizations.
3. We also erred in our estimate of the Farmers' Assoc. strength through out the county. In the long run, this seems to present the greatest problem--in areas in which the F.A. is weak, successful campaigns can-not probably be conducted, regardless of how enthusiastic the temporary organization.
4. We overestimated the cooperative abilities of the F.A. itself. The F.A. was effective so long as dealing with organizational problems in Community A. However they proved incapable of moving their interest outside their home base.
5. ...failed to supervise the candidates' campaign procedures closely enough. On the face of it, these procedures seem simple enough, filling out and filing petitions, gaining candidates cooperation, and delegating responsibilities for such things as election coverage, ballot collecting and poll watching.

But as we found out, filing a correct petition can be a significant problem which, if not supervised closely, can effectively stall a campaign. We found again that dividing up a community for campaign coverage by the candidates was a complicated problem. Most rural Negroes do not know how to read maps. Directions are in their heads and conform only vaguely to a lined piece of paper. Maps are sophisticated abstraction treated lightly only by educated people.

6. We wrongly thought we could coopt white-appointed ^{Negro} candidates into running a unified Negro slate in areas in which we weren't able to find good candidates. In all cases but one, Community D, white-appointed candidates showed only a luke-warm interest at best in their candidacy and did little to organize their own campaign. I suspect that in most cases these nominees felt little enthusiasm for the job, and because they had been appointed by whites, felt little community support behind them. This suggests for the future that such white appointees be by-passed and that only community sponsored candidates be supported. I mentioned Community D as an exception, for here several of the white sponsored Negro candidates rallied around strong liberal church leadership and ran an energetic campaign, but as we saw, with little overall community support.

Recommendations

There are at least three levels of organization needed for a successful ASC campaign. First, there must be a directly involved county-wide organization participating in the outcome of the election. Second, each community must organize itself around the campaign of its candidates. Finally, the candidates themselves must organize a cooperative community-wide campaign with delegated areas of responsibility. If any of these necessary ingredients are missing, the general effort will fail, and whites will retain control of the county ASC committee.

Because the first step involves a strong Farmers Association with a truly county-wide representative, this is our first priority for next year's election. However it is doubtful whether the association has the dynamics or resources ^{to} push throughout the county within the coming year.

- (1) Therefore I recommend extensive membership drives in the neighboring northern communities of J and B and secondarily in the South western communities of C, D, and E. All of these communities have registered Negro majorities with the exception of D, with 47%. I recommend that the farmers assoc. establish a permanent membership to oversee this drive.
- (2) I recommend that next year, instead of trying to work through the county, we concentrate our staff work in communities B and J to correspond with (hopefully) this membership drive. We will probably be able to win these two if (1) the drive produces results and ⁽²⁾ we conduct extensive ASCS workshops in our prospective communities. These workshops have been held in the past, but they have been county wide and far too general in the material covered. In this case every step of the general campaign will be methodically rehearsed with an emphasis on role playing to ensure experience in problem solving.
- (3) Finally, I recommend printing and circulating through out the county propoganda explaining ASCS, the elections, and why we lost.

Author's Message

This was a big "first" for the Negro farmers of Hinds County. Nothing had been given to them by the whites. They had successfully organized and won a public election against white opposition. This was the first time any of the five winners had been elected

to public office, although each had been a long time respected leader in his community.

Word in on the radio now. Negroes can win a farmers election, they don't have to throw votes to Mr. Charlie, because he isn't going to find out.

PERCENTAGES AND NUMBER OF REGISTERED NEGROES AND WHITE
FARMERS IN HINDS COUNTY ASCS COMMUNITIES

<u>Community & % of Negro Farmers</u>	<u>Total Nr. of Farmers</u>	<u>Nr. of Negro FARMERS</u>	<u>Nr. of White Farmers</u>
a-69	623	430	193
b-59	285	168	117
c-68	278	189	89
d-47	383	180	203
e-68	325	221	104
f-36	329	118	211
g-43	361	155	206
h-22	336	74	262
i-38	278	97	181
j-63	408	257	155

Total Nr. of Negro Farmers-----1889

Total Nr. of White Farmers-----1717

Total Nr. of All Farmers-----3606

Percentage of Negro Farmers

in Hinds County-----52.1%

Voting Returns By Communities A, B, C, and D

Community A

Total registered farmers.....	623
Total registered Negro Farmers.....	430
Total registered white Farmers.....	193

Highest vote for Negro candidate.....	215
Lowest vote for Negro candidate.....	191
Average vote for highest five.....	202
Percent polled of eligible Negro vote (on basis of aver)	48%

Highest vote for white candidate.....	121
Lowest vote for highest five.....	100
Average for five.....	109
Percent polled of eligible white vote (on the basis of average candidates's vote).....	56%

Community B

Total registered farmers.....	285
Total registered Negro farmers.....	168
Total registered white farmers.....	117

Highest vote for Negro candidate.....	54
Lowest vote for Negro candidate.....	32
Average for highest 5.....	43
Percent polled of eligible Negro votes (on the basis of average candidate's vote).....	28%

Highest vote for white candidate.....	104
Lowest vote for white candidate.....	78
Average for five.....	92
Percentage polled of eligible white vote(on the basis of average candidates vote).....	79%

Note: The percent polled of eligible whites is swelled by Negroes voting for whites. Negroes voting for whites accounts for high white vote and poor showing of Negro candidates. This pattern is reflected in every community except A where Negroes voted in block for Negro candidates.

Community C

Total registered farmers.....	278
Total registered Negro farmers.....	189
Total registered white farmers.....	89

Highest vote for Negro candidate.....	72
Lowest vote for Negro candidate.....	22
Average vote for highest five.....	51
Percent polled of eligible Negro vote (on the basis of average candidate's vote).....	27%

Highest vote for white candidate.....	90
Lowest vote for white candidate.....	59
Average vote for five.....	76
Percent polled of eligible white vote (on the basis of average candidate's vote).....	84%

Community D

Total registered farmers.....	383
Total registered Negro farmers.....	180
Total registered white farmers.....	203

Highest vote for Negro candidate.....	47
Lowest vote for Negro candidate.....	29
Average vote for five.....	35
Percent polled of eligiblle Negro vote (on the basis of average candidate's vote).....	19%

Highest vote for white caandidate.....	133
Lowest vote for white candiate.....	91
Average for five.....	111
Percent polled of eligible white vote (on the basis of average candidate's vote).....	54%

ASC BOUNDARIES IN HINDS CO, Miss.



communities with
Negro majorities
of farmers



communities
with white
majorities
of
farmers

