

S O U T H E R N C H R I S T I A N L E A D E R S H I P C O N F E R E N C E

208 Auburn Avenue, N. E.
Atlanta 3, Georgia

Martin Luther King, Jr, President

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SOUTHWIDE VOTER REGISTRATION PROSPECTUS

IN COOPERATION WITH

NATIONAL ASSOCIATION FOR THE ADVANCEMENT OF COLORED PEOPLE

NATIONAL URBAN LEAGUE

SOUTHERN REGIONAL COUNCIL

LEGAL DEFENSE AND EDUCATION FUND

CONGRESS OF RACIAL EQUALITY

UNITED STATES NATIONAL STUDENT ASSOCIATION

STUDENT NONVIOLENT COORDINATING COMMITTEE

The Southern Christian Leadership Conference has the basic aim of achieving full citizenship rights, equality, and the integration of the Negro in all aspects of American life. SCLC activity revolves around two main focal points: the use of nonviolence as a means of creative protest; and securing the right of the ballot for every citizen. Periodically, SCLC upon invitation conducts voter registration drives to enhance a community's opportunity to free itself from economic and political servitude. It is toward this end that this prospectus is directed, employing some new approaches and devices that warrant trial.

I. IMPORTANCE OF THE NEGRO VOTE

Under our American system of government, the right to vote is the basic tool for every citizen who would "promote the general welfare, and secure the blessings of liberty" set forth in the preamble to the Constitution.

With the groundswell of civil rights interest and activity as it relates to the Negro in America continually growing, the access of Negro citizens to the ballot has assumed new importance.

The demise of the white primary and the developing new posture of the Negro community since World War II have led both professional and lay analysts to conclude that the ballot is one of the keys to the solution of the myriad problems of segregation. By skillful use of the ballot, the Negro can be heard and demand equal consideration along with other groups with lobbying powers, representing business, labor, veterans and farmers.

Both major political parties have recognized the power of the Negro vote, and consequently, in the last few years, the platforms of each have included stronger resolutions aimed at improving the lot of the Negro. Much of this sentiment was crystallized in the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1957, the first legislation of its kind since Reconstruction.

However, nothing has so clearly illustrated the power of the Negro vote as did the last presidential election. Many reputable sources,

among them the New York Times, have indicated again and again with careful documentation that the sudden shift in the Negro vote in the large urban areas of the East and Midwest turned the tide for Mr. Kennedy and elected him as our 35th President. It is not safe to say that this was the only factor, but certainly the majority of experts agree that it was one of the decisive factors.

Another facet of the importance of the Negro vote that warrants mentioning is that of the impact it can have on world opinion. To say the least, racial injustice at home has been an ever-growing source of embarrassment. In emerging areas of Africa and Asia, every untoward racial incident increases our liabilities as leader of the free world. The full guarantee of the right of the franchise to every citizen and the employment of effective programs to convert the potential voting strength of the Negro in the South into actual voting strength would serve as the strongest deterrent to instances that damage our image before the nations of the world. Here again, the importance of the Negro vote is underscored; it is not only important to the resolution of our internal problems, it has direct relevance to our external problems.

Research discloses that less than 25% of the Negro population in the South of voting age is registered. Thus at one pole we have extremely low incidence of Negro registered voters and at the other pole, the extremely high importance of the Negro vote - not only to the Negro, but to our nation, and perhaps the world. How has this come to be?

The potential Negro vote in the South is beset by a two-headed monster. On the one hand, the effects of segregation have produced in him a sub-culture with an accompanying lack of educational, economic and political opportunities. So situated by cultural conditioning and the system of segregation, he has no real interest or hope that he can find relief through the ballot. Thus, the deeply entrenched apathy of the Negro community in the South towards voter registration. On the other hand, and this perhaps gives rise to a large part of the above, we have the many restrictive devices, compounded by tightening of voter registration laws (Virginia's blank sheet), purging of the voting rolls, open intimidation and economic reprisal. The Southern Christian Leadership Conference agrees that the monster is formidable but not unassailable. Our Southern dilemma cannot be relieved unless some hard-headed, well-oiled machinery in voter registration is directed at greatly increasing the number of Negro voters in hundreds of communities across the South.

II. CHURCH-ORIENTED VOTER REGISTRATION

It is our studied opinion that any successful voter registration drive, whether it be short-range and intensive or long-range and sustained, must be church-oriented. This is true of any program that directly affects the Negro community in the South. The Negro church, more than any other institution has dominated every facet of the life of the southern Negro. Its role as it relates to the Negro Community is perhaps a unique sociological phenomenon. The civil rights struggle of the Negro community

has directly paralleled the activity and development of the Negro church. The Negro church is his only forum, owned, operated and controlled by him; it affords him the broadest opportunity for social intercourse; it is generally the headquarters of the Negro's struggle for full citizenship; the pastor is the community leader and champion of the Negro's civil liberties. Most of the protest centers in the South are clergy-led.

A cursory glance at what has been done in the area of voter registration in the South quickly **reveals** that the great reservoir of manpower, pastoral leadership, and "grass roots" contact available through the Negro church has not yet been tapped. Accordingly, SCLC, from its church oriented posture, proposes in this plan a beginning directed ultimately at securing the maximum response to voter registration via the Negro church communities in the South. The strategic role of the Negro church in the community, its long identity with the struggle of its people, the practical considerations of public assembly and communication, lend emphasis to our feeling of the significance of a church-oriented voter registration program.

Outlined below are some specifics pointing up the value of such a program is mentioned above:

- A. Churches are located in practically every community.
- B. The church membership meets regularly, usually each Sunday, and often several members meet during the week.
- C. Churches are committed to the ideal of serving or meeting the basic needs of people and having genuine concern for their problems.

- D. Church membership cuts across all age, economic, educational, cultural, class, and geographical lines in a community.
- E. Churches have the resources and techniques for motivating people to voluntary and altruistic service.
- F. The time and schedule of pastors can be adjusted more naturally and easily than that of persons in most other professions.
- G. Churches remain free from narrow partisan and divisive handicaps more easily than other types of organizations.

What more fitting role could the church community of any city play than to be a decisive factor in relieving the hurt and misery of people who have been made politically and economically impotent by the system of segregation and discrimination?

III. SCLC AND SOUTHWIDE DRIVE

WORD OF PREFACE - SCLC has done some serious thinking on the prospect of a South-wide Voter Registration Drive in cooperation with other human relations organizations in the field. Our suggestion as to our responsibility geographically would be entirely dependent upon mutual agreement on these areas with the National Association For The Advancement of Colored People. It is necessary to mention this reservation because it goes without saying that NAACP has been pioneer in the civil rights struggle of the Negro. Their network of branches and state conferences cover the entire South with the unfortunate exception of the State of Alabama. Our posture remains firm that we would in every instance accept geographic responsibility only upon their mutual agreement. Most assuredly, there are some areas where both SCLC and NAACP are strong organizationally; here we would be amenable to a joint-cooperative project e.g. Virginia. In other areas, we could by agreement function where they

are weak and we are strong. The other side of the coin would be the reverse of the last instance cited. The state of Alabama from which the NAACP is presently prohibited from operating could perhaps be served best by the Conference. In this instance, there is some concentration of our following.

In short, this kind of rule of thumb would be used in relationship to the province of each organization, but more especially to NAACP because of its broad organization and extensive following.

GEOGRAPHIC RESPONSIBILITY - The Conference by way of the following proposals intends only to be suggestive and readily admits that that which appears below must have a high degree of flexibility. When it is indicated that we would assume responsibility for a geographical area, in toto, or in part, it is within the frame of reference that we would be willing to accept responsibility for whatever 'total program' could be reasonably expected for the duration of the drive. If we were to accept one-half the responsibility for a state, this means one-half the program of voter registration, that could be reasonably be conducted in that state for a given period of time.

ALABAMA - The Conference is willing to accept the total responsibility of a voter-registration program throughout the state of Alabama. We would direct our efforts at corraling the support of already-existing organizations in the field, re-activating those that have become dormant, mobilizing new forces, and gearing the total program predominantly through Negro churches. Key urban com-

munities would be chosen for intensive drives and densely populated rural counties would be primary targets. SCLC would address itself to particularly the hard-core counties where not a single Negro has ever been registered to vote. Especially will we concern ourselves with Congressional Districts that have both a high incidence of potential Negro voting strength and hard-core segregationists as their elected public officials. The same kind of concern will be given to those areas at the state and local level.

LOUISIANA - SCLC is willing to accept the total responsibility for a voter-registration program in the state of Louisiana with perhaps the exception of New Orleans. This exception is mentioned because we know that the New Orleans community is strongly NAACP-oriented and one of the more outstanding areas of their achievement in the Deep South. We would be persuaded by their judgment and in this instance would be amenable to a joint-cooperative effort. Louisiana is our second preference because of the high caliber results of the United Christian Movement headed by Dr. C. O. Simpkins (an SCLC official) and Mr. Harry Blake (Field Secretary of SCLC) in the area of voter-registration complaints that aided in bringing to Louisiana the Civil Rights Commission hearing on voting irregularities in the northern Louisiana parishes. We would honestly have the opportunity to build on a firm base that has already been laid. The same basic approach would be made in each state where the Conference functions as outlined briefly under "Alabama."

TENNESSEE - SCLC is willing to assume one-half the responsibility for the state of Tennessee. As in the NAACP's case in New Orleans,

we would feel very paternalistic about Nashville. This is one of the cities where we are perhaps at greatest strength. We recognize the superior record of the Association in Memphis and would defer to them readily. In addition to some eastern rural areas, the Conference feels it could be effective in Chattanooga and Knoxville. A plausible partition of the state into an eastern and western responsibility may be possible.

FLORIDA - SCLC is willing to accept as much as one-half the responsibility for the projected program in the state of Florida. The eternal presence of the Association provides still another platform for bi-partisan division of geographical responsibility and/or some joint-cooperative effort. CORE has a stronghold in Miami. The Association is naturally present. There exists the possibility of a three-way joint effort in this pivotal city of the state of Florida.

SOUTH CAROLINA - Upon consultation with CORE officials, we learn that they are most strongly organized in the Deep South in the state of South Carolina. Accordingly, this state, with the presence of the South Carolina Conference of NAACP branches, a tri-partite arrangement could possibly be made. The Conference is willing to accept a one-third responsibility for South Carolina.

TEXAS - Since Texas is the second largest state in the union, it is our feeling that there is room for all of the organizations in the field to function. Thusly, SCLC is willing to accept the responsibility for as much as one-third of a program deemed feasible in Texas.

VIRGINIA - The Commonwealth of Virginia is unique in the opportunity it presents, for here in this southern state alone is there the chance for a really joint program. Both the Association and the Conference have here their strongest and most active state units. So closely intertwined are the personnel and the objects of interest, geographical division of responsibility would be a great waste. It is our sincere feeling that a remarkable effort could be made under the leadership of Mr. Robert D. Robertson, state conference President of the NAACP, and Dr. Milton A. Reid, state conference President of SCLC. We trust that this suggestion be given the most serious consideration.

GEORGIA - The Conference, with an understandable bit of selfish interest, is willing to accept responsibility for the city of Atlanta. At this present moment, an evaluation of a city-wide voter-registration drive in this great southern city is being made to determine what impact some of our newer techniques have made. This drive was a joint-cooperative effort of many organizations with a sizable investment of finance and personnel of the Conference. A sound base has been laid in this pilot project and SCLC would reluctantly forego the opportunity to exploit the start that has been made. We are just as willing to enter again into a similar joint effort as of this past summer of 1961 in the city of Atlanta.

IV. STAFF*

DIRECTOR OF VOTER REGISTRATION - General overall supervision of Conference responsibility in total program. Maintenance of continual contact and coordination with Director of Southwide Project (Southern Regional Council Office). Works directly under staff head of Conference and directs personally the program and mechanics of voter-registration. Some field service absolutely necessary. Primary responsibility to oversee and discipline budget expenditures.

SECRETARY TO DIRECTOR OF VOTER REGISTRATION - Normal duties of a private secretary.

FIELD SECRETARY (5) - Upon assignment to specific geographic responsibility, general program of church-oriented voter registration would be applied. Secretary's primary responsibility would be implementation of program as it is suited to particular local community, rural and urban.

CLERICAL STAFF - Four or five part-time stenographic help drawn from home base of state where Field Secretary is on assignment. State program would determine modus operandi as to whether part-time stenographer would be a single person or several different persons in the area of the state being worked.

ORGANIZERS - Local people who would be corraled to do leg work. Modest stipends paid for time invested would be determined by prevailing wage scale of specific community.

* No attempt is being made at this point to present job descriptions. These represent only the barest details of general function.

V. BUDGET

Note: All categories apply for a duration of one year of operation.

SALARIES

Director of Voter Registration	\$7,500.00
Secretary to Director	4,000.00
Field Secretaries (5) @ \$6,000.00	30,000.00
Part-time Clerical Help (5) @ \$1,200.00	6,000.00
Organizers (No. undetermined) part time Leg work, Misc. duties \$2,400.00 per office	12,000.00

OFFICES

Rent	\$35.00	
Telephone	20.00	
Light	10.00	
Postage	20.00	
Supplies	15.00	
Pro rata \$100.00 per month		6,000.00

TRANSPORTATION

Director		3,000.00
Field Secretaries (\$1000.00 per)		5,000.00
Field Service (Organizers)		
Gas & oil \$2,400.00		
Auto 1,600.00		4,000.00
Car Pools (to registrar's office)		
Gas and Oil		4,000.00

PRINTING

Stationery, placards, handbills, throw-aways, fliers, posters, invitations, cards, etc.	10,000.00
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CHURCH WORK & CONTINGENCIES

3,000.00

PUBLICITY & ADVERTISING

Newspapers	\$1,500.00	
Radio	1,600.00	
Public Address	900.00	\$4,000.00

TOTAL \$98,500.00

VI. SUMMARY

The proposals herein contained are only suggestive and not
definitive. It is our opinion that a realistic Southwide
program demands at least a two-year period. The proposals
made had no intent to exclude mention of the other organi-
zations to be involved. We have addressed ourselves primarily
to the role of the NAACP because of the similarity of organi-
zational function. We have not presumed to say what the Stu-
dent Nonviolent Coordinating Committee or the National Urban
League or the Southern Regional Council, etc, would do. We
have the inclination to supplement what any organization may
do and be supplemented until every citizen is guaranteed the
unhampered right of the ballot. In short, SCLC pledges the
total resources it can muster for a dynamic Southwide Voter
Registration Program.