

Organizational Plans for Citizens Non-Partisan Voters Registration Campaign for 1962 in Memphis and Shelby County

I. Background

Tennessee requires no poll tax or literacy test and the only requirements for voting in Tennessee are residence in Tennessee for twelve (12) months and three (3) months in the county, and that persons be 21 years of age or above.

In order to vote in any election, the person must be registered at least thirty (30) days prior to the date of the election in which he intends to vote.

Memphis and Shelby County is comprised of a total population of approximately 627,000 persons. Of this number, approximately 399,000 are white and approximately 228,000 or 36% are non-white.

Voting age population of Shelby County approximates 359,000. Of this number, 240,000 are white and 119,000 are non-white. Of the 240,000 whites eligible to register to vote, 172,786 or 71.8% are registered and, therefore, qualified to vote. Of the 119,000 non-whites eligible to register to vote, only 76,582 or 64.3% are registered and, therefore, qualified to vote.

The non-white registrants comprise approximately 30% of the county-wide registrations.

The percentage of qualified non-whites is considerably lower than the percentage of whites who are fully eligible to participate in the voting process.

In 1948, Negro Democratic and Republican leaders grouped themselves together in an organization which adopted the name, "Citizens Non-Partisan Voter Registration Committee". It embraced Negro Democrats and Republicans along with representatives of the Bluff City and Shelby County Council of Civic Clubs, and leaders from the NAACP. Registration drives in this city from that date to the present have been conducted through this committee.

From 1952 through 1961, registration of Negro voters in this community increased from 7,000 then to the present figure of 72,000 plus, with a high point having been reached just before the November, 1960, presidential election when the records of the registrar's office revealed that 76,582 Negroes were qualified to vote.

Since the beginning of the Citizens Non-Partisan Voters Registration Campaign back in 1948, the character of the organization has been changed from year to year. Each year some improvements being made over the preceding year. Officers are elected annually, thereby taking advantage of new talent that comes available as time goes on. For example, organized labor has been very helpful in that it has sent highly talented field workers to Memphis to give us the benefit of their wide range of experiences in conducted voter registration drives. They have also assisted, down through the years, financially. The NAACP has also been an indispensable part of registration programs, down through the years. They, too, have sent in each year, trained field workers to aid us in organization of our voter registration campaigns. Likewise, they have made available funds and literature needed to make the drive successful, The local branch, more and more, has made voter registration a bigger part of its program. They have, down through the years, provided this organization with the only office space available, also

with secretarial help and traveling expense, The NAACP has repeatedly made available its list of membership workers to serve as block canvassers and provide transportation to and from the court house.

Today, the organization working through the Citizens Non-Partisan Voter Registration Committee can draw upon the following resources: approximately thirty Republican ward clubs containing approximately 1,000 members; 63 Democratic ward clubs containing approximately 3,000 members; the NAACP representing over 7,000 members; the Bluff City and Shelby County Council of Civic Clubs representing approximately 45 neighborhood clubs; and the Inter-Denominational Ministerial Alliance representing some 200 ministers from all denominations.

The Shelby County registrar's office maintains its records in an up-to-date condition. The local registrar purges the rolls according to law to eliminate persons who have not voted within the preceding four (4) years in a state-wide election. In the fall of 1961, 25,000 names were dropped from the local rolls. Approximately 17,000 of these were white with the remaining being Negro. Local efforts since that time have increased the Negro registration figures back to the present level of some 72,000.

II. outline of Plans for "62"

General

A voter registration campaign conducted in a county such as Shelby can be divided into two major phases, namely; (1) a gigantic publicity program designed to acquaint all of our citizens with the importance and necessity of registration so that they may be able to vote, and (2) a door-to-door canvassing program designed to approach the unregistered voter on an individual basis in hopes to persuade him and assist him in registering to vote. By combining these two programs, we feel a maximum amount of registration can be achieved.

In this county, July 2nd is the final date for registering in order to vote in the August 2nd elections involving the election of the Governor, U. S. Congressman, State Senators and Representatives in the Democratic Primary, and also approximately 40 officers on a county level in a general election. Therefore, the publicity program should begin on April 29, through June 3, giving us approximately six (6) Sundays. A ward organization should begin immediately.

We have listed below an outline of publicity and organization of a door-to-door program. The extent to which the media listed under publicity will depend on the availability of finance. Likewise, the perfection of the ward and precinct canvassing organization will depend to some degree to the availability of funds particularly in the employment of three (3) field secretaries who will have the task of coordinating the ward and precinct organization which is a full time job.

- I. Publicity
 - a. Media
 - i. Radio
 - ii. Speakers' bureau
 - a. Kits
 - iii. Placards and hand bills
 - iv. Pulpit announcements
 - v. Church bulletin announcements

- vi. Kick off of mass meeting here in conjunction with NAACP's May 17th celebration
 - vii. Registration mass meeting
 - viii. Newspaper ads
 - ix. Inspirational banquets
- II. Organization (Door-to-door Canvassing)
- a. Division of the county into nine (9) geographical areas
 - i. Sub-division of the areas into wards and precincts
 - b. Personnel
 - i. Employment of three (3) field secretaries each responsible for three (3) geographical areas.
 - ii. Selection and appointment of chairman and co-chairman for each of the nine (9) areas.
 - iii. Selection and appointment of chairman and co-chairman for each precinct.
 - iv. Organization of door-to-door workers.
 - c. Religious Divisions
 - i. Organization of voter education committees.
 - d. Special Projects
 - i. Worker at court house during Auto License Sale.
 - ii. Worker at the Unemployment Office.
 - iii. Organization of special teams to encourage persons to take advantage of supplementary registration centers set up in various neighborhoods at various times.
 - iv. Worker recruiting during business times.
 - v. Special teams to organize voters for limited night registration as may be available.
 - e. Steering Committee
 - i. Chairman
 - ii. Two (2) co-chairmen
 - iii. Secretary
 - iv. Treasurer
 - v. Seven (7) persons elected county-at-large
 - f. Office Structure
 - i. Executive director
 - ii. Four (4) Clerks
 - iii. As many part time secretaries as may be needed

III. Plans For Door-to-Door Campaign

As has been stated, the potential number of registered voters in Memphis and Shelby County, according to the United States' Census of 1960 is 119,000, the number of voters actually registered being 72,000 at present. This leaves 47,000 Negroes who have (not) registered. Our goal for '62 has been set at 100,000, an increase of 28,000. While we feel that this goal represents a tremendous challenge, since we are rapidly approaching a saturation point, it appears to be possible in the light of past successful registration campaigns. In order to achieve this goal, a highly organized program of systematic door-to-

door canvassing is required. To do this, we feel it necessary to secure the list of registered voters and conduct a house-to-house, street-to-street, block-to-block survey in each ward and precinct to determine who in each house on each street and in each block within every ward and precinct containing 100 or more Negro residents is unregistered. Eighty-six (86) out of Shelby County's more than 180 precincts should be thus canvassed. Past experience indicates that the block worker needs to know who in each house is registered so that he does not waste time talking to persons already registered. This requires relating the total number of registered voters to each ward and precinct street by street. This involves a great deal of clerical work.

The campaign must be conducted similarly to the taking of the Census, except that its purpose will be to pinpoint the number of unregistered persons over 21, so that the block worker's time and effort may be concentrated on them.

We hope in another year to be able to reduce our findings to maps of each precinct indicating the number of persons living in each house and whether they are registered or unregistered. Such a map would make it easier to use untrained persons and volunteer workers for future canvassing. Once this information is placed in map form, we would only have to revise the information discovered in future voters registration campaigns.

Though this program may appear at first glance as a fairly ambitious one, we have discovered from past experience that we are now approaching the hard core of resistance to voter registration, therefore, ordinary means such as talks to inspire Negroes to vote, without more, will not do this job, but the unregistered voter must be singled out and intensive persuasion must be used on an individual basis.

IV. Estimation of Financial Needs

a. Expenses

- i. Executive Director (2 months @ \$350 each month) \$ 700
 - ii. Clerical-Stenographic (4 clerks @ \$50 a week for 9 weeks) \$1,800
 - iii. Field Secretaries (3 @ \$75 a week for 8 weeks) \$1,800
 - iv. Supplies (for Compiling Voter Registration list for conducting survey) \$1,000
 - v. Transportation to Registration Office \$500
 - vi. Hand bills, posters and other literature for voters \$2,000
 - vii. Radio and Newspaper Advertisements \$2,500
 - viii. Posters and Supplies \$1,000
 - ix. Special Project (such as banquets, luncheons, meetings, workers at the Court House, etc.) \$1,000
 - x. Rent for three (3) months \$350
 - xi. Telephone (three months) \$350
 - xii. Office Equipment (file cabinet and typewriter rental) \$500
 - xiii. Miscellaneous \$250
- Total \$13,350

b. Income

- i. Anticipated funds to be raised from local donations \$ 3,000
 - ii. Anticipated funds to be donated by organizations interested in voter registration \$10,350
- Total \$13,350

In closing, we would like to point out that while such a door-to-door canvassing program as we are anticipating may seem over ambitious, in reality, this is not the case since we already have door-to-door canvassing available. We are relying heavily on the NAACP's member workers who are currently engaged in soliciting NAACP memberships and should be available by May 17. We also have the ward and precinct organizations of the Shelby County Democratic Club and the Lincoln League intact and ready to begin work on voter registration. Our finance and organization committees are already at work. We have finished the voter registration program at the court house conducted during the sale of auto license and we are happy to report that this program produced an increase voter registration of 4,000. We are, however, in vital need of funds so that we may get to work on other plans as indicated above. We would hope to finish the majority portion of our 1962 registration plans by July 2nd, the final date to register in the coming August 2nd election.

Respectfully submitted,

budget Committee of the Citizens Non-partisan Voter Registration Committee

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