POLL POWER:
THE VOTER EDUCATION PROJECT AND THE FINANCING OF THE CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT, 1961-1992

T. Evan Faulkenbury

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Approved by:

James L. Leloudis

W. Fitzhugh Brundage

Jerma A. Jackson

Robert R. Korstad

William Sturkey

Benjamin C. Waterhouse

ABSTRACT

T. Evan Faulkenbury: Poll Power:
The Voter Education Project and the Financing of the Civil Rights Movement, 1961-1992
(Under the direction of James L. Leloudis)

The Voter Education Project (VEP) was a discreet civil rights agency that funded African American registration campaigns throughout Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, and Virginia. Formed in 1961 by civil rights leaders, U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ) officials, and philanthropists, the VEP operated within the Southern Regional Council (SRC) to finance local movements and collect data on black disfranchisement. Headquartered in Atlanta, the VEP solicited grants from foundations—including the Taconic Foundation, the Field Foundation, the Stern Family Fund, and the Ford Foundation—and disbursed the money to activists conducting registration drives across the American South. The VEP supported the "Big Five"—the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE), the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC), the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), and the National Urban League (NUL)—as well as independent grassroots organizations. The VEP empowered activists by giving them funds for everyday expenses for an indigenous movement, including money to pay for office rent, flyers, salaries, food, utilities, mass meetings, car fuel, and canvassers to knock on doors. The VEP funded the southern civil rights movement, focused the struggle onto voting rights activism, and united a southwide social movement that ended Jim Crow at the ballot box.

Between 1962 and 1964, the first VEP helped register approximately 688,000 African Americans, stoking a groundswell of registration enthusiasm that laid the groundwork for the Voting Rights Act of 1965. The second VEP ran from 1966 through 1969 continuing to fight for power at the polls, until conservatives undercut the VEP by complicating philanthropic donations to registration fieldwork through the Tax Reform Act of 1969. The VEP survived until 1992, but struggled after director John Lewis resigned in 1976.

To Alex and Clara

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INTRODUCTION

In the summer of 1962, a registration campaign took place in Orangeburg County, South Carolina. African American activists set up a headquarters, planned mass meetings at churches, and hired coordinators and secretaries. They purchased office supplies, cut radio commercials, printed flyers, paid utility bills, and bought advertisement space in newspapers. Leaders mobilized car owners to pick up rural residents and drive them to the registrar's office. For small honorariums, speakers addressed packed churches on the importance of voting. Men and women took off work to canvass neighborhoods across the city and county. Working in teams, they went door-to-door, rang doorbells, handed out pamphlets from the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), talked about how whites controlled the local government, and urged residents to try to register. Canvassers who brought the most people to the registrar's office even won small prizes. Often spending hours under the hot sun, these men and women, both young and old, were the Orangeburg movement.[1]

Meanwhile, just over 200 miles away, the office of the Voter Education Project (VEP) buzzed with activity. Within a small space on Forsyth Street in downtown Atlanta, a handful of staff managed hundreds of thousands of dollars in grants from philanthropic foundations. The VEP collected and disbursed the money to Orangeburg, as well as to hundreds of other registration projects across the American South. Inside the VEP's office, typewriters clacked almost nonstop while stacks of mail came in and out each day. Local African American leaders

[1] J.W. McPherson, Report from Orangeburg Area, VEP Registration Program for the Second Congressional District of South Carolina, n.d., Reel 181, Frames 1267-1271, Microfilm Collection of the Southern Regional Council Papers, 1944-1968 (Ann Arbor: University Microfilms International, 1983). (Hereinafter SRC Papers).

applied to the VEP for funds to jumpstart community registration drives, sending in detailed information about their hometowns, voter statistics, and segregationist opposition. VEP staff reviewed each grant, weighing the costs while keeping in mind the hundreds of other projects they juggled. As often as possible, the VEP would approve grant applications, sending perhaps $500, $1,000, $5,000, or more for a grassroots registration campaign that might last several weeks or months. Behind-the-scenes, the VEP financed the civil rights movement.

Dr. C.H. Thomas Jr., am economics professor at South Carolina State College in Orangeburg, applied for a VEP grant. He knew that the desire to vote was strong in his county, where over two-thirds of the population were black but few had registered. African Americans had limited resources to orchestrate a prolonged registration movement. While churches passed offering plates and the local NAACP chapter sometimes held fundraisers, sustaining a blitz on the registrar's office would be time-consuming and costly. Fuel for vehicles cost money. Paying bills, rent, speaker fees, and salaries was not cheap. To implement a successful drive, one that could maintain the energy of Orangeburg's black community against the county's intractable white political structure, money was crucial. On August 19, Thomas received good news that the VEP had awarded $5,000 for a three-month registration operation in Orangeburg.[2]

With VEP support, a social movement for the ballot took place in Orangeburg. "Because of the total unrest and the general disgust with existing unbearable conditions," J.W. McPherson, a retired postman in his 70s and a leader within the Orangeburg movement wrote, "there was no time to form new organizations. We simply lined up what we had, closed the gaps and went to work. The Orangeburg Movement and a determined VOTER EDUCATION PROJECT was

[2] Dr. C.H. Thomas Jr. to the Voter Education Project, Attn. Wiley Branton, July 17, 1963, Reel 181, Frames 1061-1062, SRC Papers; and Wiley Branton to Dr. C.H. Thomas Jr., August 19, 1963, Reel 181, Frames 1067-1069, SRC Papers.

on."[3] During those three-months, the Orangeburg County Registrar's Office opened only on September 2, October 7, and November 4. On September 2, the Orangeburg movement had barely started canvassing neighborhoods. But momentum grew, and on October 7, 220 African Americans registered to vote, 115 people were left waiting in line, and another 26 were rejected.[4] On November 4, 161 people registered while 16 were rejected and 47 were left in line.[5]

Over the next year, the VEP supplied Orangeburg's movement with multiple grants totaling $17,900.[6] During that time, organizers expanded their movement beyond Orangeburg into the state's second congressional district, and in the summer of 1964, they formed the South Carolina Voter Education Project (SCVEP) to work throughout the state. Where African Americans had once encountered difficulty registering, they began swarming registrars' offices throughout the state. VEP money allowed grassroots organizers to nourish their social movement. Other groups joined with the SCVEP, such as the American Friends Service Committee, which found that helping others register was easier "because of Orangeburg being highly organized voter education wise due to prior VEP support."[7] By summer's end, at least 2,839 African Americans had registered in Orangeburg, and within two years, an estimated 40,000 had done so across the state, drawing on aid from eleven other VEP projects.[8]

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[3] McPherson, Report from Orangeburg Area (emphasis in original).

[4] VEP Orangeburg Report, October 18, 1963, Reel 181, Frame 1224, SRC Papers.

[5] VEP Orangeburg Report, November 14, 1963, Reel 181, Frame 1223, SRC Papers.

[6] Memorandum, Jean Levine to Wiley Branton, Re: "Final Accounting on VEP 3-20," November 24, 1964, Reel 181, Frame 1265, SRC Papers.

[7] Memorandum, John Due and Joe Tucker to Wiley Branton, August 10-12, 1964, Frames 1619-1629, Reel 176, SRC Papers.

[8] McPherson, Report from Orangeburg Area; and "Negro Voter Group Opens Office; Hundreds Register," *The State* (Columbia, SC), August 16, 1964, Reel 181, Frame 1208, SRC Papers.

Orangeburg was one of hundreds of indigenous movements across the American South that thrived with VEP assistance. For over 70 years before the VEP, African Americans had resisted Jim Crow laws and tried to register, but segregationists maintained control over local governments through poll taxes, literacy tests, intimidation, economic threats, violence, and political monopoly. In South Carolina, according to J.W. McPherson, "each county had some type of organization to encourage persons to register," but "these organizations worked on their own, at their own expense" before the VEP.[9] Most communities like Orangeburg lacked a coordinated resistance movement, that is, until the VEP launched in 1962.

The VEP was a discreet civil rights agency that supported non-partisan registration campaigns across the eleven states of the old Confederacy. Formed in 1961 by civil rights leaders, United States Department of Justice (DOJ) officials, and liberal philanthropists, the VEP operated within the Southern Regional Council (SRC), a research organization devoted to improving race relations, to finance local movements and collect data on African American disfranchisement. The first VEP operated from March 1962 through October 1964, and in those two and a half years, the organization supported 129 projects, spent $855,836.59, and registered approximately 688,000 people.[10] A second VEP began in 1966 and lasted through 1969. In 1970,

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[9] *Ibid*.

[10] VEP Financial Statement, January 1962 – May 1, 1965, Frame 1477, Reel 173, SRC Papers; Annual Report of the Executive Director of the Southern Regional Council, A Review of Program Activities During 1964, April 1965, Box 12, Folder 15, Leslie W. Dunbar Papers, Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library, Emory University (hereinafter Dunbar Papers); and Pat Watters and Reese Cleghorn, *Climbing Jacob's Ladder: The Arrival of Negroes in Southern Politics* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1967), 26-27. Watters and Cleghorn were journalists affiliated with the SRC, and *Climbing Jacob's Ladder* served as the final published report of the first VEP. By its own classification system, the VEP counted 129 projects between March 1962 and October 1964, but the actual number of local projects that received VEP support was much higher, though difficult to ascertain. Sometimes, the VEP classified grants to major organizations under one account number. For example, in 1963, grant number 3-5 went to the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) for thirty-nine local projects. I have chosen to count VEP grant 3-5 to CORE as one grant as the VEP did, although people in thirty-nine separate places benefitted. Other times, the VEP supported ongoing projects but catalogued supplemental grants under a new number, or the VEP gave single grants to be shared by multiple projects, or the VEP gave major organizations large grants to be divvied out between multiple projects and states. To avoid confusion, I hold 129 as a reasonable figure according to the

the VEP separated from the SRC, formed VEP Incorporated, and survived until 1992. Not every indigenous black registration movement in the American South drew on VEP funds, but hundreds did. The VEP dispensed money for registration campaigns, and in the process, united civil rights groups around voting rights, sustained a southwide movement, documented the fight against disfranchisement, and fortified black political power.

The VEP is not a complete mystery to historians, but none have studied the organization in detail. A handful of scholars have scrutinized parts of the VEP, though never the whole.[11] A common simplification classifies the VEP as a creation of President John F. Kennedy's Administration designed to pacify the civil rights movement's growing militancy.[12] Many local studies mention the VEP as a source for funds, and works on major leaders and the national

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VEP's own standards. To corroborate the 129 number, I compared three sources: Leslie W. Dunbar and Wiley A. Branton, "First Annual Report of the Voter Education Project of the Southern Regional Council, Inc. for the Fiscal Year April 1, 1962 through March 31, 1963," Box 1, Folder 1, Financial Records, Voter Education Project Organizational Records, Robert W. Woodruff Library, Atlanta University Center (hereinafter VEP Records); Leslie W. Dunbar and Wiley A. Branton, "Second Annual Report of the Voter Education Project of the Southern Regional Council, Inc. for the Fiscal Year April 1, 1963 through March 31, 1964," Box 1, Folder 2, Financial Records, VEP Records; and Mitchell F. Ducey, ed., *The Southern Regional Council Papers, 1944-1968: A Guide to the Microfilm Edition* (Ann Arbor: University Microfilms International, 1984), 144-154, in which Ducey documented VEP grants by separate account number. See also Appendices 2-7.

[11] Watters and Cleghorn, *Climbing Jacob's Ladder*, 44-50; Steven F. Lawson, *Black Ballots: Voting Rights in the South, 1944-1969* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1976), 260-266; and Judith Kilpatrick, *There When We Needed Him: Wiley Austin Branton, Civil Rights Warrior* (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 2007), 97-108. Vernon Jordan and John Lewis wrote memoirs detailing accounts of the VEP. See John Lewis with Michael D'Orso, *Walking with the Wind: A Memoir of the Movement* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1998), 413-420; and Vernon E. Jordan, Jr. with Annette Gordon-Reed, *Vernon Can Read! A Memoir* (New York: PublicAffairs, 2001), 166-204.

[12] Arthur M. Schlesinger Jr., *A Thousand Days: John F. Kennedy in the White House* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1965), 935; Carl M. Brauer, *John F. Kennedy and the Second Reconstruction* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1977), 112-116; David J. Garrow, *Bearing the Cross: Martin Luther King Jr. and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference* (New York: William Morrow, 1986), 161-162; Taylor Branch, *Parting the Waters: America in the King Years, 1954-1963* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1988), 477-482; Mark Stern, *Calculating Visions: Kennedy, Johnson, and Civil Rights* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1992), 63-66; Nick Bryant, *The Bystander: John F. Kennedy and the Struggle for Black Equality* (New York: Basic Books, 2006), 283-286; David C. Carter, *The Music Has Gone Out of the Movement: Civil Rights and the Johnson Administration, 1965-1968* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009), 46; and Françoise N. Hamlin, *Crossroads at Clarksdale: The Black Freedom Struggle in the Mississippi Delta after World War II* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2012), 104.

struggle acknowledge the VEP.[13] Within the broader historiography of the African American freedom struggle, key debates have missed the significance of the VEP. Lost amid arguments over "top-down" versus "bottom-up," whether or not the Black Power era represented a distinct period, or if the bulk of the twentieth century ought to be viewed within the "long civil rights movement" is the narrative of how the VEP drove forward a civil rights issue that had been a priority since emancipation.[14]

The VEP's story recasts the history of the civil rights movement in two significant ways. First, through the VEP, philanthropic foundations underwrote two of the civil rights movement's

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[13] For a selection of local studies that credit the VEP, see John Dittmer, *Local People: The Struggle for Rights in Mississippi* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1994), 119-120, 147-148; Charles M. Payne, *I've Got the Light of Freedom: The Organizing Tradition and the Mississippi Freedom Struggle* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995, 2007), 108-109, 141-172; Adam Fairclough, *Race and Democracy: The Civil Rights Struggle in Louisiana, 1915-1972* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1995); 294-295, 302-317; and J. Todd Moye, *Let the People Decide: Black Freedom and White Resistance Movements in Sunflower County, Mississippi, 1945-1986* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 103-114. For a selection of southern and national perspectives that take the VEP into account, see August Meier and Elliot Rudwick, *CORE: A Study in the Civil Rights Movement, 1942-1968* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973), 172-181; Harvard Sitkoff, *The Struggle for Black Equality* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1981, 1993, 2008), 106-111; Garrow, *Bearing the Cross*, 161-163; Branch, *Parting the Waters*, 573-579; Clayborne Carson, *In Struggle: SNCC and the Black Awakening of the 1960s* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1981, 1995), 70, 78, 97; and Adam Fairclough, *To Redeem the Soul of America: The Southern Christian Leadership Conference and Martin Luther King Jr.* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1987), 76-77, 82-83, 95-96.

[14] On the debate between the top-down and bottom-up perspectives, or the "View from the Nation" versus the "View from the Trenches," see Steven F. Lawson and Charles Payne, *Debating the Civil Rights Movement, 1945-1968* (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, 1998, 2006); and Emilye Crosby, "Introduction: The Politics of Writing and Teaching Movement History," in Emilye Crosby, ed., *Civil Rights History from the Ground Up: Local Struggles, a National Movement* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2011), 1-39. On Black Power periodization debates, see Sundiata Keita Cha-Jua and Clarence Lang, "The 'Long Movement' as Vampire: Temporal and Spatial Fallacies in Recent Black Freedom Studies," *Journal of African American History* 92, no. 2 (Spring 2007), 266-268; and Peniel E. Joseph, "The Black Power Movement: A State of the Field," *Journal of American History* 96, no. 3 (December 2009): 751-776. On the long civil rights movement, see Jacquelyn Dowd Hall, "The Long Civil Rights Movement and the Political Uses of the Past," *Journal of American History* 91, no. 4 (March 2005): 1233-1263. For a critique, see Cha-Jua and Lang, "The 'Long Movement' as Vampire." For other historiographical pieces on the civil rights movement, see Charles W. Eagles, ed., *The Civil Rights Movement in America: Essays* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1986); Adam Fairclough, "Historians and the Civil Rights Movement," *Journal of American Studies* 24, no. 3 (December 1990): 387-398; Steven F. Lawson, "Freedom Then, Freedom Now: The Historiography of the Civil Rights Movement," *American Historical Review* 96, no. 2 (April 1991): 456-471; Charles W. Eagles, "Toward New Histories of the Civil Rights Era," *Journal of Southern History* 66, no. 4 (November 2000): 815-848; Kevin Gaines, "The Historiography of the Struggle for Black Equality Since 1945," in Jean-Christophe Agnew and Roy Rosenzweig, eds. *A Companion to Post-1945 America* (Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2002): 211-234; and Danielle L. McGuire, "Introduction" in Danielle L. McGuire and John Dittmer, eds. *Freedom Rights: New Perspectives on the Civil Rights Movement* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2011): 1-8.

most notable achievements—its successful drive for the right to vote and the rise of African American political power. In 2000, historian Charles W. Eagles wrote that, despite overburdened shelves of scholarship, "Too little is known...about the non-activist patrons of the major protest organizations and how and why their support may have flowed and ebbed. In civil rights as in politics, historians might be wise to follow the money."[15] Following the money leads to the VEP and its philanthropic benefactors. With foundation money, the VEP funded the southern civil rights movement, focused the struggle onto voting rights activism, and in the process, banded together a southwide social movement that ended Jim Crow at the ballot box.[16]

Second, this history reveals how opponents of the civil rights movement rewrote tax policies to undercut philanthropic support for the VEP—a successful strategy that has received little attention. Segregationists had fought civil rights through violence, poll taxes, literacy tests,

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[15] Eagles, "Toward New Histories of the Civil Rights Era," 833.

[16] On philanthropy and the civil rights movement, see David J. Garrow, "Philanthropy and the Civil Rights Movement," Working Paper for the Center for the Study of Philanthropy, The Graduate Center at the City University of New York, October 1987; Darlene Joy Conley, "Philanthropic Foundations and Organizational Change: The Case of the Southern Education Foundation (SEF) During the Civil Rights Era" (PhD dissertation, Northwestern University, 1990); Claude A. Clegg III, "Philanthropy, the Civil Rights Movement, and the Politics of Racial Reform," in Lawrence J. Friedman and Mark D. McGarvie, eds. *Charity, Philanthropy, and Civility in American History* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003): 341-362; Olivier Zunz, *Philanthropy in America: A History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012), 201-231; and Sean Dobson, "Freedom Funders: Philanthropy and the Civil Rights Movement, 1955-1965," Commissioned by the National Committee for Responsive Philanthropy, June 2014. For a case study on the finances of one civil rights group, see Rhonda D. Jones, "Tithe, Time and Talent: An Analysis of Fundraising Activity for the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC), 1957-1964 (PhD dissertation, Howard University, 2003). On the role of philanthropy, particularly the Ford Foundation, on the Black Power Movement, see Alice O'Connor, "The Ford Foundation and Philanthropic Activism in the 1960s," in Ellen Condliffe Lagemann, ed. *Philanthropic Foundations: New Scholarship, New Possibilities* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999): 169-194; and Karen Ferguson, *Top Down: The Ford Foundation, Black Power, and the Reinvention of Racial Liberalism* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013). On the longer history of philanthropy in the American South, see James D. Anderson, *The Education of Blacks in the South, 1860-1935* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1988); James L. Leloudis, *Schooling the New South: Pedagogy, Self, and Society in North Carolina, 1880-1920* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1996); Peter M. Ascoli, *Julius Rosenwald: The Man Who Built Sears, Roebuck and Advanced the Cause of Black Education in the South* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006); Stephanie Deutsch, *You Need a Schoolhouse: Booker T. Washington, Julius Rosenwald, and the Building of Schools for the Segregated South* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2011); and Zunz, *Philanthropy in America*. On the economics of segregation and the civil rights movement, see Gavin Wright, *Sharing the Prize: The Economics of the Civil Rights Revolution in the American South* (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2013).

political monopoly, and segregation for nearly a century. After African Americans won the right to vote and began competing for power, white opponents turned to a novel tactic: they wielded the federal tax code as a powerful defensive weapon. Through the Tax Reform Act of 1969, white conservatives in Congress, led by Senators Herman Talmadge and Russell Long, restricted tax-exempt contributions to non-partisan voter registration campaigns, halting the VEP's momentum. Under the new law, organizations like the VEP could retain their charitable status only if they were active across five states at once and received no more than 25 percent of their funding from a single source. Violating the law would result in draconian penalties, such as organizations stripped of their federal tax-exemption, and philanthropic executives personally fined. These two restrictions, especially the 25 percent rule, destabilized the VEP, and as a result, grassroots voter campaigns that had relied on the VEP for financial support received less. The VEP was no longer in a position to maintain black political activism across the entire American South, and slowly, the united movement for voting power ended.[17]

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[17] On the post-1965 civil rights era, see Manning Marable, *Race, Reform, and Rebellion: The Second Reconstruction in Black America, 1945-1982* (Oxford: University Press of Mississippi, 1984, 1991, 2007); Cynthia Griggs Fleming, *In the Shadow of Selma: The Continuing Struggle for Civil Rights in the Rural South* (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, 2004); Moye, *Let the People Decide*; Emilye Crosby, *A Little Taste of Freedom: The Black Freedom Struggle in Claiborne County, Mississippi* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 2005); Thomas F. Jackson, *From Civil Rights to Human Rights: Martin Luther King Jr. and the Struggle for Economic Justice* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007); Timothy J. Minchin, *From Rights to Economics: The Ongoing Struggle for Black Equality in the U.S. South* (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 2007); Carter, *The Music Has Gone Out of the Movement*; Hasan Kwame Jeffries, *Bloody Lowndes: Civil Rights and Black Power in Alabama's Black Belt* (New York: New York University Press, 2009); Timothy J. Minchin and John A. Salmond, *After the Dream: Black and White Southerners since 1965* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2011); and Christopher P. Lehman, *Power, Politics, and the Decline of the Civil Rights Movement: A Fragile Coalition, 1967-1973* (Santa Barbara: Praeger, 2014). On conservative resistance to the civil rights movement before and after 1965, see Dan T. Carter, *The Politics of Rage: George Wallace, the Origins of the New Conservatism, and the Transformation of American Politics* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1995); J. Morgan Kousser, *Colorblind Injustice: Minority Voting Rights and the Undoing of the Second Reconstruction* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999); Kevin Kruse, *White Flight: Atlanta and the Making of Modern Conservatism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005); Matthew D. Lassiter, *The Silent Majority: Suburban Politics in the Sunbelt South* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006); Jason Sokol, *There Goes my Everything: White Southerners in the Age of Civil Rights, 1945-1975* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2006); Joseph Crespino, *In Search of Another Country: Mississippi and the Conservative Counterrevolution* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007); Keith M. Finley, *Delaying the Dream: Southern Senators and the Fight Against Civil Rights, 1938-1965* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2008); and Jason Morgan Ward, *Defending White Democracy: The Making of a*

The VEP's story also demonstrates competing reasons why black southerners and white liberals embraced voter registration as a civil rights strategy. Since emancipation, African Americans understood the vote as a basic right, but after Reconstruction ended and Jim Crow laws made it nearly impossible for black southerners to register, the strain of going alone to the courthouse, risking humiliation, assault, or unemployment was enough to keep progress at a glacial pace. African Americans saw voting as the gateway to full citizenship, and with it, a stronger position to advocate for better jobs, pay, public services, healthcare, and everyday rights. Civil rights leaders, especially Martin Luther King Jr., pushed for the movement to target the ballot. White liberals, including philanthropists and DOJ officials, also believed that the movement should focus on voting rights, not only to fulfill the promise of American democracy, but to temper civil disobedience. And both black civil rights leaders and white liberals agreed that focusing the struggle on voting rights was a sound strategy to navigate Cold War politics by emphasizing the patriotic virtue of racial justice.

The story of the VEP explains how hundreds of local movements broke out simultaneously during the 1960s. In towns and cities across Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, and Virginia, the VEP empowered activists to intensify grassroots registration campaigns. Paying for fuel, booking rallies, buying food for volunteers, and giving a few dollars to people taking off work to canvass neighborhoods were requirements for a project spanning weeks, months, or years. Creating and sustaining a social movement cost money—a resource in short supply among

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Segregationist Movement and the Remaking of Racial Politics, 1936-1965 (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2011). See also Kim Phillips-Fein, "Conservatism: A State of the Field," *Journal of American History* 98, no. 3 (December 2011): 723-743.

southern African Americans. The VEP powered participatory democracy at an extraordinary level that knitted together a massive social movement.[18]

While the VEP shaped the civil rights movement to target black disfranchisement, it did not diminish the ability of community activists to act on their own power. As scholars have proven, black southerners demonstrated against white supremacy in a variety of ways, but in terms of voter registration, the VEP empowered them to do more, to organize more effectively, and to maintain the pace for months or years. The financial support enabled local groups to mobilize registration drives, which connected them to a mass movement stretching beyond their county borders.

Results in Orangeburg suggest the kind of change the VEP promoted across the South. In November 1963, the three-month project ended with 381 new registrants. Orangeburg's leaders applied for more VEP grants, and over the next year, over 2,000 more registered to vote. J.W. McPherson described the local movement: "when demonstrations were at their height and Negroes were being jailed by the hundreds and Negro pickets lined the streets, Negroes were

[18] Sociologists have long been interested in how social movements function. Resource mobilization theory posits that if social movements receive adequate resources, such as money from sponsors, moral support from churches, cultural interest from the media, or legal aid from governments, they are more likely to succeed. Sociologists have since moved away from this deterministic approach and contend that a complex interplay of both internal and external factors contribute to a social movement's success or failure. For a summary of the sociological scholarship on the civil rights movement, see Doug McAdam, *Political Process and the Development of Black Insurgency, 1930-1970* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982, 1999). On resource mobilization theory, see John D. McCarthy and Mayer N. Zald, "Resource Mobilization and Social Movements: A Partial Theory," *American Journal of Sociology* 82, no. 6 (May 1977): 1212-1241. For sociological studies of the civil rights movement, see also Aldon D. Morris, *The Origins of the Civil Rights Movement: Black Communities Organizing for Change* (New York: The Free Press, 1984); McAdam, *Political Process and the Development of Black Insurgency, 1930-1970*; and Kenneth T. Andrews, *Freedom is a Constant Struggle: The Mississippi Civil Rights Movement and Its Legacy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004). Sociologists have also attempted to trace the finances of major civil rights organizations within these models. See Herber H. Haines, "Black Radicalization and the Funding of Civil Rights, 1957-1970," *Social Problems* 32, no. 1 (October 1984): 31-43; and J. Craig Jenkins and Craig M. Eckert, "Channeling Black Insurgency: Elite Patronage and Professional Social Movement Organizations in the Development of the Black Movement," *American Sociological Review* 51, no. 6 (December 1986): 812-829. In 1984, sociologist Herbert H. Haines tracked the incomes and expenditures of seven of the major race organizations, dividing their incomes between indigenous fundraising and outside donations. See Herbert H. Haines, "Black Radicalization and the Funding of Civil Rights: 1957-1970," *Social Problems* 32, no. 1 (October 1984): 31-43.

standing in line outside of the registrar's office by the hundreds from one end of the courthouse to the other, quietly waiting to register."[19]

The movement spread. In 1969, Kathleen Knox, a student at Winthrop College, volunteered with the York County Voter Registration Project in South Carolina. Speaking with a journalist, Knox explained her involvement: "It's up to us to convince our people that, because blacks for the most part lack economic power, they must compensate for it with power at the polls."[20] By harnessing poll power, the VEP changed the American South.

[19] McPherson, Report from Orangeburg Area.

[20] Nancy Wilstach, "She Can't Vote, But She Signs Up New S.C. Voters," *Rock Hill Evening Herald*, June 18, 1969, reprinted in *VEP News* 3, vol. 7 (July 1969).

CHAPTER 1: 'A COLD WAR OF THE BALLOT': VOTING RIGHTS, ANTICOMMUNISM, AND THE ORIGINS OF THE SOUTHWIDE CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT

Six years before the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. spoke to a crowd of less than 25,000 in front of the Lincoln Memorial. The date was May 17, 1957—the three-year anniversary of the Supreme Court's *Brown v. Board of Education* decision—and the event was the Prayer Pilgrimage for Freedom. King demanded that the federal government do more to enfranchise black southerners. "Give us the ballot," King exclaimed repeatedly. With the ability to vote, King argued, African Americans would improve the South by adding political pressure to end lynching, stopping the terrorism of the Ku Klux Klan, desegregating schools, and electing judges, governors, and congressmen who believed that the Constitution applied to every citizen. Empowering African Americans with the ballot would end Jim Crow, and activists would no longer have to appeal to the federal government to help; black southerners could do it on their own. The ballot had the potential to fix society, but for each black man and woman who had tried and failed to register, voting was also deeply personal. "So long as I do not firmly and irrevocably possess the right to vote, I do not possess myself," King intoned.[21]

King's well-known 1963 speech has overshadowed his 1957 address, but his words at the Prayer Pilgrimage signaled a strategic shift in the black freedom struggle. From 1957 through the 1960s, the right to vote was the central goal of the civil rights movement. The vote was not the movement's only objective, but it became the centerpiece that held together a massive southwide

[21] Text of Martin Luther King Jr. Address at the Prayer Pilgrimage for Freedom, May 17, 1957, Folder 001581-004-1005, Bayard Rustin Papers, Proquest History Vault.

social movement. Yet fighting for the ballot was nothing new. Black southerners had pressed for the right to vote since the end of Reconstruction, when white Democrats disfranchised nearly all African Americans at the advent of the Jim Crow era. Ever since, African Americans had struggled to win back the vote—with limited success. Through a combination of poll taxes, literacy tests, violence, and intimidation, whites exercised their political and social power to seal off the vote from black southerners. African Americans in turn pursued a variety of citizenship rights in addition to the ballot. The vote become one of many goals that African Americans pursued, along with broader issues of racial and economic justice. During the 1930s and 1940s, black activists teamed with labor organizers, communists, radicals, New Dealers, and white liberals in a class-based social movement for freedom. Historians have labeled this coalition "civil rights unionism" and the "Black Popular Front," and for a time during the New Deal era, these activists fought white supremacy alongside radical goals. They did not want to simply go to school with white students, take any seat on a bus, or sip from any water fountain; they wanted to reorder society.[22]

But civil rights unionism did not last. Cold War anti-communism undermined the left-labor coalition of the 1930s and 1940s. The post-World War II Red Scare whipped conservatives

[22] See Michael K. Honey, *Southern Labor and Black Civil Rights: Organizing Memphis Workers* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1993); Robert R. Korstad, *Civil Rights Unionism: Tobacco Workers and the Struggle for Democracy in the Mid-Twentieth Century South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003); and Martha Biondi, *To Stand and Fight: The Struggle for Civil Rights in Postwar New York City* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003). On the pursuit of black political power after Reconstruction and at the beginning of the Jim Crow era, see Leon Litwack, *Been in the Storm So Long: The Aftermath of Slavery* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1979); Eric Foner, *Reconstruction: America's Unfinished Revolution, 1863-1877* (New York: Harper and Row, 1988); Paul Ortiz, *Emancipation Betrayed: The Hidden History of Black Organizing and White Violence in Florida from Reconstruction to the Bloody Election of 1920* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005); Philip Dray, *Capitol Men: The Epic Story of Reconstruction through the Lives of the First Black Congressmen* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2008); Volney R. Riser, *Defying Disfranchisement: Black Voting Rights Activism in the Jim Crow South, 1890-1908* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2010); Charles Vincent, *Black Legislators in Louisiana during Reconstruction* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2011); Carole Emberton, *Beyond Redemption: Race, Violence, and the American South after the Civil War* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2014); and Justin Behrend, *Reconstructing Democracy: Grassroots Black Politics in the Deep South after the Civil War* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2015).

across the United States into a frenzy that equated leftist agendas with anti-American communism. Southern conservatives bought into conspiracy theories promoted by Senator Joseph McCarthy and other red-baiters that any civil rights activist was an agent of the Soviet Union, whether consciously or not. Black southerners who had organized through the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO), the Southern Conference for Human Welfare (SCHW), the National Negro Congress, the Southern Negro Youth Congress (SNYC), the Communist Party, and the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) found their alliances with labor unionists and white liberals shattered by the 1950 elections. McCarthyism gained strength into the 1950s, the leftist coalition crumbled, and Jim Crow was as strong as it had been in 1898. Conservatives continued to fan the fears of civil rights communism, especially in the South where McCarthyism outlasted McCarthy himself. Judge Tom P. Brady of Mississippi, an intellectual voice of the white Citizens' Council, warned of a coming "Black Empire" through Soviet-inspired civil rights groups "if the people of the South do not now make up their minds that this is a mortal combat, that it is to the bitter end."[23]

The Red Scare shaped the direction of the civil rights movement. According to historian Glenda Elizabeth Gilmore, the Cold War "unleashed a virulent southern anti-Communism that eviscerated postwar social justice movements and truncated the civil rights movement that

[23] Judge Tom P. Brady, "A Review of Black Monday," Address to the Indianola Citizens' Council, October 28, 1954, 12, 14, Box 3, Folder 21, William D. McCain Pamphlet Collection, University of Southern Mississippi Digital Collections, http://digilib.usm.edu/cdm/ref/collection/manu/id/1778. On the post-World War II Red Scare, see Landon R.Y. Storrs, *The Second Red Scare and the Unmaking of the New Deal Left* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013); and Don E. Carleton, *Red Scare: Right-Wing Hysteria, Fifties Fanaticism, and Their Legacy in Texas* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2014). On interracial southern radicalism during the 1930s and 1940s, see Barbara S. Griffith, *The Crisis of American Labor: Operation Dixie and the Defeat of the CIO* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1988); Robin D.G. Kelley, *Hammer and Hoe: Alabama Communists during the Great Depression* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 1990); Linda Reed, *Simple Decency and Common Sense: The Southern Conference Movement, 1938-1963* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993); Patricia Sullivan, *Days of Hope: Race and Democracy during the New Deal Era* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996); Robbie Lieberman and Clarence Lang, eds., *Anticommunism and the African American Freedom Movement: "Another Side of the Story"* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009); and Erik S. Gellman, *Death Blow to Jim Crow: The National Negro Congress and the Rise of Militant Civil Rights* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 2012).

emerged in the 1950s."[24] Other scholars have made similar arguments, and while they are correct to note how anti-communism constricted the civil rights movement, few focus on how voting rights became central to the renewed southern black freedom struggle that emerged during the mid-1950s. This reorientation was not natural or inevitable, but occurred because civil rights activists pushed the movement in this direction. By shifting the language and goals of the movement, civil rights leaders tried to assuage suspicions of radicalism by appealing to the centerpiece of American democracy: the vote.

The person most responsible for this change was Martin Luther King Jr. King was no less radical in 1957 than he had been during the 1940s, but he and his allies made the conscious decision to adapt to anti-communist fervor by centering on the ballot to build a true American democracy. Their view was global in scope, influenced by people of color revolting against colonial powers, often through nonviolent means. King and other African American leaders believed that a similar revolution could take place in the United States by framing the pursuit of civil rights as civic nationalism through registration and voting. "The rumblings of discontent in Asia and Africa are expressions of a quest for freedom and human dignity by people who have long been the victims of colonialism and imperialism," King wrote in his coda to *Stride Toward Freedom* in 1958. "So in a real sense the racial crisis in America is a part of the larger world crisis."[25] But concentrating on voting rights was not a moderate solution to global revolution, nor did it lessen resistance in the United States. A "cold war of the ballot" was underway, a fight that

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[24] Glenda Elizabeth Gilmore, *Defying Dixie: The Radical Roots of Civil Rights, 1919-1950* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2008), 8.

[25] Martin Luther King Jr., *Stride Toward Freedom: The Montgomery Story* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1958; reprint by Beacon Press, 2010), 184.

featured recalcitrant white supremacists doing everything in their power to prevent African Americans from gaining political power.[26]

During the 1950s within the context of the Cold War, two organizations and two key events centered the civil rights movement onto voting rights as never before, and in the process, began to turn the movement into a southwide struggle. The Southern Regional Council (SRC), a predominantly white research agency in Atlanta with roots stretching back to 1919, turned increasingly liberal during the 1950s and began compiling data on disfranchisement. Comprehensive research was rare prior to the SRC, and its ability to document the severity of disfranchisement illuminated the issue and gave activists a cause around which to rally. Following the Montgomery bus boycott, Martin Luther King Jr. organized the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) with other ministers in early 1957 to foment a church-based nonviolent revolution for citizenship. The SCLC, along with the NAACP and A. Phillip Randolph, sponsored the Prayer Pilgrimage for Freedom in May 1957, directing the nation to view black voting rights as a moral, religious, liberal, and patriotic issue. Following the

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[26] John N. Popham, "Lag in Negro Vote Reported in South," *New York Times*, February 8, 1953. On anti-communism shaping the civil rights movement, see Marable, *Race, Reform, and Rebellion*, 18; Korstad, *Civil Rights Unionism*, 9; George Lewis, *The White South and the Red Menace: Segregationists, Anticommunism, and Massive Resistance, 1945-1965* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2004); Jeff Woods, *Black Struggle, Red Scare: Segregation and Anti-Communism in the South, 1948-1968* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2004); Hall, "The Long Civil Rights Movement," 1249; Gilmore, *Defying Dixie*; and Yasuhiro Katagiri, *Black Freedom, White Resistance, and Red Menace: Civil Rights and Anticommunism in the Jim Crow South* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2014). On Martin Luther King Jr.'s radicalism, see Jackson, *From Civil Rights to Human Rights*. On American civic nationalism, see Gary Gerstle, *American Crucible: Race and Nation in the Twentieth Century* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001). On global decolonization movements shaping the civil rights movement in the United States, see Penny M. Von Eschen, *Race Against Empire: Black Americans and Anticolonialism, 1937-1957* (Cornell: Cornell University Press, 1997); Dudziak, *Cold War Civil Rights*; James H. Meriwether, *Proudly We Can Be Africans: Black Americans and Africa, 1935-1961* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001); Carol Anderson, *Eyes Off the Prize: The United Nations and the African American Struggle for Human Rights, 1944-1955* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003); Thomas Borstelmann, *The Cold War and the Color Line: American Race Relations in the Global Arena* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003); Kevin K. Gaines, *American Africans in Ghana: Black Expatriates and the Civil Rights Era* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2008); Brenda Gayle Plummer, *In Search of Power: African Americans in the Era of Decolonization, 1956-1974* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012); and Carol Anderson, *Bourgeois Radicals: The NAACP and the Struggle for Colonial Liberation, 1941-1960* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014).

Pilgrimage, the SCLC launched the Crusade for Citizenship in February 1958, an ambitious attempt to sustain a voter registration campaign across the South. The Crusade failed, but the idea took hold that a coordinated, inter-agency, southwide movement for the ballot was possible. Together, the SRC, the SCLC, the Prayer Pilgrimage for Freedom, and the Crusade for Citizenship laid the groundwork for the Voter Education Project.

Black Voting Rights and the Southern Regional Council

When southern states began implementing Jim Crow laws, African Americans fought back. They did so through boycotts and public protests, but as historian Blair Kelley has demonstrated, without political rights, victories were short-lived.[27] Middle-class black leaders battled disfranchisement in the courts, but in all 12 cases that reached the Supreme Court between 1890 and 1908, the Justices allowed southern states the freedom to discriminate.[28] In 1909, activists founded the NAACP, and with it, a goal of reclaiming black voting rights across the United States. At the NAACP's seventeenth annual conference, President Moorfield Storey outlined the objectives of African Americans nationwide, which "above all" included "the right to vote."[29] During the 1920s and 1930s, the NAACP aided some of its southern branches working to register voters, but the case-by-case approach was tedious and drained resources. In the 1936 presidential election, African Americans proved their voting power outside of the South by abandoning the Republican Party in support of President Franklin D. Roosevelt's New Deal. Then, into the 1940s, historian Patricia Sullivan explains, "The energy for expanding [African American] voting rights shifted to the South."[30] The "Double V" campaign, promoted by the

[27] Blair M. Kelley, *Right to Ride: Streetcar Boycotts and African American Citizenship in the Era of* Plessy v. Ferguson (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010).

[28] Riser, *Defying Disfranchisement*.

[29] "'Break' Party Lines Says NAACP Head," *Afro-American*, June 26, 1926.

Pittsburgh Courier to fight for democracy abroad and within the United States, heightened black political consciousness for war veterans and African Americans across the nation.[31] The push for the ballot led the NAACP to challenge the constitutionality of the white primary, the electoral system by which southern states circumvented the Fifteenth Amendment and barred African Americans from voting in primaries—usually the only election that mattered in the Democrat-controlled South. In 1944, the Supreme Court struck down the white primary in *Smith v. Allwright*. After a fight lasting over half a century, African Americans won a significant legal victory to reestablish their rights of citizenship.[32]

While the *Smith v. Allwright* decision led to a spike in African American registration, no southwide movement for the ballot took place. Southern legislatures adapted by implementing new forms of discrimination, such as poll taxes and literacy tests. At the same time, the Soviet Union's aggressive foreign policy, the Berlin blockade, the communist victory in China, and the Alger Hiss trials before the House Un-American Activities Committee coalesced into rabid anti-communism that enveloped the United States. Charges of communist sympathies for organizations seeking political power were fatal. The Red Scare undercut the momentum of *Smith v. Allwright*. The NAACP complained to the Department of Justice with details about registrars who denied voting rights to African Americans, but officials were "held back by a

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[30] Sullivan, *Days of Hope*, 6.

[31] Edgar T. Rouzeau, '"Black America Wars on Double Front for High Stakes' – Rouzeau," *Pittsburgh Courier*, February 7, 1942; and "The *Courier's* 'Double V' for a Double Victory Campaign Gets Country-Wide Support," *Pittsburgh Courier*, February 14, 1942. On the "Double V" campaign, see Kimberly L. Phillips, *War! What Is It Good For?: Black Freedom Struggles and the U.S. Military from World War II to Iraq* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2012), 20-63.

[32] On the NAACP, see Sullivan, *Lift Every Voice*; and Thomas L. Bynum, *NAACP Youth and the Fight for Black Freedom, 1936-1965* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2013). On the black political migration to the Democratic Party, see Nancy J. Weiss, *Farewell to the Party of Lincoln: Black Politics in the Age of FDR* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983). On *Smith v. Allwright*, see Darlene Clark Hine, *Black Victory: The Rise and Fall of the White Primary in Texas* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1979, 2003); and Charles L. Zelden, *The Battle for the Black Ballot:* Smith v. Allwright *and the Defeat of the Texas All-White Primary* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2004).

policy of restraint" because of legal precedents, a small staff, and a general unwillingness to investigate.[33] At the same time, the Red Scare empowered southern segregationists to link communist conspiracies with civil rights activists to suggest that black voting rights would imperil the nation. According to Patricia Sullivan, "the dramatic gains [in black voter registration] that followed in the wake of the white primary decision had leveled off by the early 1950s."[34]

The Southern Regional Council was an unlikely organization to reignite interest in southern black disfranchisement during the mid-1950s. The SRC's origins stretch back to 1919 with the founding of the Commission on Interracial Cooperation (CIC). Methodist minister Will W. Alexander and his parishioner Willis Weatherford established the CIC in Atlanta to be "a meeting ground where the best people of both races could work together to dispel prejudice, tensions, and violence."[35] The CIC included moderate ministers and businessmen in a church-based, mostly white, middle-class association that advocated for better race relations, but not to end segregation. According to writer John Egerton, "the CIC developed a curious image of liberal activism within the bounds of cautious and proper respectability" of the Jim Crow South.[36] Under Alexander, the CIC supported affiliates throughout the South that organized moderate leaders to address local issues. Above all, the CIC wanted to educate white and black community leaders about the dangers of racial violence and promote interracial harmony. The CIC did so by cultivating relationships with newspapers and by appealing to the white upper-

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[33] Lawson, *Black Ballots*, 119.

[34] Sullivan, *Lift Every Voice*, 414.

[35] A Brief Statement on the History and Aims of the Southern Regional Council, from "The Attack on the Southern Regional Council and the Georgia Committee on Interracial Cooperation," October 1955, Box 2S440, Folder "Southern Regional Council 1955-1957," Field Foundation Archives.

[36] John Egerton, *Speak Now Against the Day: The Generation Before the Civil Rights Movement in the South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995), 49.

middle-class that racial strife was bad for business. After the Great Depression set in, CIC leadership scaled back their operations to concentrate on publishing and education, primarily on anti-lynching. In 1929, Jesse Daniel Ames, a suffragist and anti-lynching advocate, joined the CIC as leader of the Women's Committee, and along with her management of the Association of Southern Women for the Prevention of Lynching, Ames kept the CIC afloat during the 1930s. Alexander and Howard Odum, a sociologist at the University of North Carolina, were unhappy with the decline of the CIC, and after a series of conventions in 1942 and 1943, they wrested control away from Ames and merged the CIC into a new organization: the Southern Regional Council. The old CIC had grown stagnant, and its male-dominated leadership wanted to refocus its mission on the academic study of southern racial and economic problems. Organizers chartered the SRC on January 6, 1944 in Atlanta.[37]

The SRC retained its conservatism inherited from the CIC, but beginning in 1947, SRC leaders began denouncing segregation. Then, in 1951, the SRC "formally committed itself to the aim of an unsegregated society."[38] Under the leadership of Paul Williams, a Richmond publisher and co-founder of the Catholic Committee on the South, and George S. Mitchell, an economist who came to the SRC to lead its Negro Veterans Program, the SRC began criticizing Jim Crow. They believed white southern liberals could no longer advocate for progressive change while accepting the segregationist order. While the SRC lost many members who disagreed with its

[37] On the CIC's history and its merger into the SRC, see A Brief Statement on the History and Aims of the Southern Regional Council, October 1955; SRC Report No. L-1, "The Southern Regional Council – Its Origin and Aims," April 27, 1959, Box 2S440, Folder "Southern Regional Council 1955-1957," Field Foundation Archives; Morton Sosna, *In Search of the Silent South: Southern Liberals and the Race Issue* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1977), 20-41; 115-120; Julia Anne McDonough, "Men and Women of Good Will: A History of the Commission on Interracial Cooperation and the Southern Regional Council, 1919-1954" (PhD dissertation, University of Virginia, 1993), 20-251; Jacquelyn Dowd Hall, *Revolt Against Chivalry: Jesse Daniel Ames and the Women's Campaign Against Lynching* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), 256-260; David L. Chappell, *Inside Agitators: White Southerners in the Civil Rights Movement* (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 1994), 34-41; Egerton, *Speak Now Against the Day*, 47-51; 301-315; and Sullivan, *Days of Hope*, 163-166.

[38] SRC Report No. L-1, "The Southern Regional Council – Its Origin and Aims," April 27, 1959.

new direction, it evolved into a comprehensive research agency. To widen its scope, the SRC also established councils in 12 southern states as independent, though affiliated sub-groups to study and publish reports about local issues. SRC membership remained small, but its impact was wide. In 1955, the SRC offered an assessment of its purpose: "The Council works through the sound methods of education, fact-finding, and persuasion. It seeks no legislation, it carries on no court action, and it uses no 'pressure group' tactics. It collects the facts about racial problems and progress in the South and makes these facts available."[39]

As the SRC turned increasingly liberal, red-baiters attacked it. The harassment began in December 1950 when Roy Harris, editor of the right-wing *Augusta Courier*, criticized Benjamin Mays for an article published in *New South*, the SRC's main publication. Mays, the President of Morehouse College, supported the desegregation of Atlanta's public schools, ending his article with the question, "Can there be equality in segregation?"[40] Harris thought so, and throughout the 1950s, he and other segregationists charged the SRC as a communist front. In 1951, Governor Herman Talmadge of Georgia lashed out at "foreign agitators," including the NAACP, the Communist Party, "and the Race-Mixing Southern Regional Council."[41] In 1954, the Fund for the Republic, an early think tank sponsored by the Ford Foundation that criticized anticommunism, raised Harris's suspicions further. After the Fund for the Republic donated to the SRC, Harris accused the SRC to be "a haven for known communist fronters [that] could well become the Communist Party apparatus in the South."[42] Other newspapers followed suit,

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[39] A Brief Statement on the History and Aims of the Southern Regional Council, October 1955. See also Sosna, *In Search of the Silent South*, 142-154; McDonough, "Men and Women of Good Will," 375-580; and Chappell, *Inside Agitators*, 46-48.

[40] Benjamin Hays, "Why an Atlanta School Suit?" *New South* 5 (September-October, 1950), 3. See also McDonough, "Men and Women of Good Will," 548-549.

[41] '"Outsiders' Hit by Talmadge," *Atlanta Daily World*, August 21, 1951.

including the Charleston *News and Courier*, whose editorial staff compared the Fund for the Republic's support of the SRC to John Brown's northern allies before his raid on Harper's Ferry.[43] George Mitchell and the SRC staff fought back by publishing editorials and sending corrections to newspapers, but the stories kept coming. In 1956, Georgia's Attorney General, Eugene Cook, condemned the SRC and its state affiliate, the Georgia Committee on Interracial Cooperation, as "both dominated by individuals who, like the officials of the NAACP, have long records of affinity for and participation in Communist, Communist-front, fellow-traveling, left-wing and subversive organizations and activities."[44]

Red-baiting against the SRC was a product of its support for school desegregation. Beginning with Benjamin Mays's 1950 article in *New South*, the SRC committed itself to ending segregated public schooling. Segregationists not only linked this position with communism, but feared the SRC promoted race-mixing. Many believed pro-Communists within the SRC wanted "to explore relationships between white and Negro in the South," especially regarding schoolchildren.[45] When the Supreme Court handed down its *Brown v. Board of Education* decision in May 1954 declaring segregated schools unconstitutional, SRC members were elated. But over the next three years, it became clear that southern school districts would only allow token desegregation. Massive resistance became the new reality as the white Citizens' Councils gained strength and formed a movement against integration. Rather than continue to incur the

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[42] "Southern Regional Council Financed By Ford As Haven for Commies," *Augusta Courier*, June 28, 1954.

[43] "Do-Gooders Stirring Bloodshed," *News and Courier*, October 28, 1955.

[44] Eugene Cook, "The Ugly Truth About the NAACP," speech to the fifty-fifth annual convention of the Peace Officers Association of Georgia, October 19, 1956, Frames 1734-1741, Reel 19, SRC Papers. See also A Brief Statement on the History and Aims of the Southern Regional Council, October 1955; and McDonough, "Men and Women of Good Will," 548-570.

[45] Leon Racht and Jeffrey Roche, "Name 21 Pro-Reds on Board Dixie Race Study Council," *New York Journal-American*, November 7, 1955. See also "Fund for Republic – 'A Good Investment' – For What?" Paid Advertisement in the *Virginian-Pilot*, from the Defenders of State Sovereignty and Individual Liberties, November 12, 1955, Frames 1539-1540, Reel 19, SRC Papers.

wrath of segregationists over schools, the SRC shifted its strategy to pursue a new goal, one that could not be so easily assailed: black voting rights.[46]

In 1956 and 1957, the SRC undertook a major research project to document African American voter registration, and with its final report, revealed the pervasiveness of disfranchisement across the South. The SRC had kept watch over black registration since the late 1940s, but it had not studied the problem in depth. *Smith v. Allwright* allowed for more African Americans to register, but since 1947, the number of black voters had steadily decreased as local registrars purged rolls and state legislatures implemented new barriers. "Those who rejoiced in the recent series of court decisions upholding a free ballot unhampered by racial restrictions have been sobered by the vexing problems which have persisted," the SRC wrote in a 1953 report.[47] In the midst of the Montgomery bus boycott when the injustices of the Jim Crow system were on full display to the nation, the SRC launched its registration study.

With a grant from the Fund for the Republic, the SRC commissioned locals in 11 states during 1956 to visit counties, interview people, and look through registrar rolls to record black registration. What they found was disturbing. In many places, violence against African Americans had risen, but more common were "legal weapons" that served as "successor[s] to the white primary."[48] In Alabama, Arkansas, Mississippi, Texas, and Virginia, poll taxes remained in effect. In each of the 11 southern states, registrars administered literacy tests without oversight, failing anyone at their whim. Margaret Price, the author of the SRC report, entitled *The Negro Voter in the South*, estimated that around a quarter of the eligible southern black population had

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[46] See McDonough, "Men and Women of Good Will," 548. See also Margaret Price, *The Negro Voter in the South* (Atlanta: Southern Regional Council, 1957); Egerton, *Speak Now Against the Day*, 615-617; and Gilmore, *Defying Dixie*, 10.

[47] John N. Popham, "Lag in Negro Vote Reported in South," *New York Times*, February 8, 1953.

[48] Price, *The Negro Voter in the South* (1957), 7.

registered—an optimistic tally. But she admitted the results were imprecise, complicated by poor records and white registrars who impeded the process. Price also documented hesitancy among African Americans to attempt to register. In Dallas County, Alabama, after visiting people in barber shops and pool halls, many "would not even talk about voting," and when pressed, responded, "I don't want nothing to do with it...If they don't want me to vote, I don't want to."[49] But rather than blame that hesitation on apathy, the SRC noted the level of oppression, the difficulty of going to the registrar's office alone, the ease at which local governments purged black voters, and the segregationist system that surrounded their lives. "It is difficult to arouse a motivation to vote when there is little concrete evidence of benefits to compensate for the trouble of qualifying," Price wrote.[50]

Still, black communities throughout the South, like in Laurens County, Georgia, tried to register, vote, and exercise political power. As part of the research study, Dr. Brailsford R. Brazeal, a dean and professor of economics at Morehouse College, went to Laurens County in August 1956. Out of a total population of 53,606, about 40 percent were black, yet only 2,201 African Americans were registered compared with 12,230 whites. Brazeal discovered that in 1948, the county had purged a majority of African Americans from its rolls, calling them into the registrar's office to interpret portions of the United States Constitution. "This procedure lowered the morale of the registrants who were purged and those who were not," Brazeal wrote. But recently, local leaders had organized the All Citizens Voters League of Laurens County. They held mass meetings on Monday nights, and they organized a voter registration campaign. Locals

[49] *Ibid*., 32.

[50] *Ibid*., 30.

were determined to vote, even though white officials had put the word out that "we got to stop these niggers from registering."[51]

The SCLC, the Prayer Pilgrimage for Freedom, and the Crusade for Citizenship

The SRC began compiling disfranchisement data around the same time as the Montgomery bus boycott. Soon after moving to Montgomery, Alabama to pastor Dexter Avenue Baptist Church, Martin Luther King Jr. joined the local chapters of both the NAACP and the Alabama Council on Human Relations—the SRC's state affiliate. The Montgomery chapter of the Alabama Council was small and met in the basement of King's church. King served for a time as the Alabama Council's Vice-President. He later described the Alabama Council as "the only truly interracial group in Montgomery."[52] Serving with the Alabama Council put King in conversation with progressive white ministers, and through his involvement, he learned about the SRC. The SRC's point person for researching disfranchisement was Dr. James E. Pierce from Alabama State College, who was also a participant in the Montgomery Improvement Association (MIA). Along with the SRC's research, the bus boycott exposed how deeply embedded segregation was in both public services and at registrar offices. The MIA formed a registration and voting committee, and King saw firsthand how a mass movement could incorporate the deliberate pursuit of voting rights.[53]

In January 1957 after the bus boycott had ended, King and around 60 ministers met in Atlanta to form an organization to make the African American church the epicenter of an expanded nonviolent revolution. To them, the boycott was just the beginning. Looking to Gandhi

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[51] Memorandum, Dr. B.R. Brazeal to Harold Fleming, Re: "Summary of Laurens County Interviews and Findings About Negro Political Participation in Politics," August 31, 1956, Frames 1173-1179, Reel 218, SRC Papers (all quotes).

[52] King, *Stride Toward Freedom*, 58.

[53] *Ibid*., 18-20; 58; and Foreword by Harold C. Fleming to Price, *The Negro Voter in the South* (1957).

for inspiration, whom King believed "never had more than one hundred persons absolutely committed to his philosophy" of nonviolence, King thought that a handful of southern ministers could initiate a voting rights movement spanning the South.[54] During a conference at Ebenezer Baptist Church, the pastors asked themselves, "How can we utilize the bus protest to stimulate interest in voting?" and, "What broad campaign in the South should be carried on to stimulate interest in and educate Negroes to see the basic significance of voting?" They did not have answers, but they were convinced that the time had come "to broaden the struggle for Negroes to register and to vote."[55] After several more meetings and two name changes, the Southern Christian Leadership Conference formed with the goal to achieve "full citizenship rights, equality, and the integration of the Negro in all aspects of American life."[56]

From its inception, the SCLC tried to channel the energy of the bus boycott into a southwide movement for the ballot, but King and his allies were unsure how to turn their idea into reality. They also faced criticism from the NAACP's national leadership, who believed the upstart SCLC would drain resources from local branches better equipped to register voters. But King believed that the church could inspire more African Americans to register, especially those who were uninvolved in the largely middle-to-upper class leadership of the NAACP. On the national scene, the opportunity to concentrate on the ballot seemed more likely as Congress deliberated a new civil rights law. Since January 1956, Congress had considered legislation to expand federal government oversight of civil rights violations, but it had stalled by the end of the

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[54] King, *Stride Toward Freedom*, 214.

[55] "The Next Step for Mass Action in the Struggle for Equality," Working Paper #2, Southern Negro Leaders Conference on Transportation and Non-Violent Integration, January 10-11, 1957, Folder 001565-001-0074, Part 2: Records of the Executive Director and Treasurer, Records of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, 1954-1970, Proquest History Vault (all quotes).

[56] Constitution and Bylaws of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, Folder 001565-001-0052, Part 2: Records of the Executive Director and Treasurer, Records of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, 1954-1970.

year. After reelection, President Dwight Eisenhower encouraged both parties to begin anew, focusing on civil and voting rights rather than school integration. But the legislation crawled through Congress, held up by southerners who controlled committees and who were unenthusiastic about expanding citizenship rights to African Americans. Still, hope for federal legislation motivated King and the SCLC to plan a demonstration that tied together Christianity, nonviolence, and voting rights.[57]

On February 23, 1957, the SCLC announced a "Prayer Pilgrimage" to Washington, DC for the spring. "This will not be a political march," King told journalists. "It will be rooted in deep spiritual faith."[58] With possibilities for the Pilgrimage fresh on his mind, King visited Ghana in March at the invitation of President Kwame Nkrumah to witness the nation's independence. Motivated by what he saw, King returned to the United States excited for the potential of nonviolent revolution. King found further inspiration in Billy Graham, whose evangelical crusades filled arenas across the country. With Graham's crusade rhetoric as his model, King had the idea to merge civil rights with civic spiritual renewal. White supremacy could be defeated, but the solution had to come from mass action rooted in Christian faith. King and the SCLC believed this would be a new angle that diverged from previous activism. With this focus, planners of the Prayer Pilgrimage for Freedom articulated five goals: to inspire nationwide black unity; to connect the North to the growing movement in the South; to protest violence; to oppose southern attacks on the NAACP; and to press Congress to pass a civil rights bill.[59]

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[57] Lawson, *Black Ballots*, 152-165.

[58] '"We'll March': Prayer Pilgrimage to Capital Planned," *Afro-American*, February 23, 1957.

[59] Prayer Pilgrimage for Freedom, New York Organizational Meeting, April 18, 1957, Folder 001608-024-0613, A. Philip Randolph Papers, Proquest History Vault. See also "Behind the Scenes," *Chicago Defender*, March 9, 1957; "Rev. Martin King, Billy Graham on Baptist Program," *Atlanta Daily World*, March 17, 1957; and "Negroes to

The Prayer Pilgrimage was not the first civil rights march in Washington, DC. The March on Washington Movement (MOWM), organized by A. Phillip Randolph in 1941, was a response to federal economic policies that discriminated against African American laborers during World War II. Randolph and his supporters, especially the NAACP, National Urban League, and labor unions, including his own Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters, demanded a federal Fair Employment Practices Committee (FEPC) to ensure greater job security for black men. During the first half of 1941, President Franklin D. Roosevelt hesitated to intervene, prompting Randolph to launch the MOWM. Chapters started throughout the country, and organizers prepared for a massive protest in Washington to demand action on behalf of black workers. As pressure mounted, Roosevelt acquiesced, and a week before the march was to occur, he signed Executive Order 8802 establishing the FEPC and ending employment discrimination for federal jobs and defense contracts. With this victory, Randolph called off the march. The MOWM continued until 1947, and although it never recaptured the enthusiasm of early 1941, it served as a reminder of the potential for mass action in Washington, DC.[60]

Unlike the MOWM, leaders billed the 1957 demonstration as a religious ceremony. Because of the threat that anti-communism posed, the three primary leaders, King, Randolph, and Roy Wilkins, couched the Prayer Pilgrimage as a fulfillment of American democracy and Christianity. The Prayer Pilgrimage would once again bridge civil rights and labor organizing, but it would not be an extension of the MOWM. Randolph was enthusiastic about the SCLC's idea for the Pilgrimage, and he convinced Wilkins that the NAACP ought to be involved.

Mass in Capital May 17," *New York Times*, April 6, 1957. On King's impressions of Ghana, see Martin Luther King Jr., "The Birth of a New Nation," sermon delivered at Dexter Avenue Baptist Church, April 7, 1957, in the Papers of Martin Luther King Jr., Volume IV: Symbol of the Movement, January 1957-December 1958 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 155-167.

[60] On the March on Washington Movement, see William P. Jones, *The March on Washington: Jobs, Freedom, and the Forgotten History of Civil Rights* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2013), 1-78; and David Lucander, *Winning the War for Democracy: The March on Washington Movement, 1941-1946* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2014).

Bringing religious, labor, and civil rights activists under one tent, the African American freedom struggle embraced voting rights as the essential goal.[61]

King, Randolph, and Wilkins planned the Prayer Pilgrimage to focus on the moral necessity of political enfranchisement. Responding to criticism that the demonstration would be influenced by left-wing radicalism, Wilkins told reporters that the Pilgrimage would be a "spiritual assembly" where "there will be no place for the irreligious." Furthermore, he answered, "No Communist has been or will be invited to participate in the program either as a speaker, singer, prayer leader, or scripture reader."[62] To assuage doubters, the group declared three days before the event, "We wish to state emphatically that the Prayer Pilgrimage for Freedom is dedicated to the assurance that full freedom for all Americans is possible with the help of God under the democratic process."[63] To accomplish the Pilgrimage's five aims, King, who would be the final speaker in front of the Lincoln Memorial, drafted a speech emphasizing the denial of voting privileges to southern African Americans. Bayard Rustin, a close friend and adviser to both King and Randolph, suggested that King be more insistent about the need for nonviolence alongside the pursuit of the ballot. In addition to coordinating with labor unions, Rustin advised King that voting rights was "where action [was] demanded and where action [was] possible in the wide struggle of community organization."[64] King agreed, for if the movement was to stretch across the South, people needed to believe that it was their moral right and American duty to register and vote—shielded against any charge of radicalism.

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[61] Martin Luther King Jr., A. Phillip Randolph, and Roy Wilkins, "Call to a Prayer Pilgrimage for Freedom," Folder 001608-024-0696, A. Philip Randolph Papers; "King Outlines Aims, Plans for Pilgrimage," *Atlanta Daily World*, April 27, 1957; and "Use of Lincoln Memorial is Granted Prayer Pilgrimage," *Afro-American*, May 4, 1957.

[62] Roy Wilkins Statement, May 10, 1957 in response to UPI Query, Folder 001608-024-0696, A. Philip Randolph Papers.

[63] "'Subversive' Groups Barred from the Prayer Pilgrimage," *Philadelphia Tribune*, May 14, 1957.

[64] Bayard Rustin to Martin Luther King Jr., May 10, 1957, Folder 001581-004-1005, Bayard Rustin Papers.

The Prayer Pilgrimage was part church service, part anti-communist voter rally. Septima Clark was one pilgrim who attended. Early on the morning of May 17, Clark, an organizer and teacher with Highlander Folk School, boarded a train in Newark, New Jersey bound for Washington, DC. Clark wrote Randolph of her experience after she arrived at the Pilgrimage: "As a sufferer in the cause of real freedom I wept tears of joy to see those people of all nationalities and backgrounds with banners waving marching across that green turf to stand in front of the Lincoln Memorial."[65] Along with 15,000-20,000 others, Clark heard Mahalia Jackson sing, Representative Adam Clayton Powell and Senator Jacob K. Javits speak, and Randolph, Wilkins, and King urge the United States to end black disfranchisement. Keeping with the theme of anti-communism, Randolph told the crowd, "We know that Communists have no genuine interest in the solution of problems of racial discrimination, but seek only to use this issue to strengthen the foreign policy of the Soviet Union." To combat the Reds and bring every African American into the political process, Randolph stated, "I suggest no party to vote for, but call upon every Negro to register and vote. Be a missionary, and have every neighbor in your house, block, neighborhood, hamlet, village, city, and state to register and vote."[66]

After three hours of singing, speeches, and testimony, King went to the podium to offer final remarks. Wearing a black robe, he summed up the Prayer Pilgrimage as a religious and civic ceremony demanding the right to vote. "Give us the ballot," King called out six times during his sermon's crescendo. Since organizers billed the Pilgrimage as a religious service, they told the crowd not to applaud, but "frequent showers of handkerchief and pennant waiving as

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[65] Septima Clark to A. Philip Randolph, May 21, 1957, Folder 001608-024-0631, A. Philip Randolph Papers. On Septima Clark, see Katherine Mellen Charron, *Freedom's Teacher: The Life of Septima Clark* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009).

[66] A. Philip Randolph Address at the Prayer Pilgrimage, Folder 001608-024-0631, A. Philip Randolph Papers; Program, Prayer Pilgrimage for Freedom, May 17, 1957, Folder 001581-004-1005, Bayard Rustin Papers; and Jay Walz, "Negroes Hold Rally on Rights in Capital," *New York Times*, May 18, 1957.

expressions of approval" greeted King's words.[67] His sermon was "a fiery speech delivered calmly," a journalist wrote, one that "awakened the Negro people to a new and more effective utilization of their ballots."[68] No longer was King just a pastor in Alabama who had led a successful boycott. The Prayer Pilgrimage introduced him to the nation, and with this address, he focused on voting rights as the key to ending Jim Crow.[69]

Journalists who covered the Prayer Pilgrimage were quick to point out that while King's message was inspiring, the path ahead was unclear. Writing for the *Associated Negro Press*, Hamilton T. Boswell concluded, "After all that great emotional outpouring, the one thing lacking was an effective program to harness it."[70] Similarly, Earl Brown with the *New York Amsterdam News* wrote that while the day was successful, more than prayers were needed to fix society: "the Pilgrimage will become only another meeting if we don't roll up our sleeves and give the Lord a little help in our battle for civil rights."[71]

The urgent issue following the Prayer Pilgrimage was the pending civil rights legislation held up in Congress. On June 13, King and Reverend Ralph Abernathy, King's top assistant within the SCLC, met with Vice President Richard Nixon and Secretary of Labor James P. Mitchell at the White House to discuss the bill. King had met Nixon previously during his trip to

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[67] Alice A. Dunnigan, "Prayer Pilgrimage for Freedom Hailed as Nation's Most Impressive Demonstration," May 20, 1957, Associated Negro Press, Folder 001585-062-0698, Claude A. Barnett Papers: The Associated Negro Press, 1918-1967, Part 1: Associated Negro Press News Releases, 1928-1964, Series C: 1956-1964, Proquest History Vault.

[68] *Ibid*.; and "Prayer Pilgrimage: Its Meaning," *Chicago Daily Defender*, May 20, 1957.

[69] Martin Luther King Jr., Address at Prayer Pilgrimage, May 17, 1957; Hugh Morris, "Over 15,000 in Washington in Protest for Civil Rights," *Atlanta Daily World*, May 18, 1957; and "Crowd Chants for the Ballot at Pilgrimage," *Washington Post*, May 18, 1957. On the Prayer Pilgrimage, see Garrow, *Bearing the Cross*, 90-94; Branch, *Parting the Waters*, 216-217; and Fairclough, *To Redeem the Soul of America*, 39-40.

[70] Reverend Hamilton T. Boswell, "Washington Prayer Pilgrimage a Great Success," May 20, 1957, Associated Negro Press, Folder 001585-062-0698, Claude A. Barnett Papers.

[71] Earl Brown, "Not Prayer Alone," *New York Amsterdam News*, June 1, 1957.

Ghana, and during their second meeting, King "pointed out the few number of Negroes in the South who had any voting rights in most, if not all, of the states in the South."[72] Nixon and Mitchell listened, and they assured him that on behalf of the President, they would push for Congress to pass the legislation.[73]

On September 9, after months of delays and a record filibuster by Senator Strom Thurmond, President Eisenhower signed the Civil Rights Act of 1957 into law. The first federal legislation that addressed African American civil rights since Reconstruction, the bill established a six-member Commission on Civil Rights to serve within the executive branch to study and report on major issues. It also created a new Assistant Attorney General position, paving the way for a Civil Rights Division within the Department of Justice. Ignoring the issue of school desegregation, the Eisenhower administration had urged Congress to focus the legislation on voting rights. But southerners in Congress still fought against the bill, and while the final version barred any attempt to "intimidate, threaten, [or] coerce…for the purpose of interfering with the right of such other person to vote," consequences were vague and no policies set up to monitor disfranchisement by southern states. Instead, the Attorney General could bring a "civil action" in individual cases, but each trial would be decided by a local jury, all but guaranteeing maintenance of the Jim Crow system. The bill passed, but it lacked potency. While the Civil Rights Act of 1957 did little to empower the federal government to stop disfranchisement, it helped cement voting rights as the centerpiece of the expanding civil rights movement, and it gave the SCLC a stronger platform on which to organize.[74]

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[72] "Vice President Nixon Assures Top Leaders Support," *Atlanta Daily World*, June 14, 1957.

[73] C.P. Trussell, "Civil Rights Foes Set Back in House," *New York Times*, June 14, 1957; "Prayer Pilgrimage: Its Meaning," *Chicago Daily Defender*, May 20, 1957; and Lawson, *Black Ballots*, 176.

[74] Civil Rights Act of 1957, Eighty-Fifth Congress, H.R. 6127, Public Law 85-315, September 9, 1957 (all quotes). See also Lawson, *Black Ballots*, 140-202.

King was unhappy with the Civil Rights Act of 1957, but he felt it offered the opportunity to inspire a southwide movement. Soon after the Senate approved the legislation, King wrote Vice-President Nixon, "History has demonstrated that inadequate legislation supported by mass action can accomplish more than adequate legislation which remains unenforced for the lack of a determined mass movement." While the law was not perfect, the SCLC would use it as an organizing tool. "I am initiating in the South a crusade for citizenship in which we will seek to get at least two million Negroes registered in the south for the 1960 elections," King promised Nixon.[75] The Crusade for Citizenship would fall far short of this goal, but it would build the foundation for a mass movement around voting rights.

Like the Prayer Pilgrimage, the Crusade for Citizenship blended religion and civic duty to guard against charges of communism while making equal access to the ballot the ultimate goal. Two weeks after the Prayer Pilgrimage, A. Phillip Randolph spoke to the Ladies Auxiliary of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters in Pittsburgh: "We need a crusade in the interest of the right to register and vote so that every door of every house in every city and hamlet of this nation will be knocked on."[76] The idea to label this strategy a "crusade" came from Billy Graham's popular religious rallies. On July 18, in the midst of a summer-long program at Madison Square Garden in New York City, King delivered the invocation for the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association Crusade. King was drawn to Graham's enthusiasm, his ability to connect to people, and his mild, yet increasing outspokenness against racism. While Graham pushed a non-political revolution of the soul, King's crusade hoped to enfranchise all southern African Americans.[77]

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[75] Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. to Vice-President Richard M. Nixon, August 30, 1957, in the Papers of Martin Luther King Jr., Volume IV, 263-264 (all quotes).

[76] Harold L. Keith, "Randolph Calls for Vote 'Crusade,'" *Pittsburgh Courier*, June 1, 1957.

[77] See Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., Invocation Delivered at Billy Graham Evangelistic Association Crusade, New York, New York, July 18, 1957, in the Papers of Martin Luther King Jr., Volume IV, 238; Martin Luther King Jr. to

In August 1957, the SCLC announced a massive voter registration drive that would span the American South. The planning began immediately, but without staff, offices, money, or strategy. Writer and historian Taylor Branch summed up the SCLC's impatience, writing, "such a schedule was ambitious to the point of being foolhardy at a time when the fledgling SCLC consisted of nothing more than the preachers there in the church with King."[78] They picked a budget of $200,000 seemingly at random, with no idea how they would raise it. Not until November 5 at a board meeting in Memphis did SCLC staff begin planning for the Crusade. Less than two months had passed since the events surrounding the Little Rock Nine in Arkansas, calling further attention to the intransigence of the white South to black civil rights. Something needed to be done. King released a statement that was short on specifics but grand in scale: "We are now embarking upon an historic campaign—the Crusade for Citizenship. We intend to encourage every Negro in the South to register and to vote" and "to restore the honor and integrity of our nation as a whole."[79]

While King and other ministers were enraptured with the idea for the Crusade for Citizenship, two of King's advisers, Stanley Levison and Bayard Rustin, realized they had a problem. Without someone who knew how to coordinate an organization from the top while working with the grassroots, the Crusade had little chance of success. Levison and Rustin believed the only person who could help was Ella Baker. An NAACP leader with connections to many grassroots organizations after decades of activism, Baker had a reputation for effective

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Billy Graham, August 31, 1957, in the Papers of Martin Luther King Jr., Volume IV, 264-266; and Miller, *Billy Graham and the Rise of the Republican South*, 43.

[78] Branch, *Parting the Waters*, 229. See also Emory O. Jackson, "Dr. King Calls for Massive Voter-Registration in South," *Atlanta Daily World*, August 9, 1957; and "$200,000 Drive Opens to Register Negroes," *Washington Post*, August 10, 1957.

[79] Press Release, SCLC Announcement of the Crusade for Citizenship, November 5, 1957, in the Papers of Martin Luther King Jr., Volume IV, 307-308; and Thaddeus T. Stokes, "Southern Christian Leaders Plan Southwide Voter-Drive," *Atlanta Daily World*, November 8, 1957.

leadership and organization while remaining outside of the spotlight. But she was a woman, and a woman occupying a leadership position within the patriarchal, minister-led SCLC was sure to stir dissent. Levison and Rustin met King at an airport, where they pressed him to ignore her gender and hire her to organize the Crusade. King relented, and Levison and Rustin moved quickly to get Baker in Atlanta to set up the SCLC office and manage the Crusade.[80]

Levison and Rustin did not ask Ella Baker if she wanted to head up the Crusade for Citizenship, but drafted her without asking. They met Baker and told her that they had committed her to Atlanta with the SCLC. "I suppose this is one of the few times in my life that I accepted being used by people," Baker later remembered. "And this, of course, irritated me because I don't like anyone to commit me. But, my sense of values carries with it something to this effect: that the welfare of the whole, of the people or a group of people, is much more important than the ego satisfaction of the individual."[81] Her biographer, Barbara Ransby, attributes Baker's acceptance to her belief that the civil rights movement was at a "critical crossroads," one that bridged direct action militancy and voting rights.[82] Even though Baker had little respect for the condescending attitude of southern black ministers, she hoped to influence the direction of the SCLC toward grassroots organizing. She agreed to move to Atlanta, piece together the SCLC, and plan the Crusade for Citizenship.

When Ella Baker arrived in Atlanta on January 9, 1958, she discovered that the SCLC existed only in the minds of King and his colleagues. No one had prepared for her arrival, and

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[80] Interview with Ella Baker by John Britton, June 19, 1968, RJB-203, Ralph J. Bunch Collection, Moorland-Spingarn Research Center, Howard University; Barbara Ransby, *Ella Baker and the Black Freedom Movement: A Radical Democratic Vision* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003), 172-183; Branch, *Parting the Waters*, 231-232; and Garrow, *Bearing the Cross*, 100-104. See also Interview with Ella Baker by Eugene P. Walker, September 4, 1974, G-0007 in the Southern Oral History Program Collection #4007, Southern Historical Collection, Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

[81] Ella Baker interview, June 19, 1968.

[82] Ransby, *Ella Baker*, 180.

she had no office space. On Auburn Avenue, one of the centers of black Atlanta, Baker rented a room in the Hotel Savoy, and for about a week, she used payphones and borrowed office phones in Ebenezer Baptist Church to coordinate the February 12 launch of the Crusade. She eventually secured her own office and an assistant, but by that time, she had realized the state of the SCLC's unpreparedness. She had planned to stay no more than two weeks, but there was no one to take over her responsibilities. Baker recalled having no contact with King during this period. King spoke with the media, but not to her about coordination. King told the *Atlanta Daily World* that the purpose of the Crusade was "to see that the Negro masses give meaning to the recently enacted Civil Rights Bill by using it to the fullest possible extent."[83] While King broadcasted his ambitions, Baker sat in her office trying to make them come true. She spoke with ministers in Miami, Durham, Hattiesburg, and 18 other cities to plan February 12 rallies. She encouraged journalists to cover the story, and she invited members of the newly-formed United States Commission on Civil Rights to participate. Without direction, Baker worked 12 or more hours per day to cobble together the "great registration movement" that King and his allies thought possible.[84]

On January 30, after weeks of Baker's labor, the SCLC executive committee convened at Ebenezer Baptist Church to sketch out the Crusade's aims for a southwide movement. After the meeting, King circulated a report to allies across the South. The Crusade had two goals: to double the number of black voters by 1960 and "to help liberate all Southerners, Negro and white, to extend democracy" so that "the South can have a real two party system—a necessity for

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[83] "Southern Christian Leadership Conference Pushes Registration," *Atlanta Daily World*, January 19, 1958.

[84] Ella Baker interview, June 19, 1968. See also Ella Baker to Reverend Edward T. Graham, January 21, 1958, Folder 001565-001-0344, Records of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, 1954-1970, Part 1: Records of the President's Office; Ella Baker to Reverend E.T. Brown, January 25, 1958, Box 32, Folder 7, SCLC Papers, The Martin Luther King, Jr. Center for Nonviolent Social Change, Inc. (hereinafter King Center); W.H. Hall to Ella Baker, February 4, 1958, Folder 7, Box 32, Folder 7, SCLC Papers, King Center; and "Southern Leadership Group Maps Final Plans for Voter Crusade," *Atlanta Daily World*, January 31, 1958.

real democracy." King emphasized that the Crusade was a southwide movement—the "opening step in a long and hard, but necessary and glorious struggle"—one that was non-partisan and spiritually focused. He encouraged mass participation, advocating his belief in the ballot as a solution to improve society. King also had to assuage doubt from Roy Wilkins and NAACP leadership that the Crusade would work in partnership with other organizations. Without specifics, King promised to fund the Crusade through church offerings and donations, yet he provided no instructions for local leaders to harness the February 12 rallies into a long-term registration movement. But the Crusade "must succeed for God has promised his children that the loving and the meek (the non-violent) shall inherit the earth."[85]

As February 12 neared, Baker worked with ministers to plan 21 simultaneous meetings in cities such as Memphis, Nashville, Atlanta, and New Orleans. Meanwhile, King devoted his attention to the Crusade. The two came together, invested in the idea that a southwide movement for the ballot was possible. After Baker had confirmed Congressman Adam Clayton Powell to speak at the Houston rally, King thanked Powell for participating, noting that Baker "has worked so selflessly in the Atlanta Crusade office for the past few weeks."[86] As Baker organized outside the limelight, King issued press statements and drummed up support for the Crusade. Deciding on the theme, "The Franchise is a Citizen's Right—Not a Privilege," King declared that the SCLC would "function as a service agency to help further registration and voting in communities where such efforts are already underway, and to stimulate other communities into action."[87] King

[85] Memorandum from Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. to Speakers, Local Contacts, Participants in SCLC, Re: "Crusade for Citizenship Mass Meeting, February 12, 1958," February 4, 1958, in the Papers of Martin Luther King Jr., Volume IV, 358-360 (all quotes) (emphasis in original).

[86] Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. to Congressman Adam Clayton Powell, February 7, 1958, Box 32, Folder 7, SCLC Papers, King Center. See also "Congressman Powell Joins Southern 'Crusade' Group," *Atlanta Daily World*, February 8, 1958.

also outlined the SCLC's long-term strategy "to facilitate joint [civil rights] activities and avoid wasteful duplication, give strength to movements by united actions, and…assess areas of major concentration to achieve maximum effectiveness."[88] It had never been done before, but King, Baker, and the SCLC were trying to ignite a social movement that stretched across the South.

The Crusade for Citizenship began on schedule in all 21 cities with ministers coaxing audiences to register, vote, and pray. In Nashville, King's father was the main speaker. In Shreveport, Fred Shuttlesworth spoke to an estimated 450 people. In Montgomery, the headliner was Kelley M. Smith, a Baptist minister from Nashville, who spoke to an audience of around 1,000 at Holt Street Baptist Church—the site of the first mass meeting for the bus boycott. And in the other 18 cities, ministers called on their audiences to take part in their local registration campaign that blended into the southwide Crusade. In Miami, King spoke at the Greater Bethel AME Church on why voting mattered. He opened with a civics lesson: "The history of our nation is the history of a long and tireless effort to broaden and to increase the franchise of American citizens." King went on to describe how white men and women eventually won the right to vote. Soon, King said, African Americans would gain that same right, no matter how brutal the resistance. Southern disfranchisement was "a very real embarrassment to our nation which we love and must protect." Evoking the Cold War, King warned, "If a tragic global crisis is to be avoided, if America is to meet the challenge of our atomic age—then millions of our people, Negro and white, must be given the right freely to participate in the political life of our nation."[89]

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[87] SCLC Press Release, Re: "Crusade for Citizenship," n.d., Box 381, Folder 3, United Packinghouse, Food, and Allied Workers Records, 1937-1968, Wisconsin Historical Society (hereinafter UPWA Records).

[88] Reverend King's Statement on the Crusade, n.d., Box 381, Folder 4, UPWA Records.

[89] Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., Address at Greater Bethel AME Church in Miami, Florida, February 12, 1958, in the Papers of Martin Luther King Jr., Volume IV, 367-371. See also "Scheduled Meetings," January 20, 1958, Folder

The SCLC had meant for February 12 to be the start of a movement, but the Crusade for Citizenship collapsed almost as soon as it began. Ella Baker put together the initial programs of February 12, but she could not guarantee long-term success in any location. Baker, King, and the SCLC hoped the coordinated drive would inspire registration movements across the South, but without money, organization, or stronger collaboration with other civil rights groups, the Crusade never had much opportunity for success. The SCLC never came close to its goal of $200,000. Yet Baker stayed on the job until a replacement could be found, trying without success to motivate local leaders from the 21 cities to orchestrate registration drives and file reports to her office. She encouraged Reverend J.E. Lowry of Mobile to continue with the Crusade, and she asked Reverend Edward T. Graham of Miami to report on any registration activity that came after February 12. Graham wrote of vague plans to continue the effort to register black Miamians, but he never sent a full report. Neither did anyone else. Baker tried to remain positive, knowing that "it was most unreasonable to imply failure because no record-breaking increase in Negro registration immediately followed the February 12 meetings," but the movement stalled.[90]

The Crusade faded from the minds of SCLC leaders once it became clear that it had failed. Ralph Abernathy, the SCLC's Treasurer, responded to Edward Graham's request for Crusade results by writing that Baker was out of town, implying that he did not know or care.[91]

001581-005-0619, Bayard Rustin Papers; "Launch Crusade for Citizenship," *Chicago Daily Defender*, February 13, 1958; Dr. C.O. Simpkins to Ella Baker, February 14, 1958, Folder 001563-002-0493, Records of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, 1954-1970, Part 1: Records of the President's Office; "King, Powell Address 'Crusade' Meetings," *Chicago Daily Defender*, February 22, 1958; and Inez J. Baskin, "Why Hope Remains; Topic of Speaker at Crusade Meet," *Atlanta Daily World*, March 4, 1958.

[90] Ella J. Baker to Reverend J.E. Lowry, March 28, 1958, Folder 001563-002-0493, Records of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, 1954-1970, Part 1: Records of the President's Office, Proquest History Vault. See also Ella Baker to Reverend Edward T. Graham, April 16, 1958 and Reverend Edward T. Graham to Ella J. Baker, May 7, 1958, Folder 001565-001-0344, Records of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, 1954-1970, Part 1: Records of the President's Office, Proquest History Vault.

[91] Reverend Ralph D. Abernathy to Reverend E.T. Graham, March 10, 1958, Box 1, Folder 1, SCLC Papers, King Center.

King was also quiet about the Crusade's collapse. On March 13, Congressman Charles Diggs wrote King of his disappointment: "Even in Montgomery, Negro voter applicants have dropped below normal…Rallies and speeches are fine for inspirational purposes but a successful registration campaign demands skillful follow up in the field."[92] Reminiscent of black journalists hoping for effective organizing after the Prayer Pilgrimage for Freedom, Diggs's message was blunt. Besides Baker, no one in the SCLC possessed the ability to manage the grassroots. In its May 2, 1958 issue, *U.S. News and World Report* published a story on southern African American registration, and while it did not mention the SCLC specifically, its authors wrote, the "Civil Rights law isn't bringing out the masses of Negro voters in the South…There is no stampede among Negroes to qualify as voters. 'Get out the Vote' campaigns have flopped so far."[93]

In May, the SCLC replaced Baker with Reverend John Tilley from Baltimore, but by this time, the Crusade was no longer a priority. Tilley was an ineffective leader with no experience organizing grassroots movements, and King fired him in April 1959. During his and Baker's tenure, the Crusade failed to raise much money. "Because they didn't have any money," Baker recalled, she relied on phone calls and resorted to clipping and pasting flyers together to organize the Crusade.[94] She put some distance between herself and the SCLC, annoyed by its leadership who had thought rallies and sermons would inaugurate a movement without bottom-up organization and fundraising. Yet she stayed in touch with King and the SCLC, and the following year, she told King of a new potential source of funding. She cited a "need for developing a tax exempt 'arm' of SCLC," Baker wrote. "I understand that the Marshall Field

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[92] Congressman Charles C. Diggs to Martin Luther King Jr., March 13, 1958, in the Papers of Martin Luther King Jr., Volume IV, 389.

[93] "Southern Survey Shows Negroes Stay Home, Vote Crusade Fails," *U.S. News and World Report*, May 2, 1958, 52-54.

[94] Ella Baker interview, June 19, 1968.

Foundation has some special interest in leadership training among religious leaders."[95] With this tip, King and his SCLC staff began considering the possibility of foundation support for their voter registration fieldwork. In *Stride for Freedom*, King had written, the "constructive program ahead must include a campaign to get Negroes to register and vote."[96] Even before publication, however, the Crusade for Citizenship had ended.[97]

During 1958, as the Crusade for Citizenship tried to spark a southwide movement, the SRC conducted another survey of African American disfranchisement finding no real improvement since 1957. The SRC discovered that, even with federal legislation in place, African American registration had become no easier in the South: "Neither the new civil rights legislation nor the federal agencies created by it promise any quick or dramatic improvement in Negro suffrage." White political leaders had "fanned racial prejudice," and in many states, new instruments for disqualifying black voters were introduced. In Louisiana, for example, the state government empowered parishes to update their voter rolls, giving registrars authority to purge African Americans. Since the SRC's last report, black registration in Louisiana had fallen by over 31,000 while white numbers had risen. A lack of political education among African Americans was partly to blame, but voter campaigns were difficult to organize because local and national leaders had been "preoccupied by immediate problems of local discrimination and court tests of state and city segregation laws, which left little time for registration drives."[98] Margaret Price's expanded report was published in August 1959. The study included a forecast by political

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[95] Ella Baker to Martin Luther King Jr., October 10, 1959, Box 3, Folder 8, SCLC Papers, King Center.

[96] King, *Stride for Freedom*, 218.

[97] See also "Two Named to Atlanta Office of 'Crusade for Citizenship,'" *Atlanta Daily World*, June 19, 1958; John Tilley to Reverend Henry C. Bunton, September 25, 1958, Box 1, Folder 1, SCLC Papers, King Center; and Fairclough, *To Redeem the Soul of America*, 48.

[98] Southern Regional Council Special Report, "The Negro Voter in the South – 1958," November 2, 1958, Box 2S440, Folder "Southern Regional Council, 1955-1957," Field Foundation Archives (all quotes).

scientist Elston E. Roady: "We may well have reached that plateau in the development of greater Negro participation in politics…The successful assault on the next mountain seems to rest largely in the hands of the Negro citizen."[99] That assault would begin in March 1962 with the beginning of the Voter Education Project, combining lessons learned from the Crusade for Citizenship and the Prayer Pilgrimage for Freedom.

[99] Margaret Price, *The Negro and the Ballot in the South* (Atlanta: Southern Regional Council, 1959), 33.

CHAPTER 2: 'OFF TO THE POLLS WE GO': THE CREATION OF THE VOTER EDUCATION PROJECT

On June 16, 1961, Attorney General Robert F. Kennedy hosted the Freedom Ride Coordinating Committee in his office at the Department of Justice (DOJ). For seven weeks, Freedom Riders—young activists affiliated with the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) and the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE)—had boarded Greyhound and Trailways buses in Washington, DC to travel as far as New Orleans to test the Supreme Court's 1960 *Boynton v. Virginia* decision outlawing segregated bus terminals. After weeks of bus bombings, white mob violence, and dozens of activists imprisoned in Mississippi, Diane Nash of SNCC wrote the President requesting a White House meeting to discuss "the possibilities of action on the part of the federal government" to assist the Freedom Riders.[100] The Attorney General accepted Nash's request, not as a good-faith attempt to offer DOJ help to the Freedom Riders, but to persuade them to drop the protests and make black voter registration their new primary objective.

For weeks, Robert Kennedy and the DOJ's Civil Rights Division had been in conversation with philanthropists and race leaders, including Martin Luther King Jr. and Whitney Young, to create a collaborative project that promoted voter registration as the primary avenue of civil rights activism. SNCC had not been involved. When Diane Nash, accompanied by Charles Sherrod, Charles Jones, and Charles McDew—the three Charlies, as they were known within SNCC—met Robert Kennedy, they demanded that the federal government do more to

[100] Diane J. Nash to President John F. Kennedy, June 7, 1961, Box 5, Folder "Nash, Diane J., June 21 – October 16, 1961," Harris Wofford Papers, John F. Kennedy Library (hereafter Wofford Papers).

protect the Freedom Riders. Kennedy heard them out, but he told them that it was time to switch tactics. Kennedy let them know about the DOJ's conversations with the Taconic Foundation and civil rights leaders to create a project that would fund registration fieldwork throughout the South. The plans were still confidential, but Kennedy broached the subject with the SNCC activists to let them know about the possibility of generous, tax-free funding to help register southern African Americans.[101]

Charles Sherrod was mad. Along with the others, he believed that Kennedy's offer bordered on bribery. "That's where I jumped in," Sherrod later remembered. Sherrod stood up to confront Kennedy. Wyatt Tee Walker, the executive director of the SCLC who was present as well, held Sherrod back by his coattail. Sherrod told Kennedy "that he was a public official who was supposed to…keep people who made trouble for us off our backs" and that it was not Kennedy's "responsibility to tell us how to honor our constitutional rights."[102] Tensions cooled, and Kennedy continued on, arguing that registering voters might not be as attention-grabbing as the Freedom Rides, but it had the potential to undo Jim Crow.[103]

The meeting between Robert Kennedy and the Freedom Riders was a step toward an unprecedented partnership between civil rights activists, the DOJ, and big philanthropy—one that would influence the civil rights movement toward a greater focus on voter registration. Recently, the southern black freedom struggle had been an ill-defined movement. The widely-shared goal was to end segregation, but no coordinated strategy existed to accomplish it. Activists in local communities organized marches, protests, boycotts, sit-ins, and Freedom Rides,

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[101] Interview with Charles Jones by Taylor Branch, November 24, 1986, Taylor Branch Papers #5047, Southern Historical Collection, The Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill (hereafter Branch Papers); and Branch, *Parting the Waters*, 480.

[102] Interview with Charles Sherrod by Taylor Branch, October 7, 1985, Taylor Branch Papers #5047, Southern Historical Collection, The Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

[103] Branch, *Parting the Waters*, 480-481.

and while each chipped away at segregation, white supremacy remained as long as black disfranchisement continued. Leaders in the NAACP, SCLC, and other national civil rights organizations sensed that voter registration work was the future of the fight, and philanthropists wanted to pay for it. The Kennedys also encouraged this approach because they thought it could generate new black supporters for the Democratic Party and move their civil rights agenda forward without alienating southern Democrats. Together, civil rights leaders, philanthropists, and DOJ officials pushed the civil rights movement toward registration activism through the creation of the Voter Education Project (VEP).

Charles Sherrod was angry because he correctly sensed that others were trying to steer the civil rights movement. DOJ officials, foundation executives, and civil rights leaders each had separate motives, but all agreed that the black freedom struggle needed to concentrate on voting rights activism. The most powerful influence was money—tax-exempt, foundation money—that philanthropists promised to civil rights agencies if they used the funds to register voters. Activists were already interested in registration, but they lacked the finances to manage a southwide voter campaign. The SCLC's Crusade for Citizenship in 1958 had proven that such a project might be possible if it had widespread support. The VEP would be that support, but establishing the VEP was not a foregone conclusion. For over a year between 1961 and 1962, those who believed in the idea of the VEP worked behind-the-scenes to convince others that the plan would work. In the process, they began to concentrate the civil rights movement as a battle for the black ballot.

Stephen and Audrey Currier, the Taconic Foundation, and Tax-Exemption

Stephen Currier was a central figure in the formation of the VEP. Born on August 24, 1930, Currier grew up in privilege, groomed by his family for upper-class life in New York. In

1939, his mother married Edward M.M. Warburg, a decision that launched Stephen into a life of greater opportunity. Warburg came from a prestigious Jewish family with links to New York financial markets and philanthropy. His grandfather was Jacob Schiff, a Jewish German immigrant who became an influential investment banker and corporate executive from the mid-1870s until his death in 1920. His son-in-law, Felix Warburg, grew the family fortune as a partner with the investment bank Kuhn, Loeb and Company. Felix's son, Edward, continued the financial dynasty, but his passion was philanthropy. Fine arts captured his imagination, and during the 1930s, Warburg helped found the American Ballet and supported the Museum of Modern Art. Edward Warburg imparted his love of philanthropy to Stephen. But Stephen never quite fit in; he was a shy boy torn between two legacy-rich families. "He'd had a difficult upbringing, always in that sort of no-man's land on the edge of the rich New York world," according to a friend, Harold Fleming.[104] Stephen Currier went to Harvard College, and after a few years, met one of the wealthiest heiresses in the United States.[105]

Audrey Bruce was born in 1933 into the Mellon clan, the richest family in the United States. Her grandfather was Andrew W. Mellon, former Secretary of the Treasury, entrepreneur, banker, diplomat, and philanthropist. His first-born daughter, Ailsa, struggled with depression throughout her life. She married David K.E. Bruce, a lawyer and state representative in Maryland who later became an officer with the Office of Strategic Services and served as United States Ambassador to France, West Germany, and Great Britain. Their marriage was turbulent, and

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[104] Quoted in Burton Hersh, *The Mellon Family: A Fortune in History* (New York: William Morrow, 1978), 417.

[105] Eric Pace, "Edward Warburg, Philanthropist and Patron of the Arts, Dies at 84," *New York Times*, September 22, 1992; Margalit Fox, "Mary Warburg, a Noted Philanthropist, Dies at 100," *New York Times*, March 11, 2009; and Ron Chernow, *The Warburgs: The Twentieth-Century Odyssey of a Remarkable Jewish Family* (New York: Vintage, 1994), 456-457. See also "Stephen Currier Missing on Flight," *New York Times*, January 19, 1967; "Gifts by Curriers $3-Million in 1966," *New York Times*, January 26, 1967; and John Egerton, Introduction to Harold C. Fleming with Virginia Fleming, *The Potomac Chronicle: Public Policy and Civil Rights from Kennedy to Reagan* (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 1996), xxv.

they separated around the time of Andrew Mellon's death in 1937, when Audrey was four years-old. Ailsa inherited a vast fortune, becoming one of the richest women in the country overnight. Like her father, Ailsa turned to philanthropy primarily as a tax haven, establishing the Avalon Foundation in 1940 but distancing herself from its operations. David finally convinced Ailsa to divorce in 1945, agreeing that Audrey would stay with her mother. Growing up, Audrey was a reserved child who enjoyed the privacy of her family estates. But Ailsa was restless, and she moved Audrey with her from mansion to mansion. Audrey later attended boarding schools in New York and Virginia, and in 1952, she enrolled at Radcliffe College.[106]

Although Audrey was aware of her family's wealth, her parents did not explain the extent of it until well into her college career. By that time, she had met Stephen Currier. College bored Currier, and he found work as an art consultant after dropping out. Higher education exhilarated Audrey, yet she found herself drawn to Currier, whose unstable, affluent family mirrored her own. Currier later confided to friends that he did not know about Audrey's family fortune until after they married. Whether or not that was true, Audrey's family and their close friends despised Currier. They thought he was taking advantage of Audrey to gain access to the Mellon coffers. Lauder Greenway, a close friend to Ailsa, believed Audrey chose Currier because she knew that the family would not approve, and therefore would not have to worry about the Mellons corrupting him. Audrey had little patience for family drama, and she gravitated toward Currier because she saw her life with him as separate from her upbringing. Knowing that neither the Mellons nor the Bruces would approve the match, Audrey and Stephen eloped on November 15, 1954 in Fairfield, Connecticut. They kept their union secret for over a year, enough time for

[106] Hersh, *The Mellon Family*, 414-415; David E. Koskoff, *The Mellons: The Chronicle of America's Richest Family* (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell, 1978), 534; and David Cannadine, *Mellon: An American Life* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2006), 610-612.

Audrey to graduate from Radcliffe without distractions. After marriage, they began to consider philanthropy as their future career.[107]

Two friends motivated Stephen Currier to see southern African American inequality as an opportunity for philanthropy. The first was long-time family friend, Marshall Field III. Field had inherited his family's empire of department stores in Chicago, and he later purchased and ran two newspapers. In 1940, he and his wife founded the Field Foundation. Currier often visited the Fields, and Marshall urged Stephen to look to philanthropy as a way to put his fortune to use. Unlike most of their rich peers in the Midwest, the Fields supported the New Deal and civil rights for African Americans. Field inspired Currier, and Currier began following the events of the civil rights movement.[108]

The second major influence on Currier was financial expert Lloyd K. Garrison, the great-grandson of the abolitionist. In his unpublished memoir, Garrison remembered that the Curriers arrived at his office with a problem concerning Audrey's inheritance. The Mellons were pressuring Audrey to sign a document neither she nor Stephen understood, "which would effectively have turned over her vast fortune to the management of the Mellon bank in Pittsburgh and have placed restrictions on the free use of her income."[109] With Garrison's help, the Curriers retained control of Audrey's inheritance. After settling the matter, they "talked about what

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[107] Mary V.R. Thayer, "There's a Wedding In the Mellon Clan," *Washington Post*, April 7, 1956; "Mellon Heiress Weds," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, April 24, 1956; Hersh, *The Mellon Family*, 415; and Nelson D. Lankford, *The Last American Diplomat: The Biography of David K.E. Bruce, 1898-1977* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1996), 273.

[108] Unpublished Memoir by Lloyd K. Garrison, 42, Box 1, Folder 3, Lloyd K. Garrison Papers, 1893-1990, Harvard Law School Library, Harvard University; and Egerton, Introduction in Fleming, *The Potomac Chronicle*, xxv. See also Marshall Field, "The Negro Press and the Issues of Democracy," Address before the Capital Press Club, Washington, DC, June 21, 1944, reprinted by the American Council on Race Relations

[109] Garrison unpublished memoir, 41.

Stephen should do with his life."[110] Garrison encouraged the Curriers to become philanthropists. The Curriers and Garrison discovered they had a mutual interest in race problems. Garrison had served as president of the National Urban League from 1947 to 1952, and he promised to introduce Currier to civil rights activists. The two became close friends, and as Stephen and Audrey considered starting their own foundation, Garrison urged them to concentrate on racial inequality. Few other foundations financed civil rights projects in the South, and wanting to make their mark, the Curriers took Garrison's advice.[111]

In 1958, Stephen and Audrey launched the Taconic Foundation. Named for the mountain range where the couple often vacationed, the Taconic Foundation became the creative space for Stephen and Audrey to search for interesting projects and lend a helping hand. They set up their office on the 35th floor of a Manhattan tower at 666 Fifth Avenue, and there Stephen and Audrey worked together with a small staff to channel funds to groups working to advance civil rights, mental health, and child welfare. In their view, the arts, sciences, and medicine had an overabundance of benefactors, and they wanted to finance unorthodox ventures. A favorite term of theirs was "enablement," meaning a commitment to partnering with "those with the fewest options."[112] Building on the long history of philanthropy in the United States, Taconic's goal was to make incremental improvements toward "equality of opportunity."[113] The Curriers had a novel vision for Taconic: to enact progressive change with a personal touch. According to journalist

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[110] *Ibid*.

[111] *Ibid*., 41-42; "Man of Many Posts: Lloyd Kirkham Garrison," *New York Times*, May 4, 1967; Hersh, *The Mellon Family*, 417-418; and Dennis C. Dickerson, *Militant Mediator: Whitney M. Young, Jr.* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1998), 177.

[112] "Introduction," *Taconic Foundation: Report 1959-1984* in *Taconic Foundation: Twenty-Five Years* (June 1985), 9.

[113] John G. Simon, "The Better Angels of Our Nature: A Preface," *Taconic Foundation: Twenty-Five Years* (June 1985).

John Egerton, the Curriers believed "that a foundation could be a *participant*, not merely a money dispenser."[114] Taconic sponsored such diverse programs as the Child Welfare League of America, the NAACP, the National Urban League, the Northside Center for Child Development, the Morningside Community Center, and an innovative program in Harlem that later became the inspiration for Project Head Start. According to family friend and adviser Victor Weingarten, "They never gave a dime for a building [to be named for them], no bricks, no mortar, only programs and people. They were pioneers who spent an enormous amount of time finding out for themselves what they wanted to support."[115]

The Mellons were aghast that Audrey spent family money on "distastefully radical political causes."[116] A cousin of Audrey's recalled, "My family disapproved of the things they [Stephen and Audrey] were working on. Something having to do with the colored. We felt they were on the wrong side."[117] Members of the Mellon clan, along with Audrey's father, believed that Stephen controlled Audrey and her money. The family was further annoyed that Audrey had not entrusted her inheritance to Mellon Banks. Throughout her adolescence, the family had infantilized Audrey, viewing her as sensitive and naïve. The family's fears were confirmed when Audrey appeared unhappy, at one point even asking her father for divorce advice. But to everyone's surprise and disappointment, Audrey stayed with Stephen. She attended Taconic board meetings, and she also volunteered as a nurse at Lenox Hill Hospital, where she kept her identity secret from her colleagues. The coupled purchased a 1,600 acre estate near The Plains,

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[114] Egerton, Introduction in Fleming, *The Potomac Chronicle*, xxvi, emphasis in original. See also "He gives a $ Million for rights but shuns publicity limelight," *Afro-American*, August 24, 1963.

[115] "Gifts by Curriers $3-Million in 1966," *New York Times*, January 26, 1967. See also Taconic Foundation: Grants 1958/1959-1969, *Taconic Foundation: Report 1959-1984*, 29-35.

[116] Cannadine, *Mellon: An American Life*, 616.

[117] Quoted in Hersh, *The Mellon Family*, 417

Virginia called Kinloch, where they spent much of their time when not in New York City. Stephen was sensitive to the Mellon's dislike of him and charges of opportunism, but he valued Audrey in a way the Mellons never did, and together they grew the Taconic Foundation.[118]

One of the Curriers' favorite organizations to assist was the Southern Regional Council. Through the partnership, they became friends with executive director Harold C. Fleming. Having worked with the South's foremost interracial organization since 1944, Fleming was a "self-effacing southerner…with an instinctive empathy for people in need."[119] He led the SRC in its mission to address race-related problems. Since the late 1950s, the SRC had functioned as a mediator between multiple civil rights groups. On November 5 and 6, 1957, the SRC hosted a southern interagency meeting in Atlanta to discuss a "joint fact-finding project" on black disfranchisement, employment discrimination, and school segregation. Many groups joined the SRC, including the NAACP, the Anti-Defamation League, the American Friends Service Committee, and Martin Luther King Jr.'s Southern Leadership Conference. Attempting to link multiple groups involved in the growing "resistance movement" in the South, the SRC became a central meeting place for leaders and organizations.[120]

On October 19, 1959, Harold Fleming circulated a short essay entitled "Some Observations on Foundation Giving in the Field of Race Relations" reflecting on the dearth of philanthropic support to southern groups advocating for better race relations. The major foundations—Carnegie, Ford, and Rockefeller—had "shunned direct efforts in this field like the plague," not wanting to support controversial organizations for fear of bad publicity. But he

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[118] "800 Attend Rites for the Curriers," *New York Times*, February 16, 1967; Koskoff, *The Mellons*, 511, 535-536; and Lankford, *The Last American Diplomat*, 348.

[119] Egerton, Introduction to *The Potomac Chronicle*, xvi.

[120] Minutes, Consultative Conference on Desegregation, Southern Interagency Meeting, November 5-6, 1957, Box 116, Folder 3, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Archive, Boston University Howard Gottlieb Archival Research Center (hereafter MLK Archive, Boston University).

began to notice "a slight, but encouraging, trend toward more interaction between Southern race-relationists and foundation persons."[121] Mid-sized and smaller foundations such as the Taconic Foundation, the Field Foundation, the New World Foundation, and the Christopher Reynolds Foundation had supported the SRC over the past few years because Fleming developed personal relationships with some of the men who oversaw donations. Fleming and Currier, for example, had become friends, and the Taconic Foundation granted $95,000 to the SRC for programs in 1959 and 1960.[122] Not wanting to create "undue dependence," the Taconic Foundation's grants to the SRC were not exorbitant, but they were consistent.[123] Fleming tried to convince other wealthy donors that supporting the SRC and similar organizations battling Jim Crow was a worthwhile cause. These budding relationships brought various philanthropists into the SRC's orbit.

Impressed with the SRC's work, Currier approached Fleming about a new idea: to do something unorthodox as a foundation and lobby the federal government to ensure the rights of African Americans. Soon after John F. Kennedy was elected President in November 1960, Currier and Lloyd Garrison flew to Georgia to discuss with Fleming the idea for a Washington, DC-based philanthropic hub devoted to public policy and racial issues. They toured parts of rural Georgia and had conversations about the racism. They also attended a Sunday morning service at Ebenezer Baptist Church, where they heard a young Martin Luther King Jr. preach from his

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[121] Harold C. Fleming, "Some Observations on Foundation Giving in the Field of Race Relations," October 19, 1959, Frames 23, 26, Reel 28, SRC Papers.

[122] Memorandum, Harold C. Fleming to Stephen Currier, "Summary Report on Projects Assisted by December 1958 Contributions," October 19, 1959, Folder "Southern Regional Council: General Program, 1958-1964," Taconic Foundation Records, Rockefeller Archive Center (hereafter Taconic Foundation Records). The Rockefeller Archive Center has not yet fully processed the Taconic Foundation Records, so official serial, box, and folder numbers do not yet exist. For a list of other foundations that supported the SRC during the late 1950s, see Report No. L-1, "The Southern Regional Council: Its Origin and Aims," April 17, 1959, Box 2S440, Folder "Southern Regional Council, 1955-1957," Field Foundation Archives, 1940-1990, Dolph Briscoe Center for American History, The University of Texas at Austin (hereafter Field Foundation Archives).

[123] Quoted in Hersh, *The Mellon Family*, 419.

father's pulpit.[124] Fleming had second thoughts about leaving the SRC, but after talking with Currier—and a subsequent visit to New York City—he agreed to lead the effort. Currier had big ideas, but only 29 years-old, he was unsure how to move forward. The seasoned Fleming did, and with his enormous contact list, they established the Potomac Institute as an "off-shoot or subsidiary of Taconic."[125] The Curriers did have conditions, though. As with their earlier work, they wished to remain out of the limelight. Fleming remembered, "They insisted that their personal benefactions be given no publicity and that their privacy be respected."[126] As executive vice president, Fleming put together a small staff in an office on 18th Street, meeting Currier's wish that the organization remain "quiet" and "unpretentious."[127] Currier and Fleming sensed they were in the midst of a political shift incorporating civil rights issues into the national legislative agenda. They wanted to be at the forefront, and the Potomac Institute became an influential research and lobbying firm in Washington, DC. According to Fleming, "No other organization was so linked both to government offices and the southern civil rights movement, and so trusted by both."[128]

Stephen Currier's creation of the Potomac Institute was important because it challenged an old precedent within the world of philanthropy, one that the VEP would shatter a year later. Since major foundations first emerged a half-century earlier, philanthropists like Currier had wanted to get involved with politics, but interpretations of the law prevented them from doing so.

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[124] Garrison unpublished memoir, 43-44.

[125] *Ibid*., 43.

[126] Fleming, *The Potomac Chronicle*., 8.

[127] Harold C. Fleming, *The Potomac Institute Incorporated, 1961-1971*, report published by the Potomac Institute, 1972, 2.

[128] Fleming, *The Potomac Chronicle*, vii. See also Fleming, *The Potomac Chronicle*, 2-3, 7-8; and Fleming, *The Potomac Institute Incorporated, 1961-1971*.

At stake was tax-exemption. Educational pursuits counted, but political advocacy did not. After the Sixteenth Amendment established the federal income tax in 1913, the Treasury Department created policies by which charitable gifts could be tax-exempt. But the rules were murky, especially since so few major foundations existed at the time. For years, the Treasury Department relied on a mixture of court rulings and state laws to clarify the terms, approving most charitable gifts as long as they somehow benefitted society and were not overtly political. The Treasury allowed tax-exemptions for educational initiatives, but over time, the difference between education and political advocacy blurred as more people applied for exemptions and foundations increased in number. In 1919, Treasury regulators updated their policies by "drawing a line in the sand" between advocacy and education because they "wanted to make sure beneficiaries of tax exemption did not engage in politics under the cover of educational activity," according to historian Olivier Zunz.[129]

Although regulators designed the Revenue Act of 1934 to clarify tax-exemption, it only added to the confusion. The main reason for the 1934 law was to close loopholes and raise tax revenue amid the Great Depression, but buried in one article was the root cause of philanthropy's boom over the next three and a half decades. After some debate between Congress regarding the language, they compromised with this clause: as long as "no substantial part of the activities" were political in nature, foundations and other organizations could be tax-exempt if "organized and operated exclusively for religious, charitable, scientific, literary, or educational purposes." But the law forbade them from engaging in "propaganda, or otherwise attempting, to influence legislation."[130] With parameters set, foundations concentrated on education, medicine, public

[129] Zunz, *Philanthropy in America*, 89. See also 85-89.

health, poverty, and fine arts. Major philanthropies like Carnegie, Ford, and Rockefeller were joined by hundreds of small to mid-sized family foundations looking to spend their wealth for the public good. But while the law was explicit, the word "substantial" left plenty of ambiguity in place. Foundations avoided outright partisanship, but as they funded more and more projects, the difference between education and advocacy remained hazy.[131]

Tax-exemption was crucial to philanthropy. Through tax-exemptions, charitable giving became an American institution, practiced by the middle-class and the wealthy alike. The Revenue Act of 1934 ushered in a new era of giving, one not wholly motivated by altruism. Donors found a way to avoid taxation by giving through family foundations. Writing about the law's effect five years after implementation, economist C. Lowell Harriss realized, "The exemption acts in effect as a government subsidy to institutions qualifying for the benefit under the law."[132] The federal government picked up the tab in lost tax revenue by providing generous terms for tax-exemption, and America's wealthy class took advantage. Tax lawyers perceived the implications, and they advised their rich clients to set up family foundations to serve as tax shelters where they could protect their family assets from the Treasury Department, maintain control of their holdings, and serve the public good on their own terms. Studying these effects in 1949, researcher B.W. Patch found, "With tax rates at high levels and with charitable contributions exempt from income tax…large contributors in the top tax brackets sometimes may make up in tax savings, for themselves or their estates, more than one-half of the amount of their

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[130] Section 511, Article 13, Regulations 79 Relating To Gift Tax under the Revenue Act of 1932, As Amended and Supplemented by the Revenue Acts of 1934 and 1935, U.S. Treasury Department, Bureau of Internal Revenue (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1936).

[131] Zunz, *Philanthropy in America*, 89-103. On early interpretations of the Revenue Act of 1934, see Roy G. Blakey and Gladys C. Blakey, "The Revenue Act of 1934," *American Economic Review* 24, no. 3 (September 1934): 450-461.

[132] C. Lowell Harriss, "Philanthropy and Federal Tax Exemption," *Journal of Political Economy* 47, no. 4 (August 1939), 528.

contributions."[133] Over the years, foundations fiercely guarded their tax-exemption status, creating a culture of big philanthropy dependent on tax breaks. This idea was still paramount in 1961 as the VEP began to take shape.

Voting Rights and the John F. Kennedy Administration

While the Curriers concentrated on the Taconic Foundation and the Potomac Institute between 1958 and 1961, the election of John F. Kennedy on November 8, 1960 suggested a new focus on civil rights within the federal government. Running on a campaign that included greater, albeit vague plans for federal action, Kennedy appeared to many African Americans as sympathetic on racial matters. More than President Dwight D. Eisenhower and his Vice-President Richard M. Nixon, who ran on the 1960 Republican ticket, Kennedy promoted equal rights during his campaign, but never offered specific policies for fear of upsetting southern Democrats. Kennedy called Coretta Scott King while her husband was in jail to offer some comfort, and his staff made sure his display of sensitivity reached the media. Several months after the first sit-ins in Greensboro, Kennedy praised the demonstrators: "It is in the American tradition to stand up for one's rights—even if the new way to stand up for one's rights is to sit down."[134]

After Kennedy won the Presidency, the SRC sensed a positive shift toward improved race relations. Harold Fleming and his research director, Leslie Dunbar, wanted to create an ally in Kennedy. Following the election, the SRC invited incoming Kennedy Administration staff to attend their annual meeting. Several came, and suddenly, SRC staff felt like they "were on the

[133] B.W. Patch, "Tax-Exempt Foundations," *Editorial Research Reports*, January 5, 1949, 10.

[134] Anthony Lewis, "Kennedy Salutes Negroes' Sit-ins," *New York Times*, June 25, 1960. See also Interview with John Seigenthaler by William A. Geoghegan, July 22, 1964, 120-123, John F. Kennedy Library Oral History Program.

same side as the people running the country."[135] With segregationists dominant in the Senate, effective legislation to address civil rights stood little chance of passing, but many believed the President could issue executive orders. A few weeks before the election took place, with help from a Rockefeller Brothers Fund grant, Dunbar commissioned Daniel H. Pollitt, a law professor at the University of North Carolina, to draft a paper detailing the possibilities of executive action on civil rights. Explaining the assignment to his mother, Pollitt wrote that he was preparing a "study on what a strong and willing President could do within existing powers to alleviate the racial problems in as many areas as I can think of."[136] After Pollitt completed the first draft and Kennedy won the election, he and Dunbar coordinated with dozens of other civil rights activists to make sure the report was comprehensive, incorporating recommendations from the NAACP, the NUL, and the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights. After revisions, Dunbar and about a dozen others met in Washington, DC with Kennedy staff to scrutinize the document. Before sending it to President-Elect Kennedy, those involved wanted to make sure the report's recommendations were achievable and legally sound.[137]

In January 1961, Harold Fleming sent the completed 48-page report to Kennedy in hopes of persuading the President-Elect to act on civil rights. Entitled "The Federal Executive and Civil Rights," the paper made 18 recommendations for ways the President could use the power of his office to end racial inequality in the South. Among the proposals, the SRC encouraged the President to take executive action to affirm the *Brown v. Board of Education* Supreme Court decision, push the DOJ to enforce civil rights laws, increase the staff of the Civil Rights

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[135] Interview with Leslie W. Dunbar by Jacquelyn Hall, Helen Bresler, and Bob Hall, December 18, 1978, 20, G-0075 in the Southern Oral History Program Collection #4007, Southern Historical Collection, Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

[136] Daniel H. Pollitt to Mima Riddiford Pollitt, October 23, 1960, Series 4, Box 37, Folder 348, Daniel H. Pollitt Papers #5498, Southern Historical Collection, The Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

[137] Fleming, *The Potomac Chronicle*, 14; and Leslie W. Dunbar interview, December 18, 1978, 20-21.

Division, end housing and employment discrimination, and accurately represent the country's racial problems to the international press. It called on the President to promote African American voting participation by organizing a "national campaign to educate people in their voting rights and to encourage them to vote."[138] The SRC also circulated the report to the national press. Kennedy read it before he was sworn into office, and it shaped the way he considered civil rights issues during his Presidency. The report also introduced the Kennedys and members of his administration to the SRC and its high quality work, an important factor that later brought movement activists and DOJ officials together to form the VEP.[139]

Kennedy had met African American leaders during his Senatorial career and early presidential campaign, and he began assembling a team sympathetic to the movement, including Harris Wofford. An advocate of Gandhian nonviolence, Wofford earned law degrees from Howard University and Yale University before serving as an attorney with the United States Civil Rights Commission under the Eisenhower Administration. During his time with the Commission, he became friends with Martin Luther King Jr. and sent him literature on nonviolence. While teaching at the University of Notre Dame Law School in 1959, Wofford became interested in Kennedy's presidential aspirations. Wanting to push Kennedy on civil rights, Wofford mailed the Kennedy brothers an opinion paper in which he suggested that "a shift of focus to the clear-cut issue of voting rights would be 'politically right and

[138] Southern Regional Council, "The Federal Executive and Civil Rights," January 1961, 27, Frame 1006, Section 8, Civil Rights During the Kennedy Administration, 1961-1963, Part 1: The White House Central Files and Staff Files and The President's Office Files. For a shortened summary of "The Federal Executive and Civil Rights," see *New South* 16, no. 3 (March 1961), 11-14.

[139] Confidential Report on the Southern Regional Council, Public Affairs Program of the Ford Foundation, May 7, 1965, 3, Series 010437, Unpublished Reports, Office of the President, Office Files of Harry T. Heald, Ford Foundation Records, Rockefeller Archive Center (hereafter Ford Foundation Records).

psychologically healthy.'"[140] Wofford's paper made an impression, and the following year, the Kennedys brought him on board their campaign as an adviser on civil rights.[141]

The Kennedy brothers began promoting voting rights as their primary intervention into the civil rights movement. To them, focusing on access to the polls was the best way to address civil rights without enflaming southern conservatives over the prospects of integrated schooling. According to Arthur M. Schlesinger Jr., the Kennedys believed "Negro voting did not incite social and sexual anxieties; and white southerners could not argue against suffrage for their fellow Negro citizens with quite the same moral fervor they applied to the mingling of the races in schools."[142] The Kennedys began to conceive of voting rights as a pragmatic avenue to address racial inequality, but still avoided direct statements during the presidential campaign.

After the election, Robert F. Kennedy noticed an anomaly in Fayette County, Tennessee that signaled the rising power of the black vote. Under Eisenhower, John Doar with the DOJ investigated economic reprisals in Fayette and Haywood Counties where strong evidence showed that white landowners punished and removed black tenants for political participation. In the 1960 election, demonstrating some Republican loyalty for investigating these acts, African Americans voted overwhelmingly for Nixon in Fayette County. Whereas Kennedy captured a much higher percentage of the black vote elsewhere in the country, the numbers in Fayette County proved that black voters were not locked in for the Democrats. Fayette County's example

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[140] Harris Wofford, *Of Kennedys and Kings: Making Sense of the Sixties* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1980), 159.

[141] For more on Harris Wofford's nonviolent philosophy, see Harris and Clare Wofford, *India Afire* (New York: J. Day, 1951).

[142] Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., *A Thousand Days: John F. Kennedy in the White House* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1965), 935.

cemented in Robert Kennedy's mind the need to increase black registration, and hopefully, win over more Democratic voters.[143]

Harris Wofford became a Special Assistant on Civil Rights within the DOJ after Kennedy's victory, and soon after his appointment, he recommended executive actions to the President-Elect. Familiar with "The Federal Executive and Civil Rights," Wofford echoed its message and laid out a plan for translating ideas into action. His tone was optimistic, arguing that Kennedy should welcome the opportunity to skirt an unhelpful Congress. This route offered the greatest number of possibilities to do good, Wofford suggested, because the executive branch could do more than any piece of watered-down legislation. Wofford advised Kennedy to support the anti-poll tax amendment clogged in Congress, strengthen the Civil Rights Division within the DOJ, compel southern leaders to fully desegregate schools, end federal housing discrimination, renew the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, and host public meetings with civil rights leaders to demonstrate empathy with the cause. According to Wofford, "you [Kennedy] can do without any substantial civil rights legislation this session of Congress *if* you go ahead with a substantial executive action program."[144]

In the same memorandum, Wofford counseled Kennedy to prioritize black registration. Taking stock of the civil rights movement, Wofford wrote, "It would probably help now to shift the spotlight from lunch counter sit-ins and school desegregation to Negro enfranchisement."[145]

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[143] Interview with John Doar by Taylor Branch, May 12, 1986, C-5047/8-9, Taylor Branch Papers; Interview with John Doar, conducted by Blackside, Inc. November 15, 1985, for *Eyes on the Prize: America's Civil Rights Years (1954-1965)*, Washington University Libraries, Film and Media Archive, Henry Hampton Collection. See also Branch, *Parting the Waters*, 382; and Brauer, *John F. Kennedy and the Second Reconstruction*, 72, 120. For personal memories of African Americans forced off land in Fayette County, see James Forman, *The Making of Black Revolutionaries* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1972, 1997), 116-130.

[144] Memorandum from Harris Wofford to President-Elect Kennedy on Civil Rights – 1961, 7, Box 68, Folder "Civil Rights [Reports] (2 of 4)," Burke Marshall Personal Papers, John F. Kennedy Library (hereafter Marshall Papers) (emphasis in original).

Citing his belief that registration offered the greatest potential for concrete progress with less chance of conservative resistance, Wofford envisioned African Americans registering en masse if only given federal support. He also explained that focusing on black registration could be a boon for the Democratic Party: "It would be a dramatic and good thing for the national Democratic Party to announce and launch such a drive, instead of leaving it to the NAACP and King's movement."[146] With more black votes, Democrats would secure the South while evolving beyond a whites-only party in the region. If the national Democratic Party did nothing to wrench the segregationist wing out of power in the South, Wofford feared African Americans would turn to the Republican Party. To make sure this did not happen, Wofford suggested state parties pursue black registration while national leaders supported greater enfranchisement. "The southern Negro temper is changing fast and these state Democratic parties will need to adjust or risk losing the Negro vote," Wofford warned.[147]

Wofford based some of his predictions on what Robert Kennedy observed in Fayette County, Tennessee, in which many African Americans awarded their votes to the Republican Party. Scott Franklin, President of the Fayette County Civic and Welfare League, telegrammed the President-Elect on December 30 that white landowners continued to evict black sharecroppers. "We have all been boycotted," Franklin wrote, "unable to purchase food, clothing, medical supplies and gas."[148] He asked for help, and Wofford advised the federal government to get involved.[149] Fayette County suggested what Democrats could do to hang on to

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[145] *Ibid*., 16.

[146] *Ibid*.

[147] *Ibid*., 17.

[148] Telegram from Scott Franklin to President-Elect Kennedy, December 30, 1960, Box 10, Folder "Voter Registration, June 15, 1960 – July 3, 1961," Wofford Papers.

their black supporters—those few who could vote. To prevent an exodus to the Republicans and increase Democratic votes, the Kennedy Administration needed to protect and extend civil rights. Robert Kennedy was convinced, telling DOJ lawyer John Doar, "I want to move on voting."[150]

In addition to his report, Wofford's catalogue of contacts from his service with the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights proved valuable to link civil rights leaders, philanthropists, and White House insiders. He learned about SCLC leadership making inquiries about philanthropic money for voter registration. Wofford gave the SCLC the names of foundations that might be interested in helping, and he told philanthropist friends that the Kennedy Administration was moving toward voter registration as its main civil rights target. He then told those within the DOJ about interests shared by the SCLC, foundations, and the executive branch. In this way, Wofford was a crucial link that put the three sides in conversation, a foundational step towards the eventual creation of the Voter Education Project.[151]

During the transition from Eisenhower to Kennedy, the search to find a new leader for the Civil Rights Division became crucial to the DOJ. President Kennedy's brother-in-law and campaign organizer Sargent Shriver wanted Wofford, but others within the DOJ were worried about his politics and friendship with King, not wanting to unnerve allies among southern Democrats. Burke Marshall came up as an alternative. Wofford and Marshall had been law partners and had known each other since attending law school together at Yale. Unlike Wofford, Marshall was a corporate anti-trust lawyer with no apparent opinions on racial matters or personal ties to civil rights leaders. His lack of knowledge worked in is favor, and after an

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[149] Memorandum from Harris Wofford to Myer Feldman, February 2, 1961, Box 10, Folder "Voter Registration, June 15, 1960 – July 3, 1961," Wofford Papers.

[150] John Doar interview, May 12, 1986; See also Branch, *Parting the Waters*, 382.

[151] Interview with Burke Marshall by Taylor Branch, September 26, 1984, C-5047/18, Branch Papers; Interview with Louis Martin by Taylor Branch, June 10, 1985, C-5047/19, Branch Papers; and Branch, *Parting the Waters*, 382-383.

awkward interview with Robert Kennedy in which the two men reportedly sat in silence for several minutes staring at each other, Marshall became the new head of the Civil Rights Division. Robert Kennedy thought Marshall was sympathetic to improved race relations, but uninformed enough not to worry conservatives. On February 8, 1961, Fleming wrote Currier with the disappointing news that their friend Harris Wofford would not be appointed to lead the Civil Rights Division. Fleming heard from a source that "Bobby Kennedy decided Harris was too hot for the Assistant Attorney General spot." Wofford approved the selection of his old partner, although, Fleming heard "a dismal picture of the prospects for vigorous action generally in civil rights" from his informant.[152]

On March 6, Robert Kennedy and Burke Marshall met with SRC and race leaders to argue that civil rights agencies should pursue voter registration above all else. Martin Luther King Jr. was conspicuously absent. A month earlier, *The Nation* had printed an editorial by King calling on the Kennedy Administration to support the civil rights movement by issuing executive orders, bucking tradition that incoming Presidents be given a grace period in the media. King based much of his material on "The Federal Executive and Civil Rights."[153] Feeling ignored, King wrote the White House requesting a private meeting. Busy with foreign policy matters, the President's staff declined, but DOJ officials weighed engaging King. Louis Martin, assistant chairman of the Democratic National Committee, suggested bringing King in for a private meeting to gauge how well he could work with the new administration. Over a month later, they met for lunch at the Mayflower Hotel in Washington, DC. Accompanied by trusted friend

[152] Harold Fleming to Stephen Currier, February 8, 1961, Frames 278-279, Reel 28, SRC Papers. See also Robert Wallace, "Non-Whiz Kid with the Quiet Gun," *Life*, August 9, 1963, 75-80; and Wofford, *Of Kennedys and Kings*, 90-92.

[153] Martin Luther King, Jr., "Equality Now," *The Nation*, February 4, 1961; and Martin Luther King, Jr. to Harold Fleming, February 15, 1961, Box 116, Folder 1, MLK Archive, Boston University.

Stanley Levison, King met Robert Kennedy, Marshall, Wofford, and others from the DOJ. At the meeting, the Civil Rights Division laid out their vision for the future of the movement. Marshall said that the SCLC and other race organizations ought to concentrate on voter registration, a pressing issue throughout the Jim Crow South. Marshall explained the DOJ could be most effective by filing lawsuits and pressuring local officials to stop harassing African Americans if they were trying to register. Militant demonstrations exacerbated tensions and conflicts the DOJ might not be able to resolve. According to John Seigenthaler, a DOJ aide, Kennedy told King, "Put on drives in these areas…I think some funds can be found from some of the foundations who are interested in this sort of thing."[154] King listened and did not say much. He agreed with the DOJ's opinion, but King made sure the DOJ understood his belief that meaningful demonstrations should include much more than voting campaigns. Kennedy and his colleagues were relieved to find King amenable to their ideas on registration. As a show of good faith, Marshall gave King his personal phone number with instructions to call him if trouble arose.[155]

In 1961, according to Arthur Schlesinger, "[President] Kennedy left civil rights policy pretty much to his brother," but Robert Kennedy was inexperienced in racial politics.[156] An early opportunity for Robert Kennedy to learn occurred in Athens, Georgia. Soon after he began serving as Attorney General, Jay Cox, an undergraduate student at the University of Georgia and President of the Student Advisory Council, hand-delivered an invitation for him to speak on

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[154] Interview with John Seigenthaler by Ronald J. Grele, February 22, 1966, 425, John F. Kennedy Library Oral History Program.

[155] Memorandum, John Seigenthaler to the Attorney General, "Luncheon Meeting March 6, 1961, Background Information on those attending," March 6, 1961, Box 68, Folder "Seigenthaler, John: 1961-1962," Robert F. Kennedy Attorney General Papers, John F. Kennedy Library; Wofford, *Of Kennedys and Kings*, 216; and Branch, *Parting the Waters*, 403-407. Since this meeting was secret, Branch corroborated the evidence and believes it to have taken place in the spring of 1961 between the Bay of Pigs invasion on April 17 and the initial Freedom Rides on May 4. See Branch, *Parting the Waters*, 962fn405.

[156] Schlesinger, *A Thousand Days*, 934.

campus. Only a few months earlier, the university had suspended its first two black students, Hamilton Holmes and Charlayne Hunter, after violence broke out on campus. Although the university administration had brought the students back, tensions were raw in Athens. Cox thought a visit from the Attorney General could help the university move forward. Kennedy had yet to give a major address as Attorney General, but he liked the idea of standing in the Deep South declaring that the DOJ would not hesitate to enforce the law. Intransigent southern governors and lawmakers irked Kennedy, and he savored a chance to remind them who had ultimate authority. He wanted to set a decisive tone at the outset of his tenure, so he accepted Cox's invitation.[157]

Over the next five weeks, Robert Kennedy pored over multiple drafts of his speech, bringing in at least seven colleagues and journalists to give him feedback. While he looked forward to the speech, he was preoccupied with the failed Bay of Pigs invasion in Cuba and efforts to help his brother deal with the political fallout. Global opinion was on Kennedy's mind as he prepared his Georgia speech, and in his edits, he framed the civil rights issue as part of the larger struggle for democracy worldwide. The supremacy of the law emerged as the unifying theme of his speech, tying together Kennedy's thoughts on civil rights, which he admitted was not one of his major concerns before he became Attorney General. But he understood the perils of democracy denied within his own country, and he planned to lead the DOJ against southern unlawfulness.[158]

For all of his preparation, Kennedy was nervous when he stepped on stage and delivered his address to an Athens auditorium crowded with 1,600 people on May 6, 1961. But after a few

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[157] Brauer, *John F. Kennedy and the Second Reconstruction*, 95; and Bryant, *The Bystander*, 256-257.

[158] Evan Thomas, *Robert Kennedy: His Life* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2000), 127; Brauer, *John F. Kennedy and the Second Reconstruction*, 97-98; and Bryant, *The Bystander*, 257.

minutes, Kennedy found his rhythm. "Southerners have a special respect for candor and plain talk," he told them. "They certainly don't like hypocrisy. So…I must tell you candidly what our [DOJ] policies are going to be in the field of civil rights and why."[159] Kennedy promised the DOJ would not be passive, but would pursue court action to enforce the law. For too long, southern leadership had dragged its feet or ignored court orders to desegregate, and this would no longer be permitted. Kennedy deferred to the law: "I happen to believe that the 1954 decision [*Brown v. Board of Education*] was right. But, my belief does not matter—it is the law. Some of you may believe the decision was wrong. That does not matter. It is the law. And we both respect the law."[160] Framing his approach in global terms, Kennedy reminded the audience that much of the world was non-white, and that when international audiences saw images of American children attending school, they should see black and white children together. Kennedy vowed that the DOJ would work to enfranchise African Americans: "An integral part of all this is that we make a total effort to guarantee the ballot for every American of voting age…The right to vote is the easiest of all rights to grant."[161]

After Kennedy finished, there was a brief moment of silence, then wide applause broke out across the auditorium. He outlined his intentions without humiliating the South, helped along by including criticisms of the North and the federal government. And he clarified his belief in equal voting rights. Civil rights leaders praised Kennedy for proclaiming a new era of justice

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[159] Robert F. Kennedy address at the Law Day Exercises at the University of Georgia, May 6, 1961, 6, Box 253, Folder "University of Georgia Law School, May 6, 1961," Robert F. Kennedy Attorney General Papers, John F. Kennedy Library.

[160] *Ibid*., 9.

[161] *Ibid*.

from inside the Deep South. "This is the kind of plain and forthright speaking that the South needs to hear," editorialized the *Chicago Daily Defender*.[162]

Two days before Kennedy's speech, on May 4, 1961, the first Freedom Rides set out on one Greyhound and one Trailways bus from Washington, DC toward New Orleans. The passengers on board made it through Virginia and North Carolina largely unscathed, but in Rock Hill, South Carolina, locals heard of the approaching buses and attacked several Freedom Riders at the terminal. The worst violence occurred on May 14 just outside Anniston, Alabama when police coordinated with the Ku Klux Klan to stop a bus. The attackers bombed the bus and beat passengers as they fled the smoke-filled cabin. Images of bloodied Freedom Riders and a smoking bus filled the nation's newspapers. Robert Kennedy tried to negotiate a peaceful solution. James Farmer of CORE called off the journey to New Orleans after "mobs and official hostility broke the back of the first Freedom Ride," but SNCC organized more passengers to take their place and keep up the pressure.[163] Recognizing the students' determination and the callousness of Alabama's Governor John Patterson, Kennedy directed DOJ officials to arrange protection for the Freedom Rides to avoid any more violence. Once activists crossed into Mississippi, officials arrested the passengers and put them in Parchman, the Mississippi's main penitentiary. But Freedom Rides continued, ignoring Robert Kennedy's criticism.[164]

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[162] "Hats Off To Bob Kennedy," *Chicago Daily Defender*, May 10, 1961. See also Anthony Lewis, "Robert Kennedy Vows in Georgia to Act on Rights," *New York Times*, May 7, 1961.

[163] Leslie W. Dunbar, "The Freedom Ride," Special Report from the Southern Regional Council, May 30, 1961, Box 2, Folder 14, Leslie Dunbar Papers, Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library, Emory University (hereafter Dunbar Papers).

[164] On the Freedom Rides, see David Niven, *The Politics of Injustice: The Kennedys, the Freedom Rides, and the Electoral Consequences of a Moral Compromise* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2003); and Raymond Arsenault, *Freedom Riders: 1961 and the Struggle for Racial Justice* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006); and Derek Catsam, *Freedom's Main Line: The Journey of Reconciliation and the Freedom Rides* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2009).

Behind the scenes, Robert Kennedy worked to resolve the crisis, setting a new precedent that would later benefit the establishment of the Voter Education Project. Before the Freedom Rides began, King suggested that Robert Kennedy pressure the Interstate Commerce Commission (ICC) to act on the *Boynton v. Virginia* ruling and desegregate bus terminals. Kennedy declined, citing the slow-moving reputation of the ICC, not to mention that it was an independent body unaccustomed to arm-twisting from the DOJ. By May 29, Kennedy had changed his mind. He pressured the ICC to desegregate bus terminals in line with the goals of the Freedom Riders. Kennedy's staff at the DOJ petitioned the ICC, an unprecedented move and breach of traditional executive procedure. For months, DOJ officials urged the ICC to rule for desegregation, and on September 22, 1961, the ICC issued the official order. Marshall remembered the ICC ruling "was really a remarkable administrative law achievement" that prevailed on a "conservative, very difficult administrative body."[165] According to Taylor Branch, Kennedy "telescoped a process that normally took years" and pulled off a "bureaucratic miracle."[166] This example of strong-arm lobbying established a new precedent within the DOJ, one that would reverberate when it would assist the VEP months later.

The Freedom Rides, along with Robert Kennedy's previous meetings in March with King and other race leaders, caused the DOJ to pursue a voter registration program financed by philanthropic dollars "with a vengeance."[167] The Kennedy Administration could not afford more militancy in the South. They could not deny the existence of Jim Crow laws, and the Freedom Riders pushed them to respond in new ways. From the DOJ's standpoint, funneling the militant

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[165] Interview with Burke Marshall by Louis F. Oberdorfer, May 29, 1964, 39, John F. Kennedy Library Oral History Program.

[166] Branch, *Parting the Waters*, 478.

[167] *Ibid*., 479.

spirit of the Freedom Rides into voter registration campaigns offered the best solution that also had the potential to increase Democratic voting strength and temper the civil rights revolution.

Toward a Registration Coalition

While the DOJ endorsed registration as a civil rights strategy, the SCLC happened on a fortunate break. Myles Horton of the Highlander Folk School, an interracial training institute for labor and civil rights activism in Tennessee, suggested the SCLC take over its citizenship schools as it faced legal battles regarding its tax-exemption. Directed by Septima Clark, a long-time NAACP activist, educator, and Highlander workshop organizer, the citizenship schools had trained hundreds of men and women through weeklong courses on how to register to vote, circumvent uncooperative registrars, and mobilize their communities. Recalling the failure of the Crusade for Citizenship in 1958, Martin Luther King Jr. and Walker Tee Walker leapt at the chance to absorb an already functional voter registration organization into the SCLC. Clark was upset because she was not consulted about the transfer, but she agreed to continue working under the SCLC banner and the renamed Citizenship Education Program (CEP). The CEP continued well into the 1960s, located at its new home in Dorchester, South Carolina training activists in grassroots methods of voter registration. To continue the program amid financial difficulty, the Field Foundation donated $26,500 for one year under the SCLC, which the United Church of Christ administered to avoid tax liabilities. With this grant in 1961, King and Walker's eyes opened to a vast source: big philanthropy.[168]

Wyatt Tee Walker knew that to expand the SCLC's reach, it needed money. After the Field Foundation's donation to the SCLC's citizenship training program, he began to notice other foundations that seemed eager to assist in race matters. Together, King and Walker "learned a

[168] Dunbar interview, December 18, 1978, 45-46; Interview with Leslie W. Dunbar by Robert Korstad, February 5, 1992, Southern Rural Poverty Collection, DeWitt Wallace Center for Media and Democracy, Sanford School of Public Policy, Duke University; Charron, *Freedom's Teacher*, 293-303; and Branch, *Parting the Waters*, 381-382.

whole new vocabulary: grant proposals, funding conduits, advance budgeting, program reviews."[169] They began to seek out sympathetic foundations, a decision that would bring race groups, philanthropy, and the federal government closer together.

While King and Walker were becoming interested in soliciting foundation sponsors, Harold Fleming and Burke Marshall began discussing the possibility of winning over IRS approval for a philanthropic-backed registration project. In his memoir, Fleming remembered that in their frequent conversations, Marshall cited the need for black southerners to devote themselves to voter registration rather than sit-in demonstrations because the DOJ could only get involved when local authorities discriminated against registrants. While scattered voter leagues had existed for years and NAACP chapters had mounted registration drives in the South, the major race organizations were either promoting direct action militancy or stumbling toward voter registration without any coordinated, inter-organizational effort. Marshall realized the major impediment to mass registration was financial. He knew foundations were interested in donating money to voter registration, but murky tax rules prohibiting political advocacy restricted any assistance. Marshall told Fleming that it might be possible to maintain tax exemption for foundations engaged in voter registration if it could be framed in a way not to alarm the IRS. If a project "included a significant research component and adequate safeguards against political partisanship," Fleming recalled Marshall saying, it might be possible to link philanthropy and voting activism in a novel way.[170] Marshall and Fleming conceived the idea to bridge advocacy and education and break a long-held precedent.

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[169] Branch, *Parting the Waters*, 381. See also Interview with Wyatt Tee Walker by T. Evan Faulkenbury, March 15, 2013, U-1035 in the Southern Oral History Program Collection #4007, Southern Historical Collection, Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

[170] Fleming, *The Potomac Institute*, 33. See also 15-16, 18.

Excited by their plan, Fleming approached his friend and benefactor Stephen Currier. Marshall's idea thrilled Currier. For three years, the Taconic Foundation had funded projects combating poverty and racism, but with the IRS demarcating education and advocacy, the Curriers could not directly engage in political ventures for fear of losing tax-exemption. Marshall's idea broached new possibilities, and the Curriers went to work alongside Fleming, Marshall, and the Civil Rights Division to plan how such a project might function.[171]

Back in November 1960, Currier had met Martin Luther King Jr. for the first time in Atlanta, and the two struck up a friendship that would have lasting consequences for the civil rights movement. Currier was so impressed with King that he invited him to meet the Taconic Foundation board. King visited the Taconic Foundation's New York office on February 3, 1961 to discuss the SCLC's upcoming voter registration project in Atlanta. They talked about voter registration broadly, with King impressing on Currier the denial of voting rights as the central race issue affecting the South. The two struck up a friendship, one that King would place his faith in over the coming year as the Taconic Foundation moved to bring civil rights groups together in a joint program. During this same period, Garrison introduced Currier to a number of other race leaders he knew from his time as president of the National Urban League. As more relationships were built, Garrison remembered, Currier "became more and more interested in their problems."[172]

Before a new program could be built to funnel philanthropic dollars into voter campaigns, organizers needed a willing host with an established tax-exemption to satisfy the IRS. The ideal

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[171] *Ibid*., 32-34.

[172] Garrison unpublished memoir, 33. See also Stephen Currier to Martin Luther King, Jr., January 5, 1961; James R. Wood to Stephen Currier, January 13, 1961; Martin Luther King, Jr. to Stephen Currier, May 3, 1961, all from Box 65, Folder 1, MLK Archive, Boston University; and Stephen R. Currier to Harold Fleming, November 28, 1960, Frame 257, Reel 28, SRC Papers.

solution first occurred to Fleming: the Southern Regional Council. Having worked with the SRC from 1944 through 1960, Fleming was well versed in the SRC's history, and he thought Leslie Dunbar, his successor as executive director, would be receptive to the idea. As one of the South's most influential and progressive organizations, the SRC built its reputation on solid research to document race problems with voter statistics, investigative reporting, and publications that reached lawmakers and journalists. The SRC was not an activist organization, but a research-driven one. Race leaders respected the SRC and had drawn on its resources for years. As a neutral body, the SRC would not exacerbate tensions among African American leaders, either. The SRC offered the best possible home for a coordinated voter registration effort with the support of philanthropy and the DOJ.[173]

While Currier, Fleming, Marshall, and Wofford planned, they believed that all of the major civil rights organizations needed to commit as partners. Tensions between the NAACP, SCLC, CORE, and SNCC sometimes boiled over. Another challenge was to get everyone to see eye to eye on the importance of voter registration. SNCC and CORE were committed to militant nonviolence, and voter registration had not yet been a major strategy of theirs as it had been to the NAACP and SCLC. On a diplomatic mission, Burke Marshall traveled to Capahosic, Virginia in June 1961 to meet with CORE and SNCC members not locked up in Parchman for participating in the Freedom Rides. He explained to the group the necessity of voter registration. Timothy Jenkins, a young SNCC member, listened with particular interest. Jenkins was a former student body president at Howard University, and unlike some of his SNCC colleagues, did not put much faith in the long-term goals of sit-ins and Freedom Rides. Marshall's presentation

[173] Fleming, *The Potomac Institute*, 33-34; and Leslie W. Dunbar, "The Southern Regional Council," *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 357 (January 1965): 108-112.

intrigued him, and he left the meeting committed to influencing others within SNCC to work with the Kennedy Administration and pursue voter registration.[174]

After the June 16, 1961 meeting with the Freedom Riders, Robert Kennedy and his DOJ staff stepped up their efforts to lobby SNCC to accept their plan. Unity was key in pursuing voter registration as a main tactic, and if SNCC could not be reliable, the entire project could fall apart. To demonstrate their power, Kennedy and Marshall arranged for a *New York Times* front-page story by journalist Anthony Lewis suggesting that civil rights groups were drifting towards voter mobilization. Appearing ten days after the meeting between Kennedy and the Freedom Ride Coordinating Committee, the article explained that DOJ officials were predicting a shift because "Negro leaders, including young and militant newcomers, are prepared for the first time to throw their full weight behind a registration and voting drive."[175] Lewis alluded to Marshall's recent journey to Capahosic, where he received feedback from some SNCC activists about the DOJ's plan. Bordering on speculation, Lewis wrote, "Confidence that the Government will do its best to protect those who try to register and vote also encourages Negroes to make the attempt."[176]

The day after the Lewis story ran in the *New York Times*, Harry Belafonte, a popular entertainer who supported the movement, hosted a meeting for skeptical SNCC students to coax them to pursue voting rights as their main form of activism. A few days earlier, Robert Kennedy had Belafonte over to his house to ask for his help reaching out to reluctant SNCC members. The Kennedys and Belafonte were old friends, and Belafonte agreed that voting rights ought to be the central thrust of the southern movement. Timothy Jenkins and Charles Jones were part of the

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[174] Interview with Timothy Jenkins by Taylor Branch, March 11, 1986, C-5047-48-49, Branch Papers; and Branch, *Parting the Waters*, 479-480.

[175] Anthony Lewis, "Negro Vote Surge Expected in South," *New York Times*, June 26, 1961.

[176] *Ibid*.; and Branch, *Parting the Waters*, 481.

SNCC group that visited Belafonte, and both were already leaning toward voter registration as the organization's main work. The group discussed the merits of grassroots registration work, and Belafonte gave SNCC $10,000 to initiate the process. The faction within SNCC that wanted to push the organization toward voter campaigns increasingly gained power, and a series of meetings during the summer of 1961 solidified their position.[177]

Meeting in Baltimore from July 14-16, SNCC's executive committee discussed a range of topics, including the Belafonte meeting and shifting SNCC's emphasis to voter registration. Charles Jones gave a verbal report of the gathering between himself, Timothy Jenkins, Charles McDew, Diane Nash, Walter Williams, Lonnie King and Harry Belafonte that took place in Washington, DC three weeks earlier. During their meeting, they discussed raising funds and expanding the movement by one or two hundred thousand students. More realistically, the group "felt that voter registration was the most important issue and that the real possibility to enact a successful program was at hand."[178] Led by Bob Moses, several SNCC students in Mississippi were already concentrating on registration work with the help of Amzie Moore of the state NAACP, and more SNCC personnel were seeing the value of their work. They suggested giving greater attention to voter registration work without discontinuing direct action protests like the Freedom Rides and sit-ins. The SNCC students who met with Belafonte also proposed creating a six-person staff to oversee all voter registration work. Since this was only an exploratory meeting, the representative students could not commit SNCC to anything without formal approval, but they continued to work on the proposal over the next month.[179]

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[177] Interview with Harry Belafonte by Taylor Branch, March 6-7, 1985, C-5047-34-40, Branch Papers; Carson, *In Struggle*, 39-43; and Branch, *Parting the Waters*, 481.

[178] Minutes, Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee Meeting, July 14-16, 1961, Baltimore, Maryland, Box 62, Folder 3, Carl and Ann Braden Papers, Wisconsin Historical Society.

Following a series of meetings, SNCC's leadership accepted the strategy to concentrate on voting rights activism. Gathering at the Highlander Folk School in August, Ella Baker mediated a compromise in which SNCC would have one wing devoted to voter registration and another to direct action. With this agreement, SNCC was poised to take the lead on rural grassroots mobilization efforts across the South, expecting the DOJ to provide support when needed. In November 1961 at another SNCC leadership meeting, Bob Moses led a session on "Why Voter Registration?" followed by Marion Barry's workshop on "Why Direct Action?"[180] By then, SNCC had accepted both strategies.[181]

Leslie W. Dunbar and the Southern Regional Council

As plans went forward for the SRC to host the joint registration project, Leslie W. Dunbar emerged as a credible leader. Harold Fleming later said of Dunbar, "Southern liberals of his breed are familiar with evil, for they grew up with it; discerned it among family, friends, and neighbors; learned to detect and combat it within themselves."[182] From childhood through adulthood, Dunbar witnessed racism all around him, and as he undid its grip on him, he worked to eliminate it from society. Dunbar was born on January 27, 1921 in Lewisburg, West Virginia, but he grew up in Baltimore, a diverse, yet segregated border city that exposed him to racial inequality. He remembered Baltimore's rigid racial code that extended "from the schools to residential areas to swimming pools and everything else. We even had [segregation] in the parks,

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[179] *Ibid*.; and "Report of Harry Belafonte Committee to SNCC," August 11, 1961, Box 62, Folder 3, Carl and Ann Braden Papers, Wisconsin Historical Society.

[180] Program, SNCC Leadership Training Institute, November 23-24, 1961, Box 2, Folder 9, Constance Curry Papers, Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library, Emory University (hereinafter Curry Papers).

[181] Carson, *In Struggle*, 39-43; Branch, *Parting the Waters*, 481; and Ransby, *Ella Baker and the Black Freedom Movement*, 268-271.

[182] Harold C. Fleming, "Introduction of Leslie W. Dunbar," Southern Regional Council Annual Meeting, November 5, 1969, Box 4X98, Folder "Introduction of Les Dunbar with Correspondence, 1967-1988," Field Foundation Archives.

black baseball diamonds and white baseball diamonds."[183] Growing up in Baltimore, he perceived the effects of segregation, but "not in the sense that you felt it was something you needed to do something about. We just saw the order of things."[184] After graduating from the University of Maryland and briefly attending law school, Dunbar went to Cornell University and earned his doctorate in political science. He soon received a job offer to teach at Emory University beginning in the fall of 1948, and he moved to Atlanta to begin his career.[185]

Dunbar saw racism with clarity and horror during his time in Atlanta. He recalled one experience that forced him to reckon with the everyday injustices black men and women faced in the South. Soon after joining Emory's faculty, he advised the undergraduate political science club. He came up with the idea to invite an African American professor from Atlanta University to speak to their group. Dr. William Boyd earned his PhD from the University of Michigan and was a respected expert in international relations, but when Dunbar phoned to ask him over to Emory's exclusively white campus, he asked Boyd to talk about race relations, assuming that would be his preferred topic. Boyd obliged, and he took the opportunity to detail the racist slights his family often dealt with. When they traveled to Washington, DC, Boyd told the club, his family had to pack their food and plan out bathroom breaks, knowing they could not pull into any store. Even more recently, he said, his daughter's school took up a collection for the Atlanta Zoo to purchase a new elephant, but he had to explain to her that even though she donated a dime, she would not be able to go see the elephant once it arrived. Dunbar sat stunned in the back of the room, realizing he offended Dr. Boyd by not asking him to talk about his field of

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[183] Dunbar interview, February 5, 1992.

[184] *Ibid*.

[185] Cullen B. Gosnell to Leslie W. Dunbar, May 11, 1948, Box 7, Folder "Correspondence 1948," Dunbar Papers. His dissertation was Leslie W. Dunbar, "Freedom and the Community: An Examination of Green's Political Theory" (PhD dissertation, Cornell University, 1948).

study. He apologized and Boyd accepted, but Dunbar realized he had been blind to many everyday troubles African Americans faced in the South. Race was not Dunbar's specialty within political science, but he began to pay more attention to the subject, leading him toward a much different career path.[186]

In Atlanta, Dunbar became familiar with the SRC, befriending executive director George Mitchell and Harold Fleming, and he eventually joined the staff in 1958. Mitchell gave a talk at Emory in 1949 or 1950 that Dunbar remembered as life-changing: "From then on I took the [Southern Regional] Council as my guide to what was wrong about the South, and how it could be made right."[187] He became interested in the SRC's work on race relations, and Mitchell first offered him a job at the SRC in 1954, but Dunbar declined. Dunbar later joined the faculty at Mount Holyoke College, but academia bored Dunbar, and he never quite forgot the job he turned down at the SRC. Another opportunity came once Fleming became the SRC's director in 1957. Fleming offered Dunbar a summer position with the SRC during 1958, and since Dunbar did not want to return to Mount Holyoke, Fleming made the job permanent.[188] The SRC had expanded in recent years with grants from the Ford Foundation and Rockefeller Brothers Fund, and Dunbar and Fleming decided to create a research department with Dunbar at the helm. The civil rights movement was taking hold across the South, and the SRC wanted to help through research.[189]

Dunbar helped the SRC craft a national reputation as a reliable source of information on southern race relations. Coinciding with Dunbar's hire, the SRC employed Benjamin Muse as

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[186] Dunbar interview, February 5, 1992; and Dunbar interview, December 18, 1978, 1-4.

[187] Speech by Leslie W. Dunbar, SRC Annual Dinner, November 9, 1991, Box 2, Folder 17, Dunbar Papers.

[188] Harold C. Fleming to Leslie W. Dunbar, April 23, 1958, Box 8, Folder "Correspondence 1958," Dunbar Papers.

[189] Leslie W. Dunbar interview, February 5, 1992; and Interview with Leslie W. Dunbar by Susan Glisson, May 10, 2002, 1, Southern Regional Council Oral History Collection, UF Digital Collections, George A. Smathers Libraries, University of Florida. On the Savannah River Plant, see Kari Frederickson, *Cold War Dixie: Militarization and Modernization in the American South* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2013).

field director, whose job was to travel the South, meet with leaders, interview people, and document southern issues. A former Virginia politician, Muse made a name for himself in a weekly column he wrote for the *Washington Post*, opposing massive resistance and supporting desegregation. At the revamped SRC, Fleming, Dunbar, and Muse worked with other staff to promote a liberal perspective on race in the South. SRC staff combed through newspapers and magazines from across the region, organizing clippings files and piling up a mass of research on various topics. They wrote news releases, pamphlets, and special reports on the state of school desegregation. As director of research, Dunbar pushed the SRC to produce information quickly. Soon after the student sit-in movement took off across the South in the winter and spring of 1960, Dunbar published a special report on the protests "while the stools at the first Woolworth's were still warm."[190]

As major newspapers began to pay more attention to the South and the civil rights movement, the SRC maintained close relationships with reporters, feeding them information they could use in their articles. Claude Sitton was a *New York Times* reporter assigned to the Atlanta bureau during Dunbar's time at the SRC, and the two of them developed a partnership that produced numerous pieces in the *Times*. In addition to reporters, the SRC sent its research and its magazine *New South* to state and federal legislators, foundations, and churches. While fair and accurate, Dunbar liked to say the SRC's creed was "partisan objectivity"—clearly on the side of liberal reform, but meticulous in its research to help reporters spread the word that the South was on the precipice of change.[191] "I felt in 1958, '59, and '60, that the work of the SRC was to be a

[190] Fleming, "Introduction of Leslie W. Dunbar," November 5, 1969; and Leslie W. Dunbar interview, May 10, 2002, 2. The report was "The Student Protest Movement, Winter 1960," Southern Regional Council Special Report 13, April 1, 1960. See also Harold C. Fleming to Leslie W. Dunbar, October 31, 1958, Box 8, Folder "Correspondence 1958," Dunbar Papers.

[191] Leslie W. Dunbar interview, May 10, 2002, 2.

leading part of a great mind changing going on in the South…Our role was to be something of a guide to it."[192]

On March 30, 1961, James McBride Dabbs, President of the SRC, announced that Harold Fleming was leaving as executive director and that Leslie Dunbar would be his successor. Dabbs showed confidence in Dunbar as the new SRC executive director: "he expresses in his own person the essential spirit of the Council: a sympathetic probing of Southern problems, a dislike for the limelight, a willingness to make small gains if they are sure, and the determination always to advance."[193] As Dunbar settled into his new role, he became an ally of civil rights leaders, philanthropists, and DOJ officials, emerging as a central figure in forming the VEP.

Establishing the VEP

While SNCC debated the merits of a voter registration strategy, Stephen Currier continued to meet with DOJ officials and civil rights leaders to form an organization to supply funds to southern campaigns. Currier convened meetings on July 11 and 28, 1961 to discuss logistics. Those involved knew that inter-organizational rivalries among civil rights groups endangered such a broad project, so coordinating the effort through a neutral source was paramount. Fleming was involved in the discussions, and he floated the idea that the SRC should be the headquarters for their operation. Behind the scenes, he gauged the opinions of others about having the SRC take the lead, including Martin Luther King Jr. Fleming knew that the SRC had experience drawing together multiple organizations. More importantly, the SRC was tax-exempt, nonpartisan, and educational. Fleming approached Dunbar with the idea to host a

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[192] Leslie W. Dunbar interview, December 18, 1978, 19.

[193] Memorandum, James McBride Dabbs to Members and Friends of SRC, March 30, 1961, Box 8, Folder 2, Dunbar Papers. See also "Dr. Dunbar is Home to Help," *Atlanta Journal*, April 12, 1961, clipping in Box 2, Folder 16, Dunbar Papers.

clearinghouse to dispense money to registration campaigns. Dunbar was agreeable, but he had conditions. Before he consented, the new venture must be guaranteed not to endanger the SRC's federal tax-exemption. Dunbar also wanted Currier to oversee the fundraising, to which Currier agreed. The registration project also needed its own director, and that person must be a unanimous choice. If anyone from the NAACP, CORE, SCLC, NUL, or SNCC did not feel comfortable with the leadership, the tenuous alliance would shatter before it began. And finally, Dunbar insisted that the SRC control who received funding, and that local organizations be supported alongside major groups. The idea of the SRC managing the process intrigued King, but he wanted to meet Dunbar before finalizing his opinion. Dunbar heard about King's reservations, so he called King and asked to talk in person. King visited Dunbar one Saturday morning in his office, and afterward, King felt comfortable with the SRC as the appropriate home for the project.[194]

Dunbar attended the July 28 meeting and forwarded his observations to the SRC executive committee, documenting the coalescence of the still-unnamed voter education program. Representatives of foundations included Stephen Currier, Jane Lee Eddy, and Lloyd K. Garrison of the Taconic Foundation; Justine Wise Polier of the Field Foundation; and Vernon Eagle of the New World Foundation. Harris Wofford and Burke Marshall represented the Kennedy Administration. Civil rights leaders included King and Walker from the SCLC; Charles McDew and Marion Berry of SNCC; Roy Wilkins from the NAACP; Thurgood Marshall and Robert Carter of the NAACP Legal Defense Fund; Lester Granger and Whitney Young from the NUL; James Farmer of CORE; and Timothy Jenkins representing the National Student Association (NSA). The group asked Marshall to discuss "the legal responsibilities of the

[194] Dunbar interview, December 18, 1978; and Fleming, *The Potomac Chronicle*, 32-34.

Department of Justice in the voter registration field," which he did to their satisfaction.[195] Four hours into the meeting, King motioned that the SRC take leadership of the project, and by the end of the meeting, everyone agreed that the SRC was "an acceptable coordinating agency."[196] Tax lawyers were also present and insisted that focusing on voter registration would not imperil the SRC's tax-exemption. Specific donation amounts were not discussed, nor did foundation representatives commit to join. Dunbar thought the amount donated would be "substantial but not grandiose," and the attending civil rights leaders all voiced their enthusiasm for the project. The meeting was a success, with Dunbar noting he was "deeply impressed by the amiability and harmony of the gathering."[197]

Before everyone departed, each representative promised to send the Taconic Foundation and SRC a detailed statement of their respective organizations, along with prospective methods for participating in a collective voting drive. The next meeting would fall on August 23, and the group required everyone to submit their statements for review by August 14. The NAACP, SCLC, SNCC, CORE, and NUL each drafted and sent a report before the deadline. Leaders saw the value of creating a united southwide registration drive—a feat never before attempted. None of them wanted to be left out, and each put forward an ambitious plan.[198]

Even though the NAACP, CORE, SCLC, SNCC, and NUL were often able to create large budgets through donations, membership dues, and occasional philanthropic support, financial troubles plagued them all. The size and bureaucracy of their operations devoured their

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[195] Memorandum, Burke Marshall to Voter Registration File, "July 28, 1961 meeting of Taconic Foundation," July 31, 1961, Box 34, Folder "Voter Registration 1961-1963," Marshall Papers.

[196] Southern Regional Council Memorandum, Leslie W. Dunbar to members of the executive committee, July 31, 1961, Frames 1483-1484, Reel 173, SRC Papers.

[197] *Ibid.*

[198] *Ibid.*

budgets, leaving little to devote to grassroots registration fieldwork. Even though the NAACP's membership grew to nearly 500,000 by the mid-1960s, the national office remained constantly in debt. The SCLC relied on church donations and labor union support, and although Wyatt Tee Walker exploited King's popularity to raise large sums of money, the SCLC spent more than it took in. Through telethons, benefit concerts, direct mail, speaking tours, and by capitalizing off the energy of the Freedom Rides, CORE raised $607,484.39 during the 1961-1962 fiscal year, but was in debt $120,000 by the next year. "Our financial cupboard is bare," James Farmer wrote in a fundraising letter.[199] While Whitney Young crafted relationships with several philanthropies, solvency likewise remained elusive for the NUL. By comparison to the other four, SNCC operated in relative poverty. In 1960, SNCC took in $5,000, and in 1961 raised a mere $14,000 from outside sources, unable to even meet its proposed budget of $15,980.[200] Leaders from each of these organizations felt steady pressure to raise money. The joint project offered a practical solution to take in more.[201]

Roy Wilkins composed the NAACP's response to the collective registration project. Bordering on arrogance, Wilkins painted the NAACP as the most competent civil rights

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[199] Quoted in Meier and Rudwick, *CORE*, 149.

[200] Minutes, SNCC Meeting, February 3-5, 1961, Box 2, Folder 4, Curry Papers; and Haines, "Black Radicalization and the Funding of Civil Rights: 1957-1970," 36.

[201] On the NAACP's budget, see Yvonne Ryan, *Roy Wilkins: The Quiet Revolutionary and the NAACP* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2014), 159-160. On the SCLC's finances, see Jones, "Tithe, Time and Talent"; Wyatt Tee Walker interview, March 15, 2013; Glenn T. Eskew, *But for Birmingham: The Local and National Movements in the Civil Rights Struggle* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997), 37-40; and Nikhil Pal Singh, "'Learn Your Horn': Jack O'Dell and the Long Civil Rights Movement," in Nikhil Pal Singh, ed. *Climbin' Jacob's Ladder: The Black Freedom Movement Writings of Jack O'Dell* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010), 28. On CORE's finances, see Statement of Income and Expense, Year Ended May 31, 1962, Frame 189, Reel 17, Series 5, Papers of the Congress of Racial Equality, 1941-1967; A.D. Moore to CORE Groups and Friends, Re: Freedom Ride Costs, December 29, 1961, Frame 186, Reel 17, Series 5, Papers of the Congress of Racial Equality, 1941-1967; and Meier and Rudwick, *CORE*, 42, 78, 81-83, 148-149. On NUL budgets, see Guichard Parris and Lester Brooks, *Blacks in the City: A History of the National Urban League* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1971), 394; Dickerson, *Militant Mediator*, 2; and Nancy J. Weiss, *The National Urban League, 1910-1940* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1974), 80-83, 155-159. For a chart of contributions to major race organizations, see Haines, "Black Radicalization and the Funding of Civil Rights: 1957-1970," 36.

organization in the country that deserved most—if not all—of the available funds. With the exception of Alabama, which had banished the NAACP in 1956, the group had thriving chapters in every southern state, a total of 337 active branches across 10 states. For half a century, the NAACP had promoted black registration through local drives and in court rooms. Beginning in 1957, the NAACP renewed its focus on the ballot when it created a voter registration committee with Charlotte NAACP chapter president Kelly Alexander at the helm. The next year, W.C Patton and John Brooks, two long-standing NAACP activists, took over at the NAACP's national office on matters of voter registration. Together, they coordinated a small team of field secretaries that visited branches to help launch local registration campaigns. The NAACP concentrated its resources on urban areas to target the greatest number of unregistered African Americans, citing successes in cities such as Memphis and Baltimore. With a precedent for registration work already in place, Wilkins stated, the NAACP "has the structure and the personnel to insure that voter registration campaigns are launched and carried forward." Over the next several years, he wrote, the NAACP would expand its voter registration activities in branches across the country. For these reasons, the NAACP desired to be an essential partner within the southwide registration effort, leading the way if possible.[202]

Lester B. Granger, executive director of the NUL, appealed to the Taconic Foundation as a qualified partner, citing the NUL's history of voter registration activism. Although its principal aim had been to promote "welfare resources, vocational guidance, and information on housing and employment," the NUL felt confident it could enhance its programs on voter registration. The NUL had chapters in 13 southern cities, although many had been "greatly weakened in recent years by attacks from segregationist forces." But with additional funding, Granger

[202] Roy Wilkins, "Memorandum on Structure and Activities of NAACP in Voter Registration," Box 34, Folder "Voter Registration Miscellaneous and Undated," Marshall Papers. See also Lawson, *Black Ballots*, 263-264; and Ryan, *Roy Wilkins*, 101-103.

insisted, the NUL could revitalize its work in the South and coordinate with other civil rights organizations. At the July 28 meeting, the majority had decided the project would concentrate on the South, but with the NUL's main support coming from more than 50 chapters in the North, Granger urged the group to "review its decision to limit our activity only to the South." Pointing out that over half of the country's black population resided in the urban North, Granger suggested the NUL would be in a stronger position to help if Taconic's resources could extend beyond the South.[203]

James Farmer penned CORE's self-evaluation and voter registration goals. With roots in communities across Florida, Louisiana, and South Carolina, CORE was prepared to "carry on dynamic voter registration programs" in rural and urban areas. Drawing on years of experience, Farmer laid out how funds from the Taconic Foundation would be used to increase staff, set up small offices, print materials, offer legal aid, and host workshops. Fitting with CORE's national program and ideology of nonviolence, Farmer wrote, "Our registration campaigns would be undertaken in the spirit of assuming an obligation of citizenship…to bring about an integrated society of friends."[204]

Martin Luther King Jr. and Wyatt Tee Walker wrote the SCLC's prospectus for the southwide voter drive. Citing evidence that only about a quarter of eligible African Americans were registered in the South, they blamed poll taxes and literacy tests, as well as outright violence and economic intimidation. Organized through the church, the SCLC's strategy would harness the power and connections of pastors and congregations to lead local movements for the ballot. King and Walker went through the list of states where the SCLC had contacts, indicating

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[203] Lester B. Granger to Stephen Currier, August 14, 1961, Box 34, Folder "Voter Registration Miscellaneous and Undated," Marshall Papers.

[204] Memorandum, James Farmer to Stephen Currier, "CORE Voter Registration Program," n.d., Box 34, Folder "Voter Registration Miscellaneous and Undated," Marshall Papers.

where it could be most effective. They also communicated that they were willing to work with other civil rights groups, taking careful steps to indicate their respect for the NAACP and desire for coordination. Suggesting a collaborative project of two years, the SCLC looked forward to a "dynamic Southwide Voter Registration Program."[205]

Charles McDew submitted a voter registration plan for SNCC. He pointed out SNCC's approval of the SRC as the central hub of the campaign, and he suggested creating an advisory board with members from each partner organization. For SNCC's part, it would concentrate on recruiting students to live in southern communities and organize voting workshops and citizenship schools. In the spirit of nonviolent protest that characterized the sit-ins and Freedom Rides, SNCC envisioned stand-ins at the offices of registrars who discriminated against African Americans. SNCC also planned to host mass meetings, canvass neighborhoods, print literature, drive people to the courthouse, and embed themselves within local communities to "aid in securing the franchise for all qualified citizens."[206]

While these five organizations wrote proposals about their plans for a southwide project, SRC staff drafted policy recommendations that would apply to all groups. They finished the proposal a week before the August 23 meeting, circulating it so the group could discuss ideas when they came together. In it, the SRC summarized obstacles to a unified drive, including white opposition, coordination between major organizations, and "money—and regarding this no comment is necessary." A sustained registration campaign would be a challenge as well, which "in the absence of dramatic causes, is hard, grubby, tiring, unspectacular, frequently

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[205] Martin Luther King, Jr. and Wyatt Tee Walker, "Southwide Voter Registration Prospectus," Southern Christian Leadership Conference, n.d., Box 34, Folder "Voter Registration Miscellaneous and Undated," Marshall Papers.

[206] Memorandum, Charles McDew, "Proposed (student) project in voter registration," August 14, 1961, Box 34, Folder "Voter Registration Miscellaneous and Undated," Marshall Papers.

discouraging." Yet, the SRC, the Taconic Foundation, and all participating leaders believed in the idea. Evidence was growing that black political participation was on the upswing, and activists believed a full-throttle push in that direction would achieve lasting results in race relations. "Free and full participation of Negroes in southern elections," the SRC report stated, "may be the surest means of ending or at least decreasing southern preoccupation with race."[207]

On August 23, the group reconvened in New York to discuss each organization's proposal and the SRC's blueprint for a united registration drive. Stephen Currier led the meeting, along with Lloyd Garrison of the Taconic Foundation. Dunbar represented the SRC, Fleming attended as an observer, Wofford and Marshall stood for the federal government, and James Farmer, Charles McDew, Timothy Jenkins, Whitney Young, Martin Luther King Jr., Wyatt Tee Walker, and Henry Lee Moon represented the six major civil rights groups.[208] The group evaluated each organization's proposal, determining that each made valid points and offered sound goals. Young raised the issue put forward in Lester Granger's NUL proposal that the group reconsider engaging with the North, but the majority insisted the project stay focused on the South where "resistance [was] the greatest."[209] At this point, Dunbar remembered that Young became upset, realizing the NUL would not get as much money out of the arrangement as the others since its power was in the North: "He wanted money. Everybody wanted money."[210]

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[207] Memorandum from the Southern Regional Council, for discussion August 23, 1961, Box 34, Folder "Voter Registration Miscellaneous and Undated," Marshall Papers.

[208] Jenkins represented the National Student Association, which did not join in the VEP as a full member, although at least one local NSA chapter later won a grant from the VEP. It is probably a good thing the NSA did not join, since it was later revealed to be a front for the Central Intelligence Agency. See Karen M. Paget, *Patriotic Betrayal: The Inside Story of the CIA's Secret Campaign to Enroll American Students in the Crusade Against Communism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2015).

[209] Memo, Henry Lee Moon to Roy Wilkins, "Conference of Taconic Foundation, August 23, 1961," August 28, 1961, Folder 001519-006-0525, Group III, Series A, General Office File, Subject File--Register and Vote, Papers of the NAACP, Part 4, Library of Congress.

[210] Dunbar interview, December 18, 1978, 35.

McDew wanted to know if the group could grant "immediate approval" for 10 SNCC field workers to stay in the Deep South because they needed to return to school if money was not immediately available. But the project was still in its planning stage, and Currier was unwilling to commit any funds before the SRC was ready and could make sure that its tax-exemption remained in place. Moon asked Currier how much the Taconic Foundation planned to donate, and Currier promised $250,000 for a two-year initiative, with the hope that he could recruit other foundations to support them as well.[211]

Three weeks after the meeting, Dunbar wrote to everyone with a detailed plan of action coordinated through the SRC. After speaking with his executive committee, Dunbar reported that the SRC "can accept the proposed grant, for the opportunity it offers to deepen and perfect our research into voting in the South." The SRC would be the junction between major civil rights organizations while respecting each group's autonomy. It would allocate grants made possible by the Taconic Foundation and future sources, coordinate local and regional registration campaigns, offer consulting, evaluate results, and publish material based on collective documentation. Dunbar indicated that each group must account for all expenditures, warning that if accounting was inadequate, the SRC would withhold future funds. Over objections from Wilkins and Young, the SRC stated it planned to fund local campaigns as well, not only to widen the net of research, but to empower grassroots agencies. Under the SRC, the voting initiative would have its own name, director, staff, and office space. On the SRC's side, Dunbar wrote that publicity for the project would be "the necessary minimum," but that others could promote it at their discretion. He noted that the voter campaign "now gives us [SRC] the opportunity to study and evaluate the methods which can best change these conditions" to hasten the destruction of Jim

[211] Moon to Wilkins, August 28, 1961.

Crow. Before moving forward, Dunbar awaited confirmation from each organization that they were amenable to the SRC's plan.[212]

Roy Wilkins had a conflict on August 23 and could not make it to the meeting, so he asked NAACP public relations director Henry Lee Moon to go in his place. Briefing Moon beforehand, Wilkins wrote that Currier was the "head man and has the important money…he is quite a 'hep' person and wants to aid in this field, but is far from being a patsy. Very nice and very sharp."[213] But Currier was upset when Wilkins did not show up. He pulled Moon aside before the meeting to ask why Wilkins did not come, stressing to Moon how important it was for each group's national leader to demonstrate his commitment. Moon apologized for Wilkins, but made it clear he was more than capable of filling in for his boss, having written a book himself on the black vote in 1948. A week later, Wilkins wrote Currier to explain his absence, to which Currier expressed his relief that Wilkins did not skip the meeting out of disinterest. In order for the plan to work, he told Wilkins, the NAACP must be involved.[214]

The NAACP was the last to agree to the coalition due to reservations from senior staff. Before committing his organization to the group, Wilkins solicited feedback from some of his top officers to see what they thought about the registration project. Gloster Current, the NAACP's director of branches, strongly opposed joining forces with other groups, "particularly the newer ones which have not demonstrated any degree of responsibility in such a project."

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[212] Leslie Dunbar to James Farmer, Roy Wilkins, Whitney Young, Wyatt Tee Walker, Charles McDew and Timothy Jenkins, September 13, 1961, Folder "Southern Regional Council: Voter Education Project, 1961-1962," Taconic Foundation Records.

[213] Memo, Roy Wilkins to Henry Lee Moon, August 21, 1961, Folder 001519-006-0525, Group III, Series A, General Office File, Subject File--Register and Vote, Papers of the NAACP, Part 4, Library of Congress.

[214] Memo, Henry Lee Moon to Roy Wilkins, "Conference of Taconic Foundation, August 23, 1961," August 28, 1961; and Stephen Currier to Roy Wilkins, September 8, 1961, Folder 001519-006-0525, Group III, Series A, General Office File, Subject File--Register and Vote, Papers of the NAACP, Part 4, Library of Congress. Henry Lee Moon's book was entitled *Balance of Power: The Negro Vote* (New York: Doubleday, 1948).

Current also worried that involvement would expose the NAACP's internal administration for other organizations to see, and he thought the idea was a ruse to register more Democrats. "If the Taconic Foundation really wanted to advance registration and voting," Current wrote Wilkins, "it would give the funds directly to the NAACP," not realizing direct involvement with any single group was precisely what the Taconic Foundation wanted to avoid.[215] The NAACP was the largest civil rights group with the greatest capacity for southern registration campaigns, and Current did not think that linking with others would be in its interest. John Brooks, the NAACP's voter registration director, liked the idea, but could "sense a big fight for organizational prestige among the groups participating" and worried that newer groups were not as committed to registration as the NAACP. "Look out for the explosion [of registration activism] when Miss Voter Registration is made real glamorous with a dress of dollar bills from the Taconic Foundation," Brooks warned.[216]

The delay annoyed Currier and Dunbar. By October 5, only the SCLC and NUL had committed, and until the others confirmed, the project could not move forward. Currier expressed a "deep disappointment in the lack of immediate enthusiastic response" that was on display during the July 28 meeting. The two agreed they needed to delay the project past the fall of 1961 when they had first hoped to begin. The delay worried other foundations, Currier speculated, with some of the initial excitement cooling as some groups appeared to have major reservations about the alliance.[217]

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[215] Memorandum, Gloster Current to Roy Wilkins, "The Special Project," n.d., Folder 001519-006-0525, Group III, Series A, General Office File, Subject File--Register and Vote, Papers of the NAACP, Part 4, Library of Congress.

[216] Memorandum, John M. Brooks to Roy Wilkins, "Taconic Foundation," September 22, 1961, Folder 001519-006-0525, Group III, Series A, General Office File, Subject File--Register and Vote, Papers of the NAACP, Part 4, Library of Congress.

During this waiting period, Louis Lomax, a well-known black journalist who had risen to fame after co-producing *The Hate That Hate Produced* in 1959 about the Nation of Islam, broke the story about the pending civil rights coalition with significant backing from a foundation. In a radio editorial on WBAI in New York on October 17, Lomax told his audience that three months earlier, "I came upon a good story, a scoop," but that others asked him to stay quiet "for the good of the race because some people said if I broke the story then I'd muddy the water and the thing wouldn't come to pass." He went on to detail how back in July, a foundation that Lomax left unnamed had earmarked $250,000 for black voter registration campaigns, and after gathering together representatives from leading African American organizations, the foundation encouraged them to form a coordinated plan of attack. They soon settled on running the program through the SRC—"a staid and somewhat conservative, yet very active longtime organization in the area of civil rights"—to serve as a clearinghouse. With a plan in place, each participating group needed only to ratify the SRC's plan for action and "off to the polls we go."[218]

But early excitement for the alliance had waned, and Lomax criticized civil rights leaders for the delay. Lomax editorialized, "I find it incredible that civil rights leaders would take the better part of six months to accept and implement such a program. Here we have a case of an interested foundation being willing to give a large sum of money to underwrite Negro voter registration" and yet they drag their feet. They had the support not only of the foundation, but also of the Kennedy Administration, which seemed to Lomax the perfect combination to make significant headways on racism at the ballot box. Lomax speculated that the delay was because

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[217] Leslie W. Dunbar to Stephen Currier, October 5, 1961; and Stephen Currier to Leslie W. Dunbar, October 10, 1961, both in Folder "Southern Regional Council: Voter Education Project, 1961-1962," Taconic Foundation Records.

[218] Louis Lomax, Transcript of Radio Broadcast on WBAI, October 17, 1961, Box 34, Folder "Voter Registration, 1961-1963," Marshall Papers.

black disfranchisement intimidated some leaders, for none wanted to tie themselves to a project doomed to fail for fear of hurting their national reputation. Whatever the reason, Lomax called for leaders considering the project to move forward and not waste the opportunity.[219]

Not coincidentally, on the same day Louis Lomax aired his commentary, the NAACP joined, becoming the last to sign on after SNCC and CORE pledged days earlier. But Wilkins asked Dunbar to clarify a number of points that worried his senior staff. He expressed concern that other groups would overshadow the NAACP and receive greater funding, even though the NAACP had the most extensive network of chapters. Wilkins also worried that combining forces would lead to territorial disputes, and he opposed any money directed toward grassroots campaigns unaffiliated with national groups. Dunbar wrote back to assuage Wilkins's misgivings: "We [SRC] have made our participation in the registration effort conditional upon yours. This is the measure of our regard for the NAACP." Placating to Wilkins, Dunbar emphasized how crucial it was for the NAACP to participate, because if it did not, the entire project would collapse. Dunbar explained that the joint undertaking would enhance the NAACP's voter registration efforts, not dilute them. And while he understood the concern about working with untested local groups, Dunbar wrote they must "agree to disagree."[220] Dunbar's letter arrived on Wilkins's desk on the day of a board meeting, and after discussion, the NAACP restated its intention to join by letter on November 22. "There is no dispute upon the necessity of a voter education-registration project," Wilkins wrote Dunbar. "We want to address ourselves to it, ironing out minor items as we go along."[221]

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[219] *Ibid.*

[220] Leslie W. Dunbar to Roy Wilkins, November 10, 1961, Folder 001519-006-0525, Group III, Series A, General Office File, Subject File--Register and Vote, Papers of the NAACP, Part 4, Library of Congress.

[221] Roy Wilkins to Leslie W. Dunbar, November 22, 1961, Folder 001519-006-0525, Group III, Series A, General Office File, Subject File--Register and Vote, Papers of the NAACP, Part 4, Library of Congress.

While he awaited Wilkins's answer, Dunbar requested a grant of $250,000 for two years from the Taconic Foundation and appealed to the IRS. Settling on the name "Voter Education Project," planners hoped to begin operations in January 1962, but everything was conditional on the NAACP's acceptance and the IRS affirming the SRC's tax-exemption. Classified as a 501(c)(3) tax-exempt nonprofit organization under the IRS's 1954 Internal Revenue Code, the SRC could not participate in any type of partisan political activity. After speaking with its lawyers, the SRC was positive that funding non-partisan registration drives and studying the results was not a violation. "As a matter of prudence, however," wrote Dunbar, "we have initiated discussions with the Internal Revenue Service in order to secure an advance ruling." The SRC went ahead with its grant application, confident of a favorable ruling from the IRS soon after the new year.[222]

The Taconic Foundation received the SRC's grant application for the Voter Education Project in late November, and even though Currier was supportive, he and his executive board believed they needed to hear official word from the IRS before they could grant the full amount. To get the project up and running, the Taconic Foundation gave the SRC $16,000 before the end of November.[223] After this initial donation, Currier, Dunbar, and everyone else waited. On December 14, Adrian W. DeWind, a noted tax lawyer working at Lloyd Garrison's New York law firm, requested a ruling on the SRC's proposed voter registration project from IRS Commissioner Mortimer M. Caplin. DeWind was an expert on tax policy, having served as chief counsel for the Treasury Department in the late 1940s and for the House Ways and Means

[222] Leslie W. Dunbar to Stephen R. Currier, November 10, 1961, Folder 001519-006-0525, Group III, Series A, General Office File, Subject File--Register and Vote, Papers of the NAACP, Part 4, Library of Congress.

[223] Memorandum, Henry Lee Moon to Roy Wilkins, November 27, 1961, Folder 001519-006-0525, Group III, Series A, General Office File, Subject File--Register and Vote, Papers of the NAACP, Part 4, Library of Congress.

Committee during the early 1950s.[224] He knew how the IRS operated, and he knew how to frame the registration campaign in terms the IRS staff would approve. The SRC first achieved tax-exemption in 1947, DeWind explained, and in January 1960, the IRS reaffirmed the SRC's status as a 501(c)(3). The proposed project would not conflict with the SRC's primary mission, but would "enable the Council to promote and to study and evaluate methods for teaching and encouraging exercise of the right to register and vote." DeWind outlined the SRC's methods for working with various civil rights organizations, none of which had 501(c)(3) status. The SRC would impose "stringent conditions" on all grant recipients, requiring them to submit detailed accounting for all expenditures. Grantees would not be allowed to engage in any kind of partisan activity or attempt to influence legislation. If any group violated these conditions, the SRC would terminate the relationship. As a charitable program, DeWind stated the SRC's primary purpose was to study black disfranchisement in the South by funding a massive registration drive.[225] DeWind, along with Dunbar and Marshall, hand-delivered the request to Mitchell Rogovin, Caplan's Attorney Adviser.[226]

Currier, Dunbar, and DeWind framed the VEP's mission as educational. Dunbar credited DeWind with formulating an "ingenious kind of theory" that the "VEP was really engaged in research, that we were researching the best ways to register voters in the South, and our method of research was [direct involvement]."[227] Put this way, the SRC's funding of voter registration campaigns would provide much needed data on the realities of black

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[224] Dennis Hevesi, "Adrian DeWind, Tax Expert and Human Rights Watch Founder, Dies at 95," *New York Times*, August 19, 2009.

[225] Adrian W. DeWind to the Honorable Mortimer M. Caplin, December 14, 1961, Folder "Southern Regional Council: Voter Education Project, 1961-1962," Taconic Foundation Records.

[226] Adrian W. DeWind to Burke Marshall, December 14, 1961, Box 34, Folder "Voter Registration, 1961-1963," Marshall Papers.

[227] Leslie W. Dunbar interview, May 10, 2002, 14.

disfranchisement in the South. It would measure the effects of Jim Crow laws, document registrar discrimination against African Americans, and track new registration numbers across the South. The SRC positioned its registration project as educational in which black disenfranchisement would be studied and reversed. Rather than challenge the IRS's longstanding policy that foundations not engage in political advocacy, the SRC adapted its program to fit a pedagogical model. Named the Voter "Education" Project for a reason, the VEP drew attention away from its primary purpose—to blanket the South with funds for registration campaigns.

Even with a high-powered lawyer and the involvement of Burke Marshall and Harris Wofford, there was no guarantee that the IRS would extend the SRC's tax-exemption to the registration program. Soon after DeWind submitted the request to the IRS, Robert Kennedy personally intervened in the matter. Kennedy earned his law degree from the University of Virginia, and one of his professors had been Mortimer Caplan, now the IRS commissioner. Utilizing this relationship to his advantage, Kennedy asked Caplan to have the IRS rule favorably for the SRC. "I was able to work out with Mort Caplan for them [SRC] to receive a tax [exemption]," Kennedy later remembered.[228] Kennedy, Marshall, Wofford, and others at the DOJ had invested too much in the idea of the VEP to see it end prematurely. The precedent for Kennedy's direct involvement had come months earlier when he strong-armed the ICC after the Freedom Rides to desegregate bus terminals, and in the same way, Kennedy used the power of his position to ensure the black registration project could go forward without any federal hindrance. At the time, it was crucial for Kennedy to remain inconspicuous lest the DOJ or White House be accused of partisanship in the registration drive. If word leaked about the DOJ's role in the VEP, the SRC's tax-exemption for the project might be in jeopardy. Marshall, along

[228] Fifth Oral History Interview with Robert F. Kennedy and Burke Marshall by Anthony Lewis, December 4, 1964, 396, John F. Kennedy Library.

with John Seigenthaler, believed DeWind's request was "a very fine legal document," but for a time, all they could do was wait.[229]

As 1961 ended and weeks went by in the new year without any word from the IRS, Dunbar asked for patience and counseled the leaders of the participating groups to refrain from making a public announcement about the VEP. He did not want to give the IRS any reason to be skeptical about the project, fearing that if anyone went to the press too soon, the entire operation would be off. Dunbar believed a ruling would come by mid-January: "In the meantime, we should all do what we can to keep the story from spreading," he wrote King.[230] By late January, the Tax Rulings Division within the IRS contacted DeWind seeking more information before it could make a sound judgment. Accompanied by Fleming, whose Potomac Institute had just hosted a southern interagency conference to discuss VEP plans, DeWind met representatives from the Tax Rulings Division in Washington, DC on January 31. 10 days later, after conferring with SRC leaders, DeWind drafted a supplemental letter to the IRS going into greater detail about how the registration program fit within an educational model. At this point, DeWind and others were confident the SRC would receive a favorable ruling, but they could not be sure when. On February 22, still without notice from the IRS, the VEP went ahead and announced to cooperating agencies that its office was open and in the same building as the SRC at 5 Forsyth St. NW in downtown Atlanta, but reminded everyone to say nothing to the press.[231]

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[229] Memorandum, Burke Marshall to John Seigenthaler, December 18, 1961, Box 34, Folder "Voter Registration, 1961-1963," Marshall Papers. For more on Robert Kennedy's role influencing the IRS to extend the SRC's tax-exemption to its voter registration campaign, see Wofford, *Of Kings and Kennedys*, 159; Stern, *Calculating Visions*, 65; and Branch, *Parting the Waters*, 479. Harold Fleming's account differs. He remembers Burke Marshall repeatedly telling him that Kennedy thought it would be wrong to intervene directly with the IRS, but admitted it was possible Kennedy pressured the IRS without their knowledge. See Fleming, *The Potomac Chronicle*, 35.

[230] Leslie W. Dunbar to Martin Luther King Jr., January 2, 1962, Box 22, Folder 32, MLK Papers, King Center.

[231] Wiley A. Branton to Roy Wilkins, Whitney Young, Martin Luther King, James Forman, and James Farmer, February 22, 1962, Series 1: Director's Files, Box 9, Folder 8, CORE Records; Proposed Agenda, Southern

On March 22, 1962, the IRS sent official word to the SRC that its voter registration program qualified as tax-exempt. John W.S. Rittleton, the director of the IRS Tax Rulings Division, wrote to the SRC to explain how his office reached its conclusion. Since the project would educate people "with the knowledge and will to register" without partisan bias, the SRC's tax-exemption was not in question. Rittleton approved of the SRC's detailed methods to oversee the program, including the immediate suspension of funds to any group violating its terms, and the SRC's plans to publish thorough reports on the overall initiative to encourage greater black political participation. Since the project "will be useful as a source of research, knowledge and experience, it may be considered for approval."[232] With this rendered judgment, the SRC retained its 501(c)(3) designation as an institution exempt from paying federal income taxes, a precondition the Taconic Foundation and other philanthropies needed.

The SRC had tiptoed around the IRS's restrictions on partisan political activity. Even though it would supply funds to register African Americans, the SRC's Voter Education Project qualified for an exemption since it was "primarily a research effort designed to develop educational programs which will be most effective in providing voters with the knowledge and will to register."[233] On March 29, the VEP issued a press release citing the collaboration between the NAACP, CORE, SCLC, SNCC, and NUL. They made sure to mention that the chairmen of both the Republican National Committee and the Democratic National Committee endorsed the

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Interagency Conference, Potomac Institute, January 11-12, 1962, Box 69, Folder 12, Program Department, Congress of Racial Equality Records, 1941-1967, Wisconsin Historical Society; and John W.S. Rittleton to Southern Regional Council, March 22, 1962, Folder "Southern Regional Council: Voter Education Project, 1961-1962," Taconic Foundation Records.

[232] John W.S. Rittleton to Southern Regional Council, March 22, 1962, Folder "Southern Regional Council: Voter Education Project, 1961-1962," Taconic Foundation Records.

[233] Leslie W. Dunbar and Wiley A. Branton, "First Annual Report of the Voter Education Project of the Southern Regional Council, Inc. for the Fiscal Year April 1, 1962 through March 31, 1963," Box 1, Folder 1, Financial Records, VEP Records.

idea of the VEP as well. The VEP was determined to remain non-partisan, not only to keep within IRS regulations, but to maintain its focus on black disfranchisement in the South, and, if possible, end it.[234]

[234] SRC Press Release, March 29, 1962, Box 22, Folder 33, MLK Papers, King Center.

CHAPTER 3: 'THE VOTER REGISTRATION CAMPAIGN…EXPRESSED IT ALL': THE FIRST VOTER EDUCATION PROJECT, 1962-1964

On February 5, 1963, VEP executive director Wiley A. Branton placed a check in the mail for $500. The money went toward voter registration activities in Alabama, where Bernard Lafayette of SNCC had started organizing around Selma. A grant from the VEP, the money gave SNCC a boost by enabling it to purchase basic necessities such as food and car fuel. Grassroots mobilization cost money, and the VEP grant provided much-needed relief. The following month, Colia Lafayette, Bernard's wife, reported to Branton that even though police in Selma were intimidating field workers, the community was coming around to SNCC's message that voter registration was an effective strategy for fighting white supremacy. So far, 21 people had tried to register, although none had succeeded. But by June, almost 200 had registered—the start of a movement that would carry on to the showdown on the Edmund Pettus Bridge in 1965.[235]

Six months earlier, the VEP awarded CORE a $12,800 grant for registration fieldwork in four states.[236] One community that benefitted was Kingstree, South Carolina, a small town of less than 3,000. CORE field secretary Frank Robinson used the money to coordinate car pools and canvassers to help people get to the courthouse to register. On March 4, 1963, 138 people stood in line before the registrar's office opened. By the end of the day, only 14 people had been

[235] Wiley A. Branton to James Forman, February 5, 1963, Box 1, Folder 2, Project Files, VEP Records; Bernard Lafayette, Report on Dallas County, Alabama, October 1962, Box 1, Folder 2, Project Files, VEP Records; Colia Lafayette, Field Report, March 10, 1963, Box 1, Folder 2, Project Files, VEP Records; and SNCC News Release, "SNCC Worker Beaten in Selma, Alabama," June 12, 1963, Box 2, Folder 12, Curry Papers. For more on SNCC and the Lafayettes in Selma, see Gary May, *Bending Toward Justice: The Voting Rights Act and the Transformation of American Democracy* (New York: Basic Books, 2013), 1-24; and Bernard Lafayette, Jr. and Kathryn Lee Johnson, *In Peace and Freedom: My Journey in Selma* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2013).

[236] Wiley A. Branton to James Farmer, August 15, 1962, Series 1: Director's File, Box 9, Folder 8, Congress of Racial Equality Records, 1941-1967, Wisconsin Historical Society (hereafter CORE Records).

admitted, but 11 had registered. The next month on April 1, a crowd once again gathered to register. This time, as police cars drove up and down the street next to the long line, 11 entered the office and nine registered.[237]

Between April and May 1962, the VEP granted $3,600 to the All-Citizens Registration Committee (ACRC) of Atlanta. The ACRC had begun its campaign in January, but the VEP's contribution allowed it to expand. Between April 12 and May 5, 7,644 black men and women registered to vote in precincts across Atlanta. The ACRC saturated black neighborhoods with 50,000 handbills, purchased radio spots and newspaper advertisements, organized car pools, rented busses to ferry people to the courthouse, drove sound trucks up and down roads, and canvassed neighborhoods on foot. In a matter of weeks, Atlanta's registered black population went from 37,301 to 44,945.[238]

Selma, Kingstree, Atlanta: the VEP was at the root of each one. In these places, and in Miami, Gadsden, Asheville, Lake Charles, Lynchburg, Fort Worth, Orangeburg, Hattiesburg, Knoxville, Americus, Pine Bluff and hundreds of other towns and cities across the South, the VEP provided money for independent and national civil rights groups to conduct voter registration campaigns. From 1962 through 1964, the VEP spent $855,836 and registered an estimated 688,000 African Americans, averaging $1.24 per person.[239]

With money from foundations, the VEP shaped the civil rights movement to focus on voting rights activism. These funds equipped activists to pay for food, salaries, canvassing, car

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[237] CORE News Release, "Re: One Hour to Register One Negro," March 7, 1963, Frames 505-506, Reel 172, SRC Papers; and CORE News Release, "Re: Mass Stand-In at Registrar's Office," April 3, 1963, Frame 513, Reel 172, SRC Papers.

[238] Field Report, All-Citizens Registration Committee of Atlanta, n.d., Frames 864-866, Reel 176, SRC Papers.

[239] See Appendix 2. See also Annual Report of the Executive Director of the Southern Regional Council, A Review of Program Activities During 1964, April 1965, 4, Box 12, Folder 15, Dunbar Papers; and Watters and Cleghorn, *Climbing Jacob's Ladder,* 26.

pools, handbills, mass meetings, gas, office rent, and other everyday expenses. The money was enough to cover the basic costs of orchestrating a movement. The VEP managed the money, deciding which grant applicants to support, which communities to help, and which organizations to back. For two and a half years, VEP staff worked behind-the-scenes to finance as many indigenous projects as possible, gathered research, and administered support for the black freedom movement in the South.

Wiley Branton and the Beginning of the VEP

On January 2, 1962, still waiting to hear from the IRS about tax-exemption, Leslie Dunbar wrote leaders of the NAACP, SCLC, SNCC, CORE, and NUL that Wiley A. Branton would lead the VEP. Five months earlier, Dunbar had written, "The Project director should be Negro, a man of stature, vigor, and sagacity. He will need to have the confidence of all sponsors. These being nearly impossible qualifications, the finding of the right man will be hard."[240] Leaders of the "Big Five"—a common nickname for the NAACP, SCLC, SNCC, CORE, and NUL—had suggested other candidates, but Branton's name stood out. The group unanimously approved the selection of Wiley Branton as executive director.[241]

Wiley Branton grew up in segregated Arkansas. His father owned a taxi company in Pine Bluff, and its success ensured a middle-class upbringing for Wiley and his siblings. Wiley was a bright student who excelled in school. Influenced by Booker T. Washington, his parents encouraged him to overcome white supremacy by working hard. Wiley responded to their teaching, but early experiences confronting racism shaped his personality as well. Once while shopping Wiley witnessed a white clerk attack his brother Leo in a fit of rage. Leo fought back,

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[240] Memorandum from the Southern Regional Council, for discussion August 23, 1961, Box 34, Folder "Voter Registration Miscellaneous and Undated," Marshall Papers.

[241] Leslie W. Dunbar to Martin Luther King Jr., January 2, 1962, Box 22, Folder 32, MLK Papers, King Center. Dunbar sent the same letter to Charles McDew, Roy Wilkins, Whitney M. Young, and James Farmer.

but ran out of the store when the clerk grabbed a gun. The clerk falsely accused Leo of assault with a knife. Leo was found guilty, but managed to avoid imprisonment because of a lung condition. The experience etched into Wiley's mind the brutality and unfairness of white supremacy.[242]

After serving in the military during World War II, Branton returned to Arkansas. He joined the Pine Bluff NAACP, and he participated in voter registration drives. After finishing college in 1950, he enrolled at the University of Arkansas School of Law, the fifth African American to do so. By this time, he was 27 years old, an Army veteran, branch president of the NAACP, married with three kids, and in charge of the family taxi business. But he wanted to do more, later remembering that he "decided suddenly one day that I wanted to be a lawyer, growing out of some very bitter personal civil rights experiences."[243] He excelled in law school, and after graduating, established a practice in Pine Bluff.[244]

On May 17, 1954, the Supreme Court ruled in *Brown v. Board of Education* that segregated schooling was unconstitutional, and the next year, vaguely instructed states to begin desegregating schools "with all deliberate speed."[245] In Little Rock, the school board adopted a desegregation plan in May 1955, but members scaled back the proposal once they realized neither the state nor federal government would force quick integration. The NAACP chapter and some parents of black schoolchildren wanted to challenge the school board's indefinite plans, and in February 1956, Branton filed a suit on their behalf in *Aaron v. Cooper*. After a year and a half of litigation, nine black students attempted to enter Central High School on September 4,

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[242] Interview with Wiley Austin Branton by Steven Lawson, October 21, 1970, 1, Columbia Center for Oral History, Columbia University; and Kilpatrick, *There When We Needed Him*, 1-14.

[243] Branton interview, October 21, 1970, 1.

[244] *Ibid*.; and Kilpatrick, *There When We Needed Him*, 23-51.

[245] *Brown v. Board of Education*, 349 U.S. 294 (1955).

1957, but fulfilling his promise two days earlier, Governor Orval Faubus dispatched national guardsmen to prevent the students from entering the building. The standoff captured national attention, and President Dwight D. Eisenhower ordered federal troops to Little Rock to escort the students into the building. The legal process continued, and Branton remained behind-the-scenes working with NAACP Legal Defense Fund (LDF) leader Thurgood Marshall on behalf of the Little Rock Nine. During this long ordeal, crosses were burned on Branton's lawn and anonymous callers threatened his family. For protection, Branton carried a gun wherever he went, and friends and family often guarded his home. The school integration case dragged out through 1962, taking up much of Branton's time until Leslie Dunbar contacted him about the Voter Education Project.[246]

While working on the Little Rock case, Branton became well-known within the national civil rights community. He won the trust of Thurgood Marshall and the national NAACP leadership. He also met members of SNCC and CORE who were part of the Freedom Rides. When Freedom Riders were arrested in Jackson, Mississippi, Marshall called Branton to ask him to go to the jail, bail them out, and provide legal aid. Branton did so, making a lasting impression on SNCC leader John Lewis, who remembered Branton as the first attorney to arrive after he and other Freedom Riders earned a 66-day prison sentence.[247] From 1956 through 1961, through all of the legal drudgery on behalf of the Little Rock Nine, Branton developed a reputation among national civil rights leaders as someone who was knowledgeable, dependable, level-headed, and passionate about civil rights. Knowing that the VEP director would need the trust of multiple

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[246] Interview with Wiley A. Branton by Robert Penn Warren, March 17, 1964, Louie B. Nunn Center for Oral History, University of Kentucky; Branton interview, October 21, 1970, 2, 54-59; and Kilpatrick, *There When We Needed Him*, 63-96. On the Little Rock Nine case, see Elizabeth Jacoway, *Turn Away Thy Son: Little Rock, the Crisis That Shocked the Nation* (New York: The Free Press, 2007); and Karen Anderson, *Little Rock: Race and Resistance at Central High School* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010).

[247] John Lewis, "Wiley Branton Was There For Us," *Legal Times*, January 2, 1989, 16.

civil rights leaders, Dunbar reached out to Branton because he had a "healthy ego," was "tough," and was "a good NAACP type" of person—the perfect blend to handle many personalities all asking for money.[248] Before hearing Dunbar's offer, Branton had been close to accepting a position with the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights. At first, he tried to get others to take the VEP position, but as he later recalled, "the more I tried to sell other people on this exciting new venture, the more I became personally interested."[249] By the new year, Branton had accepted the position as VEP executive director.[250]

Meanwhile, leaders of the Big Five moved their organizations forward with the promise of impending VEP funds. Since attending the planning session at the Taconic Foundation in July 1961, James Farmer had "committed himself to securing CORE's participation," according to historians August Meier and Elliot Rudwick.[251] The NUL planned to assist several of their southern chapters with the new funds, and Roy Wilkins, despite initial misgivings he and his senior staff had toward the registration alliance, readied the NAACP. The SCLC and SNCC were also eager to begin, both struggling to meet everyday expenses. Soon after Branton joined the VEP, Dunbar recommended that he reach out to the SCLC and SNCC in particular. "[T]hese people need guidance," Dunbar stated bluntly.[252]

The SRC announced the VEP by press release on March 29, and the *New York Times* picked up the story. The *Times* identified the five major participants, along with the SRC serving as the central hub: "The actual registration drive will be carried out by these organizations. The

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[248] Dunbar interview, December 18, 1978, 35. See also Branton interview, October 21, 1970, 2-5; and Kilpatrick, *There When We Needed Him*, 93-94.

[249] Branton interview, October 21, 1970, 3.

[250] Dunbar to King, January 2, 1962.

[251] Meier and Rudwick, *CORE*, 174-175.

[252] Leslie W. Dunbar to Wiley A. Branton, January 9, 1962, Frames 1950-1951, Reel 174, SRC Papers.

council's role will be confined to administering financial aid through its newly organized Voter Education Project."[253] To Branton's relief, the *Times* mentioned that both John M. Bailey and Representative William E. Miller, the chairmen of the Democratic National Committee and the Republican National Committee, respectively, endorsed the project. In the South, the black newspaper *Atlanta Daily World* published a small article based on the news release from the same day, and a week later, the Baltimore *Afro-American* announced the VEP.[254] The launch did not become headline news. Branton wanted the story to remain in the background, fearful that the VEP's tax-exemption could be endangered if the spotlight fell on them. But he thought more media attention would come once reporters realized a massive voter registration program was underway in the South, and he cautioned participants not to give away too much information. The VEP began small, with only a staff of two: Branton and his assistant, Jean Levine. Tucked away in the offices of the SRC, the VEP guarded its semi-secrecy. Stephen Currier did not want the Taconic Foundation be in the media either, or be tied to the VEP. Branton circulated a note to leaders of the Big Five instructing everyone to respond to media inquiries about funding vaguely: "the foundations (plural) do not wish their grants to be publicized at this time."[255]

News of the VEP's launch did not escape the attention of Senator Herman E. Talmadge. No friend to desegregation or racial equality, Talmadge questioned IRS Commissioner Mortimer Caplan about how foundations could sponsor tax-exempt voter registration drives aimed at African Americans. Talmadge wrote to Caplan on March 29, the day the *New York Times* reported on the VEP. He asked if the Taconic and Field Foundations could lose tax-exemption

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[253] "Negro Vote Drive Opened in South By Rights Groups," *New York Times*, March 29, 1962. See also SRC Press Release, March 29, 1962, Box 22, Folder 33, MLK Papers, King Center.

[254] "Voter Education Project Announced," *Atlanta Daily World*, March 29, 1962; and "2-Year Project Set to Spur Dixie Voter," *Afro-American*, April 7, 1962.

[255] "Guides For Answering of Inquiries from the Press or Others," Box 22, Folder 43, MLK Papers, King Center.

for financing political activity. Caplan did not respond until mid-May, but when he did, he outlined the implications of 501(c)(3) organizations like the SRC and Taconic Foundation. He explained that the IRS had reviewed the SRC's proposal for a registration campaign, and since the program promised to remain non-partisan and educational, the SRC had retained its tax-exemption.[256] Talmadge did not press the point any further, but his interest proved that the VEP needed to be cautious as it moved forward, lest it rouse southern segregationists.

Along with the first public announcement, the VEP released an internal report for participating agencies entitled "What Is Our Aim?" encouraging partners to frame the project as patriotic. In the document, the VEP defined itself as a research initiative trying to end disfranchisement. "The United States strives to be a democracy. It falls short of being one when one-third of our adults do not or may not vote," the authors wrote. Enfranchising southern African Americans was not radical, but the fulfillment of American constitutional principles. It was white segregationists who were un-American, denying the ballot to black citizens. Aware of long-standing conservative attacks labeling civil rights groups as extremist, the VEP brought the coalition together under a patriotic narrative: "The times are too serious, the threat of Communist power and ideology too vicious, for America not to be true to itself."[257]

As the VEP moved ahead, DOJ officials backed away. Burke Marshall remained involved for a time, as did Robert Kennedy and Harris Wofford, but their involvement with the VEP waned. Kennedy had encouraged the IRS to extend the SRC's tax-exemption to its registration project. The DOJ believed it had done its part by helping set up the VEP. Yet, SRC staff expected the DOJ to remain involved once local projects began, anticipating white backlash

[256] Commissioner Mortimer Caplan to Senator Herman E. Talmadge, May 15, 1962, Box 34, Folder "Voter Registration 1961-1963," Marshall Papers.

[257] "What Is Our Aim?" Box 22, Folder 32, MLK Papers, King Center (all quotes).

against registration campaigns. On March 29, the same day the VEP announced itself, Marshall spoke at a conference about the Civil Rights Division's litigation to protect African American civil liberties. After he heard about the IRS's tax-exemption decision, he wrote to Leslie Dunbar: "It is a great relief to have the waiting period over with. I have no doubt that there are going to be a lot of problems, and I urge you to feel absolutely free to call me at any time that you think that we can be of assistance in any official or unofficial fashion."[258] Dunbar and Branton both took Marshall's message as a promise of DOJ help whenever voter registration attempts provoked violence from southern whites. They expected the DOJ to share information and offer protection to registration workers. Over the next two years, however, the DOJ failed to collaborate with the VEP in any meaningful way.[259]

The VEP and DOJ split deepened with Louis E. Lomax's publication of "The Kennedys Move In On Dixie" in the May edition of *Harper's Magazine*. "Although the public is scarcely aware of it," he reported, "the Kennedy Administration is now deeply involved in an unprecedented campaign to get hundreds of thousands of Southern Negroes to vote for the first time in their lives." Lomax went on to argue that the plan was partisan, and that the effort would "rivet the Negro's loyalty to the Democratic Party for a long time to come." Lomax wrote that "white liberals" wanted to give money for registration work, and that black leaders believed these liberals were "unofficial emissaries" representing the Kennedy Administration.[260] Lomax's facts were vague throughout the article, but Wilkins was incensed. "We [NAACP] are not voting

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[258] Burke Marshall to Leslie W. Dunbar, March 30, 1962, Box 2, Folder "D 1961-1962," Marshall Papers. See also "Remarks by Assistant Attorney General Burke Marshall at the 14th Annual Conference, National Civil Liberties Clearing House," March 29, 1962, Series 1, Box 19, Folder "Background: Voting," Victor S. Navasky Personal Papers, John F. Kennedy Presidential Library.

[259] Leslie W. Dunbar to William J. Hinson, Jr., April 19, 1976, Box 2S409, Folder "VEP 76-42," Field Foundation Archives. Dunbar recalled that the "VEP had difficulty getting even routine mailings from the Department [of Justice], although a fair bit of telephone and person-to-person communication at our initiative took place."

[260] Louis E. Lomax, "The Kennedys Move In On Dixie," *Harper's Magazine*, May 1, 1962, 27.

for the Kennedy Administration or the Democratic Party," he wrote Branton, but "we are working for our people."[261] Branton was also perturbed, and he wrote to the magazine to explain that the VEP operated independently of the Kennedy Administration and had the approval of both the Democratic National Committee and the Republican National Committee.[262] Always concerned with tax-exemption, Branton dreaded how such misguided information could jeopardize the VEP. To protect its image, the VEP downplayed its relationship to the Kennedy Administration.

The Field Foundation and the Stern Family Fund

Once the IRS confirmed a tax-exemption to the SRC, the VEP could receive philanthropic contributions. Stephen Currier, who took the lead the previous summer hosting meetings between philanthropists, race leaders, and DOJ officials, gave the VEP its first major grant. Back on November 10, 1961, Dunbar had requested $250,000 from the Taconic Foundation, noting that the "conferences during the past summer [had] given dimensions of urgency to this undertaking."[263] The day after the VEP began, Currier mailed a check for $50,000 to Dunbar, representing the first part of the $250,000 grant to the VEP. The Taconic trustees had met, Currier told Dunbar, and they voted to fund the campaign for the requested amount.[264]

With the Taconic Foundation leading the way, Currier encouraged other foundations to join. Currier first reached out to the Field Foundation. The Field family had been longtime

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[261] Roy Wilkins to Wiley A. Branton, May 18, 1962, Steven Lawson Research Papers (in author's possession). In 2013, Steven Lawson gave me a briefcase full of VEP and SRC primary sources from his research on *Black Ballots*.

[262] Wiley A. Branton to Russell Lynes, May 31, 1962, Lawson Papers.

[263] Leslie W. Dunbar to Stephen R. Currier, November 10, 1961, Folder "Southern Regional Council: Voter Education Project 1961-1962," Taconic Foundation Records.

[264] Stephen R. Currier to Leslie W. Dunbar, March 30, 1962, Folder "Southern Regional Council: Voter Education Project 1961-1962," Taconic Foundation Records.

friends to Currier, and he had learned from Marshall Field III that philanthropic giving could be honorable, pleasurable, and beneficial to society. With the VEP having the potential to alter the political and social landscape of the South, he wanted to include the Field Foundation, whose support he and the SRC needed.[265]

As an adult during the Great Depression, Field III, who had inherited his grandfather's fortune of $120,000,000 as a 12-year old, became increasingly supportive of the New Deal. Over time, Field had become disenchanted with the Republican Party after supporting its platform for years. He grew tired of hearing his rich, conservative friends discuss poverty as a natural phenomenon that needed to occur without state intervention. And he disagreed with Republicans who believed that high taxes on the wealthy were unjust. Seeing the poverty that surrounded Chicago and across the country during the early 1930s, Field spurned family ideology and became a vocal supporter of President Franklin D. Roosevelt. As Field's wealth multiplied and his politics turned progressive, he became interested in a different kind of philanthropy that could improve the material lives of the less fortunate.[266]

Field married his third wife, Ruth Pruyn Phipps, and together, they created the Field Foundation in October 1940. After decades of private philanthropy, Field wanted to create an organization that could handle hundreds of requests and choose projects worthy of investment. The Field Foundation's charter stated that it would give to "charitable, scientific, or educational"

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[265] On the friendship between Stephen Currier and Marshal Field III, see Egerton, "Introduction," in Fleming, *The Potomac Chronicle*, xxv.

[266] Stephen Becker, *Marshall Field III* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1964), 45, 148-149; and 153-161. On Marshall Field's background and the history of the Marshall Field's department stores, see John Tebbel, *The Marshall Fields: A Study in Wealth* (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1947); Lloyd Wendt and Herman Kogan, *Give the Lady What She Wants! The Story of Marshall Field and Company* (Chicago: Rand McNally, 1952); Robert W. Twyman, *History of Marshall Field and Co., 1852-1906* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1954); Becker, *Marshall Field III*, 15-61; Axel Madsen, *The Marshall Fields* (Hoboken: John Wiley and Sons, 2002), 9-161; and Gayle Soucek, *Marshall Field's: The Store That Helped Build Chicago* (Charleston: The History Press, 2010).

endeavors, and that it would only bestow grants on agencies with federal tax-exemption.[267] After a decade of operation, the Field Foundation was "a quiet sort of foundation, with no extensive fellowship program, no spectacular news releases, no multimillion-dollar grants, no museums, no showcases."[268] But with assets around $11,000,000 in 1949, the Field Foundation had become a mid-size philanthropic agency during a period in which foundations were springing up throughout the country. To manage the Foundation's daily activities, former journalist and fundraiser Maxwell Hahn served as executive vice president. Over the years, the Field Foundation assisted health and education organizations, child advocacy groups, universities, and the American Council on Race Relations in Chicago. When Marshall Field III died in 1956, he bequeathed a wealth of land, stock, and money to the Foundation, ensuring its continuation under the care of Hahn and Ruth Field.[269]

Since the late 1950s, the Field Foundation had been a supporter of the SCLC's Citizenship Schools and the SRC. Since 1959, the SRC had relied on the Field Foundation's annual grants of $25,000 for its operational costs.[270] With this precedent, Dunbar and Branton believed the Field Foundation would be receptive to financing the VEP. Stephen Currier thought so too, and on November 16, 1961, he wrote Ruth Field encouraging her foundation to join with Taconic and support the VEP: "I think this is a dramatic opportunity. A cooperation between our

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[267] "The Field Foundation, Inc." pamphlet, n.d., Box 4X105, Folder "Field (Marshall) 1939-1981," Field Foundation Archives; and Introduction by Marshall Field III, Field Foundation formal report, 1949, quoted in Becker, *Marshall Field III*, 189.

[268] Becker, *Marshall Field III*, 189.

[269] Memorandum Regarding Property Passing to the Field Foundation, Inc. Under the Will of Marshall Field," for Presentation to the Directors of the Foundation at their January 25, 1957 Meeting, Box 2S429, Folder "Marshall Field Bequest 1957," Field Foundation Archives; Maxwell Hahn Dies; Charity Director, 94," *New York Times*, August 28, 1994; and Becker, *Marshall Field III*, 191-192; and Madsen, *The Marshall Fields*, 230-231, 261.

[270] Leslie W. Dunbar to Maxwell Hahn, May 17, 1962, Box 4X97, Folder "SRC Fall 1962," Field Foundation Archives.

two Foundations could result in massive breakthroughs in the South."[271] Maxwell Hahn wrote to Dunbar in February 1962 that the Field Foundation were preparing to offer "substantial assistance" to the VEP once it heard from the IRS.[272] By the end of March, the Field Foundation awarded the VEP a one-year grant of $75,000.[273]

With the Field Foundation and the Taconic Foundation committed to the VEP, Branton appealed to the Edgar B. Stern Family Fund. Founded in 1936, the Stern Family Fund dispensed the wealth of New Orleans philanthropists Edgar and Edith Stern. Edgar's family had ties to the Crescent City's financial markets, and Edith was the daughter of noted philanthropist Julius Rosenwald. Influenced by her father's philanthropy, Edith wanted to alleviate African American poverty and racial inequality. Between 1936 and 1956, Edith and Edgar's foundation gave out more than $5,000,000. During the mid-1950s, the Stern's children became more involved in the Fund and wanted to invest in opportunities outside New Orleans. For years, the Fund had given to Tulane University, Dillard University, the New Orleans Symphony Orchestra, and other local causes, but during the late 1950s and early 1960s, it supported the University of North Carolina's Institute for Research in the Social Sciences, the Brookings Institution, and other national ventures. In 1959, according to executive director Helen Hill Miller, the Fund began investing "in fields to which American society currently gives only moderate recognition."[274]

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[271] Stephen R. Currier to Mrs. Marshall Field, November 16, 1961, Folder "Southern Regional Council: Voter Education Project 1961-1962," Taconic Foundation Records.

[272] Maxwell Hahn to Leslie W. Dunbar, February 6, 1962, Folder "Southern Regional Council: Voter Education Project 1961-1962," Taconic Foundation Records.

[273] Leslie W. Dunbar to Maxwell Hahn, January 8, 1964, Box 2S438, Folder "SRC, Voter Registration, 1962-1965," Field Foundation Archives.

[274] Helen Hill Miller, "Introduction: The Start of the Project," in *Recognition of Excellence: Working Papers of a Project of the Edgar Stern Family Fund, April 1960* (The Free Press of Glencoe, Illinois, 1960), viii.; and *The Stern Fund: The Story of a Progressive Family Foundation* (New York: Institute for Media Analysis, 1992). See also *The*

On May 5, 1962, Branton addressed Stern Family Fund's board to request money for the VEP. Branton impressed, and the Fund promised $124,000 over two years. Miller wrote Branton with the good news two days later, telling him that after his "persuasive presentation," the board of trustees voted to aid the VEP.[275] Harris Wofford had also encouraged the Stern Family Fund to join the partnership.[276] As the VEP was getting ready to begin its first major southwide voter registration campaign, the Stern Family Fund provided one last boost.

To start, the VEP had $187,000 from the Taconic Foundation, the Field Foundation, and the Stern Family Fund, with more promised for the future. Even with this sum, historian Claude A. Clegg III has suggested that the VEP was "woefully underfunded," but there were reasons why foundations did not give more.[277] Foundations wanted to spread their investments around, funding multiple projects in several fields. The Taconic Foundation, for example, funded dozens of organizations specializing in child welfare, neighborhood improvement, and mental health alongside its support of the VEP and other race-related projects. In 1962, at about the same time as it committed $250,000 to the VEP for a two-year program, the Taconic Foundation granted $55,450 to the American Social Health Organization for drug addiction research, $30,000 to the Anna Freud Foundation for combating mental illness, and $75,000 to Henry Street Settlement for a New York City housing program. Foundations also spread out their donations because they did

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Stern Fund, 1-39; and Joe M. Richardson, "Edgar B. Stern: A White New Orleans Philanthropist Helps Build a Black University," *Journal of Negro History* 82, no. 3 (Summer 1997): 328-342.

[275] Helen Hill Miller to Wiley A. Branton, May 7, 1962, Box 17, Folder 19, Stern Fund Records, Wisconsin Historical Society (hereafter Stern Fund Records).

[276] Leslie W. Dunbar to William J. Hinson, Jr., April 19, 1976, Box 2S409, Folder "VEP 76-42," Field Foundation Archives.

[277] Clegg, "Philanthropy, the Civil Rights Movement, and the Politics of Racial Reform," 353.

not want to create dependency. Even though Stephen Currier was fond of the VEP, he was wary of investing too much of his time and money into a single project.[278]

Summer 1962: The Crash Program

With an investment of $187,000, the VEP began sponsoring voter registration programs. In the South, no state offered year-round, continuous voter registration. Registrars usually operated out of courthouses on a limited basis during registration season, and their presence was nonexistent at other times during the year. African Americans—and whites too—had a small window in which to register each year. Southern states sometimes allowed additional voter registration during the summer and early fall before Election Day. In May 1962, the VEP introduced a 90-day crash program.

On April 17, VEP and SRC staff met with civil rights leaders in Atlanta to plan the crash program and divide southern territories among the Big Five. For at least part of the summer and fall, six southern states—Louisiana, Tennessee, Mississippi, Virginia, North Carolina, and South Carolina—had available registration days. Marvin Rich from CORE attended the meeting and informed James Farmer about the plan. The VEP would make "flat grants" to CORE and the other organizations to work in specific cities and areas across the South.[279] The month before, each organization submitted an ambitious budget for the 90-day crash program. In its request, the NAACP asked for $138,850 for voter registration campaigns in 30 locales in nine states, and it wanted to hire eight full-time staff workers.[280] The SCLC asked for $60,000.[281] All together,

[278] Taconic Foundation Report, December 1965, courtesy of Mary Ann Quinn, Taconic Foundation Records, Rockefeller Archive Center.

[279] Memorandum, Marvin Rich to James Farmer, April 20, 1962, Series 5: Community Relations Department, Box 23, Folder 9, CORE Records.

[280] Memorandum, Roy Wilkins to Wiley Branton, April 4, 1962, Frames 1561-1565, Reel 172, SRC Papers.

budget requests from the five groups totaled $556,000 for the first year.[282] Considering the VEP could only count on $187,000, Branton had to make difficult decisions on which groups to fund, where, and at what level.

Once the VEP received all budget requests for the 90-day crash program, Branton divvied the money and handed out assignments. The VEP could not come close to giving everyone what they asked for, but it tried to be fair. For the NUL, the VEP allocated $5,750 for voter registration programs in Winston-Salem, Richmond, and New Orleans. The VEP gave the same amount to SNCC programs in several Mississippi counties and Orangeburg, South Carolina. CORE received $8,625 for its work in Baton Rouge and Jackson, along with areas of South Carolina. The SCLC and NAACP each received the largest amounts, with the SCLC taking $11,500 and the NAACP earning $17,250 for programs in Louisiana, Tennessee, Virginia, North Carolina, and South Carolina.[283] In many cases, the VEP assigned the same locations to multiple organizations, directing them to work together and conduct coordinated voter registration campaigns. In Jackson, Mississippi, for example, CORE, the NAACP, and SNCC all had plans for the area since each group had chapters and field organizers already working there. Instead of splitting them up, the VEP asked the three groups to pool their resources. When turning over these payments, the VEP also set ground rules. Agencies were required to keep the money in

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[281] Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and Wyatt Tee Walker to Wiley A. Branton, April 6, 1962, Frame 13, Reel 173, SRC Papers.

[282] Minutes, Voter Education Project Conference of May 1-2, 1962, Frames 1849-1855, Reel 174, SRC Papers.

[283] Wiley A. Branton to Whitney M. Young, Re: VEP 2-7, May 4, 1962, Frames 1515-1516, Reel 173, SRC Papers; Wiley A. Branton to James Forman, Re: VEP 2-5, May 4, 1962, Frames 1508-1509, Reel 173, SRC Papers; Wiley A. Branton to James Farmer, Re: VEP 2-3, May 4, 1962, Series 1: Director's File, Box 9, Folder 8, CORE Records; Wiley A. Branton to Wyatt Tee Walker, Re: VEP 2-4, May 4, 1962, Box 138, Folder 1, SCLC Papers, King Center; and Wiley A. Branton to Roy Wilkins, Re: VEP 2-6, May 4, 1962, Frames 1511-1513, Reel 173, SRC Papers.

designated bank accounts, log all expenditures, send registration data reports back to the VEP, and avoid all partisan activity.[284]

After receiving VEP funds and beginning local projects, agencies reported to Branton on their progress through field reports. As a research initiative, the VEP required all grantees to document their expenditures and registration figures, but it also wanted stories. These reports gave the VEP an idea of what was happening on the ground. By the end of July, the VEP had received reports from SNCC field workers in Mississippi that chronicled their hardships. Compiling these reports into one document, VEP staff wrote that while not many Mississippians had registered, "it is very clear from a reading of the field reports…that the groundwork has been laid from which should eventually come substantial increases in Negro political participation." SNCC kept field workers in Holly Springs, Greenville, Greenwood, Hattiesburg, and Vicksburg, and from each location, field workers documented their experiences trying to convince African Americans to register while constantly watching out for whites who meant to do them harm. "The resistance techniques of the whites are truly amazing in their versatility," the VEP concluded from SNCC reports. "They range from delaying tactics at the registrar's offices to the beating and jailing of registration workers." In their reports, SNCC staff wrote about one man who had helped them in Greenwood. The police took action against him, arresting him on a charge of bigamy, even though he had been living with his partner for 15 years. "It seems likely that the sudden interest of the police in this man is directly related to his connection with the voter registration activities in Greenwood," the field workers reported.[285]

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[284] Wiley A. Branton, "Conditions Governing Grants," Voter Education Project, May 1962, Box 138, Folder 1, SCLC Papers, King Center.

[285] VEP Summary Report, SNCC Program in Mississippi, May 11, 1962-July 31, 1962, Frames 862-863, Reel 176, SRC Papers (all quotes).

The VEP also received field reports from independent projects during the crash program. In North Carolina, the VEP gave $2,500 to the Durham Committee on Negro Affairs (DCNA) to reverse a voter purge taking place in the county. All names—black and white—were removed from the rolls, and the county allowed re-registration only between April 21 and May 6, 1962. The DCNA was in the best position to re-register purged African Americans.[286] Elsewhere, the VEP funded local campaigns in Atlanta, Raleigh, Tennessee, and Alabama. In Jackson, Tennessee, a local movement led by the American Friends Service Committee (AFSC) urged over 1,500 people to register after knocking on more than 2,500 doors. In Raleigh, a local contingent of the National Student Association, an organization of college student governments, registered 1,641 people between June 15 and August 3 from a grant worth $1,140. Canvassers went door to door asking people to register, and in some cases, they were able to bring deputy registrars to register people inside their homes. Across 30 counties, the Alabama State Coordinating Association for Registration and Voting (ASCARV), led by NAACP leader William C. Patton, used a $1,500 grant to contact 9,371 people—and incredibly for this Deep South state—register 1,742 African Americans.[287] From various field reports of independent organizations drawing on funds, the VEP documented thousands of African Americans who registered during the summer crash program of 1962.

Civil rights leaders sent Branton information about events on the ground. In Sumter, South Carolina, James Farmer wrote, CORE efforts alongside a local group had netted over 400

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[286] Interoffice Request for Payment Form, Voter Education Project, VEP 2-2, April 27, 1962, Frame 1522, Reel 173, SRC Papers. For more on John H. Wheeler and the DCNA, see Brandon Kyron Lenzie Winford, "'The Battle for Freedom Begins Every Morning': John Hervey Wheeler, Civil Rights, and New South Prosperity," (PhD dissertation, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 2014).

[287] VEP Summary Report, AFSC Project – Jackson, Tennessee, June 15-August 10, 1962, Frame 856, Reel 176, SRC Papers; VEP Summary Report, NSA Project, Raleigh, North Carolina, June 15-August 3, 1962, Frame 858, Reel 176, SRC Papers. The Field Foundation also contributed to this NSA project in the amount of $2,731.17; and VEP Summary Report, ASCARV Project, July 1-6, 1962, Frame 857, Reel 176, SRC Papers.

registrants. Working with the NAACP in Baton Rouge, CORE helped register 144 people. In Baton Rouge, Farmer wrote that working with the NAACP was going well, and that CORE was responsible for the south side while the NAACP took charge of the east. Farmer reported that CORE's main methods were canvassing and handing out sample application forms.[288] Wyatt Tee Walker sent Branton the SCLC's report. He described efforts in eastern North Carolina, the fourth congressional district of Virginia, and parts of Georgia and Tennessee where the SCLC worked with local groups and the NAACP. Instead of giving exact figures, he only reported "substantial increases" in these areas.[289] In another response, SCLC figures for the crash program amounted to 7,285 registered African Americans, but the author admitted "cumulative data sheets were not kept on each of the areas involved so that no actual enumeration of results is possible."[290] With such inaccuracies, and knowing the VEP had to publish its results, Branton decided to bring in an expert near the end of the crash program to help with research.

Branton announced the hiring of Jack Minnis on July 12, 1962, and under Minnis, the VEP professionalized its data collection. Minnis was close to completing his PhD in political science at Tulane University on New Orleans politics when he joined the VEP. Skilled in documenting voting trends and compiling statistics, Minnis became the VEP's director of research and oversaw all data collection carried on by participating organizations—from narrative field reports to registration information.[291] Most volunteers and staff members within the participating agencies were young. They were primarily interested in the fulfilling, yet taxing work of canvassing and trying to convince people to register. They had little time to compile

[288] James Farmer to Wiley A. Branton, June 8, 1962, Series 1: Director's File, Box 9, Folder 8, CORE Records.

[289] Wyatt Tee Walker to Wiley A. Branton, June 22, 1962, Frames 49-50, Reel 173, SRC Papers.

[290] VEP Summary Report, SCLC Crash Program Grant, n.d., Frame 867, Reel 176, SRC Papers.

[291] Memorandum, Wiley A. Branton to All Interested Parties, July 12, 1962, Box 138, Folder 1, SCLC Papers, King Center.

lengthy analyses to send back to the VEP. And few, if any, had any type of training in the creation of data sets. Minnis and Branton realized the problem, and they encouraged grant recipients to send narrative instead of quantitative reports. Some organizations, particularly SNCC, latched onto the idea. For the next two years, dozens of SNCC workers in Mississippi, Alabama, Georgia, and South Carolina sent personal accounts of voter registration work. The VEP adapted to conditions on the ground, and in the process, realized that these narrative reports conveyed the human experience of the civil rights struggle better than numbers alone. In the VEP's final report, its authors wrote that narrative reports were "not exactly material for computer programming, but the stuff of which the movement was made."[292]

The VEP's crash program ended on July 31, 1962, although reports trickled in for months. During those three months, the VEP paid out $64,240 to 12 organizations—five national and seven independent. Voter registration campaigns went forward in nearly 100 communities across six states. The VEP documented that 28,955 African Americans registered to vote through these collective efforts. Granting $64,240 and netting 28,955 new voters was a real achievement for southern African Americans.[293]

With the crash program behind it, the VEP handed out numerous long-term grants extending into March 1963. CORE received $13,800 and was assigned parts of Louisiana, South Carolina, and Miami, Florida. The SCLC obtained $15,700 for over a dozen projects in eight southern states. For its rural organizing in Georgia, Alabama, and South Carolina, SNCC received $8,254. The NAACP's grant was for $22,000 to fund registration work in 56 cities and counties across nine states. The NUL received support to carry on projects in Fort Worth, Texas, Richmond, Virginia, and Winston-Salem, North Carolina. The VEP funded 12 independent

[292] Watters and Cleghorn, *Climbing Jacob's Ladder*, 50. See also VEP First Annual Report, 15-17.

[293] See Appendix 3.

organizations as well, including the Greater Little Rock Voter Registration Movement for $1,511.60, Womanpower Unlimited in Mississippi for $1,000, the Dougherty City Voter Education League in Georgia for $4,000, and the Jefferson County Voter Registration Campaign in Alabama for $9,000. By March 1963, the VEP recorded 125,007 new registrants as a direct result from its programs after spending $111,787.60.[294]

The VEP in Southwest Georgia and Mississippi

Two projects that received VEP funding shortly after the crash program were the Albany Movement in southwest Georgia and the Council of Federated Organizations (COFO) in Mississippi. Historians have written about the movements around Albany and Greenwood, Mississippi, but without attention to the centrality of the VEP. The VEP helped SNCC and local leaders carry on the work in southwest Georgia for years after the media lost interest with the departure of Martin Luther King Jr. in the summer of 1962. King regarded Albany as a defeat, but the VEP's continued support ensured that the movement lasted. The VEP was involved in COFO from the beginning, acting as the nucleus that brought together activists from SNCC, CORE, the SCLC, and the NAACP. Because of VEP support, COFO workers had enough money to pay staff salaries and embed themselves in rural communities for over a year.[295]

In August 1962, the VEP began funding the Albany Movement. Less than 200 miles south of Atlanta, Albany was the economic center of rural southwest Georgia, a land filled with

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[294] See Appendix 4. See also Table II VEP First Annual Report; and Table III in VEP Second Annual Report. In some cases, the VEP ended up paying more than originally agreed upon. For example, Wiley Branton first told James Farmer that CORE would receive $12,800, the final figure recorded at the end of the fiscal year was $13,800. On Womanpower Unlimited, see Tiyi Makeda Morris, *Womanpower Unlimited and the Black Freedom Struggle in Mississippi* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2015).

[295] On the Albany Movement, see especially Carson, *In Struggle*, 56-65; Wesley C. Hogan, *Many Minds, One Heart: SNCC's Dream for a New America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007), 66-77; and Jackson, *From Civil Rights to Human Rights*, 148-154. On COFO, see especially Watters and Cleghorn, *Climbing Jacob's Ladder,* 59-63; Carson, *In Struggle*, 77-81; Dittmer, *Local People*, 143-157; and Payne, *I've Got the Light of Freedom*, 132-179.

farms, plantations, and sharecropper tenements. A few middle-class African American businessmen held some influence, but the majority of African Americans were powerless, spread out across thousands of square miles. Many families worked the same land as their ancestors. In September 1961, SNCC sent field workers to Albany to live in the black community and help them register. Charles Sherrod was among the group, an energetic, Bible-believing Virginian who had spent a month in jail after a sit-in in Rock Hill, South Carolina. He was devoted to nonviolence, using it as an organizing tool to encourage people to shed their fears. But the violence and intimidation that hung in the air around Albany unnerved him: "It took me time to understand how to get an old fellow who says, 'Yassuh,' 'Nawsuh,' while looking down straight at the ground" to overcome terror in southwest Georgia, remembered Sherrod.[296]

After SNCC field workers moved into Albany and began winning the trust of the black community, they joined with local leaders and the NAACP to form the Albany Movement in November 1961. The next month, they invited King and the SCLC to join the coalition. King brought the national spotlight to Albany, where Laurie Pritchett was waiting. As Chief of Police, Pritchett prepared his officers to fight nonviolence with nonviolence, to calmly arrest protestors without inciting crowds. "The men were instructed that if they were spit upon, cussed, abused in any way of that nature, that they were not to take their billyclubs out," Pritchett later explained.[297] After months of protests, arrests, and constant news coverage, King withdrew from Albany in August 1962. SNCC workers were convinced that the SCLC's presence had disrupted the local movement in southwest Georgia, and they were determined to pick up the pieces.

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[296] Interview with Charles Sherrod by Joseph Mosnier, June 4, 2011, Civil Rights History Project, Smithsonian Institution's National Museum of African American History and Culture and the Library of Congress.

[297] Interview with Laurie Pritchett by James Reston, April 23, 1976, 3, B-0027 in the Southern Oral History Program Collection #4007, Southern Historical Collection, Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

SNCC remained in Albany after the newsmen packed their cameras and the SCLC moved on to Birmingham, but SNCC needed help to sustain the movement.

Dr. W.G. Anderson, an osteopathic doctor and president of the Albany Movement, applied to the VEP for financial assistance. An upcoming registration deadline was set for October 1, 1962, Anderson explained to Branton, and he felt the community was on the precipice of change. Branton gave the appeal "emergency consideration" and mailed a check for $2,000, the first half of a $4,000 grant. The amount was the largest yet for any project. Branton explained to Anderson that Albany "offers such an interesting research problem" the VEP must study the registration results. In his proposal, Anderson floated the idea of paying field workers by commission according to how many people they registered. Branton admired Anderson's ingenuity, but forbid them from doing so because "such a proposal would not set well, in our opinion, with Internal Revenue nor with the foundations giving us money."[298]

VEP funds allowed SNCC to expand their operations beyond Albany. Penny Patch, a white college student who joined SNCC in southwest Georgia, submitted an early field report to the VEP about her experience. "Southwest Georgia is very, very beautiful. It just needs a little bit of fixing," she wrote.[299] With VEP assistance, more young activists like Patch joined the movement. Jack Chatfield was a white SNCC volunteer focused on voter registration. He went to the Terrell County courthouse to read the official voter rolls, but the registrar and a deputy from the sheriff's office would not allow him access. Chatfield and other SNCC workers urged people throughout the county to take citizenship classes. They pursued friendships with high school students at the all-black Carver High School, but the principle, E.E. Sykes, did not want SNCC influencing his students or passing out leaflets on campus. Some churches resisted SNCC's

[298] Wiley A. Branton to Dr. W.G. Anderson, August 17, 1962, Lawson Papers (all quotes).

[299] Penny Patch to Wiley A. Branton, Field Report, December 8, 1962, Lawson Papers.

requests to speak to their congregations, afraid of bomb threats and the possibility that insurance companies would not pay if they learned the church hosted registration workshops. Their fears were warranted. Three churches were burned during the summer of 1962 in Lee and Terrell Counties.[300] Rising concerns from the black community discouraged Chatfield, aware that he needed registration results to justify more VEP grants. In a December 1962 field report, he wrote, "One is obsessed with the feeling that nothing counts. Wiley Branton is looking over one shoulder, Sherrod over the other, and one's own self is perching on one's head."[301]

By April 1963, organizers saw an improvement in "the tone of feeling in the Negro community towards SNCC workers."[302] Many remained wary of SNCC's tenacious organizing, but they noticed a decrease in white harassment. A minister in Terrell County told SNCC worker Ralph Allen, "Y'all sure have done a lot 'round here. Ain't been no more killings in a long time. Used to be 'bout every week they was shooting someone."[303] In Lee County, Allen and Chatfield worked with a team of high school women to canvass neighborhoods. They were bold enough to visit their teachers as well, talking with them on their front porches on weeknights and Saturdays. Penny Patch paired with a black woman to canvass. "We'd go knocking on doors down these dirt roads in Albany," she reported, "recruiting people to come to mass meetings or giving them information about this and that, starting to talk to them about registering to vote."[304] During March and April 1963, 15 people registered in Lee County, and another 40 in Terrell

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[300] Carolyn Daniels, "We Just Kept Going," in *Hands on the Freedom Plow: Personal Accounts by Women in SNCC*, eds. Faith S. Holsaert et al (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2010), 154.

[301] Jack Chatfield to SNCC Atlanta, Re: "Terrell County report," December 24, 1962, Lawson Papers. See also Jack Chatfield to SNCC Atlanta, Re: "Terrell County report," December 13, 1962, Lawson Papers.

[302] Ralph Allen, Field Report, n.d., arrived at the VEP on April 6, 1963, Lawson Papers.

[303] *Ibid*.

[304] Interview with Penelope Patch by David Cline, April 17, 2010, U-0453, p. 12, in the Southern Oral History Program Collection #4007, Southern Historical Collection, Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

County.[305] "It [was] not easy to get people to register to vote," Janie Culbreth Rambeau recalled about her time with SNCC in southwest Georgia, "because you [had] to convince them that voting will bring about a change."[306]

Persuading people was difficult because of the "organized economic tyranny of the whites" that kept many black adults from registering, afraid they would lose their jobs if sighted at the registrar's office, Allen wrote in a VEP field report.[307] Chatfield, Allen, and others heard that whites in towns across southwest Georgia swapped information, keeping each other informed about which African Americans were aligning with SNCC. Mildred Beasely, an elementary teacher in Terrell County, had applied to register back in 1961. Her superintendent somehow heard, and he passed word that he would fire her if she did not rescind her application. Not wanting to lose her job, she withdrew her application before it could be processed. "I felt that if I did not get my application back, I would lose my teaching job as a result," she told Chatfield.[308] Stories like these were common, and even though SNCC's popularity rose in the region, many people felt they could not register for fear of losing their job.

Even with VEP support, financial limitations persisted. In February 1963, Sherrod reported to Branton that money was low and he and other SNCC activists might need to resort to odd jobs to make ends meet: "Of course we don't mind that work; we have done it before, but the money from the V.E.P., permits us to work under less tension and anxiety concerning the essential elements of life."[309] Allen included in his field report, "One final thing…we need gas

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[305] Allen, Field Report, n.d., arrived at the VEP on April 6, 1963.

[306] Janie Culbreth Rambeau, "Ripe for the Picking," in *Hands on the Freedom Plow*, 96.

[307] Allen, Field Report, n.d., arrived at the VEP on April 6, 1963.

[308] Chatfield to SNCC Atlanta, Re: "Terrell County report," December 13, 1962.

[309] Field Report, Charles Sherrod to Wiley A. Branton, February 3, 1963, Lawson Papers.

money."[310] While the numbers of registered voters in southwest Georgia remained low, Branton and Dunbar were impressed by SNCC's work. Although the VEP could not always give the requested amount, it funded the project through 1964.

As activists in southwest Georgia continued to receive VEP support, they wanted to do more than canvass and help people register. They wanted to march in the street, sit-in at restaurants that denied service to blacks, and stage nonviolent demonstrations. But they could not use VEP funds for these activities, and so "a request was made by the SNCC Southwest Georgia Project Director to break its contract with VEP. This request was accepted."[311] Activists supplemented their voter registration work in July and August with direct action campaigns in Albany, but by September, they ended these protests and once again focused on registration. But having disassociated with the VEP, even though on friendly terms, SNCC's work in the area diminished. On March 3, 1964, Don Harris and Worth Long, two SNCC leaders, visited Branton at the VEP office with a written proposal for renewed sponsorship. They wanted to concentrate on Lee, Sumter, and Terrell Counties, convinced that locals would register in large numbers if SNCC had greater resources to reach them and transport them to the registrar's office. Their ambition and strategy impressed Branton, and he awarded them $2,000 for two months. Branton was excited to renew the relationship with SNCC's southwest Georgia project, believing the data accumulated from such a long-term mission was valuable for the VEP's study. A week after the VEP sent the money, Randolph Blackwell, the VEP's field director, visited the SNCC project, staying long enough to watch a 20-block registration parade, attend a mass meeting, and hear about how 345 people had registered since the new year.[312]

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[310] Allen, Field Report, n.d., arrived at the VEP on April 6, 1963.

[311] Don Harris to VEP, Re: Southwest Georgia, March 3, 1964, Lawson Papers.

Registering people in southwest Georgia was no easier in 1964 than it had been in 1962. Although much of the "financial burden [had] been alleviated since VEP…accepted our proposal," Don Harris reported, segregationist whites pushed back against the renewed grassroots campaign.[313] Some resistance was passive, but effective. On Saturday, March 22, many people arrived at the Terrell County courthouse to find three out of four doors locked and the registration testing room relocated to another part of the building. They had received official notices earlier about where to go, but the confusion wasted time and prevented many of them from taking the test.[314] Other situations turned ugly. In Americus, SNCC workers reported, "One lady had trouble filling out the application card and Sheriff Fred D. Chappell came into the registrars office and cursed the lady and told her that she didn't know what she was voting for."[315] Less than a month later in Americus, an organizer who transported people to the courthouse went to the restroom, where the local Justice of the Peace, J.W. Southwell, attacked him. The irony of the local JP inflicting violence was not lost on the SNCC workers.[316]

As resistance mounted, more people went to the registrar's office in places across southwest Georgia. In March 1964, over 200 tried to register in Lee, Sumter, and Terrell counties following a VEP grant. The next month, the SCLC, which had returned to Albany on a smaller scale led by Andrew Young, registered 459 people by paying for 28 canvassers with VEP funds.

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[312] Don Harris to Wiley A. Branton, March 5, 1964, Frames 1786-1787, Reel 182 SRC Papers; Wiley A. Branton to James Forman, March 13, 1964, Re: VEP 4-4, Frames 1788-1789, Reel 182, SRC Papers; Don Harris to Wiley A. Branton, March 21, 1964, Lawson Papers; and Memorandum, Randolph T. Blackwell to Wiley A. Branton, Re: Field Trip to Albany, Georgia, March 30, 1964, Reel 176, SRC Papers.

[313] Don Harris, Field Report, March 27, 1964, Frames 1826-1828, Reel 182, SRC Papers.

[314] George Bess to Don Harris and Worth Long, Field Report: Terrell County, March 2 – April 6, 1964, Lawson Papers.

[315] Sammy Mahone and Sammy Rushin to Donald Harris and Wiley A. Branton, Field Report from Americus of two week period ending August 5, 1964, Lawson Papers.

[316] Sammy Mahone and Sammy Rushin to Donald Harris, Field Report from Americus and Sumter County, received by VEP September 2, 1964, Lawson Papers.

The VEP also provided an additional $3,000 to SNCC through September. C.D. King, a local black lawyer, ran for Congress in 1964, motivating more people to register and support his candidacy. Using high school students to help them canvass, SNCC covered large parts of southwest Georgia through the summer and into the fall of 1964.[317]

While the VEP assisted the Albany Movement, it also worked closely with COFO in Mississippi. With VEP funds, SNCC began organizing in six Delta counties as part of the summer 1962 crash program, but few people registered. Branton knew the challenge of white supremacy and disfranchisement was perhaps greatest in Mississippi. In May 1961, Dr. Aaron Henry, a pharmacist and NAACP leader based in Clarksdale, started COFO to bring together civil rights activists in Mississippi who had been working through different organizations. Medgar Evers, the NAACP's Mississippi field director, suggested the VEP fund all voter registration work in Mississippi through COFO. As Branton remembered it, the general feeling was "perhaps it would be better if everything was coordinated, rather than having each organization go its separate way."[318] Mississippi activists suggested that COFO operate as an "umbrella organization" that shared grants made by the VEP.[319] Branton thought it was a good idea, and they met together on August 22 in the basement of a Clarksdale church. Branton presided over the meeting where past midnight, the participants "wrote rules, drew territories, allotted future funds" and elected SNCC's Bob Moses as director of voter registration and Henry

[317] Andrew Young to Wiley A. Branton, April 30, 1964, Frame 25, Reel 183, SRC Papers; Don Harris to VEP, Re: SNCC – Southwest Project, July 12, 1964, Frames 1800-1801, Reel 182, SRC Papers; and Wiley A. Branton to James Forman, July 21, 1964, Re: VEP 4-4, Frames 1802-1803, Reel 182, SRC Papers.

[318] Testimony of Wiley A. Branton, Director, Voter Education Project, Southern Regional Council before the United States Commission on Civil Rights, February 16-20, 1965 in Jackson Mississippi, Volume I: Voting, 182.

[319] *Ibid*.

to serve as COFO president.[320] The initial grant to COFO was for $14,000, but over the next year that figure mushroomed to well over $50,000, one of the largest grants the VEP ever made.[321]

COFO marked a turning point for Branton and the VEP. Branton became personally invested in the project, developing friendships with young and eager registration workers. As a result, the VEP became much more than a conduit for funds and research. "From a day to day operational standpoint," Branton recalled, "I treated it [the VEP] as an action group."[322] Leslie Dunbar agreed, recalling that he and others in the SRC "always liked the SNCC kids" and were later willing to bend the rules at times for them.[323] Mississippi captured the full attention of the VEP, even as it funded dozens of other projects across the South.

With the VEP grant, COFO projects took off across the Mississippi Delta.[324] SNCC workers embedded themselves in Bolivar, Coahoma, Leflore, Marshall, Sunflower, and Washington Counties. Branton and Minnis communicated with Moses, Henry, and other field workers about the financial and narrative reports the VEP required. The VEP soon discovered that field workers often did not consider filing reports to be a high priority. Minnis wrote to Moses in early September listing instructions for the forms to fill out: "It is absolutely essential for our research purposes that these forms be properly filled out and mailed to us no later than the tenth of each month."[325] The same day, Branton sent Henry a check for $4,000 and promised to send COFO another $2,000 at the beginning of each month thereafter to pay salaries and other

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[320] Branch, *Parting the Waters,* 635.

[321] Wiley A. Branton to Dr. Aaron Henry, Re: VEP 2-16, September 5, 1962, Frames 1440-1442, Reel 177, SRC Papers. See also Watters and Cleghorn, *Climbing Jacob's Ladder*, 63-64.

[322] Branton interview, October 21, 1970, 5-6.

[323] Dunbar interview, May 10, 2002, 16.

[324] I use "COFO" and "SNCC" interchangeably. Most people in COFO were originally from SNCC, but many operations fell under the banner of COFO.

[325] Jack Minnis to Bob Moses, September 5, 1962, Frame 1439, Reel 177, SRC Papers.

expenses.[326] Branton, Dunbar, and Minnis realized that field workers were busy doing important work, but wanted to make sure COFO staffers knew they needed to account for their funding. "We are not trying to hustle you unduly," Minnis wrote Moses to remind him of an upcoming due date for a monthly report, "nor are we implying that you might neglect such mundane matters as reporting in favor of the more interesting problem of staying alive in Mississippi."[327] Many of SNCC's reports were grand in vision but lacking in detail. Minnis wrote Moses again in mid-October asking COFO workers to record all registration attempts, even if the number was zero: "After all, a VEP-2 [the form recording registration statistics] full of goose eggs tells an eloquent story in itself."[328]

VEP funds were critical to COFO. In its October financial report, COFO documented the salaries for all 15 of its field workers. Each was paid 25 dollars per week, a paltry sum, but an amount that allowed everyone to work full-time.[329] SNCC members saved money by staying with locals and sharing meals, drawing on the generosity of friends. Through November 9, the VEP had granted $10,000 to COFO, which the organization used to pay salaries, buy two cars, cover multiple bails, and compensate lawyers who represented them in court.[330] But COFO reports back to the VEP were inconsistent. On November 20, Branton wrote Moses, "We realize how busy you are" but you must "take time off from your other important activities and see to it

[326] Wiley A. Branton to Dr. Aaron Henry, September 5, 1962, Frames 1440-1442, Reel 177, SRC Papers.

[327] Jack Minnis to Bob Moses, October 3, 1962, Frame 1464, Reel 177, SRC Papers.

[328] Jack Minnis to Bob Moses, October 16, 1962, Frame 1486, Reel 177, SRC Papers.

[329] Financial Report, Council of Federated Organizations to the Voter Education Project, October 1962, Frame 1489, Reel 177, SRC Papers.

[330] Comprehensive Report, Council of Federated Organizations to the Voter Education Project, August – November 9, 1962, Frames 1492-1493, Reel 177, SRC Papers.

that these reports are sent to us."[331] Nine days later, he wrote Moses again: "I feel that I must impress upon you again the fact that this is primarily a research project and we simply cannot make grants to those who ignore duties."[332] Perhaps believing he was too harsh, Branton was conciliatory in a letter on December 6, telling Moses, "I hope that you do not feel that we have lost faith in you or COFO but we simply must get back on the right track in order for us to carry on effectively."[333] Moses was far from disinterested in the VEP, but when his field workers were being harassed, he prioritized events on the ground.

After Branton and Minnis stressed the need for documentation, SNCC field workers began sending in more field reports in a narrative style that chronicled their everyday challenges, serving as much as personal journal entries as data about disfranchisement. Charles McLaurin sent a field report about his time in Sunflower County. Along with Charlie Cobb and Landy McNair, McLaurin spent one of his first days in Ruleville walking around the community and meeting people: "We would ask questions about the Plantations and cotton, about the schools, parks, paved streets, stop signs at intersections and police brutality." These were topics that mattered to residents, and SNCC workers encouraged them to try to register and vote as acts of resistance that could bring change to the area. On September 10, 1962, four days after an energetic mass meeting, unknown assailants fired gunshots into the home where McLaurin lived, then shot at another house, injuring two girls getting ready for school. The community was so shaken by the shooting that attendance at mass meetings plummeted and people avoided SNCC. They told McLaurin "that if we [SNCC] had not come to Ruleville all this wouldn't have happened." For the rest of the month, McLaurin, Cobb, and McNair tried to repair relationships

[331] Wiley A. Branton to Bob Moses, November 20, 1962, Frames 1501-1502, Reel 177, SRC Papers.

[332] Wiley A. Branton to Bob Moses, November 29, 1962, Frames 1526-1527, Reel 177, SRC Papers.

[333] Wiley A. Branton to Bob Moses, December 6, 1962, Frames 1537-1538, Reel 177, SRC Papers.

by helping locals chop wood and pick cotton. Their efforts paid off, and the community embraced the SNCC workers. McLaurin transported people to Indianola to register, helped them sign up for welfare benefits, and worked to find food and winter clothing to pass out. Fannie Lou Hamer moved to Ruleville, who McLaurin noted "was a very good singer and she can do most anything…we feel that she will play a big part in getting people from the plantation to register."[334] Because of McLaurin's report, and several others, the VEP learned much about disfranchisement and white supremacy in Sunflower County.

Not every field report to the VEP was upbeat. Many, like one from Charlie Cobb reporting on the situation in Greenville from December 9-15, 1962, were downcast, reflecting the hard grind of the registration project. "This week has been really slow," Cobb opened. Only one person had attempted to register. "Voter registration wise," Cobb wrote, "we have done next to nothing this past week…Trying to deal with all this APATHY here in Greenville is much more frustrating than the fear one finds in the rural areas." But even without results, Cobb pressed on. Since few people were willing to register, he started collecting statements from residents explaining why they were unwilling to try. He sent these to the VEP, providing more data about disfranchisement for the project's records.[335] But combined with COFO's efforts across 11

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[334] Field Report, Charles McLaurin, "Report on Activity in Ruleville and Sunflower County from August 19th to December 28th," n.d., Frames 1528-1531, Reel 177, SRC Papers (all quotes). On the longer movement in Sunflower County, see Moye, *Let the People Decide.* On Fannie Lou Hamer, see Chana Kai Lee, *For Freedom's Sake: The Life of Fannie Lou Hamer* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1999); Kay Mills, *This Little Light of Mine: The Life of Fannie Lou Hamer* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2007); and Christopher Myers Asch, *The Senator and the Sharecropper: The Freedom Struggles of James O. Eastland and Fannie Lou Hamer* (New York: The New Press, 2008). See also Charles E. Cobb Jr., *This Nonviolent Stuff'll Get You Killed: How Guns Made the Civil Rights Movement Possible* (New York: Basic, 2014).

[335] Report from Charlie Cobb on Voter Registration Project in Greenville, Mississippi, for week of December 9-15, received at VEP office on December 19, 1962, Frame 1575, Reel 177, SRC Papers (emphasis in original) (all quotes).

counties in Mississippi, Cobb's work was paying off. Moses reported to Branton that over 1,100 people had tried to register since May, although only a few had succeeded.[336]

In December, COFO organizers had also collected and distributed food and clothing to the poor along with voter registration work. Jack Minnis visited Mississippi in January and observed the lines of people waiting for supplies while COFO workers had them fill out forms indicating their registration status. For those not registered, SNCC activists asked if they would be willing to try. Some said they would try right away, willing to march down to the courthouse "while their bundle is being prepared."[337] When Branton read COFO financial reports suggesting that VEP money was being used for food and clothes for the poor, he was troubled. If the IRS heard, the VEP's tax-exemption might be revoked. According to Branton, he voiced his frustrations to Moses, who simply replied, "I know, Wiley. But what can you do when you're faced with all those people standing in line?" Branton answered, "All right, but don't document it! Don't put it in the reports."[338] Branton bent the rules for SNCC working through COFO in Mississippi, understanding that what was happening in Mississippi was unique. But Branton was concerned with the well-being of the VEP, which was funding projects all over the South and registering far greater numbers in other locations. Minnis had visited once, and now Branton sent the VEP's newest member, Randolph Blackwell, to find out what was going on with COFO.[339]

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[336] Field Report, Bob Moses, "Mississippi Voter Registration Project," December 1962, Frames 1553-1557, Reel 177, SRC Papers.

[337] Jack Minnis, "Mississippi Field Trip," January 9-11, 1963, Frames 1604-1611, Reel 177, SRC Papers.

[338] Quoted in Branch, *Parting the Waters*, 714-715. See also Bob Moses to Wiley A. Branton, February 22, 1963, Frame 1716, Reel 177, SRC Papers.

[339] Wiley A. Branton to Bob Moses, February 27, 1963, Frames 1736-1737, Reel 177, SRC Papers. On Blackwell's background, see "Introducing Our Newsletter," *Voter Education Project Newsletter* 1, no. 1 (August 1963), 1, Box 2, Folder 10, Congress of Racial Equality Southern Regional Office Records, Wisconsin Historical Society; and Hickmott, "Randolph Blackwell and the Economics of Civil Rights," 22-42.

While driving on the highway to Greenwood, along with Moses and Tougaloo College student Jimmy Travis, Blackwell's vehicle was attacked by white vigilantes. After following for miles, the a Buick pulled alongside and three white men opened fire. They shot at least 13 rounds, and while Moses and Blackwell escaped harm, one bullet grazed Travis's head and another lodged in his spine. In a later affidavit, Travis recalled, "I felt something burn my ear…They had opened fire on us…it sounded like a machine gun. I yelled out that I had been shot, as I let go of the wheel. Moses grabbed hold of the wheel and brought the car to a stop on the shoulder of the highway. I was scared."[340] Blackwell and Moses brought Travis to the hospital in Greenwood where doctors patched him up, but told the group he needed to go to Jackson to have the bullet removed. The next morning doctors at the University Hospital in Jackson removed a .45 caliber bullet from the top of Travis's spine without using anesthesia.[341]

As soon as he learned about the shooting and Blackwell barely escaping injury, Branton was infuriated, but as angry as he was, he sensed an opportunity for the VEP and COFO. He got in touch with leaders of the NAACP, SCLC, CORE, and SNCC to let them know what happened. He suggested that each group come to Greenwood and work through COFO to build the registration movement. Everyone agreed, and Greenwood became the civil rights movement's ground-zero almost overnight. Branton fired off a telegram to President Kennedy and the Attorney General: "This is but the latest of these vicious assaults against registration workers and applicants in Mississippi. This cannot longer be tolerated. We are accordingly today announcing a concentrated, saturation campaign to register every qualified Negro of Leflore

[340] Quoted in Forman, *The Making of Black Revolutionaries*, 295.

[341] "Two Shots Hit Voter Worker," *Delta Democrat-Times*, March 1, 1963, clipping in Box 2, Folder 12, Curry Papers; and First VEP Annual Report, 29-30.

County."[342] He sent a copy to the *New York Times*, hoping to capture the attention of the national media.[343] Branton later remembered, "It seemed to be the only way to answer this kind of violence: instead of letting up, to pour it on; instead of backing out, to move more people in…and that if anything was going to happen at all, there was going to be increased activity."[344]

During March and April 1963, the VEP played an activist role in the Greenwood movement. Branton, Minnis, and Blackwell each spent time in Leflore County. For all of COFO's work since the summer of 1962 in Greenwood, only around 250 African Americans were registered out of a total black population of 13,567.[345] The VEP had already spent a good amount in Mississippi with little registration to show for it, but Branton wanted to see the result of a concentrated campaign in Greenwood. The VEP paid around 20 local people 10 dollars per week to canvass neighborhoods. "For the first time in a Mississippi," Branton wrote in a press release, "there has been a breakthrough of the fear which has held Negroes back."[346]

As the movement gained traction, so too did violent responses. By the end of March, Greenwood appeared to be a "major disaster area," with the police out in full force against the black community.[347] The COFO office was burned, white mobs and police attacked African Americans on the street, and the local newspaper published the names and addresses of those attempting to register. Several marches through town provoked police officers to loose dogs on

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[342] Telegram, Wiley A. Branton to President John F. Kennedy, March 1, 1963, Part 1, Reel 8, Civil Rights During the Kennedy Administration, 1961-1963.

[343] Claude Sitton, "Negro's Shooting Spurs Vote Drive," *New York Times*, March 2, 1963.

[344] Quoted in Payne, *I've Got the Light of Freedom*, 163.

[345] Watters and Cleghorn, *Climbing Jacob's Ladder*, 59.

[346] News Release, Voter Education Project, March 31, 1963, Box 2S438, Folder "SRC, Voter Registration, 1962-1965," Field Foundation Archives. See also "First Annual Report of the Voter Education Project," 30-32.

[347] Wiley A. Branton, "Description of Problems Encountered by the Voter Education Project in the State of Mississippi between April 1, 1962 and November 1, 1963," 8, Prepared for the United States Commission on Civil Rights, n.d., Reel 177, SRC Papers.

the crowd resulting in several injuries, one being Reverend Donald L. Tucker, an African Methodist Episcopal pastor.[348] More churches joined the movement and attendance at mass rallies increased, one local man recording at least 450 people packed inside a small church building on one occasion.[349] At that rally, Branton spoke to the crowd and "brought the house down" after he refuted reports that outside agitators were responsible for the chaos.[350] By the end of March, the VEP noted that at least 513 local people had attempted to register, but later evidence pushed that figure higher to around 1,300.[351]

DOJ and FBI indifference toward Greenwood annoyed Branton, but he kept pushing, and federal officials eventually sued the city of Greenwood. John Doar had been in Mississippi along with at least six FBI agents, but their work was mostly litigation and observation, not direct involvement.[352] In a telegram to Robert Kennedy, Branton tried to elicit some response from the federal government: "Will you please inform me as to what steps will be taken to aid these citizens."[353] The telegram and increased media attention had an effect, and on March 30, the DOJ filed suit against Greenwood. Scheduled for a district federal court hearing on April 2, DOJ lawyers intended to order city officials to release eight registration workers in jail, cease "further interference with a registration campaign," and allow "Negroes to exercise their constitutional right to assemble…and protect them from whites who might object."[354] VEP staff, COFO

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[348] *Ibid*., 8-9; and Field Report, Joe McCastor, "Report on Voter Registration Activities in Greenwood Mississippi," Frames 1831-1832, Reel 177, SRC Papers.

[349] Field Report, Bobby Talbert, March 25, 1963, Frames 1820-1823, Reel 177, SRC Papers; and Dittmer, *Local People*, 151.

[350] Payne, *I've Got the Light of Freedom,* 170.

[351] "First Annual Report of the Voter Education Project," 32.

[352] Dittmer, *Local People*, 153.

[353] Wiley A. Branton to Attorney General Robert F. Kennedy, March 29, 1963, Frame 1558, Reel 175, SRC Papers.

workers, and the black community were elated, believing this to be the first time the federal government had stepped in to protect black registration activities. At a mass meeting, Branton told his audience, "it's the greatest thing the President of the United States can do to let the world know we believe in democracy."[355]

But a week later, the DOJ cut a deal with Greenwood's white officials and abandoned the voter registration movement. Doar met Branton to break the news a few hours before the federal trial was to begin in Greenville. Branton was devastated, and he later remembered the DOJ's decision to abandon Greenwood "cause[d] us to develop some very bitter attitudes toward the role of the Justice Department. We thought that they had really sold us out."[356] Branton pleaded with Burke Marshall to do something, to no effect. The deal called for eight registration workers to be released from jail and for a promise from city officials to stop harassing people. Mississippi's two Senators, James Eastland and John Stennis, had both denounced the DOJ's lawsuit against Greenwood. Wary of losing southern Democrat supporters and frightened of igniting a race war, the Kennedys decided not to pursue the lawsuit. Receiving a light punishment, white officials were emboldened. Branton tried to get the city commissioners to hold up their end of the bargain by stopping the harassment of voter applicants, but they made no promises.[357]

The Greenwood movement did not end with the DOJ's decision, but it never recovered its momentum. Days later, national attention shifted to Birmingham, where the SCLC-led mobilization campaign provoked police to spray water hoses and turn dogs loose against

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[354] Claude Sitton, "U.S. Court Hears Race Plea Today," *New York Times*, April 1, 1963.

[355] Quoted in Dittmer, *Local People*, 154.

[356] Branton interview, October 21, 1970, 13.

[357] Dittmer, *Local People*, 152-157; and Payne, *I've Got the Light of Freedom*, 173-174.

nonviolent demonstrators. The Greenwood movement was all but forgotten, except by those who stayed in Mississippi. Branton began at once to create a new plan to build off of COFO's work. Around the time when the Greenwood movement had peaked, Branton wrote Aaron Henry, "Obviously, we cannot continue to maintain such a heavy financial program for one county [Leflore] for any long period."[358] A month after the DOJ's desertion, Robert Moses visited Branton in the VEP's Atlanta office to plan a new budget for COFO through September. For five months, the VEP agreed to pay COFO regular installments of $1,775, totaling $8,875. The funds supplemented the modest salaries of field workers in Greenwood, Greenville, and Holly Springs, in addition to paying for office supplies, utility bills, and food.[359] The total amount was more than the average grant to any one project, and it demonstrated the VEP's sympathy for Mississippi. But the pragmatic Branton knew the VEP could not continue to sink money into Mississippi indefinitely. After working out the budget with Moses, he wrote Henry, "I pointed out to him [Moses] the serious need for us to cut back immediately on all Mississippi expenditures."[360]

In November 1963 with the VEP grant to COFO coming to a close, Branton made the difficult choice to stop funding projects in Mississippi, except for a small NAACP effort in Jackson. Branton summarized the decision for the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, stating that the VEP tried to be equitable with its grants for projects across the South, but that "expenditures in Mississippi were heavily out of proportion, while the registration results were extremely low," totaling 3,228. He blamed the DOJ for the VEP's exit. Until the DOJ "is able to win an effective

[358] Wiley A. Branton to Aaron Henry, March 28, 1963, Frames 1833-1834, Reel 177, SRC Papers.

[359] Wiley A. Branton and Robert Moses, "Proposed Budget for Mississippi Registration Program," May 1 – September 30, 1963, May 3, 1963, Frame 1870, Reel 177, SRC Papers.

[360] Wiley A. Branton to Aaron Henry, May 7, 1963, Frames 1871-1872, Reel 177, SRC Papers.

decree" to dismantle disfranchisement laws, Branton wrote, "it seemed best to the Voter Education Project staff to expend our resources in other states."[361] He later remembered, "I hoped also that our actions would spur the Justice Department to recognize that it needed to do more."[362]

Some SNCC workers who had been a part of COFO were upset. They suspected that the VEP left because of the SNCC Freedom Vote, a mock election to demonstrate the desire for black Mississippians to register, which began a week before the VEP made the announcement. Marion Berry thought the VEP "stopped the grants because we just wouldn't do some of the things they wanted us to do…particularly around the political organizing, like the Freedom Vote."[363] Even though VEP funds had never been extravagant and filing reports had often been inconvenient, many had come to rely on VEP support. Other civil rights organizations had come to view SNCC workers as frugal over the years. With this opinion of SNCC in mind, the VEP did not think cutting its funding would necessarily disable the Mississippi movement. Recalling the VEP's decision years later, Dunbar said, naively, "SNCC was living off the land and having money was not a big thing, I didn't think."[364]

Sustaining the Movement

While the VEP invested in COFO, the Albany Movement, and other independent groups, it often struggled with the NAACP's national office and the SCLC. Roy Wilkins remained skeptical of the VEP, yet the NAACP produced high registration totals because of its long-established network of southern branches. After receiving inadequate reporting from the NAACP

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[361] Branton, "Description of Problems Encountered by the Voter Education Project," 10-11.

[362] Branton interview, October 21, 1970, 19.

[363] Quoted in Dittmer, *Local People*, 212.

[364] Dunbar interview, May 10, 2002, 12.

in 1962, Branton met with Dr. John A. Morsell, Wilkins's executive secretary, to impress on him the need for branches to produce detailed reports.[365] Morsell passed the message along, and NAACP reports to the VEP improved. But Dunbar remembered the "NAACP was a problem all the way" because it's leadership did not like being tethered to the VEP's policies.[366]

The SCLC's relationship with the VEP was worse. In 1963, the VEP initiated a "temporary cutoff" of funds to the SCLC until it could account for its finances.[367] During a meeting at the Ford Foundation on February 6, King asked Branton if the SCLC was sending all of the information the VEP needed. Branton seized on the chance to bring up the fact that the SCLC's reports were faulty and "in a state of suspension" until it could account for prior funding. King "expressed great concern over this problem" and promised to look into it.[368] Branton had Minnis prepare a detailed summary of the SCLC's lack of communication with the VEP and forwarded it to King. To date, Minnis found, the SCLC had sent only three reports to the VEP, and those were deficient and confusing. After studying these reports, Minnis found the SCLC to be disorganized in several states, lacking in leadership at the local level, and unconcerned with following the VEP's policies.[369] Minnis's account passed to Andrew Young, the SCLC's leader of the Citizenship Education Program, who was displeased with its findings. He wrote Minnis, "There were several things that disturbed me about the report, but mainly it

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[365] VEP Report on NAACP Projects in 1962, n.d., Frames 1471-1489, Reel 172, SRC Papers.

[366] Dunbar interview, December 18, 1978, 35.

[367] Branton interview, October 21, 1970, 34-35. See also Watters and Cleghorn, *Climbing Jacob's Ladder*, 48.

[368] Memorandum, Wiley A. Branton, Re: Talk with Martin Luther King, Jr. Re: SCLC Voter Project, February 20, 1963, Lawson Papers.

[369] Memorandum, Jack Minnis to Wiley A. Branton, February 12, 1963, Box 138, Folder 2, SCLC Papers, King Center.

was what I'll call your 'cruel objectivity.'"[370] Young had thought of the VEP as a partner in the struggle and was caught off guard when it cut off funds for lack of requisite accounting. He blamed the situation on poll taxes, literacy tests, workers who did not know how to research properly, and closed registration books in many counties. But by the end of the letter, he had become more apologetic. "There is really no excuse for the reporting of finances the way they were reported to you," Young wrote. "This is strictly my inadequacy."[371] According to Dunbar, "In administering the voter project, we had our biggest trouble with SCLC. They weren't any good at voter registration. They wanted money for their own uses, and we had a couple of tense times with them."[372] Out of these negative experiences with the NAACP and SCLC, the VEP built up its relationships with independent agencies. "We started more or less eliminating the involvement with the national organizations," Branton later recalled.[373]

One such independent partnership was with the Non-Partisan Voters Registration Coordinating Committee in Charlotte, North Carolina. In September 1963, the VEP granted $1,000 to the Committee and its leader, Dr. Reginald A. Hawkins, a dentist and energetic leader of the Mecklenburg Organization on Political Affairs, for a 30-day registration campaign. Describing the group's tactics for registering students from Johnson C. Smith University and residents in West Charlotte, Hawkins told the *Charlotte Observer*, "We're using a fan-out technique of catching people on the street and asking them to register."[374] In a field report to the

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[370] Memorandum, Andrew J. Young to Jack Minnis, Re: SCLC Participation in the VEP, February 26, 1963, Box 138, Folder 2, SCLC Papers, King Center.

[371] *Ibid*.

[372] Dunbar interview, December 18, 1978, 33.

[373] Branton interview, October 21, 1970, 16-17.

VEP, Hawkins documented that between September 16 and November 9, the Committee registered 1,051 African Americans. In February 1964, the VEP answered Hawkins's application for more money with an additional $3,000 through May, allowing the Committee to pay bills for rent, telephone, heat, water, and electricity, as well as for supplies, an office secretary, and salaries to canvassing workers at 50 dollars per week.[375]

Another notable VEP partnership was with Voters of Texas Enlist (VOTE)—the project that registered the most people during the first VEP. When the VEP launched in March 1962, Branton did not expect to fund many projects in Texas, where annual poll taxes were still required. But in July 1963, Blackwell attended a conference in Dallas organized by the Texas Democratic Coalition, and after hearing plans of voter registration across the Lone Star State, recommended that the VEP get involved. The Democratic Coalition was a liberal organization founded in 1962 to bring together African Americans, Latinos, union members, and white liberals to wrest control of the Texas Democratic Party away from conservatives. Larry Goodwyn, the Coalition's executive director, led a motion to create a non-partisan voter registration wing of the Coalition at the Dallas convention. On November 9, Texas citizens would vote on a referendum to outlaw the poll tax, and the Coalition wanted to register as many people as possible beforehand. The Coalition had two goals: strike down the poll tax and conduct a massive registration campaign. They asked Blackwell to address the convention, and he "related some experiences in voter registration efforts in other Southern states where it isn't as

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[374] "Drive Opens with a Rush," *Charlotte Observer*, September 17, 1963, clipping from Frame 7, Reel 182, SRC Papers.

[375] Wiley A. Branton to Dr. Reginald A. Hawkins, September 6, 1963, Frames 1-2, Reel 182, SRC Papers; VEP Field Report, Dr. Reginald A. Hawkins to Wiley A. Branton, n.d., Frame 27, Reel 182, SRC Papers; Memorandum, Dr. Reginald A. Hawkins to Voter Education Project, Re: "Proposed Budget for February 1 to May 16, 1964," January 16, 1964, Frame 44, Reel 182, SRC Papers; and Wiley A. Branton to Dr. Reginald A. Hawkins, February 20, 1964, Frame 43, Reel 182, SRC Papers.

easy to qualify to vote as it is in Texas."[376] The Coalition approved Goodwyn's idea, and the group created VOTE.[377]

The day after the Coalition chartered VOTE, it requested support from the VEP based on Blackwell's recommendation. Nell Goodwyn, the Coalition's finance chair, explained that VOTE "will be for voter education only, and not in behalf of any political candidate or partisan political issue."[378] Always concerned with tax-exemption, Branton was cautious not to rush. By itself, VOTE was non-partisan, but it was part of the openly political Democratic Coalition. And part of its strategy before November 9 was to help people pay their poll taxes of $1.50 or $1.75, something the VEP could not do. After thinking it over for a month, Branton agreed to finance VOTE, as long as it accounted for its finances and used VEP money only for voter education, never poll taxes. The VEP gave VOTE a $3,500 grant in August 1963.[379]

After receiving the grant, Goodwyn explained VOTE's strategy for voter registration. The plan hinged on motivating thousands of block workers to join together from the four legs of the Coalition—African Americans, Latinos, white liberals, and labor unions. In a 1960 registration campaign in Houston, local activists tested the model with some success, using 1,800

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[376] Democratic Coalition Newsletter 1, no. 9, August 13, 1963, Frames 1764-1765, Reel 181, SRC Papers.

[377] Memorandum, Randolph T. Blackwell to Wiley A. Branton, Re: Field Trip to Dallas, Texas, July 25, 1963, Frames 1036-1041, Reel 176, SRC Papers; and Maximilian Krochmal, "Labor, Civil Rights, and the Struggle for Democracy in Mid-Twentieth Century Texas" (PhD dissertation, Duke University, 2011), 462-463. On the Democratic Coalition, see Krochmal, "Labor, Civil Rights, and the Struggle for Democracy in Mid-Twentieth Century Texas," 412-542; and Benjamin Márquez, *Democratizing Texas Politics: Race, Identity, and Mexican American Empowerment, 1945-2002* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2014), 57-58. Larry Goodwyn went on to become a history professor at Duke University for decades, publishing, among others, *Democratic Promise: The Populist Moment in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976). For his reflections on the rise of liberalism in Texas during the early 1960s, see Interview with Lawrence C. Goodwyn by Jack Bass, November 18, 1974, A-0188 in the Southern Oral History Program Collection #4007, Southern Historical Collection, Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

[378] Nell Goodwyn to Wiley A. Branton, July 19, 1963, Frame 1746, Reel 181, SRC Papers.

[379] Jean Levine to Larry Goodwyn, August 13, 1963, Frame 1766, Reel 181, SRC Papers; and Wiley A. Branton to Larry Goodwyn, August 21, 1963, Frames 1767-1768, Reel 181, SRC Papers.

block workers to usher 42,000 registered African Americans to vote. By coordinating mass meetings across the state, local leaders would bring together motivated community members and have them sign pledge cards to become block workers in the upcoming election. Each block worker was responsible for 20 people. Block workers would meet their assigned people, share literature, and make sure they voted on Election Day. Using IBM computers to crunch polling data, VOTE coordinated volunteers—"generally women"—to compile lists of 20 names for block workers, usually within their neighborhood.[380] "The blockworker program is extremely complex," Goodwyn admitted to Branton, "involving the transfer of thousands of names from poll tax lists to 3x5 cards, reshuffling the cards by street address, breaking them down into groups of 20 to be given to individual blockworkers."[381] But for such a massive state in both population and geography, VOTE believed this was their best hope to beat the poll tax. Always looking for new tactics to study, the VEP was eager to see what happened in Texas.

During September and October, as VOTE worked to raise enough block workers before November 9, it went back to the VEP for more funding. VOTE's objective was to commit 12,000 block workers and register 240,000 people, lofty goals that required more money. The AFL-CIO and wealthy liberals donated to VOTE, but it needed a bigger financial commitment from the VEP. Demonstrating its belief in the project, the VEP committed an additional $10,500 in September and another $10,000 in October. With bills piling up, Goodwyn worried about the project collapsing before Branton called in October to let him know more dollars were on the way: "I'm afraid a bit of despair was creeping into my mind. So, your call was most timely. I feel like a vast weight has been lifted."[382] With the influx of cash, Branton warned Goodwyn again

[380] Larry Goodwyn to Jack Minnis, September 6, 1963, Frames 1775-1777, Reel 181, SRC Papers.

[381] Larry Goodwyn to Wiley A. Branton, September 1, 1963, Frames 1799-1801, Reel 181, SRC Papers.

about the VEP's delicate tax-exemption: "You mentioned the fact that perhaps the Texas Coalition could contribute to a campaign regarding the poll tax but since these are partisan matters we [VEP] cannot be involved."[383] VEP funds could be used for staff salaries, printing costs, stuffing envelopes, paying bills, and supplying VOTE's on-the-ground block workers. Goodwyn promised to keep funding separate, letting Branton know that political events were heating up: "The election continues to look like a cliffhanger. The other side is now openly organizing against us—elements of the Republican party, and the business community."[384]

The week before the referendum, VOTE stepped up its organizing. VOTE recruited Martin Luther King Jr. to write a letter to Texas voters urging them to the polls on November 9. "In the Delta of Mississippi, in Alabama, in Southwest Georgia, in so many places, we cannot vote," King explained. "You can vote. And your vote on Saturday can free thousands of your brothers to vote in the future."[385] Goodwyn wrote block workers the week before with instructions for moving their 20 people to the polling places. This coming Saturday, Goodwyn wrote his volunteers, "The job you will be doing this week is the most important political work you have ever done in your life."[386] By the time of the referendum, VOTE had not met its 12,000 block worker goal, but managed to recruit around 9,000 people. For weeks they had canvassed

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[382] Larry Goodwyn to Wiley A. Branton, October 21, 1963, Frame 1877, Reel 181, SRC Papers.

[383] Wiley A. Branton to Larry Goodwyn, September 28, 1963, Frames 1847-1848, Reel 181, SRC Papers.

[384] Larry Goodwyn to Wiley A. Branton, October 25, 1963, Frame 1879, Reel 181, SRC Papers. See also Wiley A. Branton to Larry Goodwyn, October 25, 1963, Frame 1878, Reel 181, SRC Papers.

[385] Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. to Friend, November 3, 1963, Frame 1891, Reel 181, SRC Papers (emphasis in original).

[386] "…A Message For Official Block Captains," Democratic Coalition newsletter, n.d., Frames 1899-1900, Reel 181, SRC Papers (emphasis in original).

neighborhoods, encouraged their 20 people, and attended mass rallies. Turnout was high, but not high enough.[387]

The referendum on November 9 did not pass, and the 61-year old poll tax law remained in effect. Although 243,445 voted to repeal the poll tax, 316,008 voted to keep it in place. Goodwyn was disappointed, but he tried to find a silver lining. The block worker program was successful, having encouraged grassroots participation in an off-year election. But Goodwyn believed the repeal failed because the other three legs of the Texas Coalition did not pull equal weight to the African American contingent. Racism continued to plague the AFL-CIO, and while its leaders campaigned to end the poll tax, most local unions were indifferent to forging alliances with African Americans and Latinos. While an average of about 40 percent of registered voters turned out in black precincts across the state, only 15 to 20 percent of Latino, white liberal, and labor voters cast a ballot. The VEP was disappointed in the results. Branton wrote Goodwyn four days after the referendum, "Even though we cannot support partisan politics I think it is no secret that we were all hoping that the poll tax would be outlawed in Texas."[388]

After the sting of defeat wore off, VOTE decided to renew its voter registration campaign through the end of January with a goal of registering over 300,000 African Americans and Latinos. They intended to make use once again of the block worker program after witnessing its effectiveness in the lead-up to the referendum. With a budget of $37,000, VOTE received $10,000 from the Texas AFL-CIO and more from a few private donors, "but the Lord only knows where the remaining $10,000 will come from, unless it is from the V.E.P.," pleaded

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[387] Krochmal, "Labor, Civil Rights, and the Struggle for Democracy in Mid-Twentieth Century Texas," 514.

[388] Wiley A. Branton to Larry Goodwyn, November 13, 1963, Frames 1947-1948, Reel 181, SRC Papers. See also Jack Minnis to Wiley A. Branton, Re: Telephone Conversation with Larry Goodwyn, November 11, 1963, Frame 1903, Reel 181, SRC Papers; Larry Goodwyn to Wiley A. Branton, November 27, 1963, Frames 1910-1911, Reel 181, SRC Papers; Joseph A. Loftus, "Setback of Texas Liberals May Affect Kennedy," *New York Times*, November 11, 1963; and Márquez, *Democratizing Texas Politics*, 58.

Goodwyn.[389] On December 26, Branton sent Goodwyn a check for $10,000, and VOTE spent the next month prodding its block workers to register as many people as possible. They worked in 22 urban areas and two rural sites, 80 counties in all. During the last week of the campaign, the last state needed to ratify the Twenty-Fourth Amendment did so, outlawing the poll tax in the United States. Even though the poll tax held up on November 9, it was now a moot point. Once again, VOTE extended its program, this time through March 6 coming at the end of a special 30-day registration period initiated by the state government. The VEP supplied more money, and while VOTE did not hit its 300,000 goal, it oversaw the registration of a record number of African Americans and Latinos in Texas. From September 1963 through March 6, 1964, approximately 268,000 registered as a direct result of VOTE organizing. VOTE was the most successful program in the VEP's history. In his final report, Goodwyn thanked Branton for the VEP's crucial support: "There are so many thousands of block workers who will never know the role SRC and VEP played in the VOTE effort."[390]

As the VEP worked with VOTE, national organizations, and independent groups, its staff underwent several changes. The VEP's first major shake-up came with a firing. Jack Minnis had revolutionized the VEP's research protocols since he joined in July 1962, and he was responsible for improving the quality of field reporting from partner agencies. With his help, the VEP was well on its way to collecting a rich archive of materials on disfranchisement. Minnis also visited projects and reported on them to Branton. On August 14, 1963, he went to Plaquemine,

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[389] Larry Goodwyn to Wiley A. Branton, December 17, 1963, Frames 1953-1955, Reel 181, SRC Papers.

[390] Larry Goodwyn to Wiley A. Branton, June 8, 1964, Frames 2104-2109, Reel 181, SRC Papers. I arrived at the approximation of 268,000 new voters by counting the VEP's estimate of new poll tax registrants through VOTE's initiatives: 208,000 by January 31, 1964 and another 60,000 by March 6. See VEP Second Annual Report, 15-16. See also Wiley A. Branton to Larry Goodwyn, December 26, 1963, Frame 1956, Reel 181, SRC Papers; Larry Goodwyn to Wiley A. Branton, February 25, 1964, Frame 2051, Reel 181, SRC Papers; Wiley A. Branton to Larry Goodwyn, February 25, 1964, Frames 2048-2049, Reel 181, SRC Papers; and Krochmal, "Labor, Civil Rights, and the Struggle for Democracy in Mid-Twentieth Century Texas," 519-544.

Louisiana to study CORE's registration work in the area. A week earlier, around 20 registration workers had been arrested, and activists from the area met to plan a demonstration in front of the Iberville Parish jail. Minnis attended and advised the demonstrators to demand the release of the workers because their incarceration impeded voter registration activities. Minnis's counsel in Plaquemines alarmed Branton, who interpreted his actions as provocative. He wrote Minnis, "I shudder at the thought of the 'suggestions' which you made at the meeting…VEP staff members simply should not make any suggestions regarding demonstrations of any kind, including those having to do with voter registration activities, particularly where arrests are likely to result."[391] Branton was always cautious about the VEP's tax-exempt status, and any breach of the agreement endangered the VEP. As Minnis later remembered, the SRC fired him for "unspeakable political things."[392] Minnis soon joined SNCC and set up its research department.

With only Branton, Blackwell, and administrative assistant Jean Levine, the VEP staff was too small for the size of the operation. When the Council for United Civil Rights Leadership (CUCRL) drafted Branton to oversee their meetings and finances (see chapter four), he hired Vernon Jordan, Dunbar's assistant, to be the VEP's Acting Assistant Director starting in September 1963.[393] With Minnis gone, the VEP still needed help. In early 1964, Branton hired Barbara Whittaker, John Due, and Weldon Rougeau to assist in field operations. He also brought in two additional employees to help run the office, Janet Shortt and Barbara Stewart. Whittaker graduated from Spellman College and earned a Master's degree in social work from Atlanta University, where she taught before the VEP hired her as a research assistant. John Due was a

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[391] Memorandum, Wiley A. Branton to Jack Minnis, Re: Plaquemine, Louisiana Report, n.d., Frame 2102, Reel 174, SRC Papers.

[392] Jack Minnis, Tributes to and Memorandumries of Jim Forman (1928-2005), January 7, 2005. http://www.crmvet.org/mem/forman.htm#formminnis. Accessed on November 18, 2014.

[393] Memorandum, Wiley A. Branton to All Participating Agencies, Re: "New Staff Member," September 18, 1963, Frame 2077, Reel 173, SRC Papers.

young lawyer from Florida who worked as an intern. The VEP was already acquainted with Rougeau after his successful organizing in Miami for CORE over the past year and a half, and Branton contracted him to travel and report on local registration campaigns. All together, the VEP remained a small organization set within the larger SRC, but added others to meet the demand of grant requests.[394]

By the end of 1963, the VEP made grants totaling $382,003, and its affiliates had registered 327,588 people.[395] With projects across the South going ahead, the VEP was determined to continue its work through October 1964, just before Election Day. The Taconic Foundation, the Field Foundation, and the Stern Family Fund had guaranteed funding only through March 1964, but with seven months remaining until the election, the VEP wanted to ride the wave of political enthusiasm that came during presidential campaign cycles to maximize black voter registration. Many states also held longer hours in registrar offices during primary season and during the months before the general election. And, after one and a half years, enough states had ratified the Twenty-Fourth Amendment in January 1964, eliminating the poll tax. For these reasons, the VEP believed that black registration could reach new heights in 1964.

Branton first wrote to the trustees of the Stern Family Fund to ask for an additional $100,000 for the VEP's final year. The Fund had given $124,000 during the last two years, and Branton had kept in touch with its leadership by providing details on how grantees used the money. A month after Branton's request, the Fund granted $20,000 to the VEP, and in February 1964, gave an additional $55,000 for the VEP's last year. David Hunter, the Stern Family Fund's executive director, wrote Branton with the good news, indicating that the board of trustees hoped

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[394] VEP Second Annual Report, 2-3; and Memorandum, Wiley Branton to All Participating Agencies, January 14, 1964, Box 25, Folder 21, MLK Papers, King Center.

[395] Annual Report of the Executive Director of the Southern Regional Council, A Review of Program Activities During 1963, February 1964, 5-6, Box 12, Folder 15, Dunbar Papers. See also Appendices 4, 5, and 6.

the VEP would concentrate in urban areas to increase the numbers of black registrants before year's end. Branton made no promises, since the VEP was involved in many rural areas, but thanked Hunter for the foundation's generosity.[396]

On January 8, 1964, Leslie Dunbar wrote on behalf of the VEP to request additional funding from the Field Foundation and Taconic Foundation. In his letter to Maxwell Hahn of the Field Foundation, he described the VEP's ambitions for the remainder of the year and requested $125,000. "Voting is not a panacea," Dunbar wrote, "Yet it is unmistakably the indispensable pre-condition to all other civic advance."[397] Three months later, the Field Foundation's trustees voted to grant the VEP $75,000, not the full amount requested, but a sizeable check.[398] Dunbar's letter to Stephen Currier was similarly worded, and since the Taconic Foundation had been the VEP's principal supporter from the beginning with its $250,000 grant, the VEP requested $150,000 for its final year.[399] Currier did not inform the VEP of its funding decision until April, and in the meantime, both Dunbar and Branton wrote Currier again clarifying the VEP's aims for the year, expressing how crucial it was to have a boost in funding. The VEP was unable to finance several local registration campaigns in early 1964 for fear of depleting its bank account. On April 22, Currier informed Dunbar that the Taconic trustees had voted to award the VEP with

[396] Wiley A. Branton to Marjorie Dammann, September 26, 1963; Wiley A. Branton to Marjorie Dammann, October 31, 1963; David R. Hunter to Wiley A. Branton, February 12, 1964; and Wiley A. Branton to David R. Hunter, February 25, 1964, all in Box 17, Folder 18, Stern Fund Records.

[397] Leslie W. Dunbar to Maxwell Hahn, January 8, 1964, Box 2S438, Folder "SRC, Voter Registration, 1962-1965," Field Foundation Archives.

[398] Maxwell Hahn to Leslie W. Dunbar, April 4, 1964, Box 2S438, Folder "SRC, Voter Registration, 1962-1965," Field Foundation Archives.

[399] Leslie W. Dunbar to Stephen R. Currier, January 8, 1964, Folder "Southern Regional Council: Voter Education Project, 1963-1964," Taconic Foundation Records.

$80,000, and the Foundation left the door open to additional funds later in 1964 should the VEP require. The VEP entered into its final stretch with financial security.[400]

The Final Stretch

Within the civil rights movement, 1964 was a pivotal year. President Lyndon B. Johnson became President after Kennedy's assassination in November 1963, and he spent much of 1964 working to pass a civil rights bill. On July 2, after surviving a two-month filibuster, Johnson signed the Civil Rights Act of 1964 into law. Months earlier, SNCC launched Freedom Summer in Mississippi, and three volunteers, James Chaney, Andrew Goodman, and Michael Schwerner, were murdered in Neshoba County. At the Democratic National Convention, the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party (MFDP) tried and failed to unseat the whites-only state delegation. These events captured national media attention, but in the background, the VEP continued supporting local drives throughout the South.

During January, February, and March 1964, 241,659 people registered through VEP-sponsored programs, sending the total to 569,247 since March 1962. With help from the VEP, which had invested $199,799.98 on Big Five projects and $186,023.23 on independent organizations through 1963, indigenous campaigns were successfully registering people across the South. For the first time in history, black southern voters topped 2,000,000 people, representing about 15 percent of the total southern electorate in 1964.[401]

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[400] Stephen R. Currier to Leslie W. Dunbar, April 22, 1964; Wiley A. Branton to Stephen R. Currier, February 4, 1964; and Leslie W. Dunbar to Stephen R. Currier, February 10, 1964, Folder "Southern Regional Council: Voter Education Project, 1963-1964," Taconic Foundation Records. On September 28, 1964, the Taconic Foundation granted another $9,000 to the VEP. See Stephen R. Currier to Leslie W. Dunbar, September 28, 1964, Folder "Southern Regional Council: Voter Education Project, 1963-1964," Taconic Foundation Records. See also Appendix 2.

[401] Claude Sitton, "South Notes Rise in Negro Voters," *New York Times*, May 12, 1964; VEP Second Annual Report, 4-18; and Appendix II, "Voter Registration in the South – 1962, 1964, 1966" in Watters and Cleghorn, *Climbing Jacob's Ladder*, 376-377. See also Appendices 5 and 6.

Dozens of projects across the South contributed to the VEP's total in 1964. An SCLC campaign in Petersburg, Virginia, received $16,000 from the VEP in 1964, using the money to pay for office supplies, transportation, radio advertisements, and for babysitters so that more adults could canvass neighborhoods.[402] In North Carolina, the Citizens Committee of Wilson and Wilson County used $500 from the VEP to hire 20 canvassers at the rate of one dollar per hour. After a week, Randolph Blackwell noted, their work in Wilson had netted less than 200 new registrants, but he felt confident that results would improve.[403] In Fort Valley, Georgia, an NAACP-led registration drive had capitalized off local anger after the sheriff killed a black man in the Peach County jail, with at least 420 registering within two weeks in February.[404] While projects in Petersburg, Wilson, Fort Valley, and dozens of others were not without their problems, VEP aid allowed local leaders to manage registration projects in hopes of increasing black political participation

From April through October, the VEP continued to fund scores of concurrent projects throughout the South, until its finances were depleted. During that time, the VEP registered another 118,000, bringing the grand registration total of the first VEP from 1962 through 1964 to an estimated 688,000. This figure represents the VEP's attempt to arrive at the most accurate representation of its entire project, after taking into account narrative and quantitative reports from local communities. Total southern African American registration now stood at 2,174,200, nearly 44 percent of those qualified to register, up from around 29 percent just two and a half

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[402] Budget for Voter Registration Project, November 1, 1963 – March 1964, Financial Records Subseries 14.1, Box 647, Folder 6, SCLC Papers, MARBL, Emory University; and Wiley A. Branton to Andrew Young, August 5, 1964, Box 138, Folder 7, SCLC Papers, King Center.

[403] Memorandum, Randolph Blackwell to Wiley Branton, Re: "Field Trip to Wilson, North Carolina," February 25, 1964, Frames 1233-1235, Reel 176, SRC Papers.

[404] Memorandum, Randolph Blackwell to Wiley Branton, Re: "Field Trip to Fort Valley, Georgia," February 27, 1964, Frame 1263, Reel 176, SRC Papers.

years earlier. Back when the VEP began its operations, the SRC estimated that black registrants in the South likely did not exceed 1,350,000. An increase of nearly 700,000 black voters in less than three years is remarkable, especially considering the absence of federal legislation protecting the right to vote. The VEP was responsible for one of the most dramatic voter increases in American history.[405]

The VEP's impact could be felt in the 1964 presidential election, and its reverberations would echo into 1965 with the signing of the Voting Rights Act. Lyndon B. Johnson drubbed Barry Goldwater on Election Day, but the South was more competitive. During the week and a half following the election, the SRC poured over the results to estimate the effect of the black vote. Out of the six southern states Johnson won, according to the SRC's report, "four clearly would have gone Republican had it not been for the Negro vote"—Arkansas, Florida, Tennessee, and Virginia.[406] In Virginia, for example, the SRC estimated that 166,600 African Americans voted, and that the VEP had registered around 78,700 during the previous two years. Since Johnson won Virginia by around 77,000 votes, the VEP's work helped deliver Virginia to Johnson. Black voters tipped the scales for Johnson across the South. According to the SRC's research, an estimated 211,800 African Americans voted in Florida, 67,600 in Arkansas, and 168,400 in North Carolina, all states that Johnson won thanks in part to black support.[407]

For the 1964 election, the VEP and the SRC utilized their data to depict the rising strength of the black vote. "For the first time in recent history," according to the SRC report, "the

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[405] The most comprehensive study of voting statistics related to the VEP's work comes from Watters and Cleghorn, *Climbing Jacob's Ladder*, esp. 26-27, 49, 69, 245, and Appendix II, "Voter Registration in the South – 1962, 1964, 1966" on 376-377. See also Annual Report of the Executive Director of the Southern Regional Council, April 1965, 1, Box 12, Folder 15, Dunbar Papers; Richard M. Valelly, *The Two Reconstructions: The Struggle for Black Enfranchisement* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 186; and Appendices 1 and 7.

[406] News Release, "What Happened in the South?" Southern Regional Council, November 15, 1964, Frames 433-443, Reel 177, SRC Papers.

[407] *Ibid*.

two candidates for the Presidency of the United States offered a clear-cut, opposed view on the race issue."[408] The Republicans, long dependent on black support in the South, went with a lily-white strategy, abandoning its historical ties to African Americans and embracing the racial demagoguery of Goldwater and southern segregationists. As more African Americans registered in the South, many white conservatives abandoned the Democratic Party. The SRC studied this historic shift, optimistic that with the rise of black political power, both parties would eventually discard racist tactics and court the African American vote in the future. The prediction was wrong, but on the 1964 election, the SRC correctly found that "Democrats and the nation's majority owe a greater debt to the Negro electorate in the South than has so far been acknowledged."[409]

Having exhausted its funding, the VEP closed while looking forward to a chance to study its data. During the VEP's last months, Randolph Blackwell and Barbara Whittaker resigned, and others began to move on from the VEP. Branton remained through April 1965, using the last of the funds to pay his salary and arrange the data. Two journalists with connections to the SRC, Pat Watters and Reese Cleghorn, would spend the next two years combing through the information to interpret the results. Their book, *Climbing Jacob's Ladder: The Arrival of Negroes in Southern Politics*, released in 1967, served as the first VEP's final report.[410]

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[408] *Ibid*.

[409] *Ibid*.

[410] Minutes, VEP Staff Meeting, July 23, 1964, Frames 147-148, Reel 175, SRC Papers. Leslie Dunbar planned to write the final report, but he left the SRC in August 1965 to join the Field Foundation as Executive Director, and the SRC decided it wanted the report to reach a wider public audience. See Letter to Watters and Cleghorn from Harcourt, Brace and World, Inc., October 21, 1966, Box 1, Folder 15, Dunbar Papers; and Dunbar interview, May 10, 2002, 14.

In his preface to *Climbing Jacob's Ladder*, Leslie Dunbar wrote, "The voter registration campaign was not the whole of the civil rights movement, but it expressed it all."[411] Bus boycotts, sit-ins, Freedom Rides, and other nonviolent actions had spurred the movement forward, but what made those actions stick was voter registration. Civil rights demonstrations highlighted the injustice of segregation, and by turning their anger toward the pursuit of democracy, African Americans secured political privileges that had the potential to reorient society. The next year, the President would sign the Voting Rights Act of 1965 into law, made possible by the two and a half years of VEP-backed indigenous movements that proved African Americans wanted to vote.

The VEP was crucial, according to Watters and Cleghorn, for it pushed "Negro registration off dead center, where it had been for most of the previous decade, and reestablished momentum."[412] During the late 1950s and early 1960s, southern black voter registration efforts were disorganized and disconnected from each other, having only marginal effects on local populations and doing little to challenge white political power. Many saw equal political participation as the key to achieving lasting civil rights. Philanthropists, race leaders, and DOJ officials came together at an opportune moment in 1961 to put together a plan for a united registration effort, one that led to the creation of the VEP and a two and a half year movement that reshaped the South. "The money," the SRC declared, "was perhaps white. Everything else—the planning, the decision-making, the skills, the devoted and hard work—was Negro."[413]

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[411] Leslie W. Dunbar, Preface, in Watters and Cleghorn, *Climbing Jacob's Ladder,* xv-xvi.

[412] Watters and Cleghorn, *Climbing Jacob's Ladder*, 47.

[413] SRC Annual Report of the Executive Director of the Southern Regional Council, A Review of Program Activities During 1964, April 1965, 4, Box 12, Folder 15, Dunbar Papers.

CHAPTER 4: 'BEHIND THE REVOLUTION': THE COUNCIL FOR UNITED CIVIL RIGHTS LEADERSHIP, 1963-1967

On June 12, 1963, in the middle of the night, Mississippi's NAACP field director, Medgar Evers, was shot outside his home in Jackson. One week later, meeting at the lavish Carlyle Hotel in Manhattan, 96 philanthropists and corporate executives met in New York City. These events appear unrelated, but inspired by Evers's murder, Stephen Currier of the Taconic Foundation—the VEP's principal backer—used the tragedy to fundraise for the civil rights movement. Currier gathered wealthy friends and colleagues from New York's high society for breakfast where invited race leaders, including Martin Luther King Jr., James Farmer, and Roy Wilkins, appealed for money. They implored those in the Carlyle ballroom to donate to the struggle because their organizations needed money to expand. Their words had an effect, and many guests opened their checkbooks. The group collected about $100,000 that morning, and they pledged to raise $1,500,000 over the coming year. With this influx of cash, Currier and the leaders of the six major civil rights organizations—now commonly referred to as the "Big Six" including the National Council of Negro Women (NCNW)—created the Council for United Civil Rights Leadership (CUCRL—pronounced "kuck-rul"). They designed CUCRL to bring together the leaders of the major civil rights groups under one banner and raise money for the civil rights movement beyond voter registration and the VEP.[414]

[414] Peter Kihss, "Joint Negro Council Allocates $565,000 to Rights Groups," *New York Times*, July 18, 1963; "Taconic Plays Major Role In Aiding Negro," *New York Amsterdam News*, August 10, 1963; Reese Cleghorn, "The Angels are White: Who Pays the Bills for Civil Rights?" *The New Republic*, August 17, 1963, 12-14; and Garrison unpublished memoir, 34. On Medgar Evers, see Michael Vinson Williams, *Medgar Evers: Mississippi Martyr* (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 2011).

Many historians mention CUCRL, but similar to their treatment of the VEP, few give the group much attention. CUCRL's marginalization within the historical record is partially attributable to CUCRL itself, for members kept their meetings confidential. They met privately to coordinate tactics between organizations, discuss ideas, and to the extent that was possible, control the civil rights movement. In addition to Currier and his associates with the Taconic Foundation, CUCRL included Martin Luther King Jr. for the SCLC, James Farmer of CORE, Roy Wilkins representing the NAACP, Whitney Young of the NUL, Dorothy Height from the NCNW, and James Forman and John Lewis alternating as representatives for SNCC. Later, Jack Greenberg of the NAACP Legal Defense Fund (LDF) and A. Philip Randolph joined. Beginning in February 1963, these leaders met informally at the Taconic Foundation to brainstorm ideas, but Evers's death changed their relationship. Except for the NCNW, these agencies had been working together for over a year through the VEP, but the VEP operated independently of each and concentrated solely on voter registration in the South. While the VEP could only address disfranchisement, the major civil rights groups wanted to do more. Their alliance through CUCRL was pivotal in two major ways.[415]

First, CUCRL served as a common meeting ground between leaders that held the civil rights movement together through broad coalition. Forming the VEP had brought them together in 1961, but since its implementation, they had seen less of each other since the VEP financed their organizations separately. Currier believed it was worthwhile to come together regularly in person. Often meeting in New York, they shared ideas, debated tactics, divvied out money,

[415] On CUCRL in secondary sources, see Nancy J. Weiss, "Creative Tensions in the Leadership of the Civil Rights Movement," in Eagles, ed., *The Civil Rights Movement in America*, 39-55; and Dickerson, *Militant Mediator*, 177-183. James Farmer gives vivid, first-person details of CUCRL meetings in his memoir *Lay Bare the Heart: An Autobiography of the Civil Rights Movement* (New York: Arbor House, 1985), 215-219. Farmer also summarized CUCRL meetings based on his memoir in James Farmer, "Secret Meetings of the Six Who Shaped the Movement," *Ebony* (April 1985): 108-115.

ironed out grievances, pressured the White House on race issues, and helped plan the March on Washington. They listened to different points of view, and they reached compromises. While unity was the goal, working through CUCRL intensified conflicts between leaders. Meetings were often contentious, with big personalities clashing over major and minor differences. Desperate for additional funds, leaders consented to join the group, and although everyone was hopeful that their alliance would be mutually beneficial, disagreements plagued CUCRL from the beginning. Yet CUCRL bound organizations and its leaders together, creating a collective movement for civil rights on the eve of the March on Washington.

Second, a study of CUCRL illuminates the attempt at top-down management of the civil rights movement. With little fanfare, the most powerful race leaders in the United States gathered in the same room with white philanthropists about once every four-to-six weeks to try to order events on the ground—private meetings "behind the revolution."[416] Malcolm X was one of the few alarmed by CUCRL at the time, and while some of his facts were wrong, he pointed out that white philanthropic money muted the militancy of the struggle. His criticisms were aimed at the 1963 March on Washington, but his words highlighted how money influenced the movement. CUCRL tried to call the shots of the struggle, and its members used money to impose behavior, especially regarding SNCC. CUCRL could not control everything, but this behind-the-scenes maneuvering and decision-making helped dictate the course of the movement. From the more conservative NAACP, NCNW, and NUL to the more direct action-oriented CORE, SCLC, and SNCC, race organizations were tied together through large donations from wealthy whites. While the VEP funded registration work across the South, CUCRL tied the civil rights leadership together and tried to restrain militant activism within the black freedom movement.

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[416] Pat Watters, "Atlanta is in Forefront of Quiet but Momentous Civil Rights Move," *Atlanta Journal*, August 21, 1963, clipping in Box 18, Folder 12, Branton Papers.

In their memoirs, Dorothy Height and James Forman remembered CUCRL differently. Height wrote of it with fondness as a space where "we developed a kind of mutual appreciation and respect, an uncommon meeting of minds."[417] But Forman, as a representative of SNCC, felt that when he attended a CUCRL meeting, it was as though "we were in a jungle—a jungle of civil rights hyenas."[418] Once the money ran out, Forman recounted, he knew CUCRL would break apart. He was right, but Height was not altogether wrong, either. Although relationships within CUCRL could be both contentious and affable, together, these leaders maneuvered the civil rights movement in pivotal ways.

After a year sponsoring the VEP through the Taconic Foundation, Stephen Currier had become familiar with several race leaders, but he wanted to become personally involved in the southern movement. Currier believed that the civil rights struggle lacked cooperation between its major organizations. He had the idea of bringing together leaders to discuss larger problems of racism and civil rights. Too often, leaders and organizations faced these issues on their own, and even though each group employed different strategies, everyone had similar goals in mind. Currier wrote Roy Wilkins on February 4, 1963 inviting him to the Taconic Foundation office on February 18 to discuss "a plan which I should like to tell you about."[419] He also invited Farmer, King, Height, Young, and SNCC representatives. Together, they formed a study group—a precursor to CUCRL.

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[417] Dorothy I. Height, *Open Wide the Freedom Gates: A Memoir* (New York: PublicAffairs, 2003), 142.

[418] Forman, *The Making of Black Revolutionaries*, 366. This chapter relies on autobiographies of civil rights leaders, acknowledging that their memories provide unique vantage points, though not always unbiased history. For more, see Kathryn L. Nasstrom, "Between Memory and History: Autobiographies of the Civil Rights Movement and the Writing of Civil Rights History," *Journal of Southern History* 74, no. 2 (May 2008): 325-364.

[419] Stephen R. Currier to Roy Wilkins, February 4, 1963, Folder 001519-006-0702, Group III, Series A, General Office File, Subject File--Register and Vote, Papers of the NAACP, Part 4, Library of Congress.

To hold the assembly together, everyone agreed to abide by certain rules. They consented to monthly meetings where only heads of organizations were allowed. No one could send a substitute. Since Currier was closest to Whitney Young, he tapped his friend to chair the group. To give their meetings substance, the group came up with a list of pressing issues, such as education, housing, and the criminal justice system. Each person chose a topic to research and present to the group. Everyone took their roles seriously. With this format, members learned from each other about multiple problems facing African Americans across the country. They did all of this in addition to their responsibilities to their own organizations. The forum was not only a time for personal education, but a chance to convince more foundations to support the movement through different avenues. "The point of the gathering was to begin to see how American philanthropy could be more supportive of black organizations," recalled Height.[420] They met regularly from February through June 1963, up until the time of Medgar Evers's death. "What was compelling," remembered Currier's assistant, Jane Lee Eddy, was simply that "everybody got to know each other."[421]

When Currier heard about Evers's death, he called Lloyd K. Garrison "to consider what might be done to deal with the crisis."[422] He then invited Young, Farmer, King and Wilkins to his office to talk about an appropriate response. Over the past four months, the group had shared information and ideas, but shaken by the tragedy, Currier was ready to act. In his invitation to King, Currier wrote, "As a citizen, I am prepared at this time to exert every effort to rally

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[420] Dorothy I. Height, '"We Wanted the Voice of a Woman to Be Heard': Black Women and the 1963 March on Washington," in Bettye Collier-Thomas ed., *Sisters in the Struggle: African American Women in the Civil Rights-Black Power Movement* (New York: New York University Press, 2001), 83. See also Height, *Open Wide the Freedom Gates*, 138-139.

[421] Quoted in Weiss, *Whitney M. Young, Jr*., 114.

[422] Garrison, unpublished memoir, 33.

substantial support from those who have not yet participated in a tangible way in the current crisis, as well as the few who have." Handwritten in the corner, Currier told King, "I cannot overemphasize how important I think it that you be with us in this meeting, for your wisdom and your immediate participation."[423] Wilkins and Young were the only two who could attend the meeting on short notice, and they encouraged Currier to use his influence to win over wealthy people to donate to the movement. Currier immediately went to work. He knew that asking for money by telephone or letter was too impersonal because people could be noncommittal. In person, however, and capitalizing on the outrage over Evers's murder, gathering people together in one room and asking for financial assistance had the potential to create a windfall for civil rights groups. In a telegram co-signed by Young, Wilkins, King, Farmer, Height, Greenberg, and Garrison, Currier announced an "emergency meeting to assess the situation and develop immediate ways and means for constructive and coordinated action."[424] Currier booked a ballroom in the Carlyle Hotel on East 76th Street the week after Evers's death, and he invited over 100 philanthropists and corporate executives to attend a special breakfast to hear directly from activists. Race leaders were impressed with Currier's organizational skills and genuine concern for the movement: "Currier really understands what is going on," two of them told journalist Reese Cleghorn.[425] After all of the invitations were sent, Currier had convinced 96 people to attend the breakfast meeting. "Many people he [Currier] talks to are just ashamed of

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[423] Stephen Currier to Martin Luther King Jr., June 12, 1963, Box 8, Folder 3, MLK Papers, King Center (emphasis in original).

[424] Telegram from Stephen Currier et al to List, June 17, 1963, POL1 1963.2, Stephen and Audrey Currier Private Papers, The Plains, Virginia.

[425] Cleghorn, "The Angels are White," 12-13.

some of the things happening in the South, and in the North," Cleghorn reported.[426] Playing on their guilt, Currier brought them into the Carlyle Hotel.[427]

On the morning of June 19, 1963 in the Carlyle Hotel, many of the wealthiest men in New York gathered to hear Martin Luther King Jr., Roy Wilkins, Whitney Young, and other leaders speak about the civil rights movement. Although they covered different topics, the central message was the same: we need more money. These affluent men empathized with African Americans in the South, but they lived in a world apart, not quite grasping their plight, nor understanding the toll of Jim Crow on everyday life. The speakers tried to make them see black struggles more clearly. As the only woman in the group, Dorothy Height shared how many black women were imprisoned in the South and how police abused them. "At the end of the discussion," recalled Height, "Whitney Young made it plain that all of us knew more about what needed to be done and how to do it than our resources would allow. 'We are all hurting,' he declared."[428]

The moneyed crowed enthusiastically committed funds to the civil rights organizations. Many donated large sums on the spot, and others pledged more from their personal accounts and from the corporations or foundations they represented. The Ford and Rockefeller Foundations promised money, as did Currier's Taconic Foundation. After everyone left, money kept pouring in, totaling $565,000 by mid-July. By the next month, $800,000 had been raised, and those

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[426] *Ibid*., 13.

[427] *Ibid*.; "Council for United Civil Rights Leadership: Where Are Negro Donors In $1,500,000 Campaign?" *New Pittsburgh Courier*, July 27, 1963; Fleming, *The Potomac Chronicle*, 87; Height, *Open Wide the Freedom Gates*, 139-140; and Weiss, *Whitney M. Young, Jr*., 115-116. The Carlyle Hotel had a reputation as a popular place to hold discreet meetings involving the rich and famous. See Marie Brenner, "The Inside Story of the Carlyle," *New York Magazine*, December 19, 1983: 28-43; and Alexandra Wolfe, "The Never-Ending Glamour of the Carlyle Hotel, *Wall Street Journal*, September 12, 2013.

[428] Height, *Open Wide the Freedom Gates*, 140. See also Height, '"We Wanted the Voice of a Woman to Be Heard,'" 84; and "Taconic Plays Major Role In Aiding Negro," *New York Amsterdam News*, August 10, 1963.

involved promised another $700,000 by the following year. As the public slowly learned about these funds, rumblings began that the money came with strings attached. Reese Cleghorn, writing for the *New Republic*, tried to find out more. After speaking with those personally involved, he wrote, "It is not truly a case of infiltrating the revolution with money, the sponsors insist; it is just that money, as President Kennedy might say, is 'a part of the great American tradition.' If you are going to have a revolution, it might as well be solvent, and imbued with American know-how."[429]

After acquiring donations, civil rights leaders created a shared program to dispense the funds among themselves. They were attached to one another already through the VEP, but they worried about tax-exemption since they had no intention of funneling the money into the VEP or using it only for voter registration. A few days after the breakfast meeting, the group gathered and formed the Council for United Civil Rights Leadership. CUCRL was a financial clearinghouse, but it was also a space for leaders to continue meeting together for monthly sessions. According to historian David Garrow, CUCRL became a "dual-purpose, supra-organization"—one that allocated funds among its members and provided a "rubric for regular, structured interactions."[430] For tax purposes, the group established two separate entities. CUCRL would be the main organization through which the group identified, and it would be the designation for non-tax-exempt gifts. They also created the Committee for Welfare, Education, and Legal Defense (WELD) to house tax-exempt donations. Since education fell under the mantle of tax-exempt charitable giving according to the IRS's Internal Revenue Code, donations going to the NUL, NCNW, or the NAACP Legal Defense Fund, which became a member of the

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[429] Cleghorn, "The Angels are White," 14. See also Peter Kihss, "Joint Negro Council Allocates $565,000 to Rights Groups," *New York Times*, July 18, 1963; and "Council for United Civil Rights Leadership: Where Are Negro Donors In $1,500,000 Campaign?" *New Pittsburgh Courier*, July 27, 1963.

[430] Garrow, "Philanthropy and the Civil Rights Movement," 9-10.

group soon after the breakfast meeting, were designated within WELD. These groups spent their donations on projects eligible for tax-exemption, abstaining from all types of political activism. The Field Foundation gave upwards of $100,000 to WELD.[431] Contributions to CORE, SNCC, the SCLC, and the NAACP fell under CUCRL as non-tax-exempt.[432]

To split the money, the group came up with a formula that most, but not all, deemed fair. From the CUCRL coffers, each group received 10 percent of their total national budget from the previous fiscal year. That meant the larger organizations received the most from CUCRL. Out of the first $565,000 paid out between the seven groups, the NAACP and NUL received $125,000 each, CORE and the LDF accepted $100,000 each, $50,000 went to both the SCLC and NCNW, and finally, SNCC took the last $15,000.[433] The SCLC was entitled to more, but recent fundraising had been lucrative, and part of its share went instead to the NCNW, a smaller organization planning to use its funds to give scholarships to civil rights workers. While the majority of members were satisfied with the arrangement, SNCC representatives James Forman and John Lewis were not pleased. Without their presence or knowledge, they claimed, the others had configured the formula, and since SNCC operated on a small budget, it was entitled to a miniscule amount by comparison. Lewis blamed Wilkins, who saw him as someone only interested in the NAACP. "We were at the bottom of the barrel. We were considered the kids, the upstarts, and we were given peanuts compared with what the others received," recalled Lewis.[434] Forman was angry that without consulting them, "a neat little formula by which a few crumbs

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[431] Jack Greenberg, *Crusaders in the Courts: How a Dedicated Band of Lawyers Fought for the Civil Rights Revolution* (New York: Basic Books, 1994), 398.

[432] Kihss, "Joint Negro Council Allocates $565,000 to Rights Groups;" Weiss, *Whitney M. Young, Jr*., 117; and Dickerson, *Militant Mediator*, 178.

[433] "Council for United Civil Rights Leadership: Where Are Negro Donors In $1,500,000 Campaign?"

[434] Lewis, *Walking with the Wind*, 232. See also Garrow, *Bearing the Cross*, 278.

would be thrown to SNCC" was accepted without debate from the group.[435] They accepted the small amount as better than nothing, and Forman or Lewis kept attending CUCRL meetings, but they never fully trusted the others in the group.

Giving SNCC a lower amount was a conscious decision on CUCRL's part to limit the radical wing of the civil rights movement from gaining too much power. To the others in the group, SNCC was the most volatile and militant, led by students provoking white authorities in the most dangerous areas of the Deep South. But CORE and the SCLC engaged in nonviolent direct action too, and while members had faith in the leadership capabilities of Farmer and King, there was concern that any one group could upset the balance of the movement by striking out independently in a militant direction. A spokesperson for the group told the black press that a byproduct of CUCRL "will be to strengthen the democratic non-violent nature of groups participating in this, rather than letting them go off half-cocked."[436] Wilkins told *Jet Magazine* that CUCRL respected the autonomy of each group, "allow[ing] them to greatly expand their operations," but that it "will hold regular meetings in an effort to assure responsible conduct in the rights movement."[437] With this quote, Wilkins betrayed the underlying intent of CUCRL. Years later, Whitney Young confirmed Wilkins's sentiment, stating that CUCRL's purpose was to protect the movement so it would not be "taken over by some of those fellows waiting in the wings."[438]

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[435] Forman, *The Making of Black Revolutionaries*, 366.

[436] "Council for United Civil Rights Leadership: Where Are Negro Donors In $1,500,000 Campaign?"

[437] *Jet Magazine*, August 1, 1963, 6.

[438] Quoted in Weiss, *Whitney M. Young, Jr.*, 116.

CUCRL asked VEP director Wiley A. Branton to serve as "chief of staff."[439] Impressed by his leadership and financial management of the VEP, CUCRL wanted Branton to take charge. His experience made him the logical choice after having established a working relationship with philanthropists and race leaders over the past year, learning how to mediate disagreements and stick to strict budgets to maximize registration results through VEP projects. Branton served as CUCRL's coordinator through 1964 while at the same time running the VEP. The VEP remained his primary mission, and although working with CUCRL was congruent to his main job, he brought over Leslie Dunbar's assistant, Vernon Jordan, to be the VEP's Acting Assistant Director beginning in September 1963. Branton flew to New York about once a month to study CUCRL finances and divide the money between organizations. One CUCRL member told reporter Pat Watters that Branton would essentially serve as "president of the Negroes in America"—a telling comment that reflected CUCRL's self-image.[440]

Branton's presence within CUCRL made an immediate impact beyond splitting money between organizations. The Civil Rights Act of 1964 has recently passed, and leaders within each national agency were trying to interpret its finer points. One issue was whether or not activists had to be arrested while testing the desegregation of public accommodations in order to file a complaint to the DOJ. For years, direct-action protests had been effective tools of movement activists, resulting in both brief and long-term incarcerations across the South. But with the Civil Rights Act of 1964, Branton discovered after consulting with lawyers and DOJ officials, it was no longer necessary to carry on a protest to the point of arrest. "The mere denial

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[439] Jane Lee Eddy to Dorothy Height, March 9, 1991, Taconic Foundation Records.

[440] Watters, "Atlanta is in Forefront of Quiet but Momentous Move." See also Branton interview, October 21, 1970, 61; "7 Civil Rights Groups Choose Coordinator to Bolster Activity," *New York Times*, August 16, 1963; "Wiley A. Branton To Knit 7 Rights Groups Together," *New Pittsburgh Courier*, August 24, 1963; and Kilpatrick, *There When We Needed Him*, 102-103.

of service gives rise to a cause of action when it can be shown that the denial was the result of racial discrimination," Branton wrote to CUCRL members. "It would perhaps be good for your branches over the country to know this so as to avoid arrests which would require valuable time of our lawyers and increase our bail problems."[441]

CUCRL's moderating influence on the civil rights movement was also noticeable in planning meetings for the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom in 1963. Although CUCRL was not a direct, monetary supporter of the march, its members, including Currier, were part of strategy sessions. In his memoir, Farmer recalled A. Philip Randolph visiting a CUCRL meeting to explain his idea for the March on Washington and seek their support.[442] Except for Wilkins, everyone was enthusiastic. During the summer of 1963, CUCRL members met several times with Randolph, Bayard Rustin, organized labor, and government officials to plan the march. Senator Hubert H. Humphrey wrote to Currier to discuss the march. Less than a week before the march, CUCRL met once again at the Carlyle Hotel to strategize. Just before August 28, President Kennedy indicated his support for civil rights legislation, prompting leaders within CUCRL to pressure John Lewis to tone down his angry rhetoric he had planned in his speech aimed at the federal government. He complied, demonstrating the power CUCRL exercised within the civil rights movement.[443]

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[441] Memorandum, Wiley A. Branton to All CUCRL Members, July 3, 1964, Box 7, Folder 29, MLK Papers, King Archive.

[442] Farmer, *Lay Bare the Heart*, 239.

[443] Hubert H. Humphrey to Stephen R. Currier, August 12, 1963, Folder 001473-018-0387, Group III, Series A, Administrative File General Office File (Leagues and Organizations)," Papers of the NAACP, Part 21, Library of Congress; Memorandum, Wiley A. Branton to Members of CUCRL & WELD, Re: "Meeting – August 22, 1963," August 15, 1963, Folder 001473-014-0456, Group III, Series A, Administrative File General Office File (Leagues and Organizations)," Papers of the NAACP, Part 21, Library of Congress; Jones, *The March on Washington*, 167. On John Lewis's speech, see Lewis, *Walking with the Wind*, 201-227.

CUCRL's influence on the March on Washington was less financial than it was strategic, pushing the mass demonstration as a peaceful protest without rankling the White House or Congress. The total budget for the march was $117,240, and even though labor groups donated a sizeable portion, Randolph, Rustin, and the planning committee had to come up with the money. Currier's presence in planning meetings created speculation that he funded the rest. Louis Lomax spread a story that the Taconic Foundation donated $1,000,000 to the March on Washington. Suppressing the rumor, a Taconic Foundation spokesman announced, "Not one cent of Mr. Currier's personal funds or of foundation money has gone for the march in any way, shape or form."[444] Agreeing with this statement, historian Paula F. Pfeffer wrote, "If the march committee were indeed assured of as much financial aid from Currier as rumor had it, Randolph would not have been so concerned about expenses."[445]

Soon after August 28, CUCRL began fundraising on its own by selling a vinyl record of the March on Washington and buttons featuring equality signs. Currier himself designed a lapel button with an equality logo, sold for a dollar apiece in stores and at events. By August 1964, the buttons had raised $20,062.79.[446] March on Washington organizers gave exclusive rights to CUCRL of the recordings from the day's events, including all speeches and musical acts. CUCRL created an album—*We Shall Overcome!: A Documentary of the March on Washington*—featuring all performances, including King's "I Have a Dream" speech. In a press

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[444] "Foundation Denies Million-Dollar Gift," *Washington Post*, August 20, 1963; and "Rights March Leaders Will Meet Kennedy," *Los Angeles Times*, August 20, 1963.

[445] Paula F. Pfeffer, *A. Philip Randolph, Pioneer of the Civil Rights Movement* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1990), 265. For the budget amount, see page 259. Dorothy Height also remembered that many assumed CUCRL organized the March on Washington, but CUCRL referred inquirers back to Rustin and Randolph—the two in charge. See Height, "We Wanted the Voice of a Woman to Be Heard," 85-86.

[446] CUCRL Cash Transactions Statement, August 12, 1963-August 6, 1964, Box 7, Folder 29, MLK Papers, King Center.

statement, CUCRL announced, "In making the exclusive grant, Dr. King pointed out that in this way all funds derived from record sales will be channeled directly into the civil rights movement."[447] At least three other labels illegally created their own albums featuring audio from the March on Washington, but the SCLC sued them, and soon CUCRL was the only organization producing the album through a partnership with Broadside Records. Released on October 5, CUCRL leaders coordinated with their own organizations to promote sales. Branton wrote John Lewis soon after its release with an update: "We believe that the spirit of the March—and your role in it—is movingly captured on this record. Most important, it will help keep the civil rights movement alive" by raising more money.[448] Labor groups and churches sold the album for a reduced price of three dollars. In stores, albums sold for $3.98, raising money for CUCRL "to meet costs of the civil rights crisis."[449] While they hoped the record would become "the next national 'million record seller,'" sales were low.[450] The album raised money, but only a disappointing $14,344.50.[451] In April 1965, Branton gave a final update to CUCRL members: "As you probably know, we did not do very well on our record album venture, and we still have approximately 5,300 record albums in the warehouse."[452] CUCRL's attempt to raise their own money failed, making it more reliant on the goodwill of benefactors.

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[447] CUCRL Press Release, October 22, 1963, Box 7, Folder 29, MLK Papers, King Center.

[448] Wiley A. Branton to John Lewis, October 17, 1963, Frame 578, Reel 10, SNCC Papers.

[449] "Rights Council Has Record," *New York Amsterdam News*, October 19, 1963.

[450] Jay Goodlette-Bass to Jim Forman, October 2, 1963, Frame 14, Reel 6, SNCC Papers.

[451] CUCRL Cash Transactions Statement, August 12, 1963-August 6, 1964.

[452] Memorandum, Wiley A. Branton to All CUCRL Members, Re: "Final Settlement on 'March on Washington' Album," April 9, 1965, Frame 588, Reel 10, SNCC Papers. See also "King Assigns Rights to 'I Have A Dream'" *Afro-American*, November 2, 1963; Dickerson, *Militant Mediator*, 179; and Brian Ward, *Just My Soul Responding: Rhythm and Blues, Black Consciousness, and Race Relations* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 273-275.

CUCRL almost disintegrated in late 1963 over an idea for a Christmas boycott. By demonstrating the purchasing power of African Americans, the SCLC had emphasized economic issues during the Birmingham movement earlier in the spring. King wanted a national boycott, which SNCC also supported, but fearing the strategy was a way for the SCLC to expand into the North and into NAACP and NUL territory, Wilkins opposed the idea. Even though King tried to assuage those misgivings, according to historian David Garrow, "Wilkins and other moderate figures worked behind the scenes to ensure that SNCC and SCLC's national boycott idea would be rebuffed at the next meeting of CUCRL in New York on October 4."[453] To preserve the unity of the group, King backed down. Instead of an all-out Christmas boycott, CUCRL took a more conservative approach, creating a "Holiday Gift Fund" and encouraging people to donate at least five dollars to CUCRL that December. The Christmas campaign raised only $3,153.50.[454]

In late 1963 while CUCRL fundraised, Malcolm X called out the group. In his "Message to the Grass Roots" delivered in Detroit on November 10, 1963, he criticized Stephen Currier, CUCRL, and the March on Washington as a concerted effort by white men to moderate the movement. He oversimplified the June 19 breakfast meeting as Currier telling a room full of black leaders, "By you all fighting each other, you are destroying the civil-rights movement."[455] Currier injected money into the movement, according to Malcolm X, changing its trajectory by putting white liberals in charge. The March on Washington was initially a grassroots-led black revolution, but in Malcolm X's mind, Currier and CUCRL wrested control away from the

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[453] Garrow, *Bearing the Cross*, 299.

[454] CUCRL Cash Transactions Statement, August 12, 1963-August 6, 1964. See also '"Big 7' of Civil Rights Have Unique Xmas Plan," *New Pittsburgh Courier*, November 23, 1963; and "Rights Council Rejects Yule Ban," *Atlanta Daily World*, October 8, 1963.

[455] Malcolm X, "Message to the Grass Roots," November 10, 1963, speech at King Solomon Baptist Church in Detroit at Northern Negro Grass Roots Leadership Conference, in *Malcolm X Speaks: Selected Speeches and Statements* (New York: Merit Publishers, 1965), 15.

people: "The white man put the Big Six at the head of it; made them the march. They became the march. They took it over."[456] Malcolm X termed it the "farce" on Washington, and in another speech in early December, he described the negative influence of white money: "This shrewd maneuver placed the white liberal and the Taconic Foundation in the position to exercise influence and control over the six civil rights leaders and, by working through them, to control the entire civil rights movement, including the March on Washington."[457]

Soon after Malcolm X's comments, Stephen Currier distanced himself from CUCRL. The charges dismayed Currier, who did not see his involvement as an attempt to moderate the civil rights movement. In his mind, he was a neutral benefactor. Currier wrote to CUCRL members that he was happy to help raise money, but he did not want to "allow my involvement to generate public confusion as to the true nature of this Council" or to "permit my official role to serve as a pretext for attacks on the Council as a part of some white 'conspiracy' to 'take over' or 'de-fang' the civil rights effort."[458] Currier stepped back, at least publicly, while he remained an official part of the group. Wilkins spoke for the rest when he wrote Currier on New Years Eve, "Your prompt action, spurred by your conviction that something very specific had to be done following the Evers tragedy, led to the only forward-looking program that grew out of those months."[459] Even though Currier remained committed, he grew frustrated by the growing animosity within CUCRL, reaching a tipping point in September 1964 when the NAACP called

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[456] *Ibid*., 16.

[457] Malcolm X, "God's Judgment of White America (The Chickens Are Coming Home to Roost)," December 4, 1963, in *Malcolm X: The End of White World Supremacy: Four Speeches* (New York: Arcade Publishing, 2011), 142.

[458] Stephen R. Currier to CUCRL Members, December 3, 1963, Folder 001473-014-0456, Group III, Series A, Administrative File General Office File (Leagues and Organizations)," Papers of the NAACP, Part 21, Library of Congress.

[459] Roy Wilkins to Stephen R. Currier, December 31, 1963, Folder 001473-014-0456, Group III, Series A, Administrative File General Office File (Leagues and Organizations)," Papers of the NAACP, Part 21, Library of Congress.

a meeting to discuss a "moratorium on demonstrations until after the November elections, [with Currier] feeling that the meeting should have been called through the Council."[460] Currier resigned, but the group insisted on keeping him around loosely affiliated as an associate.

Even with its problems, CUCRL continued to meet and divide money between August 1963 and 1966. King, Wilkins, Farmer, Height, Young, Forman, Lewis, and Greenberg were the principal collaborators. A. Philip Randolph joined later in 1965. Branton sent everyone a reminder a week or two beforehand with information on the location and time of meeting, often at the Carlyle Hotel or the Taconic Foundation office. In addition to the major donations inspired at the first breakfast meeting, the United Auto Workers contributed, as did other foundations and private individuals. Eliot D. Pratt, a rich Connecticut farmer and member of the American Friends Service Committee, gave the most at $200,000.[461] King later gave CUCRL $17,000 of his Nobel Peace Prize award.[462] Currier donated another $6,000 to CUCRL, along with an additional $6,000 each to CORE, the NAACP, the NAACP's *Crisis* magazine, the SCLC, and $4,000 to SNCC.[463] At a meeting on December 3, 1963, members voted to give SNCC $10,000—less than all other groups—illustrating yet again the group's control by allocating only a fraction of its income to student activists.[464] Donations kept arriving, and Branton and the group discussed how to divide the pot. Often, the process was painful because everyone wanted money, and each had a case that they needed it the most. Tempers sometimes flared, and Branton was called upon to make tough financial decisions. Dunbar recalled that Branton often returned

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[460] "Millionaire Quits Leadership Council," *New York Amsterdam News*, September 19, 1964.

[461] Wiley A. Branton to James Forman, December 10, 1963, Frame 584, Reel 10, SNCC Papers.

[462] Wiley A. Branton to Martin Luther King Jr., January 15, 1965, Box 7, Folder 30, MLK Papers, King Archive.

[463] Stephen Currier to Wiley A. Branton, December 23, 1963, PHI1.39, Currier Family Papers.

[464] Branton to Forman, December 10, 1963.

to Atlanta worn down after overseeing a CUCRL meeting in New York: "Wiley said that some of the sessions were pretty awful."[465]

CUCRL gathered to discuss strategy, but each member was unique, and their organizations had philosophical differences. They lobbied Congress and the White House for a civil rights bill and declared the death penalty immoral. Occasionally, they released joint statements as CUCRL—a unified civil rights voice.[466] But disagreements metastasized, and as much as CUCRL tried to influence the direction of the movement, it usually reacted to events on the ground rather than shape them. According to Whitney Young, CUCRL was "a place where people could talk through events which they were supposed to be in control of but actually weren't."[467] Within their private meetings, James Forman charged other leaders with being too conservative, Wilkins belittled King and the SCLC for lacking substance, and everyone fought over money. While Farmer insisted CUCRL "was not a squabbling squad," members were too far apart on most matters, creating as much division as collaboration.[468] After many years, Farmer romantically remembered CUCRL as "the knights of the round table, but there was no King Arthur. Each one there was a leader and no one *had* a leader."[469]

CUCRL became less effective once the VEP ended in late 1964 and Branton moved on, never reaching the full $1,500,000 goal. Attendance dropped, and meetings became infrequent.

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[465] Dunbar interview, December 18, 1978, 18. See also Memorandum, Wiley A. Branton to Members of CUCRL, Re: "Next Meeting of Council," November 18, 1963, Folder 001473-014-0456, Group III, Series A, Administrative File General Office File (Leagues and Organizations)," Papers of the NAACP, Part 21, Library of Congress; and Dickerson, *Militant Mediator*, 178-179.

[466] The CUCRL called the death penalty a "barbaric relic of the past." See Jack Greenberg to Governor Nelson Rockefeller, May 21, 1965, Folder 001473-014-0456, Group III, Series A, Administrative File General Office File (Leagues and Organizations)," Papers of the NAACP, Part 21, Library of Congress.

[467] Quoted in Weiss, "Creative Tensions in the Leadership of the Civil Rights Movement," 44.

[468] Farmer, *Lay Bare the Heart*, 219.

[469] *Ibid*., 216.

At a CUCRL gathering on June 17, 1965 in which several members did not show up, Forman "asserted his feeling that Council meetings should be fully attended by all Council members. The attendance lack was deemed a bad investment of time for those in attendance if all members were not present."[470] By February 1966, $67,000 remained in CUCRL's account, quickly divided between groups with no more coming in.[471] In January 1967, Jack Greenberg sent word to all CUCRL members that "there are no more funds to be distributed" and that keeping CUCRL around was beginning to cost tax money. He and Young agreed that "procedures should be undertaken to legally liquidate" CUCRL, giving everyone two weeks to object.[472] No one did, and without any media attention, CUCRL ended.[473]

Looking back, Whitney Young believed CUCRL reacted to events more often than shaped them, but taken as a whole, this coterie of leadership tried to impose their will on the movement. CUCRL was not as nefarious as Malcolm X portrayed it, but it tried to moderate the civil rights struggle. SNCC was isolated and deprived of funding. CUCRL helped shape the March on Washington. The SCLC's idea of a nationwide Christmas boycott was shelved. CUCRL did not stop SNCC from functioning or dictate other SCLC policies, but the inner circle tried to keep control. Summing up CUCRL in his memoir with both humor and criticism, James Farmer calculated that, within the larger civil rights movement, members comprised "one-fourth leadership, one-fourth showmanship, one-fourth one-upsmanship, and one-fourth partnership."[474]

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[470] CUCRL Meeting Minutes, June 17, 1965, Box 7, Folder 30, MLK Papers, King Archive.

[471] CUCRL Meeting Minutes, February 25, 1966, Box 7, Folder 31, MLK Papers, King Archive.

[472] Arthur Q. Funn to Martin Luther King Jr., January 30, 1967, Box 7, Folder 31, MLK Papers, King Archive.

[473] See Dickerson, *Militant Mediator*, 182; Weiss, "Creative Tensions in the Leadership of the Civil Rights Movement," 45; Weiss, *Whitney M. Young, Jr.*, 118; and Greenberg, *Crusaders in the Courts*, 398-399.

[474] Farmer, *Lay Bare the Heart*, 215.

CHAPTER 5: 'VOTE-LESS PEOPLE ARE A HOPELESS PEOPLE': THE SECOND VOTER EDUCATION PROJECT, 1965-1968

In February 1965, a few months removed from the end of the first VEP, Bayard Rustin published "From Protest to Politics" in *Commentary*. Famous for its characterization of the civil rights movement's first decade as the "classical phase," Rustin's essay called for civil rights activists to begin focusing on party politics. The time had come, he wrote, to stop demonstrating in the streets. Nonviolent protest had united a movement and ended public discrimination, but the remaining challenges of racial and economic inequality could only be solved through political action. Rustin wanted to see activists get involved in local politics and steer the Democratic Party to the left, bringing together African Americans, union workers, and white liberals into a powerful coalition to counter the growing influence of the Right. While greater citizenship rights were now guaranteed under the Civil Rights Act of 1964, African Americans still needed to fight for better education, healthcare, employment opportunities, housing, and voting access—none of which could be done effectively without political organization. "Here is where the cutting edge of the civil rights movement can be applied," wrote Rustin. "We must see to it that the reorganization of the 'consensus party' proceeds along lines which will make it an effective vehicle for social reconstruction."[475]

Those involved with the VEP and the SRC did not need convincing. A year before Rustin's article appeared, Leslie Dunbar argued that the only way for the American South to overcome poverty and racial affliction was "to do something that *would* matter to the world, and

[475] Bayard Rustin, "From Protest to Politics," *Commentary*, February 1965. https://www.commentarymagazine.com/article/from-protest-to-politics-the-future-of-the-civil-rights-movement/

that is to become a rarity, a bi-racial community at peace with itself. It can do so, I think, only by integrating Negroes into its political processes."[476] For two and a half years, the VEP had worked to realize the political potential of southern African Americans by giving out hundreds of grants to grassroots campaigns registering people to vote. In the process, VEP staff worked with local activists, financed drives, collected data on disfranchisement, published reports, and helped register nearly 700,000 people before the 1964 election. Funded by progressive foundations, the VEP had a similar vision as Rustin: equip southern African Americans with the power to change their communities through political action.

But by the time Rustin's essay came out, the VEP was no longer operational, and many disagreed with Rustin that direct action had reached its full potential. Major events of 1965 further isolated Rustin's advice. Malcolm X was murdered; President Lyndon Johnson escalated the war in Vietnam; Daniel Patrick Moynihan's controversial report, *The Negro Family*, exasperated African Americans by blaming black poverty on weak family units. On March 7, the march from Selma to Montgomery ended in chaos as police troopers attacked peaceful protestors on the Edmund Pettus Bridge. Bloody Sunday, as it came to be called, provided the motivation for President Johnson and Congress to usher the Voting Rights Act into law on August 6, but less than a week later, rioting broke out in Los Angeles. To many, militant direct action was needed more than ever, not less as Rustin advocated.

While the VEP's office sat closed for much of 1965, it's parent organization, the SRC, continued to operate. As early as March, senior staff began exploring the possibility of re-booting the VEP. They noticed the shift to black nationalism within the movement, but they also believed the time had come for increased political activism. The idea gained traction in August

[476] Leslie W. Dunbar, "The Changing Mind of the South: The Exposed Nerve," *The Journal of Politics* 26, no. 1 (February 1964), 20. Emphasis in original.

after the passage of the Voting Rights Act of 1965—a sweeping piece of legislation that protected the right to vote by dismantling literacy tests and promising federal intervention in counties that disenfranchised its citizens. But the Voting Rights Act did not automatically register anyone. The burden of registration still fell on individuals, and the SRC realized there would be a greater need for voter mobilization and education. Through the Voting Rights Act, the possibility now existed for southern African Americans to register en masse and seize the kind of political power outlined in Rustin's essay.

From 1966 through 1968, the second VEP equipped southern African Americans to compete for poll power through voter registration, citizenship education, and leadership training. The VEP did so by trying to manage the movement, and by funneling philanthropic money into local registration projects. Although Rustin's vision of a progressive Democratic Party never materialized, the VEP contributed to the re-creation of a two-party South as African Americans gained voting strength and earned elected positions most often as Democrats, intensifying the white conservative exodus to the Republican Party.[477] These changes occurred because the VEP continued to push voting rights as the main strategy of the civil rights movement. The VEP, Rustin, and many local and national civil rights leaders retained a faith in the American system of government. Realizing that voter registration was never the final objective, the VEP steered the civil rights movement forward by kindling black political action across the American South.

[477] The VEP was one ingredient among many that contributed to party realignment. See also Earl and Merle Black, *The Rise of Southern Republicans* (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2002); Crespino, *In Search of Another Country*; Lassiter, *The Silent Majority*; Steven P. Miller, *Billy Graham and the Rise of the Republican South* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009); Glenn Feldman, ed., *Painting Dixie Red: When, Where, Why, and How the South Became Republican* (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 2011); Joseph Crespino, *Strom Thurmond's America* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2012); and Bryan Hardin Thrift, *Conservative Bias: How Jesse Helms Pioneered the Rise of Right-Wing Media and Realigned the Republican Party* (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 2014).

Building the Second VEP

On March 15, 1965, President Johnson addressed the nation one week after Bloody Sunday in support of African American voting rights. "Many of the issues of civil rights are very complex and most difficult," Johnson said. "But about this there can and should be no argument. Every American citizen must have an equal right to vote."[478] The civil rights movement's latest nonviolent demonstration stirred the President to action, and he urged Congress to work with him to pass legislation to protect the right to vote. In his speech, he proposed striking down all barriers to the franchise. Johnson also promised federal registrars where state officials refused to enfranchise African Americans. His words encouraged civil rights activists, who for the first time heard the President offer a viable path forward to end disfranchisement. Five months later, the Voting Rights Act became law.

Leslie Dunbar and Stephen Currier both tuned into the President's address, and his words inspired them to re-establish the VEP. Having been involved in the VEP—Dunbar as executive director of the SRC and Currier as the VEP's primary financier—they knew that legislation alone would not be enough to solidify black registration. For the Voting Rights Act to fulfill its promise, the VEP needed to come back. Dunbar wrote Currier the day after the President's speech letting him know that staff at the SRC had been thinking about restarting the VEP with a new emphasis on citizenship education. Between 1962 and 1964, the VEP had focused on registration alone; the next step, with the promise of federal involvement, was to help create a knowledgeable electorate. Dunbar was considering reaching out to the Field Foundation, the Stern Family Fund, and the Rockefeller Brothers Fund for renewed financial support, but he first

[478] Transcript, President Lyndon B. Johnson address to Congress, March 15, 1965. http://www.lbjlibrary.org/lyndon-baines-johnson/speeches-films/president-johnsons-special-message-to-the-congress-the-american-promise

wanted to know Currier's thoughts on further Taconic Foundation sponsorship. What was clear, Dunbar wrote Currier, was that "there is a special need for resumption of VEP-type activity."[479]

Throughout 1965, Dunbar and the SRC discussed ways to train black communities to translate their votes into power. In the SRC's opinion, the missing key was citizenship education. The focus needed to be on participatory politics, but many black communities knew little about how governments actually functioned. After conducting a survey of leading civil rights, labor, and political figures to determine what a new voter education program should look like, the SRC recommended starting a new VEP with an emphasis on citizenship education. Quoting a common phrase from movement activists, the author of the report wrote, "vote-less people are a hopeless people. This means that outlawing discrimination against qualified potential voters is not enough. Getting them registered is not enough. The primary objective should be that they use their vote and use it wisely."[480]

In promoting registration activism in the wake of the Voting Rights Act, the SRC was also trying to counter arguments from black activists disillusioned with democratic solutions. Dunbar preached that direct action militancy was ineffective when detached from political strategies. One Ford Foundation representative wrote of Dunbar, "He has been telling demonstration-prone civil rights groups that they need to learn 'that change has occurred, and that it no longer suffices merely to keep doing the same things over and over, however dramatic and apparently effective they may be.'"[481] Echoing philanthropists and other civil rights leaders

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[479] Leslie W. Dunbar to Stephen R. Currier, March 16, 1965, Folder "Southern Regional Council: Voter Education Project, 1965 – June 1966," Taconic Foundation Records.

[480] Memorandum, Southern Regional Council, "Programming for Civic Education," September 1965, Folder "Southern Regional Council: Voter Education Project, 1965- June 1966," Taconic Foundation Records.

[481] Confidential Report of the Southern Regional Council, by the Public Affairs Program of the Ford Foundation, May 7, 1965, Unpublished Reports, Series 010437, Office of the President, Office Files of Henry T. Heald, Ford Foundation Records.

who worried over the changing ideologies of SNCC and CORE, the SRC pushed to keep the civil rights movement unified around the pursuit of voting rights and black political power.

While Dunbar helped plan a new VEP, he resigned from the SRC to manage the Field Foundation, moving into a role similar to Currier as a financier of the civil rights movement. As executive director, Dunbar would oversee numerous programs beyond the civil rights field, but the position would also allow him to ensure the VEP received philanthropic support. As Dunbar later recalled, "The first assignment I gave myself when I got to New York was to get VEP re-funded."[482] During his years as SRC executive director, Dunbar had gained firsthand experience interacting with foundations and convincing them to invest in the civil rights movement. "I believe that I have a realistic view of how much and only how much money can accomplish" as well as "how limited [money] is," Dunbar wrote a Field Foundation official soon after accepting the position.[483] Knowing what more money could do, Dunbar sent around the SRC's proposal for a renewed voter education program to foundations, but even though many found "virtual unanimity" on the need to restart the VEP, philanthropists were slow to promise funding.[484] Even Currier seemed hesitant about recommitting the Taconic Foundation to the VEP once again. After the success of the 1962-1964 project and the promise of the Voting Rights Act, some felt that the mission had been successful. Dunbar made them see otherwise. With his new position, he first committed the Field Foundation to the new VEP. He then spoke with other philanthropists, including Currier, and convinced them to support the VEP once again. Even

[482] Dunbar interview, December 18, 1978, 56.

[483] Leslie W. Dunbar to Maxwell Hahn, May 16, 1965, Box 8, Folder 4, Dunbar Papers.

[484] Leslie W. Dunbar to Stephen R. Currier, September 22, 1965, Folder "Southern Regional Council: Voter Education Project, 1965 – June 1966," Taconic Foundation Records.

though Dunbar had left the SRC, his move to the Field Foundation had been fortuitous, all but guaranteeing a new VEP with his influence within the world of philanthropy.[485]

In December 1965, the SRC applied for grants to begin the re-imagined VEP. Dunbar was waiting for it at the Field Foundation, as were other philanthropists with whom he had talked to about the project. The SRC's new executive director was Paul Anthony, a 37-year old white Virginian who had graduated from the University of Miami and had worked at the SRC since 1956 as an administrative assistant and researcher. Anthony wrote Dunbar, "Here it is. This represents the best work of a lot of people here."[486] The SRC proposed another three-year VEP "to reach those persons in the region still unregistered and bring them and others more fully into the political life of their communities."[487] The VEP would continue to be non-partisan, holding to its tax-exempt status under the SRC. In addition to voter registration, the new VEP would also concentrate on citizenship education and leadership training to ensure a powerful black political presence in the South. According to the SRC's research, around 2,300,000 African Americans were registered in the South, leaving some 2,000,000 more who had yet to take advantage of the Voting Rights Act. Over the next several months, the SRC received enough financial support from foundations to go forward with the VEP. For its first year, $100,000 came from the Field Foundation; $150,000 from the Taconic Foundation; $50,000 from the Rockefeller Brothers

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[485] Dunbar interview, December 18, 1978, 56.; and "Atlantan Will Head Field Foundation," *Washington Post*, August 9, 1965.

[486] Paul Anthony to Leslie W. Dunbar, December 7, 1965, Box 2S438, Folder "SRC, Voter Registration, 1962-1965," Field Foundation Archives. See also "Southern Reg. Council Picks New Director," *Pittsburgh Courier*, August 21, 1965; and Dunbar interview, December 18, 1978, 44, 55-56, 58.

[487] Grant Request, Southern Regional Council, "A Proposal for Support of a Project in Citizenship Participation," December 1965, Box 2S438, Folder "SRC, Voter Registration, 1962-1965," Field Foundation Archives.

Fund; $24,000 from the Ford Foundation; and $1,000 from the Marion Ascoli Fund. With $325,000 for the first year and the assurance of additional funding, the VEP took shape.[488]

While Anthony and Dunbar did most of the planning, finding a new executive director for the VEP was crucial. Wiley Branton had excelled in that role, but since he had taken a federal job, the VEP needed someone new. Vernon Jordan became the top choice. First arriving at the SRC in 1963, Jordan worked as Dunbar's assistant, and he later served as Branton's acting assistant director for the VEP. For a while, Jordan was a candidate to replace Dunbar as SRC executive director, but he was young, and Dunbar was annoyed that Jordan quit the SRC to work for the Office for Economic Opportunity (OEO). But as plans for the new VEP came together, Jordan was the logical choice to lead the program. He agreed to leave the OEO and become the VEP's executive director in October 1965.[489]

Born on August 15, 1935, Vernon Jordan grew up in a middle class family in Atlanta. The Jordans lived in a neighborhood adjacent to Atlanta's community of African American universities, and along with helping his mother cater professional conferences, Vernon grew up watching and interacting with black professors, attorneys, ministers, and community leaders. He came of age in a black metropolis, but his family's roots were in rural Georgia, and they often took vacations to visit grandparents and cousins. On these trips, Vernon caught glimpses of the South's racial order he did not often witness in Atlanta, such as his aunt telling him to call his white playmate "Mr. Bobby" when they reached adolescence. Vernon stopped playing with Bobby instead.[490]

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[488] Financial Report on Programs Assisted by the Voter Education Project, as of July 15, 1966, Folder "Southern Regional Council: Voter Education Project, July – December, 1966," Taconic Foundation Records.

[489] Jordan, *Vernon Can Read!*, 179; and Dunbar interview, December 18, 1978, 55-56.

[490] Jordan, *Vernon Can Read!*, 24-25.

After graduating from DePauw University, Jordan attended Howard University School of Law to train with the nation's foremost civil rights lawyers. Jordan first became interested in politics and the civil rights movement at DePauw, but it was during a visit home to Atlanta where he heard Martin Luther King Jr. speak that roused him: "King's words were so powerful, his delivery so inspired, that I knew right then and there that I was going to actively participate in the civil rights movement. There was just no doubt in my mind about that."[491] He moved to Washington, DC in 1957, and for the next three years, Jordan trained with other civil rights-minded students preparing for a life using the law to challenge segregation. He graduated in 1960 and moved back to Atlanta to begin his career.[492]

Jordan's first job out of law school was with Don Hollowell in Atlanta, a well-regarded civil rights lawyer who worked with the NAACP and LDF. For a year, Jordan traveled with Hollowell across Georgia to meet clients falsely accused of rape, violence, or for violating the rules of race. In 1961, Jordan helped Hollowell and the LDF defend Hamilton Holmes and Charlayne Hunter when they enrolled at the University of Georgia. Later that year, he was hired as the NAACP's field director for Georgia. For about two years, Jordan crisscrossed Georgia helping set up new NAACP chapters, leading membership drives, encouraging old branches to become more active, and promoting voter registration campaigns. Excelling at his job, he caught the attention of Leslie Dunbar in the spring of 1963, who asked Jordan to be his executive assistant at the SRC. Jordan jumped at the chance.[493]

Under Dunbar, Jordan travelled the South, researched civil rights issues, wrote reports, communicated with various activists and organizations, helped with fundraising, and developed

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[491] *Ibid*., 83.

[492] *Ibid*., 68-125.

[493] *Ibid*., 126-168.

relationships with foundations. He also aided Wiley Branton and the VEP during its final year by filling in when Branton was in New York overseeing CUCRL meetings. After the first VEP ended, Jordan took a job with the OEO, but after the Voting Rights Act passed, Jordan thought that a renewed VEP could be even more effective than the first. Years earlier when Jordan worked for the NAACP, his supervisor, Ruby Hurley, had taught him that segregationists only understood two things: "the dollar and the ballot. Those interested in maintaining white supremacy worked hard to keep blacks away from both."[494] When Paul Anthony asked Jordan to return to the SRC and lead the second VEP, he had no hesitation. He would use the dollar to acquire the ballot.

After Jordan agreed to serve as director beginning on December 1, news began to spread that the SRC was restarting the VEP. Alan Gartner, CORE's community relations director, wrote Anthony, "We are very pleased that the Southern Regional Council plans to continue voter registration work using the VEP model."[495] "Since the demise of the old voter project," Gartner later told Jordan, CORE had continued its registration work registering about 29,000 in 1965, but with the VEP, it could do more.[496] Just before the year ended, Martin Luther King Jr. wrote Jordan, "We were very pleased with the manner in which VEP operated in the past years, and we found this quite helpful to our total movement." The Voting Rights Act, King continued, "means very little in view of the limited government action, and our situation remains essentially unchanged in the majority of southern states."[497] John A. Morsell, the NAACP's director of

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[494] *Ibid*., 43. See also *Ibid*., 166-182. On Jordan's political ideology at the time, see Interview with Vernon E. Jordan Jr. by Robert Penn Warren, March 17, 1964, Louie B. Bunn Center for Oral History, University of Kentucky.

[495] Alan Gartner to Paul Anthony, October 25, 1965, Box 62, Folder 14, Office Files, VEP Records.

[496] Alan Gartner to Vernon E. Jordan Jr., November 30, 1965, Box 62, Folder 14, Office Files, VEP Records.

[497] Martin Luther King Jr. to Vernon E. Jordan Jr., December 28, 1965, Box 22, Folder 40, MLK Papers, King Center.

branches, told Jordan, "There is no question as to the immense value of SRC's previous voter registration project." Although the NAACP's experience with the first VEP "was marked occasionally by misunderstanding" due to the "cumbersome system" of finances whereby the VEP sent money to the national office to distribute to local branches, much had been accomplished. The NAACP was currently only doing registration work in Alabama, Mississippi, South Carolina and Texas, "but the restriction to these four states is solely a reflection of the limited resources upon which we can draw at this time."[498] Without the VEP, the major race organizations had to scale back their registration fieldwork. News of its return was greeted with excitement from those who saw firsthand the benefits of the first VEP.

Once Jordan rejoined the SRC, he put together a small staff for the VEP. They continued to share office space with the SRC on Forsyth Street in downtown Atlanta. He hired Thaddeus Olive as the administrative assistant to focus on finances and grant disbursements. Olive and Jordan had attended high school together, and since Jordan needed an accountant he could trust, Olive was an ideal choice. The research director was Marvin Wall, responsible for studying registration statistics and writing reports. Nobbie Morgan was Jordan's secretary. Later on, the VEP hired more office help, student interns, and a field director. But for now, Jordan and Anthony were content to keep VEP office personnel small to maximize the amount they could dispense to registration campaigns.[499]

Months after the Voting Rights Act had gone into effect, Nicholas Katzenbach, the United States Attorney General, criticized race organizations for not doing more to register

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[498] John A. Morsell to Vernon E. Jordan Jr., December 3, 1965, Box 2S438, Folder "SRC, Voter Registration, 1962-1965," Field Foundation Archives.

[499] Annual Report of the Executive Director of the Southern Regional Council for 1965, January 1966, p. 37, Box 2S440, Folder "Southern Regional Council (State Councils), 1961," Field Foundation Archives; "VEP in Second Year; 50 Projects Funded," *VEP News* 1, no. 1 (June 1967); and Interview with Thaddeus Olive by Susan Glisson, November 23, 2002, Southern Regional Council Oral History Collection, UF Digital Collections, George A. Smathers Libraries, University of Florida.

southerners. Civil rights activists were in turn upset that the DOJ was slow to send in registrars and had not placed enough counties under federal supervision believed to disfranchise black citizens. As Jordan planned an early 1966 start for the VEP, he learned that Katzenbach wanted to help with the official kick-off. Instead of feeling honored, Jordan was skeptical of Katzenbach's intentions. VEP staff feared Katzenbach's goal was to soften criticism aimed at his office. Jordan also believed any public mentions of specific foundation grants, as Katzenbach wanted to do, would be inappropriate. But Jordan sensed an opportunity. Jordan was against any program that made the Attorney General the center of attention at the VEP's expense, but he was open to Katzenbach delivering a speech on the federal government's support for voting rights. It would be a chance to hear directly from the Attorney General in a room packed with race activists demanding that the DOJ do more to enforce the Voting Rights Act.[500]

While planning for the Attorney General's speech, the SRC announced the new VEP to the press on February 18, 1966. Emphasizing that both the Republican National Committee and Democratic National Committee had once again endorsed the VEP as a non-partisan venture, the VEP's goal was to register the estimated 2,000,000 unregistered African Americans in the South. The VEP would work alongside the major civil rights groups, but it promised to heavily invest in grassroots organizations. From lessons learned between 1962-1964, the VEP realized the right to vote was only the first step to political empowerment.[501]

On February 28, 10 days after the VEP's announcement, over 300 civil rights leaders gathered in Atlanta to hear the Attorney General speak on voting rights. Katzenbach heaped

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[500] Memorandum, Vernon E. Jordan Jr. to Paul Anthony, December 29, 1965, Box 2S438, Folder "SRC, Voter Registration, 1962-1965," Field Foundation Archives.

[501] Press Release, Southern Regional Council, February 18, 1966, Folder 7573, North Carolina Fund Records #4710, Southern Historical Collection, Louis Round Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill (hereafter NCF Records). See also "New Voter Drive Opened in South," *New York Times*, February 18, 1966; and Robert E. Baker, "Project That Registered 700,000 Again Seeks Negro Voters in South," *Washington Post*, February 18, 1966.

praise on the first VEP, which was "even more remarkable considering that it came entirely before the Voting Rights Act struck down so many of the barriers." Since August, he told them, around 300,000 African Americans had registered, including 51,000 in Mississippi, 56,000 in Alabama, and 53,000 in Louisiana. While the Voting Right Act put checks in place to make sure states could no longer disfranchise people, Katzenbach told his audience that the onus to register people was on the civil rights organizations. The DOJ was doing its part by responding to complaints, sending in registrars, and making sure literacy tests and poll taxes were no longer in use. Now, activists needed to move unregistered people to their county's registrar office and have them sign up—a simple act, he suggested, since the legal hurdles were gone. Echoing Bayard Rustin, if only vaguely, he said it was time for the civil rights movement to "turn from protest to affirmation."[502]

The audience was not happy. Katzenbach received only minor applause when he stepped off the stage. Reporters surrounded leaders afterwards to hear their opinions. Not only were movement activists displeased that the Attorney General did not promise additional federal registrars, but they were also irritated that he blamed their race organizations for not doing more to register people. Although Katzenbach indicated his office was doing all that it could to help, race leaders disagreed, and they thought it was wrong for him to suggest that private groups were responsible for registration. To them, it felt as though the federal government was distancing itself from the civil rights movement, content to let the Voting Rights Act speak for itself without doing more to implement it. "He [Katzenbach] put the burden right back on us," one SRC member told the *New York Times*.[503] Audience members were also put off by Katzenbach's

[502] Address by Attorney General Nicholas Katzenbach to the Southern Regional Council, February 28, 1966, Box 2S438, Folder "SRC, Voter Registration, 1962-1965," Field Foundation Archives.

[503] John Herbers, "U.S. To Underplay Voter Drive Role," *New York Times*, March 1, 1966.

comments that protest tactics were no longer appropriate. Martin Luther King Jr. told the *Atlanta Constitution*, "There has been too much caution in sending out registrars. In some cases, I think we will have to demonstrate."[504]

Katzenbach's comments indicated to Jordan that the VEP was necessary now more than ever. The government was content to let the VEP do its work for them, just like it had between 1962-1964. Jordan had not expected any more out of the DOJ this time around, but now that it was obvious, he was ready to move the VEP forward and begin supplying grants to registration campaigns across the South. In a thank-you note sent to Katzenbach's office the day after his speech, Paul Anthony wrote, "I think we have every reason to believe that the occasion was a very successful one in terms of what we hoped to accomplish."[505] If anything, the path was clear: the VEP and its grantees, not the government, would register southern African Americans.

Months later, as VEP projects were beginning, Jordan spoke to Atlanta's black community at the Butler Street YMCA explaining the broader goals of the renewed VEP. "The Negro voter has never been an accepted or welcomed participant in the political process in the South," he said. "Rather, he has been a victim of the process, an object of contempt, scorn, defamation, humiliation, vilification, exploitation, and dehumanization." But the situation was changing, even though white registration still outpaced black. He reminded his audience that between 1952 and 1962, the black southern vote grew by only 400,000 people, but between 1962 and 1964 under VEP programs, nearly 700,000 black men and women had registered. And since the passage of the Voting Rights Act, thousands more had registered. But that was not enough.

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[504] Remer Tyson, "It's Time to Let Votes Talk on Rights, Katzenbach Says," *Atlanta Constitution*, March 1, 1966. See also Robert E. Baker, "Katzenbach Advises Voter Education Drive," *Washington Post*, March 1, 1966; and Jack Nelson, "Katzenbach Speech Received Coolly by Rights Leaders," *Los Angeles Times*, March 1, 1966.

[505] Paul Anthony to Jack Rosenthal, March 2, 1966, Series 6, Box 36, Folder "2/28/66, Southern Regional Council, Atlanta, GA," Nicholas deB. Katzenbach Personal Papers, John F. Kennedy Presidential Library.

"Registration and voting are mighty instruments of power, but they are only instruments and not ends in themselves," Jordan told them. The VEP's aim was not to register people, but to help African Americans achieve political power in a way they never had before.[506]

Managing the Movement

By financing registration projects across the South, the VEP at once empowered local communities while attempting to manage the civil rights movement by promoting participatory democracy. An interested person or group would submit an application to the VEP to help sponsor a project, often as a one or two-page summary, along with ideas for voter registration fieldwork and citizenship education, such as canvassing and workshops. The more specific the proposal, the better. Often if a proposal was too vague, Jordan let them know so they could revise it before rejecting it outright. Beginning in 1967, the VEP's field director, Weldon Rougeau, often traveled to meet those asking for assistance to get a sense of the people, the area, and the chances for registration success, offering counseling along the way to improve their grant requests. Sometimes when multiple proposals came from different groups from the same region, the VEP combined them into one project.[507]

Vernon Jordan was aware of the power he had within the civil rights movement at the time, whose position "made me kind of a chancellor of the exchequer. This was a heavy responsibility, and I took it very seriously."[508] Looking back, Jordan believed that the competition for money that the VEP offered increased the efficiency of the civil rights movement by making local and national groups more accountable. "Everyone soon learned that is wasn't

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[506] Vernon E. Jordan Jr., Speech to The Hungry Club at the Butler Street YMCA, May 25, 1966, Box 2T78, Folder "SRC (VEP) Fall 1966," Field Foundation Archives.

[507] Guidelines for Voter Education Project Grants, n.d., circa July 1966, Folder "Southern Regional Council: Voter Education Project, July-December 1966," Taconic Foundation Records.

[508] Jordan, *Vernon Can Read!*, 182.

enough to just have a good heart and good intentions," wrote Jordan in his memoir. "They had to present a viable plan to get the funds and they had to successfully execute the plan if they wanted more to undertake other projects."[509] Not only did the VEP enable movements to go forward throughout the South, but its strict regimen for grant recipients to meet their goals, document results, and be frugal with the money also forced local activists to be successful. Money produced results.[510]

Over the next three years, the VEP supplied at least 403 grants to local campaigns in 11 states, spending $580,065 on grassroots projects.[511] VEP partners used the funds to blanket their communities with canvassers and car pools to move people to the registrar's office and register to vote. The VEP kept accurate registration statistics per project during 1966, but not in 1967 and 1968. VEP grants went to chapters of the NAACP and SCLC, but most went to independent organizations. In 1966, the VEP sent $1,925 to the Pensacola Improvement Association, which registered 590 people. The Lynchburg Voters League in Virginia received $2,475 and registered 1,376 people; the Calhoun County Voters League in South Carolina used $250 to register 268; and the Fort Valley Citizens Education Commission spent $1,000 to register 305 community members. In 1967 and 1968, VEP grants continued to fund diverse registration projects across the South, including the Screven County VEP in Georgia, the Sunflower County VEP in

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[509] *Ibid*., 184.

[510] *Ibid*., 182-185. See also Olive interview, November 23, 2002, 2, 5; and Guidelines for Voter Education Project Grants, circa July 1966.

[511] To arrive at 403 as an approximation and an expenditure total of $580,065.73, I compared a list of sources. See sources listed under Appendix 8, as well as Maureen McLaughlin, "Voter Project Loses Grant," *Washington Post*, August 4, 1966; "VEP in Second Year; 50 Projects Funded," *VEP News* 1, no. 1 (June 1967); "VEP Programs Total 122 in '67; Busy Year Ahead," *VEP News* 2, no. 1 (January 1968); and Voter Education Projects, State-by-State Distribution, 1968, Box 43, Folder 4, Office Files, VEP Records. See also Appendix 8.

Mississippi, and the Northampton County Voters Movement in North Carolina. VEP grants coated the South, ensuring local activists had resources to compete for power.[512]

One of these 403 VEP grant recipients was the Auburn League of Women Voters in Alabama. Alice Alston submitted a grant application to the VEP soon after funds became available. In Lee County, she wrote, many African Americans were illiterate, no black man or woman had ever held an elected position, and the registrar's office was only open on the first and third Monday of every month, except for special occasions. To assist black voters in her county, she wanted to rent voting machines and have people practice using them. The League would train them on how to use the machines, taking steps to help people overcome their fear of embarrassment for not knowing how they operate or how to read candidate names.[513] She only asked for $200, which the VEP approved on March 11.[514] In June, the VEP answered a grant request from the Lee County Voters League for $1,200 for a six-week registration program, working together with the local League of Women Voters.[515] Following the drive, the VEP gave an additional $775 to the Auburn League of Women Voters to record elementary-level television programs about voting. Using the grant money to book a studio, write scripts, produce the film, and publicize, they created three shows seen by an estimated 33,000 people. Seven television and radio stations aired their programs, teaching people how to vote and why it was important. By July, the Auburn League of Women had registered around 2,500 people.[516]

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[512] See Appendix 8 for a list of all known VEP grant recipients between 1966 and 1968.

[513] Request For Grant for Voter Education, League of Women Voters of Alabama, Auburn, n.d., Reel 184, Frame 1399, SRC Papers.

[514] Vernon E. Jordan Jr. to Mrs. Wallace Alston Jr., March 11, 1966, Reel 184, Frames 1394-1395, SRC Papers.

[515] R.E. Peters to Vernon E. Jordan Jr., June 21, 1966, Reel 184, Frame 1412, SRC Papers.

Another VEP grantee was the North Carolina Voter Education Project (NCVEP). The VEP helped set up state VEPs in Arkansas, Louisiana, and South Carolina—umbrella organizations uniting several independent campaigns—but the NCVEP was unique because it was a product of the North Carolina Fund (NCF) as much as the VEP. The NCF began in 1963 under Governor Terry Sanford, combining funding from the OEO and other federal departments with private grants to support 11 anti-poverty programs across the state between 1963 and 1968.[517] In 1966, black leaders in North Carolina expressed interest in forming a political training group through the NCF. George Esser, the NCF's director, connected with Vernon Jordan to see if the idea could be realized through the VEP. In February 1967, meeting with dozens of black leaders from across the state in Durham, Jordan gave advice for setting up the NCVEP. He recommended keeping the NCVEP small with one director and a small budget to organize voter registration campaigns, citizenship education classes, and leadership training institutes more often and in more places than the VEP could do on its own. Jordan instructed them to apply for a VEP grant as soon as possible. They requested $30,000, but deeming the amount to high, the VEP instead allocated $13,000 to the NCVEP to pay for a full-time director at $7,500, a secretary for $2,600, and the rest for office supplies and travel costs. Under director John Edwards, a young NCF worker from Durham's Operation Breakthrough, the NCVEP

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[516] Memorandum to VEP Advisory Committee, n.d. circa July 1966, Folder "Southern Regional Council: Voter Education Project, July-December 1966," Taconic Foundation Records; Vernon E. Jordan Jr. to Alice Alston, July 12, 1966, Reel 184, Frame 1413, SRC Papers; and Annual Report of the Executive Director of the Southern Regional Council for 1966, January 1967, 25-27, Box 2S440, Folder "Southern Regional Council (State Councils), 1961," Field Foundation Archives.

[517] See Robert R. Korstad and James L. Leloudis, *To Right These Wrongs*: *The North Carolina Fund and the Battle to End Poverty and Inequality in 1960s America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010).

announced it's goal to go "after the potential voters who, for one reason or another, never have registered."[518]

The NCVEP led five registration campaigns and sponsored a conference in 1967. Edwards traversed the state spending VEP and NCF money helping communities orchestrate registration projects. A three-week effort in Martin County registered around 900 people. In Rocky Mount, 1,400 people registered after the NCVEP helped sponsor citizenship clinics. Up to 400 people registered in Goldsboro and another 600 in Kinston. In Robeson County, approximately 4,500 people registered once the local government appointed deputy registrars to visit the homes of African Americans and Lumbee Indians to sign them up on the spot. On July 22, the NCVEP led its first Leadership Training Conference in Durham with nearly 500 participants featuring speakers and holding workshops on indigenous leadership, election laws, and voter mobilization.[519]

Not every VEP-sponsored project was successful. The VEP committed $8,100 to the Northern Virginia Voter Education Project, but after learning funds may have been used to picket Alexandria's police headquarters, the VEP withdrew its grant. Before then, the group had accomplished minimum registration results, and Jordan felt that it had become a waste of resources. Plus, as Paul Anthony told the *Washington Post*, "We're extremely careful that none of our funds go for partisan political activities or for direct action."[520]

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[518] "No Time Like the Present to Begin," *Durham Sun*, May 31, 1967. See also Minutes, North Caroline Voter Education Meeting, February 27, 1967, Folder 694, NCF Records; Press Release, NCVEP, May 30, 1967, Folder 7573, NCF Records; Vernon E. Jordan Jr. to A.I. Dunlap, April 26, 1967, Folder 714, NCF Records; Day Piercy, "Leadership Training and the NCVEP," August 26, 1968, 31, Folder 7497, NCF Records, 31-34; and Winford, '"The Battle for Freedom Begins Every Morning,'" 458.

[519] Minutes, Full Board Meeting of NCVEP, June 1, 1967, Folder 7566, NCF Records; and First Annual Report of the NCVEP, May 15, 1967 – December 31, 1967, Folder 695, NCF Records.

[520] Maureen McLaughlin, "Voter Project Loses Grant," *Washington Post*, August 4, 1966.

Along with financing campaigns like the Northern Virginia Voter Education Project, the NCVEP, and the League of Women Voters in Auburn, Alabama, part of the VEP's management role within the civil rights movement meant interacting with the five major organizations. Of the five that had been valuable during the first VEP, only two remained in close partnership with the VEP: the NAACP and the SCLC. CORE's leadership planned to be involved with the second VEP, and CORE had received funding for three projects in Louisiana in 1966, but those were the last grants to CORE before turning its attention to the North. Jordan asked Floyd McKissick, James Farmer's successor as CORE director, if CORE had any more interest in VEP work. Ruth Turner, CORE's executive secretary for its Cleveland branch, returned his query by asking if the VEP could sponsor registration work in Cleveland, but Jordan informed her that the VEP's work was confined to the South.[521] The NUL's base was also in the North, and while the VEP funded a handful of projects for its few southern branches during the first VEP, Jordan did not expect the NUL to play a major role again. But he reached out to the NUL's southern regional office offering the chance at some funds. In 1967, the VEP awarded the NUL with $6,600 for citizenship education programs in Jacksonville, Florida and Hobson City, Alabama, but that was the extent of the relationship.[522] SNCC was even less involved. During this period, SNCC underwent a transformation in leadership and ideology, embracing black nationalism and distancing itself from other civil rights groups. But SNCC still needed money. In July 1965, SNCC had applied for a $119,000 grant from the Taconic Foundation, but finding SNCC's plans

[521] Vernon E. Jordan Jr. to Floyd McKissick, March 30, 1967; Ruth Turner to Vernon E. Jordan Jr., April 12, 1967; and Vernon E. Jordan Jr. to Ruth Turner, April 20, 1967, all in Box 62, Folder 14, Office Files, VEP Records.

[522] Report on the Voter Education Project of the Southern Regional Council, Inc., October 19, 1967, Box 2T79, Folder "SRC (VEP) Fall 1967," Field Foundation Archives.

too vague, Taconic denied the request.[523] After the VEP re-launched, SNCC made "one or two" grant applications to the VEP, but they "were not well conceived and therefore not funded."[524]

The VEP maintained an association with the NAACP and the SCLC, but tensions over control and management sometimes kept them at a distance. Back in December 1965, Jordan and John Morsell had discussed the VEP supplying NAACP chapters directly instead of through the national office. Jordan wrote Wilkins on March 9, 1966 after 18 NAACP chapters had so far appealed directly to the VEP for funds. He assured Wilkins that "no branch of the NAACP would be funded by VEP without the approval of either [John M.] Brooks or [W.C.] Patton," the NAACP's two national leaders for voter registration and education.[525] Wilkins was satisfied, but Gloster Current, the NAACP's director of branches, was not. Current worried that money going straight to chapters damaged the national office's power, and he fired off an angry memo to Wilkins and Morsell on the day Jordan's explanation arrived: "[Jordan] ought to know better and I am surprised that he is seeking this method to divorce our units from National Office control."[526] But Current's opinion was rejected, and the NAACP allowed for its branches to communicate directly with the VEP under Brooks's and Patton's supervision. Between 1966 and 1969, the VEP funded dozens of NAACP campaigns, maintaining a working relationship with the national office throughout its tenure. Writing to thank Jordan at the end of 1966 for the

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[523] Taconic Foundation Memorandum on SNCC Proposal, June 29, 1965, Folder "Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, 1960-1961, 1965," Taconic Foundation Records.

[524] Memorandum to Currier and Eddy, July 28, 1966.

[525] Vernon E. Jordan Jr. to Roy Wilkins, March 9, 1966, Box 65, Folder 6, Office Files, VEP Records.

[526] Memorandum, Gloster B. Current to Roy Wilkins and John A. Morsell, Re: Voter Education Project Guidelines, March 9, 1966, Folder 009057-005-0797, Group IV, Series A, Administrative File, General Office File, Papers of the NAACP, Part 28, Library of Congress.

VEP's support of NAACP branches, Morsell quipped, "There appears to have been only one fault to find: you didn't have enough money to give us."[527]

The VEP's partnership with the SCLC was even more strained after accusations that the VEP was unfair. Martin Luther King Jr. focused on the national scene and left the daily work between the SCLC and its branches to his executive staff. The SCLC's director of voter registration was Hosea Williams. The VEP approved several SCLC-related projects in 1966, but Williams demanded more. On April 22, he telephoned Jordan about extending VEP money to an SCLC project in Savannah. But Jordan refused, saying that the VEP was already working with the NAACP branch in Savannah. Williams "responded immediately with a great emotional outburst and accused the [Voter Education] Project of being unfair" and declared an end to the SCLC's partnership with the VEP.[528] Jordan refused to cancel the agreement unless he heard from Williams' superiors, which he never did. Over the next few years, the VEP funded SCLC projects in Alabama, Georgia, and Virginia. In 1969, Williams led a protest outside the VEP's office with picket signs reading "Vernon Jordan—An Educated Uncle Thomas" and "SRC's VEP is a fraud."[529] Unbeknownst to the picketers, Jordan arrived and stood with them to learn why they were upset without anyone recognizing him. Williams was angry that the VEP had denied the SCLC $29,000 for a one-day registration drive and accused the VEP of financial mismanagement. The VEP thought the request was outrageous, and instead of confronting Williams about it in the street, Jordan mailed off a copy of the proposal to the *Atlanta*

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[527] John A. Morsell to Vernon E. Jordan Jr., December 14, 1966, Box 2T78, Folder "SRC (VEP) Fall 1966," Field Foundation Archives.

[528] Vernon E. Jordan Jr. to Hosea Williams, April 28, 1966, Box 22, Folder 40, MLK Papers, King Center.

[529] "Civil Rights Group Pickets Another That Denied Help," *Wall Street Journal*, April 4, 1969.

Constitution. The protests stopped right away, and Williams submitted a more reasonable request that the VEP granted.[530]

Managing the civil rights movement also required the VEP to expand its research agenda for the benefit of the general public. During the summer of 1966, the VEP released two reports based on Marvin Wall's early research. The first was released one week after James Meredith was shot on the second day of his solo march from Memphis to Jackson. Meredith survived, but the act of violence was one of many that continued to plague the South. As research director, Wall had been working on a study of violent acts carried out against African Americans since the Voting Rights Act went into effect to demonstrate that the law itself had not ended white supremacist intimidation against registration workers. At least 16 documented incidents had occurred since August 1965. In Greenwood, Mississippi, 16 year-old Freddie Lee Thomas died after a car struck him while he was walking on the side of the road. His half-brother was convinced that Freddie had been targeted "to discourage Negro voter registration efforts." In Barnwell, South Carolina, four canvassers affiliated with a local project were attacked and one stabbed by a gang of 15 to 20 white men. After collecting complaints for federal registrars in Laurel, Mississippi, an NAACP leader's house was peppered with shotgun blasts. Vernon Dahmer, a 58 year-old leader in Hattiesburg, Mississippi, died after a firebombing on his home after leading a registration drive. Five miles south of Colerain, North Carolina, a five-foot cross was burned next to the house of a woman active in Bertie County registration work. These acts were not only evidence that white violence against African Americans had not stopped, but that

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[530] "SCLC Disowns Pickets at VEP," *Afro-American*, May 10, 1969; and Jordan, *Vernon Can Read!*, 193-194.

the pursuit of black political power was proving successful, triggering the most brutal of segregationists to lash out.[531]

A month later, the VEP released "The Effects of Federal Examiners and Organized Registration Campaigns on Negro Voter Registration" to prove that the most politically active counties were those with both VEP projects and federal examiners. After nearly a year of the Voting Rights Act, examiners had gone into 41 counties in Alabama, Mississippi, Louisiana, and South Carolina and had registered 122,905 people. Even though the Voting Rights Act had also placed Georgia, Virginia, and 26 North Carolina counties under watch, no examiners had yet arrived in those areas. Wall documented that counties with both federal examiners and VEP programs had the highest percentages of black registration. The next highest numbers came from counties with only federal examiners, followed by those with just VEP projects. Counties with neither had the lowest figures. In Alabama, for example, Marengo County had both federal registrars and a VEP financed program where 5,535 out of 7,791 African Americans had registered, about 71 percent. Autauga County had only federal examiners, and 2,275 out of 3,651 had registered, or 62 percent. A VEP registration project in Sumter County resulted in 3,369 out of 6,814 African Americans registered, but that was only 49 percent without examiners. And a typical county without either was Clarke County, where 2,495 out of 5,833 had registered, about 43 percent. In total for Alabama, 69 percent had registered in counties with both examiners and the VEP, 64 percent with only examiners, 58 percent with only the VEP, and 45 percent without either.[532] Results were similar in the other three states, with Mississippi the furthest behind. By the end of the summer, southern black registration stood at 2,620,359, compared to 14,309,704

[531] Press Release, Voter Education Project, June 13, 1966, Reel 177, Frames 249-252, SRC Papers.

[532] "The Effects of Federal Examiners and Organized Registration Campaigns on Negro Voter Registration," Voter Education Project Special Report, July 1966, Box 855, Folder 12, SCLC Papers, MARBL, Emory University.

of the white population—52 percent and 70 percent of those eligible, respectively.[533] Based on hard evidence, Wall logged proof of the efficacy of federal examiners and the VEP, as well as the distance still to go.

The VEP continued to amass information on disfranchisement, and in 1968, the United States Commission on Civil Rights borrowed heavily from VEP data in its 256-page study "Political Participation" chronicling the impact of the Voting Rights Act. Utilizing VEP studies and statistics, the Commission determined that while black registration and voting had increased, numerous barriers still existed that prevented African Americans from full political engagement. Since November 1966 when the study began, Commission attorneys and staff members visited 55 counties in 10 states to review black political conditions. They came away with a picture of the South far from political equality. White conservatives held onto political power by diluting black votes, erecting barriers for black candidates, gerrymandering, turning elected positions into appointive ones, interfering with black poll watchers, and outright discrimination. The Commission also noticed that neither the Republican nor Democratic Party had made a full effort to bring African Americans into their organizations.[534] Vernon Jordan called the report "well-written, well-documented, and carefully prepared," and along with its authors, called on the government to address these issues. Federal help combined with black registration could end these injustices. For Jordan, the solution was simple: "It has been our observation that the hostility and deviousness of white officials usually decrease as Negro voting registration increases."[535]

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[533] Voter Education Project, "Voter Registration in the South – Summer, 1966," Box 563, Folder 3, SCLC Papers, MARBL, Emory University.

[534] United States Commission on Civil Rights, *Political Participation* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1968).

[535] Vernon E. Jordan Jr., "Changing Rules in the Middle of the Game," *VEP News* 2, no. 5 (May 1968).

Between 1966 and 1968, the VEP also translated its research and observations into booklets designed for citizenship education and distributed them among its grantees. Among them were "How to Conduct a Registration Campaign" and "Know Your Georgia Government." Patricia Collins, a sophomore at Spellman College and a summer intern with the VEP in 1967, researched and wrote the manual on registration work. At 19 pages, the booklet was compact, yet thorough enough to serve as a primer for any group to sponsor their own drive. "A registration campaign in full swing is exciting to watch," Spellman wrote, but "doesn't happen automatically."[536] Collins advised finding an energetic director with good organizational skills, dividing areas between canvassers, documenting results, sticking to a budget, studying the laws, using local issues as motivation, carpooling to the registrar's office, booking churches for mass meetings, and finding babysitters. Canvassing was the key. She also counseled readers to realize that people often do not admit they are unregistered, so canvassers should be persistent but understanding.[537]

In "Know Your Georgia Government," the first of several state-specific civic guides, the VEP explained the structure of the local and state government in 23 pages. The VEP found that many people voted without having a clear sense of the responsibilities of many offices. This was not only true for newly registered African Americans, but all voters, regardless of race. Sections on city, county, and state government, the governor's office, the Legislature, the state constitution, law-making, courts, juries, as well as major issues such as education, welfare, and taxes, all explained to the reader what their votes could influence. "Having a vote means you

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[536] "How to Conduct a Registration Campaign," Voter Education Project, Patricia Collins, May 1967, Folder 1122, NCF Records.

[537] *Ibid*.

have power—power to help decide who is going to run your city, your county, and your state. Whom you elect determines the sort of government, good or bad, you will have."[538]

The VEP's efforts in voter registration, research, and citizenship education paid off in the 1966 mid-term elections. 20 black candidates won seats in state legislatures and many more assumed various county posts. Lucius Amerson won the sheriff's race in Macon County, Georgia, believed to be the first black sheriff in the South during the twentieth century. Three African Americans were elected to the Texas State Legislature, including Barbara Jordan. In North Carolina, African American voters helped the progressive Nick Galifianakis win the fifth congressional district seat in the U.S. House. Demonstrating a willingness to support whichever party best served black interests, between upwards of 90,000 African Americans voted in the Arkansas gubernatorial race against the segregationist Democrat candidate and for Republican Winthrop Rockefeller, giving Rockefeller the victory. Black precincts in Memphis went overwhelmingly for the Democrat Ray Blanton, providing the margin to defeat Republican James Hurst in Tennessee's seventh district. In Lowndes County, Alabama, the Black Panthers ran independent candidates, although they lost every race. In Mississippi, an NAACP member in Jefferson County won a school board seat by a vote of 225 to 113, becoming the state's first black county official since Reconstruction. And significantly, in Dallas County, Alabama, African Americans voted out Sheriff Jim Clark—the face of white supremacy in Selma. During an election that witnessed the resurgence of conservatism across the United States, and while whites held on to most seats in the South, a new black political force also took shape.[539]

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[538] "Know Your Georgia Government," Voter Education Project, 1967, Folder 1122, NCF Records.

[539] Press Release, Southern Regional Council and Voter Education Project, "What Happened in the South, 1966," December 14, 1966, Folder 1120, NCF Records.

To foment this rising black political power, the VEP drew heavily on its philanthropic supporters, but a year into the second VEP, tragedy struck the Taconic Foundation. Since 1961, Stephen Currier had been one of the VEP's anchors of support, but in January 1967, he and his wife Audrey disappeared on the way to the Virgin Islands.[540] Eulogies poured in about the Currier's support for the civil rights movement. Although Stephen had become more comfortable in the media, the Curriers had remained unknown to the general public. "What Stephen and Audrey Currier have meant to the civil rights movement in this country has never been adequately described," Gertrude Wilson wrote in the *New York Amsterdam News*.[541] In the *Washington Post*, Robert Baker wrote, "He [Stephen] saw his role as a catalyst for solving problems—one of them was money—in the civil rights movement. His actions steadied the major civil rights groups at a time of despair and growing distress."[542] One of Currier's strengths had been to build coalitions, whether through the VEP, CUCRL, or other foundations. According to a friend, '"Currier believed it was not healthy philanthropy to build dependency on one source,'" and he succeeded in bringing foundations together to support diverse causes.[543] Although many Americans were unfamiliar with the Taconic Foundation and the Curriers, race leaders had come to know him well. Whitney Young wrote, "They were white in complexion, but saw this as an accident of birth—not as a symbol of advantage, privilege or superiority over other human beings of different color."[544]

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[540] "Stephen Curriers Missing on Flight," *New York Times*, January 19, 1967; "Heiress, Husband Missing on Plane Trip in Caribbean," *Los Angeles Times*, January 19, 1967; "Vanished Couple Feared Lost at Sea," *New York Amsterdam News*, February 11, 1967; Lankford, *The Last American Diplomat*, 347; and Fleming, *The Potomac Chronicle*, 169-172.

[541] Gertrude Wilson, "Best of the Best," *New York Amsterdam News*, January 28, 1967.

[542] Robert E. Baker, "Court Asked to Rule Curriers Legally Dead," *Washington Post*, February 2, 1967.

[543] Loudon Wainwright, "The Resonance of Charity," *Life Magazine*, February 24, 1967, 21.

The deaths of Stephen and Audrey Currier sent the VEP into a mild panic because the Taconic Foundation was in no position to carry on business as usual. Paul Anthony asked David Hunter at the Stern Family Fund for assistance, explaining "Their tragic death has changed things considerably and it is out of the question that Taconic could continue this support."[545] In 1966, the Taconic Foundation had given $150,000 to the VEP. Now, the VEP needed to make up the money elsewhere to meet the 1967 budget. Through the next several months, the VEP worked to expand its philanthropic base. The Ford Foundation gave another $24,000, and the Rockefeller Brothers Fund donated $50,000. The Field Foundation did the most to make up for Taconic's loss, with Dunbar initiating a $150,000 grant. The VEP also received $50,000 from the Mary Reynolds Babcock Foundation, $25,000 from the New World Foundation, $10,000 from the New York Foundation, and $1,645 from individual donations. In total, the VEP took in $310,545 for 1967.[546]

In 1968, the VEP took in its highest total ever at $437,500. To ensure the VEP's solvency, Jordan and Anthony reached out to various foundations for continued support. Leslie Dunbar remained a crucial ally of the VEP since leaving the SRC for the Field Foundation, and he again donated $150,000 for the VEP in 1968. Able to count on the Field Foundation, the VEP entered 1968 confident of winning other donations. By the end of the year, it had received another $24,000 from the Ford Foundation, $10,000 from the New York Foundation, $4,000 from the North Carolina Fund, $15,000 from the Mary Reynolds Babcock Foundation, $2,500

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[544] Whitney Young, "The Curriers Passed This Way and Made World a Better Place," *Philadelphia Tribune*, February 28, 1967. See also Edward P. Morgan, "Edward P. Morgan and the News," Radio Editorial on ABC Radio Network, February 3, 1967, Reel 27, Frame 2345, SRC Papers; Reese Cleghorn, "A Vanished Plane, a Fortune, and a Story," unknown clipping, n.d., Reel 27, Frame 2334, SRC Papers; and "800 Attend Rites for the Curriers," *New York Times*, February 16, 1967.

[545] Paul Anthony to David Hunter, March 28, 1967, Box 17, Folder "VEP," Stern Fund Papers, WHS.

[546] Contributions to the Voter Education Project of the Southern Regional Council, Inc., n.d., received by Vernon E. Jordan Jr. on November 5, 1968, Box 65, Folder 20, Office Files, VEP Records.

from the Abelard Foundation, and $2,000 from private donors. The Taconic Foundation, still in the process of recovering after the loss of the Curriers, gave $5,000. In total, the VEP had acquired less than in previous years, but enough to get by. But in April, a horrific tragedy inspired another contribution. The VEP and the rest of the nation grieved at the loss of Martin Luther King Jr. after his murder on April 4. In memory of King's achievements, the Field Foundation gave another $225,000 to the VEP as part of a larger donation to civil rights groups. Now with $375,000 from the Field Foundation alone, the VEP took in a total of $437,500 for 1968. Conscious of King's advocacy for black political power as "a lever for social and economic change," the VEP worked to realize his vision.[547]

Black Power and Leadership Training

The second VEP operated during the early Black Power era, but rather than embrace the ideology of black nationalism as some disenchanted activists did, the VEP imagined black power as a strategy for local leaders to win political elections. The VEP promoted leadership training as effective black power, that when combined with voter registration and citizenship education, electing African Americans to local, state, and national offices offered the best path to political empowerment. In July 1966 during a planning meeting between VEP staff, foundation representatives, and civil rights leaders, the subject of black power came up. According to a Taconic Foundation official in attendance, "There was a lengthy discussion on the implications of 'black power' and the VEP project. All of the people who are close to the southern scene agreed that this is more of a slogan than a movement. They agreed that it is a very appealing

[547] Vernon E. Jordan Jr., "Martin King's Crusade Will Be Carried On," *VEP News* 2, no. 4 (April 1968). See also Leslie W. Dunbar to Paul Anthony, November 22, 1967, Box 64, Folder 13, Office Files, VEP Records; Leslie W. Dunbar to Paul Anthony, April 11, 1968, Box 64, Folder 13, Office Files, VEP Records; and Contributions to the Voter Education Project, n.d., received by Vernon E. Jordan Jr. on November 5, 1968. See also Appendix 9.

concept and could become a movement with the right leadership."[548] Jordan never publicly criticized black power activists for their embrace of black nationalism, but the VEP interpreted black power as engaged politics. When Kwame Ture (formerly Stokely Carmichael) and Charles V. Hamilton published *Black Power* in the fall of 1967, Jordan and others at the VEP studied the text. *Black Power* was more of a meditation rather than a blueprint, and its section on the Lowndes County Freedom Organization (LCFO) offered an analysis on voting that the VEP agreed with. "The *act* of registering to vote does several things," wrote Ture and Hamilton. "It marks the beginning of political modernization by broadening the base of participation. It also does something the existentialists talk about: it gives one a sense of being."[549]

To realize black power, the VEP hosted a series of leadership training conferences between 1966 and 1968. These meetings were rooted in history. Jordan and other black leaders knew what happened last time African Americans rose in political influence in the South. "In the years after Reconstruction came a dark period called Redemption," wrote VEP staff. "During this period, white Southerners turned back the clock and reasserted their control over the lives of black people…A second Redemption is unthinkable if the region—and the nation—is to survive as a multi-racial society."[550] The VEP committed itself to preventing a second Redemption. To do so, the VEP supported the South's newly elected black officials. Whether as a state legislator, chancery clerk, school board member, county commissioner, sheriff, constable, justice of the peace, mayor, or any local position, most people had not served in elected office before. Unlike

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[548] Memorandum to Currier and Eddy, July 28, 1966.

[549] Kwame Ture and Charles V. Hamilton, *Black Power: The Politics of Liberation in America* (New York: Random House, 1967, 1992), 104. Emphasis in original.

[550] A Statement of the Voter Education Project of the Southern Regional Council, Inc., June 14, 1969, Frames 771-780, Reel 170, SRC Papers.

funding individual projects, Jordan believed that leadership training necessitated bringing people to the VEP. During late 1966, the VEP first tried out the idea.

On December 29 and 30, 1966, the VEP hosted a seminar for state legislators. The VEP had no model on which to base such a conference, and it wanted to try out this idea without media scrutiny. "VEP chose not to publicize the Seminar, so that all discussions could be off-the-record and frank," summarized Paul Anthony in his year-end report.[551] Dr. Vivian Henderson, President of Clark College, spoke on "Southern Economics and Public Policy." Jack Greenberg of the LDF, with whom the VEP partnered for the seminar, lectured on how state legislators could help their constituents. State Senator Leroy Johnson from Georgia and State Representative A.W. Willis from Tennessee led a workshop on "effective law making." The next day, State Senator Barbara Jordan from Texas and State Senator Horace Ward from Georgia led an informal discussion on strategies that worked in their chambers. In total, 11 legislators who attended were from Georgia, while six came from Tennessee, and three from Texas. Representatives from the Democratic National Committee, the Republican National Committee, the United Auto Workers, the AFL-CIO's Committee on Political Education, and the United States Commission on Civil Rights attended as well.[552] "The seminar was one of VEP's most successful and exciting undertakings of the year," Jordan wrote Leslie Dunbar. "The seminar sustained our belief that leadership training is important and valuable to all segments of the Negro community in the South."[553]

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[551] Annual Report of the SRC Executive Director, January 1967, 28.

[552] Agenda, State Legislators Seminar, Voter Education Project, Atlanta, Georgia, December 29-30, 1966, Box 2T39, Folder "SRC (VEP) miscellaneous Fall 1966," Field Foundation Archives.

[553] Vernon E. Jordan Jr. to Leslie W. Dunbar, January 5, 1967, Box 2T39, Folder "SRC (VEP) miscellaneous Fall 1966," Field Foundation Archives.

The next training conference took place at Clark College in July 1967 for local government officials. A total of 34 elected officials attended, representing multiple offices and states from around the South. The VEP paid for their travel and lodging, and it organized several workshops such as "Practical Problems of Negro Councilmen" and "Problem Areas of Urban Government." Bayard Rustin gave the keynote address, sending a message that "the civil rights struggle is now a matter of practical politics—not, as in the past era of demonstrations, one of ideological absolutes."[554]

Six months later, the VEP held another leadership seminar for Mississippi officials. At the time, few African Americans held elected positions in the state, but as more registered, they stood poised to swell in number since Mississippi had the highest black population percentage in the United States. Anticipating the rise of black political power in Mississippi, the VEP invited all of the state's black officials. Out of 22 people, 18 came from 10 counties, holding positions such as county supervisor, constable, justice of the peace, chancery clerk, and coroner. They held question-and-answer sessions with VEP staff and speakers, sharing ideas about how to govern with confidence. Reminding them of the past, Jordan told them, "We must avoid the perils that befell your predecessors in the Reconstruction era."[555] Bayard Rustin delivered the main address, entitled "An Overview of the Negro in the Political Process." He challenged them to govern for their black and white constituents alike, and to entrench the ideals of the civil rights movement into legislation. Repeating familiar themes, Rustin told the eighteen officeholders, "What we need to do is to force the American society to re-evaluate its values...That will not be done in the

[554] Cheryl Chisholm, "Officeholders Meet at Clark," *VEP News* 1, no. 3 (August 1967); and Agenda, Local Government Seminar, Clark College, July 27-29, 1967, Folder "Southern Regional Council: Voter Education Project, 1967-1971," Taconic Foundation Records.

[555] W.F. Minor, "Newly Elected Mississippians Told To Be On Guard," *New Orleans Times Picayune*, December 15, 1967.

streets. It will be done in the city halls, the state legislatures, in the national Congress and in the White House."[556]

In between the Clark College conference and the one in Mississippi, hundreds of African Americans ran for office in Louisiana, Mississippi, and Virginia. In Louisiana, 252 black men and women campaigned for positions, along with 40 in Virginia and 32 in Mississippi. On Election Day, 28 won in Louisiana, 22 in Mississippi, and six in Virginia. Each state also had one black candidate win a seat in the state legislature, bringing the total to six states in the South with at least one African American serving in the highest branch of state government. While the majority of candidates lost, the VEP looked at these results in a positive light, providing further evidence of a historic political shift in the making. After all of the results were in, Marvin Wall found a connection between VEP projects and locations with black candidates. "As might be expected," he wrote Jordan, "there is a high correlation between counties in which the Voter Education Project has funded projects and counties in which Negroes are running for office and being elected to office."[557]

Over the next year, the VEP hosted several more seminars for elected officials in Louisiana, North Carolina, South Carolina, Florida, and Alabama. During the 1968 primary season, over 250 black men and women appeared on ballots for various posts in local and state races. Anticipating the highest total ever of southern black elected officials after Election Day,

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[556] Bayard Rustin, Speech to Institute for Mississippi Negro Elected Officials, Box 42, Folder 5, Office Files, VEP Records. See also Agenda, Institute for Mississippi Negro Elected Officials, December 14-15, 1967, Box 2S415, Folder "SRC: State Councils, Desegregation 1970," Field Foundation Archives; "Mississippi Negro Officials Meet, Conquer Bond Problem," *V.E.P. News* 1, no. 7 (December 1967); and Vernon E. Jordan Jr., "Jackson Meeting Historic Moment in Mississippi," *V.E.P. News* 1, no. 7 (December 1967).

[557] Memorandum, Marvin Wall to Vernon E. Jordan Jr., January 26, 1968, Box 17, Folder "VEP," Stern Family Fund Papers, WHS. See also "Negro Candidates Make Strong Bid in Three States," *VEP News* 1, no. 5 (October 1967); "Negroes Win Major Races in Three Southern States," *VEP News* 1, no. 6 (November 1967); Vernon E. Jordan Jr., "Candidates Fared Poorly? We Don't Agree," *VEP News* 1, no. 6 (November 1967); and Frederick Graves, "Black Political Power Now a Reality as Negroes Win Election," *Jet Magazine*, November 23, 1967, 6-7.

the VEP judged that a major conference for the entire South was necessary. Naming it the Southwide Conference for Black Elected Officials and booking space in Atlanta from December 11-14, 1968, Jordan invited every known black official and candidate in the South with a personalized invitation promising that the VEP would pay travel expenses. Applying to the Taconic Foundation for additional funds for the conference, Jordan wrote, "We feel…that it is a natural extension of the VEP's role to convene these officeholders…for an exchange of views and for discussion of the future."[558]

While the VEP planned the Southwide Conference, Jordan turned his attention to the 1968 presidential race. President Johnson had announced on March 31 that he would not campaign for another term, worn down by the Vietnam War, a splintered Democratic Party, and the growing strength of Eugene McCarthy and Robert Kennedy in the primaries. Most African Americans supported Kennedy, but his assassination on June 6 deflated their excitement about the election, mixed with the lingering grief over Martin Luther King Jr.'s death in April. Violence in Chicago tarnished the Democratic National Convention while delegates chose Vice-President Hubert H. Humphrey as their presidential nominee. On the Republican side, former Vice-President Richard Nixon resurrected his political career and held off a challenge from Ronald Reagan to earn the presidential nomination. Former Alabama Governor George C. Wallace ran as an independent catering to reactionary whites across the country. Compared to the other candidates, Humphrey was liberal, but African Americans doubted his sincerity on civil rights after black newspapers printed photographs of him embracing Georgia's segregationist

[558] "Proposal by the Voter Education Project for a Southwide Conference of Black Elected Officials, December 11-14, 1968, Atlanta, Georgia," submitted to the Taconic Foundation, n.d., Folder "Southern Regional Council: Conference of Black Elected Officials 1968," Taconic Foundation Records. See also Taconic Foundation evaluation of the Voter Education Project grant application for the Southwide Conference of Black Elected Officials, October 15, 1968, Folder "Southern Regional Council: Conference of Black Elected Officials 1968," Taconic Foundation Records; "Black Officials to Meet Dec. 11-14," *VEP News* 2, no. 9 (September 1968); and Janet Wells, "More Than 250 Negroes Running in South Nov. 5," *VEP News* 2, no. 10 (October 1968).

Governor Lester Maddox on the campaign trail. Sizing up all three candidates in *The Nation*, Jordan noted that unlike in 1960 and 1964, "the Southern Negro has the franchise but no choice." African Americans were lukewarm at best about Humphrey, and they took Nixon's and Wallace's calls for law and order as thinly veiled racism. Jordan acknowledged that Nixon would probably win, but he also warned the country to stop overlooking southern black voters. African Americans were poised to win elections across the South—evidence of actual black power.[559]

On November 5, 1968, southern African Americans demonstrated their poll power in hundreds of state and local races. Echoing the strategy of Bayard Rustin, Jordan spoke at an Associated Press convention ten days after the election: "We did not speak with sit-ins and demonstrations, boycotts or court action. Nor did we voice our grievances…through civil disobedience or violence. We spoke to America at the ballot box."[560] According to VEP research, around two-thirds of registered African Americans in the South voted, usually for Democratic candidates. In Texas, the black vote helped secure Humphrey's lone win in the South. Elsewhere, at least 107 African Americans won their contests. 12 African Americans were elected to the Legislature in Georgia, 19 as justices of the peace in Alabama, 15 to the Election Commission in Mississippi, five on city councils in Arkansas, and three to local school boards in Louisiana. Others won races for magistrate, constable, town marshal, board of revenue, and city recorder in several states. In total, 385 black men and women now served in elected positions within the eleven southern states. Nixon's victory drew little praise from African Americans, but gains in local elections demonstrated black political power.[561]

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[559] Vernon E. Jordan, Jr., "New Game in Dixie," *The Nation*, October 21, 1968, 397. See also Carl Solberg, *Hubert Humphrey: A Biography* (New York: Norton, 1984), 306.

[560] Vernon E. Jordan Jr., Statement to the Associated Press Managing Editors Annual Convention, November 15, 1968, Box 2T79, Folder "VEP Fall 1967," Field Foundation Archives.

With the election results tallied, the VEP concentrated on the Southwide Conference for Black Elected Officials. Out of 385 eligible people, 189 attended the four-day seminar in Atlanta. CBS and NBC sent television crews to film highlights, and major newspapers printed stories about the historical significance of the gathering. Not since Reconstruction had so many elected African Americans been in one room. On the conference's opening night, Jordan welcomed them with a warning: "The Negro officeholder is being observed closely by both races. Some of the watching eyes are friendly, but many are hostile."[562] He sympathized with them as leaders bearing the weight of unfair expectations from their constituents when they were new to government. "Black voters often feel that officeholders should produce instantly, almost magically, all those benefits and services that had been denied down through the years by callous white officials."[563]

Roaming the conference halls and peering into workshops, Reverend John Morris, the SRC's coordinator for special projects and an Episcopalian minister, found the Southwide Conference sessions "very much alive with discussion."[564] Seminars offering practical advice for school board members, law enforcement officers, state legislators, and multiple city and county officials lasted for hours and generated many new ideas. Notable speakers at the conference included Attorney General Ramsey Clark, Mayor Gordon Hatcher of Gary, Indiana, Congresswoman Shirley Chisholm from New York, Georgia State Representative Julian Bond,

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[561] Janet Wells, "Over 100 Blacks Elected Nov. 5," *VEP News* 2, no. 11 (November 1968); and "Nov. 5 Winners Listed," *VEP News* 2, no. 11 (November 1968).

[562] Vernon E. Jordan, Jr., "…A Rapidly Growing List…" Opening Remarks in the Conference Proceedings of the Southwide Conference of Black Elected Officials, December 11, 1968, Box 2T71, Folder "SRC, Inc.," Field Foundation Archives. See also Harmon Perry, "Negro Politicians Watched, Voter Project Director Says," *Atlanta Journal*, December 12, 1968; and Annual Report of the Executive Director of the Southern Regional council for 1968, January 1969, Box 2S415, Folder "SRC General 1971," Field Foundation Archives.

[563] Vernon E. Jordan, Jr., "…A Rapidly Growing List…"

[564] "Report of the Conference Coordinator," Southwide Conference of Black Elected Officials, n.d. Folder "Southern Regional Council: Conference of Black Elected Officials 1968," Taconic Foundation Records.

Reginald Hawkins and Eva Clayton from North Carolina, and Lawrence T. Guyot Jr. of the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party. Ultimately, according to Morris, the "chief success" of the conference was simply that "for the first time, the region's black elected officials…assembled together."[565]

Black power was as an important theme of the Southwide Conference. Rooting the ideology in black electoral power, the VEP encouraged those in attendance to apply black power to politics in a way that Bayard Rustin suggested. Shirley Chisholm, the first African American woman elected to Congress, told the crowd, "Black power is concerned with organizing the rage of black people" through political activism.[566] In his keynote address, former SNCC communications director and Georgia State Congressman Julian Bond told the crowd to be proud that their constituents placed enough faith in them to give them their vote, and to take it as a sign that most African Americans still believed in political solutions. Quoting the words of Reconstruction-era black politicians who were stripped of their positions a century earlier, Bond stated, "Their words are 100 years old, but their thoughts and ideas are as fresh as tomorrow. If each of us can approach his job with one half the fire and fervor that these…men did, then we will have vindicated the trust our constituents put in us."[567] Agreeing with the tone of the conference, the *Atlanta Constitution* editorialized, "'Black power' is a much and often misused

[565] *Ibid*. See also Conference Proceedings of the Southwide Conference of Black Elected Officials, December 11-14, 1968, Box 2T71, Folder "SRC, Inc.," Field Foundation Archives.

[566] Quoted in Janet Wells, "200 Black Elected Officials Attend First Southwide Meet," *V.E.P. News* 2, no. 12 (December 1968).

[567] Rep. Julian Bond, "…An Attack on All of Us…" in Conference Proceedings of the Southwide Conference of Black Elected Officials.

slogan…But what happens when black power is achieved—when Negroes are elected to office? Then the focus of interest must shift from power to responsible use of power."[568]

After four days of speeches, networking, and workshops, the Southwide Conference ended with black elected officials more confident about their roles in government. After returning home, many wrote the VEP with sincere thanks. Sheriff Lucius D. Anderson of Macon County, Alabama, the South's lone black sheriff, expressed his gratitude.[569] State Representative Albert W. Thompson of Georgia wrote that the Southwide Conference was "one of the richest and most rewarding of my entire life."[570] Norfolk City Councilman Joseph A. Jordan Jr. thanked the VEP for moving "towards liberating the Southland."[571] V.A. Edwards, a Board of Revenue Commissioner in Macon County, Alabama, wrote Jordan thanking the VEP for "making it possible for the newly elected officials…to make a better adjustment than was done in the earlier days of Reconstruction."[572]

With 1968 turning out to be the VEP's busiest year, Jordan and the SRC renewed the VEP for a third time through 1972. The second VEP had proven that the Voting Rights Act alone was not enough to solve black disfranchisement. The task was far from finished, and the VEP wanted to continue its work through voter registration, education, and leadership training. At an SRC conference, staff members discussed the possibility of disassociating the VEP from the

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[568] Editorial, "The Use of Black Power," *Atlanta Constitution*, December 12, 1968. See also Ralph McGill, "Southerners At Their Best," *Atlanta Constitution*, December 12, 1968.

[569] Lucius D. Anderson to Vernon E. Jordan Jr., December 30, 1968, Folder "Southern Regional Council: Conference of Black Elected Officials 1968," Taconic Foundation Records.

[570] Albert W. Thompson to Vernon E. Jordan Jr., December 16, 1968, Folder "Southern Regional Council: Conference of Black Elected Officials 1968," Taconic Foundation Records.

[571] Joseph A. Jordan Jr. to Vernon E. Jordan Jr., December 19, 1968, Folder "Southern Regional Council: Conference of Black Elected Officials 1968," Taconic Foundation Records.

[572] V.A. Edwards to Vernon E. Jordan Jr., December 18, 1968, Folder "Southern Regional Council: Conference of Black Elected Officials 1968," Taconic Foundation Records.

SRC, securing its own tax-exemption so the VEP could "do more than just be a backer" and become an active civil rights group.[573] They proposed a new policy for its grants to only go to counties with less than 50 percent of its black population registered and require local groups to raise matching funds. For the four-year project, Jordan created a budget worth $500,000 per year, and he sent the proposal to various foundations. Eclipsing its previous grants to the VEP, the Ford Foundation committed $250,000 for 1969. The Taconic and Field Foundations also responded with interest. Taconic was noncommittal but hinted at future support, while the Field Foundation pledged $125,000 for 1969 with a promise to consider three annual renewals. Leslie Dunbar, the VEP's constant supporter, wrote Jordan with news of the Field Foundation's assistance: "We are happy to have been a part, and to continue being one, of this program that has meant so much to all of us."[574]

More than any other organization, the VEP fostered and managed the rise of post-Voting Rights Act black poll power in the South. In three years, the VEP funded at least 403 local projects concentrating on registration, citizenship education, and leadership training in 11 states. Black registration grew from 2,689,000 in mid-1966 to 3,112,000 by the end of the summer in 1968, an increase of 423,000 people, about 14 percent.[575] Although the VEP was not responsible for every registrant, it ensured that activists had access to resources that encouraged community members to register, vote, and get involved in local politics unlike ever before. Encapsulating the

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[573] Minutes to the Advisory Meeting of the Voter Education Project, June 21-23, 1968, Box 43, Folder 3, Office Files, VEP Records. See also Memorandum, Vernon E. Jordan Jr. to VEP Advisory Committee, Re: The Future of the Voter Education Project, June 21, 1968, Box 43, Folder 3, Office Files, VEP Records.

[574] Leslie W. Dunbar to Vernon E. Jordan Jr., November 27, 1968, Box 64, Folder 13, Office Files, VEP Records. See also Memorandum from the Field Foundation on VEP Grant Proposal, Fall 1968, Box 2T71, Folder "Southern Regional Council Miscellaneous (VEP) Fall 1968," Field Foundation Archives; and Memorandum from the Taconic Foundation on VEP Grant Proposal, November 26, 1968, Folder "Southern Regional Council: Voter Education Project, 1967-1971," Taconic Foundation Records.

[575] Voter Education Project, "Voter Registration in the South – Summer, 1968," Folder 7607, NCF Records.

opinions of others, John Morsell wrote Vernon Jordan in March 1969 thanking him for the VEP's support to the NAACP over the last several years: "The funds which VEP has made available to us via the route of direct grants to branch campaigns have often spelled the difference between some action and no action at all."[576] Recalling his time with the VEP years later in his memoir, Jordan wrote, "There was never any doubt in our minds that we were doing some of the most vital work in the South. Those newly registered and voting black people would change Southern politics forever."[577]

Although it intended to last another four years through 1972, the VEP's progress ruptured in 1969. According to Paul Anthony, "Through much of the year, in dramatic testimony to its effectiveness, VEP was engaged in a struggle for its life. At the end of the year, VEP's future remained clouded."[578] That struggle was due to the debate surrounding tax reform, in which congressional conservatives decimated the VEP's support from philanthropic foundations.

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[576] John A. Morsell to Vernon E. Jordan Jr., March 31, 1969, Box 65, Folder 6, Office Files, VEP Records.

[577] Jordan, *Vernon Can Read!*, 183.

[578] Annual Report of the Executive Director of the Southern Regional Council for 1969, January 1970, Box 2S415, Folder "SRC General 1971," Field Foundation Archives.

CHAPTER 6: 'THE BIGGEST BIASED REGISTRARS OF ALL': THE TAX REFORM ACT OF 1969 AND THE ATTACK ON THE BLACK VOTE

Representative Wright Patman, a populist New Dealer from Texas who had served in the House of Representatives since 1929, finally felt vindicated. On February 18, 1969, he sat as the first witness before the House Ways and Means Committee to offer his opinion on big philanthropy, an opinion he had been trying to share for over a decade, although few had paid attention. "Are the giant foundations on the road to becoming political machines?" he asked the Committee members. For years, Patman had criticized the exponential growth of philanthropic foundations and how their tax-exemptions deprived the federal government of revenue. Under generous IRS guidelines, foundations had avoided paying taxes, and while philanthropists claimed these exemptions freed them to spend generously on projects intended to benefit society, Patman was convinced that the majority harbored their money and cheated the American people. At times, Patman's evidence had bordered on the conspiratorial, but within the last two years, conservatives started paying attention to his claims. They saw something more insidious than tax shelters, especially within the Ford Foundation, which in their opinion, was the most liberal of all major foundations. Patman saw it too, and in his opening statement, wondered aloud to his fellow House members, "Does the Ford Foundation have a grandiose design to bring vast political, economic and social changes to the nation in the 1970s?"[579]

[579] Statement of Hon. Wright Patman, Hearings Before the Committee on Ways and Means, House of Representatives, 91st Congress, First Session on the Subject of Tax Reform, Part 1, 15. See also Robert Sherrill, '"The Last of the Great Populists' Takes on the Foundations, the Banks, the Federal Reserve, the Treasury," *New York Times Magazine*, March 16, 1969.

During the late 1960s, conservatives attacked philanthropic foundations. They did so out of fear, believing that many foundations had grown too large, powerful, wealthy, liberal, and supportive of the civil rights movement and black power. The assault began in late 1967. Earlier that summer, the Ford Foundation gave a $175,000 grant to CORE for voter registration fieldwork in Cleveland, Ohio. Months later, Carl Stokes won the city's mayoral race, becoming the first African American mayor of a major metropolis. CORE was not involved in Stokes's campaign, but conservatives saw a connection. Without evidence, conservatives in Congress and in the press believed the Ford Foundation had meddled in politics and helped elect the first African American mayor of a major city. Over the next year and a half, more stories surfaced about alleged tax abuses by foundations. Many liberals and populists were upset alongside conservatives, converging with a larger national debate over taxes and whether or not philanthropy paid its fair share in society. This cross-ideological, collective outrage against foundations shielded conservatives and enabled them to weaken the civil rights movement.[580]

Many Americans believed their country was descending into chaos during the late 1960s, and big philanthropy was only part of the problem. President Lyndon B. Johnson's policies within his War on Poverty were beginning to unravel as he sunk his attention and political capital into expanding the Vietnam War. Riots broke out in Newark, Detroit, and other cities. The Democratic National Convention in Chicago turned violent, only months removed from the assassinations of Martin Luther King Jr. and Robert F. Kennedy in 1968. Richard Nixon and George Wallace appealed to white conservatives through their presidential campaigns, engineering a racialized populist anger across the United States. Part of that frustration took aim

[580] On CORE, the Ford Foundation, and Carl Stokes, see Karen Ferguson, "Organizing the Ghetto: The Ford Foundation, CORE, and White Power in the Black Power Era, 1967-1969," *Journal of Urban History* 34, no. 1 (November 2007): 67-100; and Leonard M. Moore, *Carl B. Stokes and the Rise of Black Political Power* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2002), 56.

at liberal foundations, who conservatives claimed fomented social rebellion in cities like Cleveland.

Conservatives took advantage of popular indignation toward big philanthropy to undermine African American voting power. They did so through the Tax Reform Act of 1969, a long, complex law that was the product of 10 months of legislative wrangling between the United States House of Representatives, Senate, and Treasury Department. The bill eliminated loopholes for the rich while easing taxes for most Americans by updating regulations on bonds, credit, charitable deductions, and income tax. Most Americans were in favor of tax reform, and while the law addressed hundreds of separate taxation policies, Section 4945 did something else. Within this portion of the bill, Congress outlined restrictions for philanthropic foundations that gave money to voter registration campaigns. Southern conservatives in Congress were responsible—those once proud to identify as segregationists. To defund organizations working to register African Americans, conservatives led by Senator Russell Long of Louisiana and Senator Herman Talmadge of Georgia accused tax-exempt foundations of illegally influencing politics when sponsoring voter registration activities. Most Americans agreed that tax-exempt philanthropies should not be involved in politics, but Senators Long, Russell, and their allies enflamed the issue by exaggerating the extent to which foundations supported such projects. Through the Tax Reform Act of 1969, conservatives compromised the money supply to civil rights groups conducting registration campaigns.

Caught in this firestorm was the Voter Education Project. While the VEP remained operational in 1969—funding 98 projects and helping increase southern African American registration by 136,000 to a record high of 3,248,000—the tax debate distracted executive director Vernon Jordan, frightened philanthropic supporters, and put the VEP's future in

jeopardy.[581] The VEP and its allies lobbied against the tax reform bill, helping forge a compromise of sorts. The Tax Reform Act of 1969 allowed for the continuation of tax-exempt philanthropic support to the VEP and similar organizations, but under strict rules. The new restrictions meant that the VEP would have to spend an inordinate amount of time fundraising, diversifying its financial support, and stretching its resources. Philanthropists became much more cautious when dealing with civil rights agencies, and foundations instituted much tighter oversight. The SRC and VEP separated to preserve separate tax-exemptions, cutting the VEP off from its parent organization and support system. The close relationship between philanthropy and the VEP diminished, and as the money became more difficult to acquire, voting rights activity stalled across the South.

Conservatives such as Senators Long and Talmadge did not care, for by compromising philanthropic support to the VEP, they intentionally undermined the civil rights movement. To them, the VEP was part of the problem, empowering black political activism across the American South. After the Voting Rights of 1965, African Americans registered in greater number than ever before, and since the South had remained a one-party region for nearly a century, they joined the Democratic Party. White conservatives were alarmed, not only because black enfranchisement changed the racial complexion of the Democratic Party, but to them, the civil rights movement had harmed society, not improved it. Yet the legislative successes of the civil rights era and changing moods within the country prevented conservatives from using the same racist tactics and language that had served them so well over the past century. Using the tax reform debate as an under-the-radar tactic, conservatives learned to employ race-neutral and tax-oriented language to mask their underlying motives to attack civil rights and black power.

[581] Annual Report of the Executive Director of the Southern Regional Council for 1969, January 1970, Box 2S415, Folder "SRC General 1971," Field Foundation Archives.

Borrowing from Nixon's racially coded appeals to the silent majority, conservatives claimed they wanted to stop foundations from tampering with elections, but they were also trying to prevent the civil rights movement from going any further.

The VEP survived the Tax Reform Act of 1969, but it was never the same. Neither was the larger civil rights movement in the American South since grassroots organizations like the Houston County Voters Committee in Georgia, the Jefferson Davis County Voters League in Mississippi, and the McCormick Civic League in South Carolina lost crucial financial and educational support from the VEP. The diminished capability of the VEP accelerated the loss of enthusiasm and local activism surrounding black voting rights, and the southwide movement for the ballot began to wither away.

The Fight Against Philanthropy

The conservative assault against foundations stretched back almost two decades. In 1952, Representative Edward E. Cox of Georgia led a House investigation to determine if "tax exempt educational and philanthropic foundations are financing un-American and subversive activities."[582] Cox and his allies believed foundations had connections to communist sympathizers. During the late 1940s and early 1950s, foundations funded more social science research within the United States and abroad, projects that often pointed out problems of inequality. In particular, Cox considered the Carnegie Corporation's work with the United Nations as unacceptable, recalling Carnegie's previous support to Gunnar Myrdal during the 1940s. Myrdal was a Swedish sociologist whose influential 1944 publication, *An American Dilemma: The Negro Problem and Modern Democracy*, chronicled racism in the South. Carnegie's relationship to Myrdal underscored conservative mistrust of big philanthropy. During his investigation, Cox also called executives of the Ford and Rockefeller Foundations to give

[582] "Vote To Probe Red Influence in Foundations," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, April 5, 1952.

testimony on their philanthropic ventures to promote integrated schooling in the South. In an editorial for the *Chicago Defender*, NAACP executive secretary Walter White argued that the purpose of the Cox Committee was "to intimidate all foundations so that they would be afraid to contribute funds for the advancement of civil rights and equal justice for Negroes in the South."[583] Less than three weeks later, Cox died. His committee had been unable to find any evidence of subversive activities by foundations, and without Cox, the committee disbanded.[584]

Conservatives in Congress had taken note of Cox's allegations, and less than a year later, Congressman B. Carroll Reece of Tennessee formed a new committee to continue investigating tax-exempt foundations. Reece had more to scrutinize than did Cox. In 1953, the Fund for the Advancement of Education and the Fund for the Republic, two projects established under the Ford Foundation, began studies of segregated education that disturbed southern Congressmen. Calling the Cox Committee "soft," Reece promised more action to study how tax-exempt foundations supported propaganda "to influence public opinion for the support of certain types of ideologies that tend to the left."[585] But Reece's study came at a time when the country and national press were wary of Senator Joseph McCarthy's alleged communist conspiracies. The *Washington Post* poked fun at Reece soon after hearings began by calling him "mischievous" and arguing that another committee to inspect foundations was "wholly unnecessary, stupidly wasteful of public funds and can serve no purpose save intimidation."[586] Public opinion and

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[583] Walter White, "Cox Committee Tactics Threaten Good Works of Great Foundations," *Chicago Defender*, December 6, 1952.

[584] See also "Foundations Deny Knowledge of Supporting Subversives," *Washington Post*, December 4, 1952; "House Unit Criticizes Foundations for Aiding Some Reds but Generally Praises Projects," *Washington Post*, January 3, 1953; and Zunz, *Philanthropy in America*, 193-194.

[585] Murrey Harder, "New Probe in Works: Reece Aims at Foundations Again," *Washington Post*, July 20, 1953.

[586] "Probing Foundations," *Washington Post*, August 2, 1953.

House leadership were against Reece, and he abandoned the inquiry before foundations even had the chance to respond.[587]

While the Cox and Reece Committees had little immediate impact, they planted in the mind of conservatives the belief that foundations were leftist, powerful, and mysterious with tax-exempt privileges. And foundations took notice. "[I]f not part of a vast communist conspiracy," writes historian Alice O'Connor, "the big foundations were undeniably part of a fairly insulated, at least moderately liberal, heavily Ivy League, and, yes, interlocking corporate-government-university elite."[588] Philanthropy's secrecy, coupled with allegations from the Cox and Reece Committees, gave conservative writers plenty of material to draw on. Through the rest of the decade, popular right-wing authors such as René A. Wormser and Harold Lord Varney accused the Ford Foundation of insidious, left-wing activity.[589] The backlash against Ford caused its leadership to scale down its grants to projects that might appear controversial, including shutting down its Gray Areas urban program and the Fund for the Advancement of Education. As historian Olivier Zunz sums up, "The Cox and Reece congressional investigations failed to convict the liberal foundations, but they put them on alert."[590]

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[587] On the Reece Committee, see Alice O'Connor, "The Politics of Rich and Rich: Postwar Investigations of Foundations and the Rise of the Philanthropic Right," in Nelson Lichtenstein, ed., *American Capitalism: Social Thought and Political Economy in the Twentieth Century* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006): 228-248; and Zunz, *Philanthropy in America*, 194-195. On the Fund for the Advancement of Education and the Fund for the Republic, see Thomas C. Reeves, *Freedom and the Foundation: The Fund for the Republic in the Era of McCarthyism* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1969); Storrs, *The Second Red Scare and the Unmaking of the New Deal Left*, 178-179; 195-196; and Ferguson, *Top Down*, 40-48.

[588] O'Connor, "The Politics of Rich and Rich," 241-242.

[589] For example, see René A. Wormser, *Foundations: Their Power and Influence* (New York: The Devin-Adair Company, 1958); and Harold Lord Varney, "The Ford Foundation: The Road to Thought Control," *American Mercury*, July 1959: 5-14.

[590] Zunz, *Philanthropy in America*, 195. See also Alice O'Connor, "The Ford Foundation and Philanthropic Activism in the 1960s," in Lagemann, ed. *Philanthropic Foundations*, 169-194; and Ferguson, *Top Down*, 48.

In 1961, around the time when Stephen Currier was pushing for greater philanthropic support for civil rights, Representative Wright Patman launched what would become an eight-year campaign against alleged philanthropic tax abuse. Patman's views on government were opposite from Cox and Reece, but like his conservative colleagues, he accused foundations of financial manipulation. He suspected that most foundations were nothing more than facades of altruism that horded wealth. The year before Patman began his inquiry, *Business Week* published an advice column asking its affluent readers, "Have you ever thought about setting up a 'family foundation'?" It made sense, the magazine suggested, because "if properly set up…it pays no federal taxes at all; yet it can be kept entirely under the control of its founder and his family."[591] This type of message alarmed Patman, and as chair of the House Select Committee on Small Business, he reviewed over 500 foundations searching for a pattern of tax abuse. During his years of investigation, he did uncover abuses—most notably the CIA's control of the National Student Association—but errant research and a penchant for exaggeration undermined Patman's broader call for philanthropic reform. His work had a cumulative effect, and he published eight reports during the decade. In 1964, Patman pushed the Treasury Department to investigate foundations, but the Treasury found that most abuses were negligible and that small foundations were the main culprits, not major ones like Ford and Rockefeller. Yet Patman—"the most indefatigable of the populist gadflies on Capitol Hill"—would not relent, calling for a 25-year limit on foundations, greater oversight, and an easier way to strip them of tax-exemption.[592]

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[591] "Personal Business," *Business Week*, May 7, 1960, 153-154.

[592] "Tax-Exempt Foundations," *Washington Post*, March 29, 1968. On Wright Patman and his investigations of foundations, see Waldemar A. Nielsen, *The Big Foundations* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1972), 5-9; Thomas A. Troyer, "The 1969 Private Foundation Law: Historical Perspective on Its Origins and Underpinnings," *The Exempt Organization Tax Review* 27, no. 1 (January 2000), 55-59; Nancy Beck Young, *Wright Patman: Populism, Liberalism, and the American Dream* (Dallas: Southern Methodist University Press, 2000), 207-216; William H. Byrnes IV, "The Private Foundation's Topsy Turvy Road in the American Political Process," *Houston Business and Tax Law Journal* 4 (2004), 562; O'Connor, "The Politics of Rich and Rich," 243-244; Korstad and

As government officials and the general pubic became more aware of Patman's accusations against tax-exempt foundations, the *New York Times* broke the story of CORE's $175,000 voter registration grant from the Ford Foundation on July 14, 1967. Calling Ford's grant "an unusual move" to a "so-called militant civil rights group," reporter Douglas Robinson noted that CORE had become "an increasingly vocal champion of the black power concept."[593] Robinson also observed that Mayor Ralph S. Locher refused to discuss whether or not the grant would help his opponent Carl Stokes in the upcoming Democratic primary. The money was for non-partisan registration drives and community programs, but right away, the grant raised suspicions of political activity by a major foundation because of its timing to the election. Black newspapers did not help, with headlines such as "$175,000 Ford Grant To Help Put Stokes in Office" and "CORE's Ford Grant Could Help Get Stokes Elected."[594] On October 3, Stokes defeated Locher by 18,736 votes and went on to win the race, becoming the first black mayor of a major American city. Many looked at the Stokes campaign with suspicion for the role the Ford Foundation may have played. Philanthropic support for voter registration work was nothing new, but Ford appeared to have crossed a line by getting involved in a particular city during an important race. The possibility of foul play was enough to raise suspicion that if foundations wanted to, they could involve themselves in more elections to manipulate outcomes through tax-exempt donations.[595]

Leloudis, *To Right These Wrongs*, 328-329; and Zunz, *Philanthropy in America*, 202-206; and Paget, *Patriotic Betrayal*, 346, 354.

[593] Douglas Robinson, "Ford Grant to Aid CORE in Cleveland," *New York Times*, July 14, 1967.

[594] "$175,000 Ford Grant To Help Put Stokes in Office," *Afro-American*, August 5, 1967; and "CORE's Ford Grant Could Help Get Stokes Elected," *Chicago Defender*, August 12, 1967.

[595] See Abe Zaidan, "Stokes Victory Shakes Cleveland Politicians," *Washington Post*, October 12, 1967; M.A. Farber, "Ford Fund Widens Reform Role and Draws Mounting Criticism," *New York Times*, December 23, 1968; Korstad and Leloudis, *To Right These Wrongs*, 333-334; and Zunz, *Philanthropy in America*, 220-223. On Carl

Over the next year, more stories broke about alleged foundation abuses. McGeorge Bundy, who took over as President of the Ford Foundation in 1966 after serving in the Kennedy and Johnson Administrations, pushed Ford in an increasingly ambitious direction that funded controversial projects. In particular, the Ford Foundation financed a school reform project in Brooklyn that smacked of political interference, and it awarded eight former staff members from Senator Robert F. Kennedy's presidential campaign with travel grants worth $131,000 to help them recoup after his murder. The national press reported on these stories, reflecting the Ford Foundation's growing reputation as too cozy with liberals and a provocateur of social change. At the same time, Americans were becoming restless about taxes in general. While inflation continued to climb, the Johnson Administration had increased income taxes in 1967 to fund the Vietnam War. One of the final acts of the Treasury Department under Johnson had been to release a report that detailed over 200 people taking advantage of tax loopholes. In February 1969, the Treasury Department was flooded with nearly 2,000 letters demanding reform. With Americans angry about tax abuse and distrustful of foundations, a change in the White House afforded a convenient time for both Republicans and Democrats in Congress to move forward with comprehensive tax reform.[596]

On January 29, 1969, the House Ways and Means Committee announced it would begin hearings in February to reform federal tax laws. Chairman Wilbur D. Mills, a Democrat from Arkansas who wielded enormous influence within the House, told the press that his committee

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Stokes, see Moore, *Carl B. Stokes and the Rise of Black Political Power*; and David and Richard Stradling, *Where the River Burned: Carl Stokes and the Struggle to Save Cleveland* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2015).

[596] Fred M. Hechinger, "Ford Fund Pledges Drive Against Racial Prejudice," *New York Times*, February 18, 1968; Fred M. Hechinger, "Now the Foundations are on Trial for 'Activism,'" *New York Times*, February 2, 1969; "Ex-Kennedy Men Got $131,000 in Ford Grants, Panel Reports," *New York Times*, February 13, 1969; Nielsen, *The Big Foundations*, 9; Korstad and Leloudis, *To Right These Wrongs*, 329; and Molly C. Michelmore, *Tax and Spend: The Welfare State, Tax Politics, and the Limits of American Liberalism* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012), 107-108.

wanted nothing less than a "comprehensive reform package," indicating that investigating tax-exempt foundations was high on their priority list.[597] In between his announcement and the first hearing on February 18, the story broke about the Ford Foundation aiding former Robert Kennedy staffers, solidifying in the mind of conservatives the opinion that foundations needed stricter controls. Reminding readers of all recent abuses, Laurence Stern of the *Washington Post* labeled Ford and similar foundations the "philanthropic-industrial complex." But to Stern, the most egregious offense was CORE's Cleveland grant from Ford, which "expanded voter registration in the slums, a venture that was presumed to have helped ensure the victory of Carl B. Stokes in 1967."[598] Before the first witness had been called, it was clear that big philanthropy was the primary target.[599]

The first witness was Wright Patman. On February 18, he took center stage before the House Ways and Means Committee, pleased that the federal government was finally looking into philanthropic tax abuse. According to his research, somewhere between 22,0000 and 30,000 foundations existed, with around $20,500,000,000 in total assets. Philanthropy had grown too big without proper federal checks, Patman claimed, and his proposals were meant not "to destroy foundations, but to reform them."[600] He recommended a 20 percent tax on investment income and a 25 year limit on all foundations. Alan Pifer, president of the Carnegie Corporation, likened

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[597] Eileen Shanahan, "Foundations Face Tax Hearings Soon," *New York Times*, January 30, 1969.

[598] Laurence Stern, "Tax Reformers to Scrutinize Foundations' Exempt Status," *Washington Post*, February 12, 1969.

[599] Fred M. Hechinger, "Now the Foundations are On Trial for 'Activism,'" *New York Times*, February 2, 1969; and Louis Dombrowski, "Fairer Taxes Nixon's Goal, Kennedy Says," *Chicago Tribune*, February 8, 1969. On Wilbur D. Mills, see Julian E. Zelizer, *Taxing America: Wilbur D. Mills, Congress, and the State, 1945-1975* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

[600] Statement of Hon. Wright Patman, Hearings Before the Committee on Ways and Means, House of Representatives, 91st Congress, First Session on the Subject of Tax Reform, Part 1, 13. See also Rodney Crowther, "Patman Proposes Foundation Tax," *Baltimore Sun*, February 19, 1969.

the proposals to "a remedy tantamount to using a jack hammer to crack a walnut."[601] But in Patman's mind, while some foundations gave to important causes, many more "don't do much for the nation except serve as tax evasion devices for the very rich. But they're so loaded with money that no one dares touch them—except me."[602]

The next day, Representative John J. Rooney, a Democrat from New York, fanned Patman's accusations by claiming that a foundation had funded his opponent during his last campaign. "I am the first known member of Congress," Rooney declared in his testimony, "to be forced to campaign for reelection against the awesome financial resources of a tax-exempt foundation."[603] Without providing evidence, Rooney accused Frederick W. Richmond, a wealthy coffin manufacturer based in Manhattan, of using his Richmond Foundation to move $250,000 into several Jewish neighborhood groups in Brooklyn that functioned as ward clubs for his opponent. Richmond denied the allegations, but Rooney's message had its intended effect. Already distrustful of philanthropic ventures into politics, House members thought Rooney's allegations sounded plausible, even without proof.[604]

The day after Rooney's testimony, McGeorge Bundy appeared before the House Ways and Means committee to represent the Ford Foundation. During four hours of questioning, Bundy was belligerent and defensive, hardening the will of the committee to strike at

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[601] R. Thomas Herman, "Tax-Exempt Foundations Feel the Heat," *Wall Street Journal*, February 18, 1969.

[602] *Ibid*. See also Patman, Hearings Before the Committee on Ways and Means, 15; Crowther, "Patman Proposes Foundation Tax;" and Sherrill, '"The Last of the Great Populists' Takes on the Foundations, the Banks, the Federal Reserve, the Treasury."

[603] Statement of Hon. John J. Rooney, Hearings Before the Committee on Ways and Means, House of Representatives, 91st Congress, First Session on the Subject of Tax Reform, Part 1, 213. See also Philip Warden, "[Rooney] Tells House How Election Rival Used Tax-Free Funds," *Chicago Tribune*, February 20, 1969.

[604] Spencer Rich, "Political Use of Tax-Exempt Funds Charged," *Washington Post*, February 20, 1969; Rodney Crowther, "N.Y. Foundation is Called Campaign Tactic," *Baltimore Sun*, February 20, 1969; "Head of Foundation Responds to Accuser," *New York Times*, February 21, 1969; and Kenneth R. Crawford, "The Rooney Reform," *Newsweek*, March 3, 1969.

foundations in the new law. Committee members from both parties brought up allegations of improper Ford Foundation grants, such as CORE's work in Cleveland, school reform programs in New York City, and travel grants for Robert Kennedy's former staff. Where was the line, they asked Bundy, between educational grants and political advocacy? These were tax-exempt funds, they reminded him, and should not be used on anything that could be taken as political. Bundy defended the work of the Ford Foundation, but with too much arrogance for the committee to stomach. Responding to a line of questioning from Representative John W. Byrnes regarding the criteria the Ford Foundation uses to determine its grantees, Bundy stated testily, "We do it case by case or program by program, Mr. Byrnes."[605] He claimed each grant was educational and not intended to shape public policy. But it was how Bundy delivered the message that was remembered, not the substance of what he said.[606]

Through several more weeks of testimony, committee members heard from philanthropists, tax experts, and government officials in preparation for writing the bill's first draft. Tightening controls on foundations was just one part of the larger bill, but foundations were the main target. Those called before the committee kept reinforcing the need, whether on purpose or not. Former IRS chairman Mortimer Caplan called for greater oversight, while Nelson Rockefeller III tried to dismiss the allegation that the entire philanthropic model was unjust. But when Rockefeller mentioned that he had not paid income taxes since 1961 because of generous write-offs, he "brought the committee bolt upright and sent newspapermen racing for

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[605] Statement of McGeorge Bundy, Hearings Before the Committee on Ways and Means, House of Representatives, 91st Congress, First Session on the Subject of Tax Reform, Part 1, 363.

[606] Bundy, Hearings Before the Committee on Ways and Means, 354-431; "House Unit Studying Tax Reform Grills Ford Foundation Chief on Exempt Status," *Wall Street Journal*, February 21, 1969; Eileen Shanahan, "Bundy Backs Ford Grants as Within Limits of Law," *New York Times*, February 21, 1969; A.D. Horne, "Grants to RFK Aids Defended by Bundy," *Washington Post*, February 21, 1969; Nielsen, *The Big Foundations*, 11-12; Kai Bird, *The Color of Truth: McGeorge Bundy and William Bundy: Brothers in Arms* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1998), 387-388; and Troyer, "The 1969 Private Foundation Law," 61.

the telephones."[607] The next day, the *Chicago Tribune* printed the story on its front page: "Rockefeller Bares: No Tax on His Income."[608] The evidence kept piling up, and foundations could not mount a credible defense. On April 22, President Nixon gave a speech on tax reform promising that "exempt organizations, including private foundations, would come under much stricter surveillance."[609] Two days later, the House Ways and Means Committee ended hearings with Mills predicting that a draft version of the bill would be ready in August.[610]

As Congressmen began writing the law, distrust for foundations swelled. In April, the American Conservative Union circulated an influential pamphlet throughout Congress, and in May, a scandal involving Supreme Court Justice Abe Fortas and the little-known Wolfson Foundation solidified American opinion against big philanthropy. The American Conservative Union, a lobbying firm that originated out of Barry Goldwater's 1964 presidential defeat, published "The Financiers of Revolution" by a Senate staff attorney named Allan C. Brownfeld. In it, Brownfeld outlined all recent accusations made against the Ford Foundation, arguing "tax-exempt foundations do, in fact, engage in partisan political activities, and on a grand scale."[611] While "The Financiers of Revolution" passed hands in Congress, William Lambert broke a story in *Life Magazine* about Supreme Court Justice Abe Fortas and his ties to Wall Street financier Louis Wolfson and the Wolfson Foundation. Although the details remained murky, Lambert

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[607] Nielsen, *The Big Foundations*, 13.

[608] Philip Warden, "Rockefeller Bares: No Tax on His Income," *Chicago Tribune*, February 28, 1969. See also Bruce Galphin, "Tax-Exempt Enterprise is Criticized by Caplan," *Washington Post*, February 25, 1969; and Eileen Shanahan, "Rockefeller 3rd Says a Foundation's Mistakes Differ from Misconduct," *New York Times*, February 28, 1969.

[609] "Text of President Nixon's Speech on Tax Reform," *New York Times*, April 22, 1969.

[610] Philip Warden, "Mills Predicts U.S. Tax Reform Bill by August," *Chicago Tribune*, April 25, 1969.

[611] Allan C. Brownfeld, "The Financiers of Revolution," American Conservative Union, April 1969, 11. See also Marquis Childs, "Tax Reform Bill Bodes Ill for Future of Foundations," *Washington Post*, August 4, 1969; and Korstad and Leloudis, *To Right These Wrongs*, 330.

proved that Fortas received a check for $20,000 from the Wolfson Foundation in 1966 for unspecified reasons. Almost a year later, Fortas returned the money, but only after Wolfson was indicted for stock manipulation, for which he was later imprisoned. Lambert implied that Wolfson had paid his friend Fortas to help with his legal situation. Nixon and Chief Justice Earl Warren pressured Fortas to resign rather than face impeachment, and he turned in his letter on May 15. The situation could not have come at a worse time for the foundation community. As House members were drafting legislation, theories about the Ford Foundation's political intentions were eclipsed by the all-too-real example of Fortas and the Wolfson Foundation.[612]

Crippling the Vote by Compromising the Money

As popular distrust of foundations grew and House members drafted the law behind closed doors, civil rights leaders began expressing concern over tax reform. Up until that point, the VEP and its allies had stayed quiet, not wanting to draw extra attention to the relationship between foundations and voter registration projects. But when it became clear that foundations would be affected, race leaders started speaking out. Whitney Young telegrammed President Nixon and copied Mills with the message that restraining foundations would mean hampering voter registration efforts, thereby damaging the civil rights movement. Young raised the specter of black power and insisted that registration work kept radical tactics at bay: "By channeling black citizens' anger and frustration into voting through non-partisan programs we have been able to make this a more constructive alternative than those methods proposed by more violent revolutionists."[613] Roy Wilkins wrote to Representative Emmanuel Celler to argue that by

[612] William Lambert, "The Justice…and the Stock Manipulator," *Life Magazine*, May 9, 1969. See also Fred P. Graham, "Life Said Fortas Received and Repaid a Wolfson Fee," *New York Times*, May 5, 1969; John P. MacKenzie, "Fortas Confirms Fee from Wolfson," *Washington Post*, May 5, 1969; and "Fortas' Letter to Warren On His Ties to Wolfson Foundation," *Washington Post*, May 16, 1969.

[613] Telegram, Whitney M. Young Jr. to President Richard M. Nixon, April 30, 1969, Series 9, Box 54, Folder 531, Office of the Vice-President of the Administration, Office Files of Arthur D. Trottenberg, Ford Foundation Records.

limiting support for black voter fieldwork, "the registration of Negro citizens to vote would be crippled so badly that, in effect, the Administration and the Congress would be the biggest biased registrars of all."[614]

Wilkins's letter to Celler was in response to the Treasury Department's recently released proposals for tax reform. While the Treasury Department would not write the law, the Treasury wanted the House Ways and Means Committee to take its recommendations into consideration. In a press statement, Treasury stated that it wanted to "prohibit private foundations from themselves engaging in voter registration drives or other activity affecting political campaigns."[615] But using ambiguous language, Treasury hinted that it would be possible for foundations to continue supporting registration work if combined with public funds. Treasury offered no explanation for how the proposal would work, nor did it promise that House members would implement the suggestions into their legislation. "It is a tremendous outrage," Vernon Jordan commented to a journalist.[616] Responding to Young's telegram, Deputy Assistant Treasury Secretary John S. Nola wrote that their proposal "would not prevent or inhibit private foundations from making grants to publicly supported charitable or educational organizations even though their activities included…conduct of voter registration drives."[617] Assistant Treasury Secretary Edwin S. Cohen specifically mentioned the VEP as the type of organization that would be permitted to continue receiving philanthropic grants. But other parts of the press release made it read like all support for registration work must end because each project had the

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[614] Murray Seeger, "Rights Setback Seen in Tax Reform Package," *Los Angeles Times*, May 8, 1969.

[615] Press Release, Treasury Department, "Treasury Explains Its Tax Proposals Do Not Bar Voter Registration Drives By Publicly-Supported, Tax-Exempt Organizations," May 9, 1969, Series 9, Box 54, Folder 531, Office of the Vice-President of the Administration, Office Files of Arthur D. Trottenberg, Ford Foundation Records.

[616] Seeger, "Rights Setback Seen in Tax Reform Package."

[617] John S. Nolan to Whitney M. Young Jr. May 23, 1969, Series 9, Box 54, Folder 531, Office of the Vice-President of the Administration, Office Files of Arthur D. Trottenberg, Ford Foundation Records.

potential to influence an election. Treasury staff kept contradicting themselves while the House wrote the actual law in private, and they agitated civil rights leaders who wanted straight answers. "Stripped of its finery," editorialized the *Washington Post*, "it is disclosed as an attempt to forbid the voter registration drives which produced such stunning political upsets in Cleveland…where only white folks used to go to the polls."[618]

On May 27, the House Ways and Means Committee ended some of the intrigue by releasing a statement about drafting the tax reform legislation. Increasing the anxiety of Jordan, Wilkins, Young, and other civil rights leaders, the statement read in part, "No private foundation is to be permitted to directly or indirectly engage in any activities intended to influence the outcome of any election (including voter registration drives)."[619] Jordan and others had their answer. Cutting through the political doublespeak, it was clear that all civil rights groups receiving funding for registration work would have their support rolled back. The VEP's very existence was in question because African American voter registration was its main purpose.

Since the VEP's beginning in 1962, its leadership had avoided the media spotlight to safeguard its tax-exemption, but with the VEP endangered, Vernon Jordan took the lead among civil rights leaders advocating against the ban. Capitalizing on long-standing relationships with newspapers, the VEP fed information about how the proposed legislation would damage its mission. The *Washington Post* ran articles centering on the VEP and how the tax bill would stifle projects that were designed to bolster American democracy by widening the electorate. John W.

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[618] "Crimping the Foundations," *Washington Post*, May 18, 1969.

[619] Press Release, Committee on Ways and Means, U.S. House, May 27, 1969, "Chairman Wilbur D. Mills (D-AR), House Committee on Ways and Means, Announces Tentative Decisions on Tax Reform Subjects To Date For Purposes Of Drafting Legislative Language," Series 9, Box 54, Folder 530, Office of the Vice-President of the Administration, Office Files of Arthur D. Trottenberg, Ford Foundation Records.

Gardner, for example, reported that the VEP "has conducted voter registration drives over the past seven years, and has done so without the slightest partisanship."[620]

While members of the press defended the VEP, Jordan lobbied his contacts within the world of philanthropy to speak out against the proposed restrictions. Anne Blaine Harrison and Vernon Eagle from the New World Foundation wrote Mills explaining that some reforms were necessary, but not to voter registration work. Harrison and Eagles also informed Mills that philanthropic support had been crucial to the civil rights movement: "We are sure you will agree that such [registration] activities do not contravene the will of the Congress, having in mind the Civil Rights Acts of 1964 and 1968 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965. On the contrary, it appears that our activities have helped to carry out the very purposes envisaged by these Acts."[621] The leadership of the Field Foundation, including Leslie Dunbar, wrote Mills to suggest they were more amenable to limiting the lifespan of foundations than giving up registration sponsorship: "We find it hard to see why any voter registration, at any time, in any place, for any motive, is not in the pubic interest, and we would exclude foundation support from only those voter registration drives which make an overt appeal to partisan interests."[622] And Jordan also sent Mills information about the VEP, hoping to assuage any doubts about its necessity.[623]

As Jordan concentrated on the endangerment of voter registration funding, heads of foundations worried about the entirety of the coming tax reform bill. Before 1969, major and

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[620] John W. Gardner, "A Whip That Can Cripple," *Washington Post*, June 8, 1969. See also "Shaking the Foundations," *Washington Post*, June 1, 1969; Don Oberdorfer, "Administration's Plans Peril Negro Strides in Politics," *Washington Post*, June 5, 1969; and "Foundation Attack Excessive," *Los Angeles Times*, June 18, 1969.

[621] Anne Blaine Harrison and Vernon A. Eagle to Rep. Wilbur D. Mills, June 17, 1969, Box 65, Folder 16, Office Files, VEP Papers.

[622] Ruth P. Field, Morris B. Abram, and Leslie Dunbar to Rep. Wilbur D. Mills, June 9, 1969, Box 65, Folder 16, Office Files, VEP Papers.

[623] Vernon E. Jordan Jr. to Rep. Wilbur D. Mills, June 19, 1969, Box 65, Folder 16, Office Files, VEP Papers.

mid-sized foundations had been loosely affiliated through the Council on Foundations, an umbrella organization established in 1949, and later the Foundation Group, which compiled research on philanthropy. Foundations operated on their own, but the impending tax crisis drove them together. Soon after the House Ways and Means Committee began hearings, foundation executives gathered to discuss cooperative strategy. On July 14, fearful of a proposed five percent tax on all investment income, representatives from the Ford, Danforth, Sloan, Commonwealth, Carnegie, and other foundations met in New York to discuss the situation. They believed that Congress would enact a devastating bill on philanthropy due to a few small foundations abusing financial loopholes, and because of the Ford Foundation's sponsorship of registration activity. They also thought that the Ford Foundation inaccurately symbolized all large-scale philanthropic work, and that for the time being, each foundation ought to stop making grants "that seemed to be connected with the more militant types of activity in the civil rights field and the ghettoes."[624] While the philanthropic community lacked the "machinery for cooperative action," these leaders allied in anticipation of the coming federal legislation.[625]

After two months of silence, the Ways and Means Committee finished the bill, and the House of Representatives approved H.R. 13270 on August 7 by a vote of 394 to 30. The bill stipulated that no more than 25 percent of a registration project's budget could come from a single tax-exempt philanthropic source, and that groups undertaking such projects must operate in at least five states at once to protect against charges of partisanship in particular races. While benign on the surface, these two conditions alarmed civil rights leaders. While the VEP had operated in 11 states, the added pressure of the five-state provision meant that it would always

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[624] Draft Notes on Foundation Executives' Meeting, New York, July 14, 1969, Series 6, Box 37, Folder 827, Office of the Vice-President of the Administration, Office Files of David Bell, Ford Foundation Records.

[625] *Ibid*. See also Frank C. Porter, "Foundations Hit Plans for New Curbs," *Washington Post*, May 29, 1969; and "Shaking the Foundations," *Washington Post*, June 1, 1969.

have to ensure that simultaneous operations were ongoing in at least five states at once. The 25 percent rule was more disconcerting. While the VEP had applied for and won grants from several foundations, the bulk of the funding in recent years had come from the Ford Foundation, well exceeding 25 percent of the total budget. The VEP had never before paid attention to balancing percentages between foundations, glad to receive as much support as possible from any source. If the House version of the bill were to become law, it threatened to make the VEP's job of raising money and balancing figures much more difficult. All other civil rights agencies would be affected as well. In a letter to the *New York Times*, Roy Wilkins wrote, "Regardless of the language, the proposals before the Congress in the so-called tax reform bill to bar the use of foundation funds for voter registration are principally anti-black."[626] Wilkins thought that some members of Congress were unaware of the voter registration implication, but believed other members were purposefully defunding the civil rights movement. To him, Congress "proposes to crush the rising participation of Negro voters in the election process under the guise of regulating the foundations."[627]

After the House approved H.R. 13270, it went before the Senate Finance Committee, where during hearings between September 4 and October 8, conservatives mounted a blatant attack on black voting rights by disputing the legality of philanthropic support. Race leaders suspected partisanship during the House portion of the debate, but the actions of Senators Russell Long and Herman Talmadge confirmed their fears. Long, Talmadge, and other Senate southerners had opposed civil rights legislation throughout their careers, but after the Voting

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[626] Roy Wilkins, "Negro Voting Rights," Letter to the Editor of the *New York Times*, August 8, 1969.

[627] *Ibid*. See also "Tax Reform Bill OK'd by House Unit," *Chicago Tribune*, August 1, 1969; Marquis Childs, "Tax Reform Bill Bodes Ill for Future of Foundations," *Washington Post*, August 4, 1969; "Preserving the Foundations," *New York Times*, August 6, 1969; "Tax Reform," *Congressional Quarterly*, August 8, 1969, 1423; "Tax-Exempt Organizations," *Congressional Quarterly*, August 8, 1969, 1427; and "Foundations Curbs Seen as Big Blow to Blacks," *Chicago Daily Defender*, August 16, 1969.

Rights Act of 1965 passed, it appeared that they had lost. But they kept fighting, and the tax reform debate gave them cover to oppose civil rights surreptitiously by stopping the flow of money. A long piece in the *National Review* by Jeffrey Hart came out the same week when hearings began that claimed foundations operated as a "shadow government" fomenting "social aggression" in cases like Cleveland, an opinion shared by congressional conservatives.[628] Long and Talmadge's aim was not to disenfranchise African Americans—they had already lost that fight. But as Democrats, they wanted to preserve their power in the party while limiting the political capacity of foundations. As more African Americans registered, they voted as Democrats since it was the only well-organized party in the South. And as more African Americans voted as Democrats and ran black candidates in local elections, the Democratic Party inched toward the left. Opposing the funding for black voter registration was Long and Talmadge's final effort to conserve their ideal of the Democratic Party.[629]

On September 4, Senator Long, chairman of the Senate Finance Committee, opened the first day of hearings by promising his committee would discuss foundations—"a special target of this tax reform bill."[630] He expected to hear from some 300 witnesses before his committee would edit H.R. 13270. The first witness was the new Treasury Secretary David M. Kennedy. Concerning foundations, Kennedy recommended that the Senate lower the House's proposed 7.5 percent tax on all income to two percent. Kennedy described the tax as too harsh on foundations. While some Senators questioned Kennedy on specifics, Talmadge pressed him on the perpetuity of foundations. "Insofar as I know," Talmadge stated, "a foundation is the only thing in the

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[628] Jeffrey Hart, "The New Class War," *National Review*, September 9, 1969.

[629] On Senators Long, Talmadge, and other southerners opposing civil rights, see Finley, *Delaying the Dream*.

[630] Part 1, Hearings Before the Committee on Finance, United States Senate, 91st Congress, First Session on HR 13270, September 4 and 5, 1969 (Washington: US Government Printing Office, 1969), 1.

world that is permanent in scope. Individuals die, corporation charters expire and must be renewed, all life on earth and vegetation die," yet foundations live on.[631] The Nixon Administration had thought about recommending a twenty or twenty-five year limit on all foundations, Kennedy explained, but decided against including it within the Treasury Department's proposals to the House. Talmadge knew the Ford Foundation was 33 years-old. By pursuing the question, he and his conservative colleagues indicated their interest in adding a death sentence in their version of the tax bill.

Over the next month, the Finance Committee concentrated on other aspects of the tax reform bill, saving the foundations for last. While they waited, Vernon Jordan and Paul Anthony drafted a statement defending philanthropic funds for the VEP. Explaining the SRC and VEP's commitment to nonpartisanship, they argued that proposals in the House version were unfair because they insinuated the VEP's work could influence specific elections. While the VEP sponsored nonpartisan voter drives, it also benefitted the public good by collecting data, publishing reports, and providing citizenship education across the South. Anthony and Jordan were especially concerned about the House's proposals on capping funds from sources at 25 percent and dictating that groups like the VEP operate in at least five states. There were "still relatively few foundations which are willing to support programs of social reform," they argued, but "occasionally an unusually imaginative foundation has the courage and foresight to support exclusively, or almost exclusively, a new group which has promise and a sound idea."[632]

The Taconic Foundation had been such a supporter of the VEP, and John Simon, who took over as President after the deaths of Stephen and Audrey Currier, sent a statement to the

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[631] *Ibid*., 676.

[632] Statement by the Southern Regional Council to the U.S. Senate Finance Committee, Re: HR 13270, September 11, 1969, Frames 782-795, Reel 170, SRC Papers.

Senate Finance Committee defending philanthropic support of registration work. Writing, "to bring to your attention an apparently unintended adverse effect upon the [Southern Regional] Council," Simon reminded the Senators that the VEP had held a special tax-exempt ruling from the IRS since 1962, and he defended its nonpartisan mission as vital to the growth of American democracy.[633] The five state requirement would be drastic, and offering a compromise, he suggested they lower the number to three. But like Jordan and Anthony, Simon contended that the 25 percent stipulation would prove devastating since it would be "almost impossible for any new voter registration programs to be undertaken."[634] The VEP might be forced to refuse funds from foundations if they could not generate matching grants from other sources, a liability that would impede its effectiveness with millions of unregistered voters remaining in the South.

Michael Harrington, the celebrated left-wing journalist, picked up on the story and wrote about how conservatives were hiding their true intentions of upending black voting rights through tax reform legislation. "Although these provisions are phrased in dry, legislative jargon," he wrote, "they translate out into plain English as an attack on the democratic rights of the least powerful people in the land."[635] He implied that most Americans were not seeing the big picture. While adjusting tax laws could benefit the poor by forcing the wealthy to pay higher income taxes, impeding philanthropic support for African American voter registration would harm society. While such activities had been nonpartisan, "conservatives [had] noticed an obvious pattern. When the minorities and the impoverished finally gain access to the political process,

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[633] John G. Simon to Senate Finance Committee, October 1, 1969, Folder "Southern Regional Council: Voter Education Project, 1967-1971," Taconic Foundation Records.

[634] *Ibid*.

[635] Michael Harrington, "From the Left" syndicated column, October 4/5, 1969, clipping in Box 3, Folder 4, Printed and Published Materials, VEP Records.

they tend to favor civil rights and liberal economics."[636] Attempting to reach liberals who viewed the impending tax reforms in a positive light, Harrington stressed its negative consequences.

One such liberal—albeit not on race—was Wright Patman. Viewing the tax reform debate as a veteran New Dealer and not as a progressive on civil rights, he was more intent on curbing foundation power than protecting the source of funds for groups like the VEP. When the Senate Finance Committee convened on October 3 to begin hearings related to philanthropy, Patman testified with conspiratorial air, "I do not believe we really know the vast amount of tax dollars lost to this Nation by tax avoidance through the vehicle of privately controlled tax-exempt foundations."[637] For a decade, Patman's colleagues had not taken him seriously, but now, they lauded his foresight. Long and Talmadge praised his career and investigations into philanthropy, and they listened to Patman's long statement on the unchecked power of foundations. Conservatives appreciated Patman's single-minded pursuit of foundations, and his populist tendencies gave credibility to their argument that philanthropy avoided paying its fair share in society.

But foundation executives disagreed. Since earlier in the summer, leaders from dozens of foundations had coordinated preparation of their testimony in the Senate hearings. Their aim was to avoid overlap and to lay out every reason why tax-exempt philanthropy was important to civic life. J. Irwin Miller, president of the Cummins Foundation, responded to Long by saying foundations that hoarded family wealth to avoid taxes were few in number. Proposals for taxes, restrictions, and penalties on all philanthropy was unfair and would "take the risk-taking out of

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[636] *Ibid.*

[637] Part 6, Hearings Before the Committee on Finance, United States Senate, 91st Congress, First Session on HR 13270, October 3, 6, 7, 8, and 22, 1969 (Washington: US Government Printing Office, 1969), 5123.

giving."[638] J. George Harrar from the Rockefeller Foundation, Alan Pifer of the Carnegie Corporation, and David Freeman representing the Council on Foundations echoed Miller's message: "we very strongly fear that the results of a tax upon private philanthropy would be negative in terms of human progress and our ability to contribute to it."[639] And McGeorge Bundy—much more courteous before the Senate than he had been before the House—indicated that foundations filled gaps left by the government and corporations. When Talmadge or Long brought up voter registration projects and charged that philanthropies had moved into the political realm, foundation executives countered by saying that if such grants focused on nonpartisan campaigns, they strengthened rather than undermined American democracy.[640]

While philanthropic executives focused on the big picture of tax reform, civil rights advocates centered on the necessity of external funding to increase African American voter registration. But only three people had the opportunity to speak before the Senate Finance Committee on this topic—Whitney Young, Paul Anthony, and Lucy Benson from the League of Women Voters. Benson raised concerns about the House bill being too vague about what constituted a partisan voter registration campaign. Anthony, accompanied by Vernon Jordan and SRC lawyer Joseph Haas, summarized their earlier statement on the importance of the VEP. But it was Whitney Young who gave the most powerful testimony. Part of the tax reform bill, according to Young, "had the direct result of making the black community particularly feel that it is a hostile bill, a bill that suddenly came into fruition with a purpose as much to intimidate as to

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[638] *Ibid*., 5348.

[639] *Ibid*., 5375.

[640] For all witness statements and testimonies, see Part 6, Hearings Before the Committee on Finance, United States Senate, 91st Congress, First Session on HR 13270, October 3, 6, 7, 8, and 22, 1969.

legislate."[641] Foundations were already showing signs of cutting back. "There is some evidence that foundations will become again very cautious, very conservative," Young testified.[642] And their money was needed now more than ever, because without it, black militants would win. Such activists decried political solutions, Young suggested, and depriving institutions like the VEP of their funding would indirectly aid black radicalism. "You and others ask the black community to be responsible," Young testified, "but you do not give us the resources with which we can assume responsibility."[643]

Young's message failed to move Long, Talmadge, and their conservative allies, who moved to add a "flat prohibition against foundations' financing of voter registration drives."[644] If this version passed into law, the VEP would shut down and all other civil rights organizations would be compromised. Race leaders were outraged, and Jordan re-doubled his efforts lobbying against the law. The same day of the Senate's proposal, Jordan wrote and sent out mass mailings to political friends of the VEP, including Senator Edward M. Kennedy and Senator Daniel K. Inouye. Conservatives had proposed the change, but it would not be voted on until October 31. The VEP spent three days lobbying Congress, collecting debts from journalists to elevate the story in the press, and communicating with other race leaders and foundation executives to expose the pending consequences. While conservatives guarded their words about motives, Jordan was quick to label their tactics as racist and worried that others in Congress were not seeing the potential danger. Under the guise of tax reform, conservatives were undermining southern black voting power. "Make no mistake about it," Jordan warned. "Black people in the

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[641] *Ibid*., 5405.

[642] *Ibid*., 5405-5406.

[643] *Ibid*., 5407. See also *Ibid*., 5405-5407; 5892; and 5898-5899.

[644] Jan Nugent, "Foundation Curb Voted by Hill Unit," *Washington Post*, October 28, 1969.

South cannot continue to make the sort of registration gains they need to make without organized registration programs."[645]

The VEP's message resonated, and concerned citizens petitioned Senators to change their minds. Nate Welch, a member of the board for the Southern Regional Council, wrote Talmadge that the southern African American "voter registration effort will be virtually halted if the proposed legislation is enacted."[646] President Wallace L. Young Jr. of the New Orleans NAACP urged Long to drop the proposal: "Such drives increase in practice the theory of a democracy which involves all the people."[647] Once again, conservatives on the Finance Committee were unmoved, and they passed the resolution to ban all tax-exempt funding for voter registration projects by a vote of 13-4. The Committee also went forward with a proposal to cap the lifespan of all foundations at 40 years. While the VEP and civil rights leaders worried about the ban on voter campaigns, foundation executives panicked that their entire world was about to crash, paying less attention to voting rights concerns.[648]

While the Senate Finance Committee spent the next several weeks amending the legislation, Jordan kept mobilizing opponents. In a mass letter drawing attention to the "little-noticed recommendation" with "an insidious racist thrust aimed at inhibiting emerging black political power," Jordan tried to help people see beyond the obvious need for tax reform to the

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[645] VEP Press Release, October 30, 1969, Box 65, Folder 16, Office Files, VEP Papers. See also Meeting Notes by VEP staff, n.d., Plan of Action to Raise Awareness of Tax Reform Act, Box 65, Folder 16, Office Files, VEP Papers; and Vernon Jordan mass mail, October 28, 1969, Box 65, Folder 16, Office Files, VEP Papers.

[646] Nate Welch to Senator Herman Talmadge, October 30, 1969, Box 65, Folder 16, Office Files, VEP Papers.

[647] Telegram, Wallace L. Young Jr. to Senator Russell Long, October 30, 1969, Box 65, Folder 16, Office Files, VEP Papers.

[648] See "Punishing the Foundations," *New York Times*, November 3, 1969; and Vernon E. Jordan Jr. to Lane Kirkland of *AFL-CIO News*, November 10, 1969, Frames 836-837, Reel 170, SRC Papers.

clandestine attempt to upend civil rights gains.[649] Roy Wilkins rallied NAACP chapters around this message, and sympathetic journalists wrote that the Finance Committee's revisions would leave the VEP "penniless and impotent."[650]

Jordan also dealt with concerns from his foundation supporters. The Council on Foundations had reconvened following the Finance Committee's recommendation of a 40-year death sentence, and executives were terrified that their foundations were doomed. Not only were they worried about their foundations, they were also scared personally, for the tax legislation carried with it strict penalties for executives who used tax-exempt funds to sponsor political activities. Foundations could be penalized up to 100 percent of the offending grant if misappropriated funds were not returned within 90 days, and executives could be additionally liable for up to 50 percent of the grant value.[651] These philanthropists felt overwhelmed by the complexity of the law and the threat of personal penalties, and they were cautious about provoking Congress any further. As they worked on a statement, Jordan pressed them to include language denouncing the proposed ban on registration support. Jordan kept pushing, and Eli Evans of the Carnegie Corporation tipped him off that the Council on Foundation's response would dispute the registration prohibition. "Please note it [their statement] includes voter

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[649] Vernon E. Jordan Jr. to "Friend," November 13, 1969, Box 65, Folder 16, Office Files, VEP Papers.

[650] James T. Wooten, "Group Says Tax Vote Perils Black Vote," *New York Times*, November 19, 1969. See also "Voter Unit Hits Curb on Foundations," *Washington Post*, November 18, 1969; Reg Murphy, "Knives Sharpened for Registration," *Atlanta Constitution*, November 19, 1969; David Sanford, "Rocking the Foundations: A Tax Reform that Clubs Reform," *The New Republic*, November 29, 1969, 17-20; and Roy Wilkins to Vernon E. Jordan Jr., November 19, 1969, Box 65, Folder 16, Office Files, VEP Papers.

[651] For information about penalties, see David F. Rock, "V.E.P. and the 1969 Tax Reform Act," 1970, Box 44, Folder 8, VEP Papers; Homer C. Wadsworth, "Private Foundations and the Tax Reform Act of 1969," *Law and Contemporary Problems* 39, no. 4 (Autumn 1975), 261; and General Explanation of the Tax Reform Act of 1969, HR 13270, 91st Congress, Public Law 91-172, Prepared by the Staff of the Joint Committee on Internal Revenue Taxation, December 3, 1970 (Washington: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1970).

education and mentions Southern Regional Council," Evans wrote Jordan. "It wasn't easy."[652] Evans's message implied that many executives wanted to leave the issue of voter registration out in hopes of placating Congress. Their response to Congress stated that a group like the SRC "represents a major contribution to the maintenance and improvement of the American system of democratic government."[653]

After the Senate's harsh version, the House's earlier bill began to look much sweeter. The Council on Foundations recommended that the Senate turn back to the House's provisions rather than an outright ban. Jordan also came to see the House's version as the lesser of evils, and he began promoting its re-adoption. Senators Ralph Yarborough, a Democrat from Texas, and Hugh Scott, a Republican from Pennsylvania, drafted an amendment to accomplish that goal—to nullify the Finance Committee's proposal and return the tax legislation closer to the original House version. On December 1, they introduced what became known as the Yarborough-Scott Amendment to H.R. 13270. It included a more lenient application of the House's original ideas, including a requirement that organizations receiving tax-exempt funds for registration work conduct campaigns in more than one state, have at least three philanthropic supporters, and receive no more than 40 percent from one source. The Senate Finance Committee's actions, Yarborough and Scott stated, "harms all Americans, [and] would destroy such universally approved organizations as the League of Women Voters Education Fund and the Voter Education Project."[654] Jordan wrote to each Senator, urging approval of the amendment.[655]

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[652] Eli N. Evans to Vernon E. Jordan Jr., November 19, 1969, Box 65, Folder 16, Office Files, VEP Papers.

[653] Press Release, Council on Foundations, Inc., November 22, 1969, Box 65, Folder 16, Office Files, VEP Papers.

[654] Senator Ralph W. Yarborough and Senator Hugh Scott to "Senator," November 26, 1969, Box 65, Folder 16, Office Files, VEP Papers.

[655] Vernon E. Jordan Jr. to all U.S. Senators, December 2, 1969, Box 65, Folder 16, Office Files, VEP Papers. See also Senate Press Release, "Yarborough Scott to Introduce Amendment on Tax Exempt Foundations," November

On December 4, the Senate adopted the Yarborough-Scott Amendment by a vote of 52-36. Calling the vote "a very significant victory," Jordan praised those Senators who saw the value of nonpartisan voter registration fieldwork.[656] But Talmadge complained that the amendment was too vague concerning the meaning of "nonpartisan." In his mind, the Ku Klux Klan, John Birch Society, and Black Panther Party could all claim nonpartisanship and receive tax-exempt funds for registration projects. Talmadge also objected to the more-than-one-state requirement, citing it as much too easy to overcome.[657] Three days after the amendment passed, Senator Paul Fannin put together a hasty counter-amendment to forbid all tax-exempt registration fieldwork, but it failed. It appeared as though conservatives had lost, and for the time being, the VEP and its supporters celebrated a successful lobbying effort. The chairwoman of the League of Women Voters thanked Jordan: "It seems a little presumptuous for me to thank you for all you did for us—since obviously the Voter Education program of the Southern Regional Council was the really significant and critical matter at stake—but we're pleased to have benefitted, too."[658]

But Talmadge, Long, and their conservative allies had one more play. Capitalizing on their deep knowledge of congressional rules, they waited until after the Senate had approved the tax bill and it went to conference committee to resolve disagreements between both chambers and finalize small details before going to President Nixon. Between December 15 and 19, Senate and House members negotiated terms and straightened out the language of H.R. 13270. Before

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26, 1969, Box 65, Folder 16, Office Files, VEP Papers.

[656] Duane Riner, "Foundation Aid to Vote Registration Backed," *Atlanta Constitution*, December 5, 1969.

[657] *Ibid*.

[658] Mrs. John A. Campbell to Vernon E. Jordan Jr., December 10, 1969, Box 65, Folder 16, Office Files, VEP Papers. See also "Private Foundations and the Tax Reform Bill of 1969," Research Report by Maurer, Fleisher, Zon and Associates, Inc., circa 1971, Series 1, Box 4, Folder 37, Council on Foundations, Inc. Records, Rockefeller Archive Center.

the committee met, David E. Rosenbaum of the *New York Times* explained the shadowy proceedings: "Their negotiations will be in private session, with neither the press, the public nor even other members of Congress allowed in the conference room, and the proceedings of the meetings will never be published."[659] During these closed-door sessions, conservatives pushed the Yarborough-Scott Amendment terms back to the original House version—five or more states at once, and no more than 25 percent from one foundation for voter campaigns. The more generous terms of one state and 40 percent were raised without any explanation. In his account of the conference committee, Rosenbaum had written, "In theory the conferees argue for the provisions of the bill passed by their chamber. In practice, they have considerable latitude."[660] What took place within the conference committee will never be known, but somehow, Long, Talmadge, and their allies took one last shot at philanthropies and voter registration projects. On the day the committee began meetings, Talmadge wrote Jordan, signaling his resolve: "I am sorry that you and I cannot agree on this issue...I have always felt that voter registration drives are the very essence of politics and I do not believe that Foundation money should be used to promote a candidate or a party."[661]

After the conference committee finalized the legislation, the House approved the Tax Reform Act of 1969 by a vote of 381-2, and the Senate did so by 71-6. With overwhelming bipartisan support, it went to President Nixon to be signed into law. He did so on December 30,

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[659] David E. Rosenbaum, "14 Conferees to Iron Out Tax Bill Details in Private," *New York Times*, December 12, 1969.

[660] *Ibid*. For an explanation of conference committee rules, see Elizabeth Rybicki, "Conference Committee and Related Procedures: An Introduction," Congressional Research Service Report, March 9, 2015.

[661] Senator Herman Talmadge to Vernon E. Jordan Jr., December 15, 1969, Box 67, Folder 11, Office Files, VEP Papers. See also General Explanation of the Tax Reform Act of 1969, 50.

enacting a comprehensive tax reform package that addressed income tax, bonds, stocks, loopholes, and philanthropy.[662]

Right after the bill went into law, the SRC suspended all VEP activities. While the VEP's philanthropic benefactors worried about all aspects of the law, the restrictions on voter registration unnerved civil rights leaders. McGeorge Bundy circulated a memorandum among Ford Foundation trustees that the law's constraints required "re-examination of our relations to the Southern Regional Council and the League of Women Voters."[663] With their futures uncertain, SRC and VEP staff met with lawyers to determine what to do next. After some debate, the SRC and VEP decided to separate. Lawyers counseled that if the VEP continued to spend tax-exempt philanthropic dollars on voter registration, the entire SRC would be subject to the 25 percent rule. On January 22, 1970, Anthony and SRC lawyers met with IRS representatives in Washington to seek advice. Soon afterward, the SRC worked with VEP staff to set up VEP, Inc. in accordance with IRS tax-exempt policy. Around the same time, Vernon Jordan announced he was stepping down from his role as VEP executive director to lead the United Negro College Fund. On May 14, the IRS approved the independent tax-exemption of VEP, Inc., and under its new executive director, former SNCC chairman John Lewis, the VEP reopened with hopes of picking up where it had left off.[664]

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[662] Eileen Shanahan, "Tax Bill Signed; President Vows Balanced Budget," *New York Times*, December 31, 1969.

[663] McGeorge Bundy to Ford Foundation Trustees, December 24, 1969, Series 2, Box 19, Folder 240, Office of the President, Office Files of McGeorge Bundy, Ford Foundation Records. On foundation executives discussing how the new law might impact their work, see "Foundations and the Tax Reform Act of 1969," Proceedings of Conferences Held on February 17, 1970, at Kansas City and February 23, 1970, at New York City (New York: The Foundation Center, 1970).

[664] Memorandum, Paul Anthony to Supporting Foundations, February 27, 1970, Folder "Southern Regional Council: General Program, 1958-1964" Taconic Foundation Records; Vernon E. Jordan Jr. to Leslie Dunbar, February 23, 1970, Box 2T71, Folder "SRC, Inc. (VEP) fall 1968, Field Foundation Archives; and "Jordan Takes UNCF Post; Lewis New VEP Director," *VEP News* 4, no. 1 and 2 (February 1970).

But the VEP would be different after the Tax Reform Act of 1969. Long, Talmadge, and conservatives had won: they had compromised the financial security of the southern civil rights movement. They were unable to preserve their lily-white Democratic Party, but their efforts in the tax debate undercut the VEP's momentum and destabilized the pursuit of black poll power in communities across the South. David F. Rock, one of the VEP's lawyers, wrote later in 1970 that the law "served as a vehicle for angry elements in Congress who regarded their interests as somehow jeopardized by Voter Registration drives."[665] The law had changed, and the VEP was forced to change with it. While Lewis refused to let the VEP go under, its funding became erratic, and its impact on the civil rights movement lessened as its resources stretched thin. And yet the VEP trudged on, all the way until 1992.

[665] David F. Rock, "VEP and the 1969 Tax Reform Act," 1970, Box 44, Folder 8, VEP Publications, VEP Papers.

CHAPTER 7: 'TAKING WHAT WE WON TO THE LOGICAL CONCLUSION': THE VOTER EDUCATION PROJECT AND THE PROMISE OF THE CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT, 1970-1992

On the tenth anniversary of the March on Washington, the VEP released a statement quoting executive director John Lewis: "I think that black Americans and the nation itself has lost something in the course of the past ten years."[666] Gone was the fiery SNCC chairman, who a decade earlier gave headaches to civil rights leaders when he wanted to use the rally to criticize the Kennedy Administration for its inaction on race relations in the South. His comment revealed an acute awareness of the political reality facing African Americans in 1973. As the leader of the VEP, Lewis felt as though his organization was one of the few still fighting for a civil rights revolution. While African Americans had won equal rights the previous decade through federal legislation, the energy that had bolstered their cause had ebbed. Economic recession, stagflation, mistrust of the White House, the subsiding of the Black Power movement, a fracturing of the left over identity politics, and a growing lack of interest on the part of white liberals for civil rights made matters worse. Weighing these factors, Lewis bemoaned the loss of a united southwide movement when asked if another March on Washington was possible in 1973: "We need that kind of spirit, that kind of movement today…But another March on Washington? I don't think so. I just don't think so."[667]

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[666] VEP Press Release, Archie E. Allen, "Ten Years After the March," August 23, 1973, Box 855, Folder 14, SCLC Papers, MARBL, Emory University.

[667] *Ibid*. On economic recession, the political malaise of the 1970s, identity politics, and the fracturing of the left, see Bruce J. Schulman, *The Seventies: The Great Shift in American Culture, Society, and Politics* (New York: The Free Press, 2001); Edward D. Berkowitz, *Something Happened: A Political and Cultural Overview of the 1970s* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005); Andreas Killen, *1973 Nervous Breakdown: Watergate, Warhol, and the*

Under John Lewis, the VEP set out to fulfill the unmet expectations of the civil rights movement. "We are now involved in taking what we won to the logical conclusion," Lewis stated, by registering voters, teaching them about citizenship, and motivating them to pursue local political power.[668] By the end of 1970, 3,357,000 southern African Americans had registered out of an estimated 5,016,100, nearly 67 percent who were eligible. Never before had so many African Americans been registered to vote in the South, but these statistics were misleading. While the number of registered voters was high, only 644 African Americans held political offices in the South—a record total, but still miniscule when compared to whites. White registration was over 16,000,000 by the end of 1969.[669] Through its research, the VEP monitored the pulse of black political power, convinced that more work was necessary if the civil rights goals expressed during the previous decade were to be reached.

But while the VEP had clear goals in mind and did what it could to promote black political power, problems that began with the Tax Reform Act of 1969 snowballed, and the VEP was not as effective as it had been during the 1960s. After six months of suspended operations, the VEP re-opened in mid-1970 after separating from the SRC, but financial insecurity plagued it from then on. Not only did the VEP detach from the SRC, but philanthropic foundations, worried about new tax restrictions, also became extra cautious when giving money to causes involving voter registration. And when foundations did give, they required much greater oversight. The

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Birth of Post-Sixties America (New York: Bloomsbury, 2006); Rick Perlstein, *Nixonland: The Rise of a President and the Fracturing of America* (New York: Scribner, 2008); Jefferson Cowie, *Stayin' Alive: The 1970s and the Last Days of the Working Class* (New York: The New Press, 2010); Thomas Borstelmann, *The 1970s: A Global History from Civil Rights to Economic Inequality* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011); and Robert O. Self, *All in the Family: The Realignment of American Democracy since the 1960s* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2012).

[668] VEP Press Release, August 23, 1973.

[669] VEP Press Release, February 12, 1973, Record Group 3.1 Grants, Box 1079, Folder 6582, Rockefeller Brothers Fund Records; *VEP News* 4, no. 1 and 2 (February 1970); and VEP Annual Report, 1970, Frames 121-167, Reel 177, SRC Papers.

VEP continued to receive funds from Ford, Rockefeller, Field, and other foundations, but their support fluctuated, forcing the VEP to constantly balance donations to meet the 25 percent rule. As a result, the VEP expanded its staff and grew into its own bureaucracy as it conducted fundraisers and spent energy soliciting donations to meet financial demands. During the 1960s, the VEP remained small with only a handful of staff so that it could funnel most of its money directly to grassroots organizations. Starting in 1970, it no longer had this luxury, and local groups received less VEP support. As a consequence, the larger civil rights movement in the American South lost its momentum.

The civil rights struggle did not end in 1970, but the united southwide movement for African American voting rights did. The VEP tried to keep it together for another two decades, but the Tax Reform Act of 1969 inhibited its ability to do so effectively. During the late 1950s, civil rights leaders made the decision to focus on voting rights. The tactic proved effective, and with help from the VEP, black communities across the South joined in a mass movement throughout the 1960s. The ballot gave African Americans an objective goal, and once they achieved easier access through the Voting Rights Act of 1965, the VEP helped continue the movement by pushing for black political power. But the Tax Reform Act of 1969 undid this unity by hampering the VEP. As a result, poll power activism declined, even as black registration increased and more African Americans were elected to office. Voting became less community-driven. Whether they lived in a rural county or major city, black southerners felt connected to a movement bigger than themselves when they registered and voted. That feeling receded during the 1970s.

The VEP's story after 1969 is not one of declension, for that interpretation blames black southerners for the loss of a united movement. Rather, the fault lay with congressional

conservatives who intended to undermine the VEP through the Tax Reform Act of 1969. By disrupting the relationship between philanthropy and black voter registration projects, conservatives won a major victory against the civil rights movement. With the VEP weakened, the southwide movement receded. Even as black political power grew through higher registration rates, conservatives countered their growth by mastering the ability to gerrymander and isolate African American voters into contained districts. Without the VEP financing as many local campaigns and educational conferences, black southerners were at a disadvantage to compete on an equal political playing field. The VEP had shored up a massive social movement, but conservatives dismantled it.

And yet, the VEP lasted for another two decades, trying to fulfill the promises of the civil rights movement. John Lewis led the VEP until 1977, when he decided to run for Congress. During his tenure, the VEP continued to give grants to local registration projects, supported college service centers through 1972, targeted young people after the adoption of the Twenty-Sixth Amendment, conducted research, and printed educational materials. Along with Julian Bond, SNCC's former communications director and State Representative in Georgia, Lewis went on dozens of voter mobilization tours to encourage communities to keep registering and voting. The VEP also helped create the Southwest Voter Registration Education Project (SVREP) in 1974 to register Latino voters across the Southwest. When Lewis resigned, he thought the VEP was on stable ground, but its next director, Vivian Malone Jones, resigned after little more than a year after being diagnosed with cancer. A string of executive directors followed, and even with a brief revitalization of activities between 1982 and 1984 under Geraldine Thompson, the VEP diminished in scope. In 1984, the Field Foundation evaluated the finances of the VEP at Thompson's request and found "very serious problems," including mismanagement and poor

records for its few remaining registration programs.[670] The following year, the *Atlanta Constitution* published a story about the report, ruining the VEP's reputation. The VEP never recovered. In February 1992, the VEP received its final grant from the Ford Foundation totaling $65,000 to transfer its mass of records to the Atlanta University Center's Robert W. Woodruff Library. Then, the VEP closed.[671]

Adjusting to the Tax Reform Act of 1969

After the Tax Reform Act of 1969 passed, the SRC suspended all VEP activities to decide how to comply with the new restrictions. While Vernon Jordan had already tendered his resignation to lead the United Negro College Fund, the VEP staff sat in limbo while tax lawyers debated next steps. IRS officials convinced SRC lawyers that the safest path would be for the SRC and VEP to separate. "The Council is not limited to the amount of income it may receive from another private foundation," wrote Anthony, "so long as that income is expended on tax-exempt activity within one year of receipt. If, however, the Council engages in voter registration campaigns…it is the opinion of counsel that the entire income of SRC is subject to the [25 percent] limitation."[672] Paul Anthony and the SRC leadership feared entanglement with the VEP—that if they remained conjoined, the SRC's finances would be dragged down along with the VEP. On January 31, SRC lawyers filed paperwork with the IRS to create the Voter

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[670] Francesta E. Farmer and Ruby G. Martin, "A Confidential Report on an Evaluation of the Voter Education Project," July 1984, Box 2T49, Folder "A Confidential Report on an Evaluation of the Voter Education Project," Field Foundation Archives.

[671] Diane L. Galloway-May to Ozell Sutton, February 26, 1992, Frames 2398-2399, Reel 6389, Series OVP-Finance and Administration, Ford Foundation Records.

[672] Memorandum, Paul Anthony to Supporting Foundations, February 27, 1970, Folder "Southern Regional Council: General Program, 1958-1964," Taconic Foundation Records.

Education Project, Inc. Without a leader and uncertain about the future, VEP staff did not object.[673]

Years later, Leslie Dunbar recalled the split between the SRC and VEP as something that "did not have to be done." He blamed it on the ignorance of SRC lawyers and on Paul Anthony's self-interest. In the immediate aftermath of the Tax Reform Act, lawyers were unclear about the legislation's many complexities, and the SRC's council advised it to err on the side of caution by disassociating from voter registration. Dunbar also believed foundations and the IRS pressured Anthony to disconnect from the VEP to maintain their associations. "I think, at that time," remembered Dunbar, "they [SRC] may have felt that this was not legally necessary, but maybe politically necessary in relationships with IRS." Plus, Anthony and Jordan did not get along, and Dunbar believed that Anthony did not want to have to work with the VEP's next leader. "Paul had had the problem of Vernon. He could not control Vernon. Vernon was a better known person than he, and becoming more so. I don't think Paul wanted to have to [also] take responsibility for John Lewis."[674] On February 24, VEP, Inc. filed for its own corporate charter, and the new board of directors unanimously approved John Lewis as its first executive director. Three months later, the IRS approved VEP, Inc. as a 501(c)(3), the IRS classification for an independent, non-profit, tax-exempt organization. Although they continued to share office space on Forsyth Street for the next year, the VEP and SRC became independent of one another, a move that ultimately weakened both.[675]

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[673] *Ibid*.

[674] Dunbar interview, December 18, 1978 (all quotes).

[675] Minutes, VEP Inc. Board of Directors meeting, March 21, 1970, Frames 17-19, Reel 177, SRC Papers; and IRS letters to VEP, Inc., May 14, 1970, Box 2T94, Folder "VEP 2nd fall 1969," Field Foundation Archives. See also "The New VEP," *Atlanta Constitution*, June 6, 1970; "South's Voter Education Project Becomes an Independent Force," *New York Times*, June 7, 1970; and "Voter Education, Southern Council Split," *Pittsburgh Courier*, June 20, 1970.

As the VEP moved toward autonomy, foundations surveyed the altered landscape after the Tax Reform Act and considered the future of voter registration grants. The Ford Foundation, the Field Foundation, and other philanthropies told Lewis that they remained committed to funding the VEP, but the 25 percent provision complicated their ties. "The Foundation's commitment to you and the VEP is, if anything, stronger than ever," Basil Whiting, a Ford Program Officer, assured Lewis. But the Ford Foundation needed to decide on new policies because of the Tax Reform Act, and Whiting wrote, "[W]e are not sure what that will be yet but will inform you."[676] Ford wanted to closely monitor the VEP and review its policies for funding non-partisan registration campaigns. After he heard that the SRC had stopped all VEP activities in the wake of the tax legislation, Dunbar wrote Anthony that he was "disturbed to learn that voter registration activity ceased the first of January," especially since 1970 was an election year.[677] But Dunbar also feared the law's implications for the Field Foundation, and he asked lawyers for clarity on tax-exempt funds used for registering voters. They recommended to Dunbar that "as a matter of protecting itself [Field Foundation] against a possible claim of the Internal Revenue Service for liability to the tax imposed by section 4945," it should be cautious and specific that its donations only be used for non-partisan activities.[678]

The 25 percent requirement compromised the VEP's finances. After the VEP and SRC separated, both organizations worked with foundations to move money that had originally gone to the SRC into the new VEP, Inc. This process highlighted the difficulty of raising money and balancing figures between foundations to meet the 25 percent rule. In 1968, the Ford Foundation

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[676] Basil J. Whiting to John Lewis, June 16, 1970, Frames 48-49, Reel 177, SRC Papers.

[677] Leslie W. Dunbar to Paul Anthony, March 3, 1970, Box 2T94, Folder "VEP 2nd fall 1969," Field Foundation Archives.

[678] Lawyers at Paul and Weiss to Leslie W. Dunbar, June 18, 1970, Box 2T94, Folder "VEP 2nd fall 1969," Field Foundation Archives.

had committed $590,000 to the VEP over three years, but "in accordance with the 'twenty-five percent rule,'" wrote Assistant Secretary William H. Nims to McGeorge Bundy, "it is recommended that the Foundation contribute only $120,000 of the amount originally allocated."[679] The Field Foundation gave $72,920 instead of the originally promised $125,000 for 1970. Dunbar alerted Lewis, "I think it is premature to specify just how we should proceed in the future."[680] The Rockefeller Brothers Fund had not donated to the VEP during 1969 "due to pending tax reform legislation," but gave $50,000 for 1970 and another $50,000 for 1971—small amounts that they hoped would prompt the VEP to reach out to other potential backers.[681] By August, the VEP had received nearly $131,000, but it could only speculate about how much the Carnegie Corporation, New World Foundation, Irwin-Sweeney-Miller Foundation, Aaron E. Norman Fund, and other past supporters would give. Lewis feared it might have to forfeit money if the 25 percent balance could not be met. "If these arrangements…are not carried out," Lewis wrote Anthony, "the result will be a serious crippling of the VEP."[682]

John Lewis was well aware of the financial threat facing the VEP, but his life had been full of challenges up to this point. Born on February 21, 1940, Lewis grew up on a rural farm in Pike County, Alabama. His parents had been sharecroppers, but in 1944, they purchased 110 acres for $300. Lewis spent his childhood and adolescence working on the farm alongside his nine siblings. They were poor, and they lived in a world of strict segregation. When he was 11,

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[679] Memorandum, William H. Nims to McGeorge Bundy, Re: "Regranting of Funds – PA 690-0065," July 23, 1970, Frame 366, Reel 4959, Record Group: Grants, Series: OVP – Finance and Administration, Sub Series: Rights and Social Justice Programs, Ford Foundation Records.

[680] Leslie W. Dunbar to John Lewis, June 19, 1970, Frames 45-46, Reel 177, SRC Papers.

[681] Memorandum, Thomas W. Wahman to Dana S. Creel, Re: "RBF Southern Program—Voter Education Project, Inc.," August 27, 1970, Record Group 3.1, Box 1078, Folder 6578, Rockefeller Brothers Fund Records.

[682] John Lewis to Paul Anthony, n.d., Frames 95-98, Reel 177, SRC Papers; and VEP Financial Statement, August 1970, Box 2T25, Folder "SRC Inc. (VEP) fall 1966," Field Foundation Archives.

he went with his Uncle Otis on a trip to Buffalo, New York, and when he returned to Alabama, the racial inequality of his home county was clearer than ever. He loved some aspects of farm life, but his passion was school and readings books. By reading everything he could, he learned about the world outside Pike County. He studied the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision, which inspired him to imagine Alabama as a place without segregation. In 1955, he heard Martin Luther King Jr. preach on the radio, hearing for the first time about the social gospel. Later that year, Emmett Till was murdered, and it shocked Lewis to know that someone near his age could be killed without consequence. The next year, two days after he preached his first sermon at the age of 16, his great uncle, Thomas Brewer, an NAACP leader in Columbus, Georgia, was shot seven times and died. Black community members believed the store owner who murdered Brewer—who was never indicted—had ties to the Ku Klux Klan. These violent events, plus the bus boycott in Montgomery and Alabama's Attorney General banning the NAACP, inspired Lewis to apply for membership at the local whites-only library. He was denied, but he had his first taste of nonviolent protest. Soon after, he won acceptance to attend college at the American Baptist Theological Seminary, and he moved to Nashville, Tennessee in 1957.[683]

In Nashville, Lewis learned how to protest and fight for civil rights—skills that served him during the sit-in movement, as a Freedom Rider, as a founding member of SNCC, as chairman of SNCC for three years, and later, as the VEP's third executive director. As a freshman, Lewis tried to start an NAACP chapter on campus, but the president discouraged him due to the seminary's ties to the Southern Baptist Convention. The following year, he met James Lawson, a student at Vanderbilt Divinity School who led community workshops in nonviolence

[683] Interview with John Lewis by Jack Bass and Walter Devries, November 20, 1973, A-0073 in the Southern Oral History Collection #4007, Southern Historical Collection, Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill; Archie E. Allen, "John Lewis: Keeper of the Dream," *New South* 26, no. 2 (Spring 1971): 15-25; and Lewis *Walking with the Wind*, 17-64.

based on Mahatma Gandhi's philosophy that challenged British colonialism. In November 1959, he and other Nashville students began sit-in tests in downtown department stores, and after four students in Greensboro captured national headlines in February 1960, the Nashville movement gained momentum. Later that year, Lewis helped organize SNCC, and the following year, he went on several Freedom Rides, endured physical attacks, and served prison time on Parchman Farm in Mississippi. As SNCC's chairman, Lewis oversaw the expansion of the student-led organization into rural communities urging locals to register. He helped coordinate Freedom Summer in Mississippi in 1964, and he was beaten bloody on the Edmund Pettus Bridge in Selma on March 7, 1965. During his tenure with SNCC, he received support from the VEP. In May 1966, Stokely Carmichael was elected as SNCC's chairman. Two months later, Lewis left SNCC after it became clear to him that the organization's embrace of black nationalism and the ouster of its white members signaled a turn away from its founding principles. He went to work for Leslie Dunbar and the Field Foundation in New York for a year, then returned to Atlanta to head the SRC's Community Organization Project until March 1970, when he accepted the job to lead the new VEP, Inc.[684]

John Lewis and the VEP, Inc.

John Lewis still believed in politics as the primary battlefield of the civil rights movement. In a VEP fundraising letter, he wrote, "The goal of a truly representative government is still distant. If we fail to realize how incomplete this movement is now and do not attend to the remaining needs, the accomplishment thus far may turn out to be empty achievements."[685] By July 1970, the VEP had already received over 200 applications from local groups wanting

[684] Lewis interview, November 20, 1973; and Lewis, *Walking with the Wind*.

[685] VEP Fundraising Letter, n.d., Frames 975-976, Reel 28, Series 200 U.S., Record Group "General Correspondence," Rockefeller Foundation Records.

support to conduct voter registration drives. In their minds, too, the civil rights movement was ongoing. VEP staff and board members met for three days in Capahosic, Virginia to discuss the future, acknowledging that southern African Americans were not content with the status quo and needed the VEP. During their retreat, they discussed strategy, programs, and how to comply with the Tax Reform Act. Along with Lewis, VEP staff comprised Thaddeus Olive as administrative assistant, Marvin Wall as research director, and Janet Shortt as administrative secretary—all holdovers from the previous VEP. Charles Rooks, Marilyn Adamson, and Patricia Madsen joined in support roles. The VEP also retained a lawyer. With enough funds to begin, the VEP salvaged the election year and began financing dozens of grassroots campaigns in the South.[686]

By the end of 1970, the VEP had spent $210,513 on 100 projects in 11 states. The Citizens Coordinating Committee of Daytona Beach received $1,200. The Southwest Georgia Voter Education Project in Albany earned $1,800. The San Patricio and Bee County Voter Registration Council in Texas received $1,500. These and the other 97 projects helped push black registration in the South to 3,357,000—an increase of 212,000 since November 1968. By the end of the year, an estimated 644 African Americans held elected positions.[687] The VEP did all of this on a smaller budget. Lewis pulled in a total of $292,017, but he had hoped for much more. By the end of 1970, seven foundations had donated to the VEP, supplemented by five religious and civic organizations giving small amounts. The Ford Foundation had promised $125,000, but based on all other giving, it had to reduce its contribution to $73,000—24.9985 percent of the VEP's budget.[688]

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[686] Report of the VEP Executive Committee Meeting, Moton Memorial Foundation, Capahosic, Virginia, July 24-26, 1970, Box 34, Folder 10, Office Files, VEP Records.

[687] VEP Press Release, "What Happened in the South, 1970," November 1970, Frames 73-81, Reel 177, SRC Papers; and VEP Annual Report, 1970.

Between 1970 and 1976, the VEP sponsored at least 449 local registration campaigns across the American South.[689] The movement in Thomas County, Georgia was one of those. Through a VEP grant worth $700, the local NAACP launched a six-week registration campaign in May and June of 1972. The VEP had supported a similar project in Thomas County in 1966, resulting in 1,600 new black registrants. Curtis Thomas, the director of the registration effort, wanted to recreate the enthusiasm of the 1966 drive. Recently, according to Thomas, the black community had grown indifferent toward voting, made worse by complaints that the county had taken many people off the rolls without explanation. Thomas organized volunteers to canvass the county and drive elderly people to the courthouse. He even convinced the county to appoint temporary black and white deputy registrars with the power to register people in their homes. VEP funds allowed him to print flyers, organize car pools, and pay for food for his volunteers. He described one 90 year-old woman who lived 20 miles from the courthouse: "She might come into town on Saturday to shop, but the courthouse was closed and nobody had encouraged her to go register. So she was happy that she could register. We found a lot of 65 and 70 year-olds who were just waiting for us to come along."[690] The NAACP also boycotted local businesses during the campaign to push for more African Americans to be hired. Members printed bumper stickers that read, "Save Your Bucks, Use Your Ballot—Register and Vote."[691] John Lewis, Hosea

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[688] Summary of Auditors Report of VEP, Inc., 1970, by Alexander Grant and Company, submitted on December 31, 1970, Box 2, Folder 3, Financial Records, VEP Records. See also Appendices 10 and 11.

[689] The 1973 VEP Annual Report did not include a full tally of projects. See VEP Annual Report, 1970; VEP Annual Report , 1971, Reel 177, SRC Papers; VEP Annual Report, 1972, Box 855, Folder 12, SCLC Papers, MARBL, Emory University; VEP Annual Report, 1973, Box 2S409, Folder "Voter Education Project: 75-19, Fall 1974," Field Foundation Archives; VEP Annual Report, 1974, Record Group 3.1, Box 1079, Folder 6584, Rockefeller Brothers Fund Records; VEP Annual Report, 1975, Record Group 3.1, Box 1079, Folder 6585, Rockefeller Brothers Fund Records; and VEP Annual Report, 1976, Box 2S409, Folder "VEP 76-42," Field Foundation Archives.

[690] VEP Press Release, Archie E. Allen, "Thomas County, Georgia: Profile of a Black Voter Registration Drive," June 22, 1972, Record Group 3.1, Box 1078, Folder 6581, Rockefeller Brothers Fund Records.

Williams, and Shirley Chisholm visited and spoke at mass rallies. After six weeks, 1,300 had registered. Lenzie Adams, a resident of Pavo, described how black voting power had pushed elected officials to pave roads, put in sewers, and improve the lives of Thomas County's African American citizens: "We got these streets, street lights, and paved roads by voting—it was our vote. This is what you have to look at—how all these things came about."[692]

To keep assisting places like Thomas County, Lewis knew he needed to expand the VEP's ability to raise its own capital. But by devoting more time and energy to fundraising, the VEP became less efficient. The VEP had always relied on philanthropic support alone, enabling it to concentrate on moving money quickly into the hands of activists. To meet the demand, Lewis hired more staff and created a fundraising division within the VEP. Between 1970 and early 1977 when Lewis resigned, the VEP developed several fundraising programs, but each one siphoned away employee energy and resources that could have gone directly to grassroots organizers if philanthropic support had been higher.

During the 1970s, the VEP coordinated direct mail campaigns, and unlike conservatives such as Jesse Helms who mastered the strategy, the VEP spent more than it accumulated through the effort. In October 1970, Lewis hired Shirley Cooks to coordinate direct mailing for the VEP. In April 1971, she sent out around 15,000 letters costing $2,250, and by June, the VEP had taken in $11,000 from about 1,000 people donating in small sums. Within each envelope, Cooks included a letter and brochure about the VEP. In the fall, Lewis decided to professionalize fundraising and hired Grizzard Advertising to handle direct mail. Grizzard upped the VEP's mailing capacity into the hundreds of thousands, and over the next year, the VEP sent color brochures and letters to people across the United States. A fundraising letter signed by a diverse

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[691] *Ibid.*

[692] *Ibid.*

cast of supporters, including Julian Bond, Fannie Lou Hamer, Senators Edward Kennedy and Jacob Javits, Governors Winthrop Rockefeller and John West, President of Duke University and former Governor Terry Sanford, and Sheriff John Hulett of Lowndes County, Alabama, informed readers that "foundation support for VEP has been restricted by the 1969 Tax Reform Act" and that the VEP had been unable to fund over 50 applications in 1971.[693] By June 1972, Grizzard's strategy had netted the VEP over $44,000, but it had cost the VEP $58,460.64 to hire the firm. To make matters worse, another firm that Lewis had hired to expand its mailing list had computer problems, and for over a year, the VEP's contact list was inaccessible. In late 1973, Lewis contracted another advertising firm in New York to handle direct mail, but by the following summer, less than one percent of people had responded, giving less than $16,000 after the VEP had paid nearly $12,000 to the firm. The year 1977 was worst of all—$87,000 spent while netting $31,000. In seven years, the VEP lost more than it made on direct mail.[694]

The VEP courted other potential donors through benefit dinners and by appealing to corporations, but neither initiative proved lucrative. The VEP hosted its first benefit dinner in 1974 with Senator Edward Kennedy as the featured speaker. Over 800 people attended and spent 50 dollars per plate, hearing Kennedy praise black political participation with "the Voting Rights Act [acting] as their protector and the Voter Education Project as their shepherd."[695] The VEP invited union officials and corporate executives to the dinner as well, including representatives

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[693] VEP Fundraising Letter, n.d., Rockefeller Foundation Records.

[694] Summary of the Voter Education Project's Direct Mail Experience, 1971-1975, Box 2S466, Folder "Voter Education Project, 1976," Field Foundation Archives; and Memorandum, Harry J. Wexler to R. Harcourt Dodds, Re: "Monitoring Report on Voter Education Projects," April 6, 1977, Series 1, Box 30, Folder 6, National Affairs Division, Vice-President, Office Files of Mitchell Sviridoff, Ford Foundation Records. On Jesse Helms and direct mail, see William A. Link, *Righteous Warrior: Jesse Helms and the Rise of Modern Conservatism* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2008).

[695] VEP Press Release, May 31, 1974, Folder "Voter Education Project, Inc. 1973-1974," Taconic Foundation Records.

from the United Auto Workers, the AFL-CIO, Coca-Cola, and Delta Airlines. Lewis remained hopeful that some of these unions and businesses would fund the VEP, but long-term support was negligible. The VEP hosted two more benefit dinners in 1975 and 1976 with high-profile speakers Senator Jacob Javits and Governor Jimmy Carter. While the events generated immediate capital, including around $50,000 from the Carter dinner, they were not a long-term solution.[696]

A major reason why the VEP needed more money was its new emphasis on print, radio, and television advertisements. Under Vernon Jordan, the VEP pushed citizenship education as a prerequisite for greater African American political power, and Lewis believed that in addition to grassroots investment, popular media could reach millions more about the power of the ballot. The idea gained a stronger foothold within the VEP after ratification of the Twenty-Sixth Amendment on July 1, 1971, lowering the voting age to 18 nationwide.[697] With millions of young people now eligible to vote, Lewis wanted to make sure African American youth knew what to do. Lewis suspended the newsletter *VEP News*, except for the occasional update, and instead concentrated on mass appeals to the public. Soon after taking over the VEP, Lewis hired Atlanta artist Herman "Kofi" Bailey to create an attention-grabbing poster. Bailey came up with "Hands That Pick Cotton Now Can Pick Our Elected Officials," illustrating one black hand picking cotton, and another dropping a ballot into a box. Lewis recalled, "10,000 copies were made and distributed all through the South, where they wound up on the walls of beauty parlors and barber shops, schools and churches."[698] Later in 1970, the VEP recorded its first radio ad and paid for it to run on 70 stations in the lead-up to the mid-term elections.[699]

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[696] See VEP Annual Report, 1975; VEP Annual Report, 1976; and Wexler to Dodds, April 6, 1977.

[697] R.W. Apple Jr., "The States Ratify Full Vote at 18," *New York Times*, July 1, 1971.

The VEP recognized that voter registration "sometimes seems mundane and non-glamorous," and it drew on popular culture to resonate with people.[700] Under communications director Archie Allen, the VEP utilized radio, television, and flyers during election years throughout the 1970s. In 1972, the VEP worked with an Atlanta advertising firm to create 30-second color television commercials in English and Spanish with the theme, "Don't Crush Your Chances for Change. Register and Vote."[701] That same year, VEP radio spots were broadcasted on over 300 radio stations, and Allen purchased newspaper space and mailed flyers across the South. Four years later, the VEP hired another firm for its biggest media blitz ever. The VEP hired characters from television series such as *All in the Family*, *Maude*, and *Chico and the Man* for six television advertisements and more radio spots encouraging people to register and vote. Over 150 television stations aired the commercials. The VEP spent another $54,000 on a single flyer: an image of Muhammad Ali ready to strike, reading, "It's your fight. Vote. It's the greatest equalizer."[702]

To energize registrants, John Lewis went on dozens of voter mobilization tours with his friend Julian Bond. Their first tour came in June 1971 to Mississippi, where they made 39 stops in 25 counties over nine days. Lewis and Bond spoke at mass rallies in churches, schools, colleges, and out in the open, and for every community visited, their message was "that they were not alone in their struggle. We did not tell them who to vote for or what political party to

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[698] Lewis, *Walking with the Wind*, 434-435.

[699] VEP Annual Report, 1970.

[700] VEP Annual Report, 1973.

[701] Archie E. Allen, 1972 Voter Registration Advertising Campaign of the VEP, Inc., November 22, 1972, Box 6, Folder 19, Wiley Branton Papers, Howard University.

[702] VEP Press Release, October 28, 1976, Record Group 3.1, Box 1079, Folder 6585, Rockefeller Brothers Fund Records; and Wexler to Dodds, April 6, 1977.

join, but simply that they could begin to control their own destiny by registering to vote."[703] One memorable stop occurred in Belzoni, Mississippi, a place once known for its racial violence. At a mass rally, a white man came up to Lewis, extended his hand, and said, "I'm the mayor and I want to welcome you here."[704] Cognizant of the growth in the number of black voters in the town, the mayor behaved in a way that would have been rare a decade earlier. Not only did African Americans have an opportunity to gain political influence, but their civic presence also altered race relations for the better.

Lewis, Bond, and other VEP staff visited all 11 southern states in 1971 and 1972, and they continued making trips throughout Lewis's tenure to stimulate black voting power. Many places conducting a community-wide registration project were in rural counties, cut off from other civil rights activists. These tours were meant to inspire and link African Americans together across their states—to impart to them the confidence that their vote had the potential to change the political and racial order of their hometowns. Whites no longer carried out mass violence against African Americans trying to register, but after a tour of Mississippi in 1975, Lewis concluded that intimidation was still a reality in the South: "At several of the meetings and rallies in Mississippi we heard people saying the boss man told them they didn't need to vote, they didn't need to register. People on the farms, the plantations are afraid to come in to register."[705]

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[703] VEP Annual Report, 1971, Frames 168-183, Reel 177, SRC Papers. See also VEP Press Release, "John Lewis and Julian Bond To Make Voting Rights Tour of Fifteen Mississippi Counties," June 11, 1971, Box 855, Folder 14, SCLC Papers, MARBL, Emory University; and *VEP News* 5, no. 1 (April – June, 1971).

[704] Lewis interview, July 18, 2013; and Lewis interview, November 20, 1973.

[705] Wells, "Voting Rights in 1975." For information about other tours, see VEP Annual Reports, for 1972, 1974, and 1975; VEP Press Release, August 26, 1972, Record Group 3.1, Box 1078, Folder 6581, Rockefeller Brothers Fund Records; VEP Press Release, September 25, 1972, Record Group 3.1, Box 1078, Folder 6581, Rockefeller Brothers

Alongside local projects, the VEP supported black elected officials, whose number across the South had risen to 388 in 1969 and would grow to 873 in 1972.[706] As an extension of the Southwide Conference in December 1968, the VEP established five service centers for local officials on five historically black college campuses—Tougaloo College, Clark College, Southern University, Talladega College, and Miles College. The VEP designed these centers to be in-state resource hubs "on the procedures, duties, and responsibilities of their positions" and "libraries of knowledge for helping officials take advantage of federal programs."[707] These centers hosted their own conferences, worked with state leaders, and brought political scientists in academia together with grassroots politicians. The Carnegie Corporation donated $200,000 for three years, and the Ford and Aaron E. Norman Foundations later contributed. For a brief time, these service centers provided crucial assistance for African American elected leaders in state politics where their presence unsettled and angered long-serving white Democrats.[708]

At the Tougaloo College service center, Taunya Banks became a force within Mississippi politics. A recent law school graduate of Howard University, Banks served as the director of the center, where she recruited undergraduate volunteers, hosted workshops, wrote political manuals, and contacted the DOJ when whites discriminated against black candidates and officials. The center provided a home base while Banks also traveled the state to meet with black elected officials. Banks worked with people in Bolton, Mound Bayou, and Edwards to make sure

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Fund Records; and VEP Press Release, October 17, 1974, Box 2S409, Folder "Voter Education Project: 75-19, Fall 1974," Field Foundation Archives.

[706] VEP Press Release, February 12, 1973, Record Group 3.1-Grants, Box 1079, Folder 6582, Rockefeller Brothers Fund Records.

[707] John Lewis, Report of the Executive Director to the Board of Directors meeting, November 16, 1970, Box 34, Folder 10, Office Files, VEP Records.

[708] "Interim Report to the Carnegie Corporation on the Operation of the VEP-Sponsored College Service Centers for Elected Officials," September 10, 1971, Box 1078, Folder 6580, Series 3.1 Grants, Rockefeller Brothers Fund Records.

aldermen were seated without resistance. She counseled Geneva Collins from Claiborne County, who served as the state's only African American chancery clerk. Banks stayed informed about changes to election laws, and she contacted African Americans when their offices were affected. By thwarting white officials hoping to keep African Americans officials in the political dark, Banks ensured they remained part of the political process.[709]

While Banks was an effective leader at Tougaloo College until she resigned in mid-1970, the other service centers struggled, and the VEP terminated the program in mid-1972. The service centers were expensive to maintain, and staff spent much of their energy simply trying to get the word out about their presence. In Louisiana, for example, local officials could not find the time to travel to Baton Rouge for advice at the Southern University center. The staff at the centers was small, and they could not cover an entire state whose black elected population grew every year. The issues kept growing, and service center staff had to become experts on school desegregation, prison reform, public programs, welfare, taxes, and election laws. Officials began seeking out service centers less as the enthusiasm from the 1968 Southwide Conference waned and as locals concentrated on their own community's problems with less attention to a wider movement. In 1972, the VEP decided to end the program and concentrate elsewhere.[710]

Since the days of Wiley Branton's leadership, the VEP had tried forging relationships with Latino voters to expand minority voting power, but this strategy gained new momentum under John Lewis. During Vernon Jordan's tenure, the VEP began reaching out to Chicano activists about potential registration projects in the Southwest. Several visited the VEP's Atlanta

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[709] *Ibid*. See also Eli Evans to Vernon E. Jordan Jr., March 28, 1969, Box 2T79, Folder "VEP Fall 1967," Field Foundation Archives; "Services Set Up for Officeholders," *VEP News* 2, no. 7 (July 1968); "Service Centers at Five Colleges for Black Officials," *VEP News* 3, no. 1 (January 1969); Walter Rugaber, "Blacks in Office: 'One of the Miracles of the Democratic Process,'" *New York Times*, December 15, 1968; and Annual Report of the Executive Director of the Southern Regional council for 1968, January 1969.

[710] Interim Report to the Carnegie Corporation, September 10, 1971; VEP Annual Report, 1971; and VEP Annual Report, 1972.

headquarters to glean ideas about starting a Latino-focused VEP, including Willie Velásquez. A committed political activist for Mexican-Americans since the early 1960s, Velásquez co-founded La Raza Unida in Texas, but left after he became convinced that an independent, ethnically-singular party would win few electoral contests. Soon after taking over the new VEP, Lewis began funding Mexican-American registration projects in Texas and worked with Velásquez to set up a separate organization with IRS tax-exempt privileges. In early 1974, they finally succeeded, and in May, the Southwest Voter Registration Education Project (SVREP) received its charter and set up its headquarters in San Antonio.[711]

As its own organization, the SVREP operated separately from the VEP, but the two organizations stayed in regular communication as Velásquez built up the Latino vote in Texas, New Mexico, Arizona, Colorado, Utah, Nevada, and California. The SVREP started small by conducting voter registration campaigns in Texas, but quickly expanded across the region. The SVREP received funding from several donors with ties to the VEP, including the Field Foundation, Rockefeller Brothers Fund, and the United Auto Workers. In 1976, the group sponsored almost 50 projects aimed at registering Latinos and educating them about their citizenship rights. "While many Americans are celebrating the Bicentennial Anniversary of their participation in American government," Velásquez said in a joint statement with the VEP, "we are still working so that Blacks, Spanish-Speaking, and Native Americans can have a voice and full participation in the social, political, and economic arenas [of the United States]."[712] That

[711] Articles of Incorporation, Southwest Voter Registration Education Project (SVREP), Box 14, Folder 1, Branton Papers; and SVREP Board Meeting Minutes, January 17, 1975, Box 14, Folder 1, Branton Papers. See also Memorandum, Ed Stanfield to Paul Anthony, Re: "Possibility of an SRC-Type Agency in the Southwest," December 4, 1967, Box 2T79, Folder "VEP Fall 1967," Field Foundation Archives; VEP Annual Reports for 1970, 1972, and 1974; and "The Voter Education Project: A Concise History 1962-1979," 1979. On Willie Velásquez, see Juan A. Sepúlveda Jr., *The Life and Times of Willie Velásquez: Su Voto es Su Voz* (Houston: Arte Público Press, 2003); Márquez, *Democratizing Texas Politics*, 97-98; and Kiko Martinez, "The Legacy of Willie Velásquez," *La Prensa*, September 28, 2003.

year, the SVREP helped register 161,500 Latinos across the Southwest. Over the next decade, the SVREP would organize hundreds of registration campaigns, conduct research, publish reports, and file dozens of suits challenging redistricting. "It's similar to what happened in the South with blacks," Velásquez told the *Washington Post* in 1977. "The same thing is happening with Latinos except we're a couple of years behind."[713]

Even as the VEP expanded, its finances remained continually in flux due to the unsteadiness of philanthropic support. At a symposium in Washington, DC in late 1971, executives from scores of foundations gathered to assess the impact of the Tax Reform Act of 1969. Ruth C. Chance, the executive director of the Rosenberg Foundation, summarized her colleagues' feeling that the legislation had forced them to "enter on a period of caution."[714] James L. Kunen from the Meyer Foundation concurred, saying that the law will "divert us. It will divert us from the pressing problems that we ought to be paying attention to," such as urban renewal, housing, education, and civil rights.[715] Howard R. Dressner from the Ford Foundation addressed how the legislation affected large and small foundations. While Ford and its peers had the resources and staff to assess whether each grant application met with the standards of the Tax Reform Act, smaller foundations did not have that capacity, and so "they [play] it safe simply by

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[712] VEP Press Release, July 12, 1976, Box 2S409, Folder "VEP 76-42," Field Foundation Archives.

[713] William Greider, "Hispanic-Americans Learn the Game of Politics," *Washington Post*, April 3, 1977. See also SVREP Quarterly Report, March 1, 1977, Box 14, Folder 2, Branton Papers. On the historical context for the SVREP, see Zaragosa Vargas, *Crucible of Struggle: A History of Mexican Americans from Colonial Times to the Present Era* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 331-338; 349-352; and Gordon K. Mantler, *Power to the Poor: Black-Brown Coalition and the Fight for Economic Justice, 1960-1974* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2013).

[714] Ruth C. Chance, "Operational Effects," in *Tax Impacts on Philanthropy* (Princeton, NJ: Tax Institute of America, 1972), 111.

[715] James L. Kunen, "Effects of Act," in *Tax Impacts on Philanthropy* (Princeton, NJ: Tax Institute of America, 1972), 128.

not recommending this or that proposal to the trustees."[716] From the topics covered at this symposium, foundation executives were adapting to the law, but they recognized new limitations on social reform grants—such as to the VEP. To some extent, their worries were self-fulfilling prophecies, but their newfound conservatism came from a genuine fear of IRS repercussions should they violate the Tax Reform Act.

The VEP's relationships with foundations changed as a consequence of the law, complicating their finances and requiring greater oversight that constricted its work during the 1970s. This was most evident through the VEP's partnership with the Ford Foundation. At a May 1971 meeting with VEP staff, Bryant George of the Ford Foundation said, "The IRS watches the Foundation very closely and therefore VEP in turn will have to be monitored to assure the Foundation that it is adhering to the law."[717] Ford promised a new hands-on approach if the VEP wanted to continue receiving major grants, including Ford staff visiting local projects that drew on VEP money, observing VEP staff in the office, reviewing printed materials to ensure nonpartisanship, and monitoring the VEP's overall effectiveness.

One event in 1974 threatened to rupture the relationship between the VEP and the Ford Foundation. In April, Lewis went on a voter mobilization tour in Alabama with Julian Bond and Hosea Williams during the gubernatorial race in which incumbent George Wallace was drawing unprecedented support—even from segments of the black community. A reporter with the *New York Times* covered the story, writing that Lewis, Bond, and Williams "told black Alabamians in half a dozen cities and towns that a vote for George Wallace was a traitorous step backward."[718]

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[716] Howard R. Dressner, "Learning to Live with the Tax Reform Act," in *Tax Impacts on Philanthropy* (Princeton, NJ: Tax Institute of America, 1972), 134.

[717] Ford Foundation Review Team Meeting, May 3, 1971, Box 47, Folder 13, Office Files, VEP Records.

[718] B. Drummond Ayres, "Black Clubbed in Selma Assails Blacks Aiding Wallace," *New York Times*, April 24, 1974.

The story reached Ford Foundation executives who were concerned enough to launch a full-scale investigation of the tour to see if the VEP had violated its grant conditions by engaging in partisan politics. Ford representatives brought VEP staff into the foundation's New York headquarters to review grant policies. Lewis maintained that he had done nothing wrong and that the journalist has misinterpreted several details. He stood up for his actions, saying that many African Americans were confused about the election after several black mayors, including Tuskegee's Johnnie Ford, endorsed the former segregationist when he appealed to black communities as a changed man. Ford's lead investigator determined "certain liberties may have been taken which, in light of the highly sensitive status of VEP, were both unfortunate and, possibly, inappropriate," but recommended no further action beyond a stern reproach.[719]

The VEP continued to receive funding from a handful of other foundations, but balancing figures for the 25 percent rule was difficult, compounded by the economic recession that weighed on the United States during the 1970s. Between 1971 and 1973, the VEP kept increasing its budget as it won more contributions, but it stretched its resources thin as it expanded its programs. By 1974, the money started drying up. "The VEP's entire range of financial supporters, from individual donors to foundations, is suffering from the recession," Lewis wrote Dunbar.[720] Stock values dropped, and since many foundations had their wealth tied up in markets, foundations scaled back their philanthropy. The Ford Foundation alone lost

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[719] Memorandum, Hugh Price to Harry Dodds, Re: Investigation of VEP Voter Registration Rallies in Montgomery and Selma, Alabama on April 21-22, 1974, May 28, 1974, Series 1, Box 30, Folder 6, National Affairs Division, Vice-President, Office Files of Mitchell Sviridoff, Ford Foundation Records. See also Memorandum, John Lewis to Harcourt Dobbs, Re: VEP Alabama Trip, April 21-22, 1974, May 31, 1974, Series 1, Box 30, Folder 6, National Affairs Division, Vice-President, Office Files of Mitchell Sviridoff, Ford Foundation Records; and Memorandum, R. Harcourt Dodds to Howard R. Dressner, Re: Investigation of VEP Voter Education Rallies in Montgomery and Selma, Alabama, July 9, 1974, Series 1, Box 30, Folder 6, National Affairs Division, Vice-President, Office Files of Mitchell Sviridoff, Ford Foundation Records.

[720] John Lewis to Leslie W. Dunbar, December 4, 1974, Box 2S409, Folder "Voter Education Project: 75-19, Fall 1974," Field Foundation Archives.

around 1,000,000,000 dollars in total assets in 1974. The VEP felt these reverberations. Lewis laid off five staff members in late 1974, after a year plagued by money shortages in which the VEP sponsored only 16 registration projects. Speaking at the Butler Street YMCA in Atlanta, Lewis told the crowd, "the current economic recession threatens to wipe out the social and political gains" of the civil rights revolution.[721] Paul West, a reporter with the *Atlanta Constitution*, followed up on the story and interviewed foundation executives who sounded the alarm about how much they would be able to give to civil rights groups. "Hard times may do more damage to the civil rights movement in one year than resistance by white supremacists did in twenty," West concluded.[722]

Amid financial trouble, Lewis appeared before both branches of Congress in the spring of 1975 to advocate for congressional renewal of the Voting Rights Act. He listed the benefits of the legislation, but also took the opportunity to blast the Tax Reform Act of 1969 for impeding the work of the VEP and undermining the Voting Rights Act. "The Congress," Lewis explained to House members, "with one hand, removed some of the barriers to the ballot; four years later, it turned around and, with its other hand, placed a serious restriction on private financial support to achieve the franchise."[723] Lewis recognized that he was there to comment on the Voting Rights Act, but he could not separate the two pieces of legislation, for one curtailed the other and few seemed to know or care. He blamed the Tax Reform Act for limiting the VEP's finances the past

[721] Paul West, "Recession Seen as Rights Peril," *Atlanta Constitution*, November 14, 1974.

[722] Paul West, "Hard Times Drying Up Funding for Civil Rights," *Atlanta Constitution*, December 9, 1974. See also Lewis to Dunbar, December 4, 1974; VEP Annual Report, 1974; and John Lewis to Wiley Branton, December 4, 1974, Box 6, Folder 20, Branton Papers.

[723] Testimony from John Lewis before the Civil and Constitutional Rights Subcommittee on the House Committee of the Judiciary, March 3, 1975, Box 6, Folder 20, Branton Papers.

two years, forcing him to lay off staff members and reduce assistance to communities trying to organize registration campaigns.[724]

A major consequence of the Tax Reform Act impeding the Voting Rights Act, Lewis told Congress, was the rise of gerrymandering. Conservative legislators in states across the South had become adept at redistricting, nullifying the rise of black political power by isolating African American neighborhoods. But because the VEP struggled to operate, it did not have the resources to study and counter partisan redistricting. Lewis argued that conservative strategies to gerrymander defied the Voting Rights Act and were ongoing: "These violations…did not occur a decade ago. They happened last year, last month, yesterday, and there is no indication that they will cease in the foreseeable future."[725] Beyond redistricting, conservatives found ways around the Voting Rights Act. "Every conceivable tactic has been used by the southern states to violate, oppose, circumvent, and ignore both the letter and spirit of the Voting Rights Act," Lewis told the Senate Judiciary Committee.[726] For example, Mississippi in 1972 created a new voter application form that the federal government did not bother to challenge that required people to write down their license plate number, list any crimes, record all properties, and indicate where they worked and went to church. If the federal government would not do anything about these disfranchisement tactics, Lewis explained, the VEP would try, but the tax law impeded its reach. In August, Congress extended the Voting Rights Act to 1982, but did not address Lewis's concerns about gerrymandering, state intransigence, or the Tax Reform Act of 1969.[727]

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[724] *Ibid*.

[725] *Ibid*.

[726] VEP Press Release, April 9, 1975, Box 2S409, Folder "Voter Education Project: 75-19, Fall 1974," Field Foundation Archives. See also Janet Wells, "Voting Rights in 1975: Why Minorities Still Need Federal Protection," *Civil Rights Digest* (Summer 1975), 13-15; and VEP Annual Report, 1975.

Lewis turned his attention to keeping the VEP afloat during the recession. The VEP struggled in 1975, funding only 25 registration projects even as the number of southern black elected officials rose to 1,588.[728] The next year, still operating as "lean and hungry," the VEP benefitted from excitement over the presidential race and spent $78,786 on 87 registration projects.[729] Jimmy Carter appealed to African American voters in the South, and they rewarded him with over 95 percent of their votes for President. With over 3,500,000 African Americans registered in the South, their influence was "the most decisive and influential single exercise of minority political power in this century," the VEP reported.[730] In South Carolina, for example, around 200,000 African Americans voted for Carter, and he won the state by about 90,000 votes. In all 11 southern states, the VEP conducted "spot-checks," estimating that 60-70 percent of registered African Americans voted.[731]

The Decline of the VEP

With $88,534 in the VEP's account, John Lewis resigned in January 1977 to run for Congress, confident that the VEP was stable. But Lewis's absence disrupted the VEP in ways he

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[727] *Ibid*. On redistricting, see David Lublin, *The Paradox of Representation: Racial Gerrymandering and Minority Interests in Congress* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997); Kousser, *Colorblind Injustice*; Christopher M. Burke, *The Appearance of Equality: Racial Gerrymandering, Redistricting, and the Supreme Court* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1999); Pamela S. Karlan, "John Hart Ely and the Problem of Gerrymandering: The Lion in Winter," *Yale Law Review* 114, no. 6 (April 2005): 1329-1351; Jonathan Winburn, *The Realities of Redistricting: Following the Rules and Limiting Gerrymandering in State Legislative Redistricting* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2008); George Derek Musgrove, *Rumor, Repression, and Racial Politics: How the Harassment of Black Elected Officials Shaped Post-Civil Rights America* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2012); and Erik J. Engstrom, *Partisan Gerrymandering and the Construction of American Democracy* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2013).

[728] Wells, "Voting Rights in 1975."

[729] VEP Annual Report, 1976.

[730] VEP Press Release, November 7, 1976, Record Group 3.1, Box 1079, Folder 6585, Rockefeller Brothers Fund Records.

[731] *Ibid*. VEP News Release, January 10, 1977, Box 2S409, Folder "VEP 76-42," Field Foundation Archives; VEP Annual Report, 1975; VEP Annual Report, 1976; Gregory S. Kearse, "John Lewis: He's Still 'On the Case,'" *Ebony*, November 1976: 133-141; Bryant Rollins, "Black Passage: From Civil Rights to the Ballot Box," *New York Times*, November 14, 1976; and Wexler to Dodds, April 6, 1977.

could not predict. Archie Allen served as interim director, but he lacked the charisma and leadership of Lewis. The Ford Foundation hired a firm to conduct a review of the VEP shortly after Lewis left, and it discovered internal friction between staff members, a lack of grants made to local groups, and paralysis of its research wing. By April 1977, the VEP still had not reviewed the 1976 elections. Ford representatives worried about the VEP's future without Lewis, and although some within its National Affairs Division thought the only way for the VEP to survive would be for Ford to exert more influence, they decided "to sit tight for now."[732] But Ford staff members were anxious to find a new leader for the VEP, fearful that no current staff members were up to the task. Without an ambitious leader, the VEP was in peril. "The demise of VEP would be a great loss to the South," lawyer Harry J. Wexler wrote. "It is one of a very few civil rights organizations that is widely respected for its overall performance."[733]

In July, VEP board members named Vivian Malone Jones as executive director. In 1965, Jones became the first African American graduate of the University of Alabama. She had grown up in Mobile and attended Alabama A&M College, but after it lost accreditation, she decided to enroll at the University of Alabama with help from the NAACP. Governor George Wallace barred her and James Hood from entering Foster Hall on June 11, 1963 before federal troops arrived to ensure their enrollment. Jones graduated with a degree in business management. After she graduated, she earned a job as a research analyst with the Civil Rights Division, and later, she directed the Civil Rights and Urban Affairs Division of the Environmental Protection Agency in Atlanta. On August 1, 1977, she became the fourth executive director of the VEP.[734]

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[732] Wexler to Dodds, April 6, 1977.

[733] *Ibid*.

[734] VEP Press Release, July 22, 1977, Box 2S409, Folder "VEP 76-42," Field Foundation Archives; Harry Huge to Leslie W. Dunbar, July 15, 1977, Box 2S409, Folder "VEP 76-42," Field Foundation Archives; Christena Bledsoe, "Vivian Malone Jones and the VEP: From Integration to Voter Registration," *Southern Changes* 1, no. 2 (1978): 8-

Vivian Malone Jones was an accomplished organizer, but after a little more than a year with the VEP, she resigned due to poor health. Between the summers of 1977 and 1978, Jones tried to keep the VEP solvent, stressing in a fundraising letter from November 1977 that "our cash flow has been depleted."[735] She cut programs, but did so reluctantly. "Sophisticated tactics designed to deny equal rights" were also increasing throughout the South, extinguishing the drive among many to remain politically active.[736] In Dallas, for example, the VEP estimated that around 30,000 African Americans would soon be purged from voter roles after the county began a "recertification process."[737] She reduced programs for 1977, but promised the VEP would increase its activity—pending funds—for 1978. But stronger financial support was not forthcoming, and Jones began receiving cancer treatment around mid-1978. She resigned later in the year, forcing the VEP's field director, Sherrill Marcus, to take over as interim executive director.[738]

In 1979 and into the 1980s, the VEP remained operational, but it was only a fragment of what it once was. Soon after taking control over the VEP, Marcus released a press report summarizing the VEP's past and present situation. "The political empowerment journey requires money, manpower, organization, and leadership," he wrote. "During the past sixteen years, VEP

10; and Douglas Martin, "Vivian Malone Jones, 63, Dies; First Black Graduate of University of Alabama," *New York Times*, October 14, 2005. On the integration of the University of Alabama and the civil rights movement in Tuscaloosa, see E. Culpepper Clark, *The Schoolhouse Door: Segregation's Last Stand at the University of Alabama* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993); Simon Wendt, "God, Gandhi, and Guns: The African American Freedom Struggle in Tuscaloosa, Alabama, 1964-1965," *Journal of African American History* 89, no. 1 (Winter 2004): 36-56; and B.J. Hollars, *Opening the Doors: The Desegregation of the University of Alabama and the Fight for Civil Rights in Tuscaloosa* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2013).

[735] VEP Fundraising Letter from Vivian Malone Jones to Wiley E. Branton, November 10, 1977, Box 5, Folder 44, Branton Papers.

[736] *Ibid*.

[737] *Ibid*.

[738] VEP Press Release, December 21, 1978, Record Group 3.1, Box 1078, Folder 6579, Rockefeller Brothers Fund Records; and VEP Fundraising Letter from Vivian Malone Jones, June 28, 1978, Box 5, Folder 44, Branton Papers.

has possessed organization, and leadership; but often, it has had insufficient amounts of money—when money is scarce, manpower is scarce."[739] At a VEP board meeting the following month, members concluded that "floundering programs, staffing, and lack of new funding became critical in the fall of 1978."[740] But they were not ready to close down the VEP. Wiley Branton, Vernon Jordan, and John Lewis pledged their support to find another executive director, as did the Ford Foundation. With an estimated deficit of $55,000 in February 1979, the VEP became inactive until a new leader emerged.[741]

Over two years passed before the VEP board decided on a new executive director. Geraldine Thompson had a long track record of public service to the city of Atlanta and to the NAACP, making her a good fit in the eyes of VEP board members, Ford Foundation representatives, and former VEP executive directors. Raised in Memphis, Thompson graduated from Le Moyne College in Syracuse, New York and returned to the South to work on the campaigns of Andrew Young for Congress in 1972 and Maynard Jackson for mayor of Atlanta in 1973. She worked in the mayor's office as Special Assistant for Community Affairs between 1974 and 1976, and later served as Associate Director of the Atlanta branch of the NAACP. Before accepting the position with the VEP, she served as Regional Administrator for Region Four of the Department of Housing and Urban Development. She knew resurrecting the VEP would be challenging, but she committed to "use every resource available to transform that American ideal [of full political representation] into reality."[742]

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[739] VEP Press Release, December 21, 1978.

[740] VEP Board Meeting Minutes, January 27, 1979, Record Group 3.1, Box 1078, Folder 6579, Rockefeller Brothers Fund Records.

[741] Memorandum, R. Harcourt Dodds to National Affairs Division of the Ford Foundation, Re: "Voter Education Project," February 27, 1979, Series 1, Box 30, Folder 6, National Affairs Division, Office Files of Mitchell Sviridoff, Ford Foundation Records.

Under Geraldine Thompson, the VEP underwent a small renaissance between 1982 and 1984, but it accrued heavy debt that precipitated its end. The VEP appeared to have recovered during that span, receiving large grants from the Ford Foundation, Field Foundation, and others. The VEP funded 50 projects in 1982 and another 85 in 1983, with a projected budget of $450,000. Thompson also expanded the VEP to aid campaigns focusing on women, including workshops in multiple states to encourage women to run for office and vote. But even as the VEP increased its programs, philanthropic supporters wanted assurance of its solvency. At Thompson's request, the Field Foundation conducted a six-week review of its operations and finances. Instead of assuaging doubts, Francesta Farmer and Ruby Martin, the two who conducted the review, documented numerous operational and financial discrepancies within the VEP. They reported that 85 percent of the VEP's budget went to administrative costs, and the rest went to local projects. But the VEP had no bookkeeper, no actual budget, no work plans for employees, no concrete goals, no research protocols, and almost nothing in its bank account. They found the VEP to have no clear strategies for increasing minority political participation, and they criticized the VEP for failing to outline future plans. Worse, the VEP was failing to capitalize on Jesse Jackson's presidential campaign. Jackson was speaking throughout the South exciting local communities about black voting power, but the VEP played no role in helping local people register after his campaign stops ended.[743]

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[742] "…Named," *New York Amsterdam News*, October 31, 1981. See also "Geraldine Thompson Heads VEP; Speaks for Voting Rights," *Atlanta Daily World*, June 28, 1981; and Allison Galloup, "Voter Education Project Executive Director Geraldine Gray Thompson," Robert W. Woodruff Library, Emory University, Scholar Blog, November 22, 2010. https://scholarblogs.emory.edu/woodruff/fyi/voter-education-project-executive-director-geraldine-gray-thompson. Accessed December 21, 2015.

[743] Farmer and Martin, "A Confidential Report on an Evaluation of the Voter Education Project," July 1984; VEP General Support Proposal, 1984, Folder "Voter Education Project, Inc. 1984," Taconic Foundation Records; VEP Annual Report, 1984, Folder "Voter Education Project, Inc. 1985 January-February," Taconic Foundation Records; and Billy Cutler, "Planting Seeds: The Voter Education Project," *Southern Exposure* 12, no. 1 (1984): 41-45. On the VEP's focus on African American women, see "Southern Voter Project Targets Black Women," *Afro-American*,

In 1985, the *Atlanta Constitution* obtained a copy of the Field Foundation's report and published on the VEP's financial problems. The article wrecked the VEP's reputation in Atlanta, within the civil rights field, and with philanthropic foundations. Peter Scott, the journalist who broke the story, wrote, "VEP does not appear to have any systematic strategies or programs to increase voter registration/education among minorities."[744] While Thompson disputed parts of the report, she acknowledged that much of it was true, including salary increases for herself and some staff. Scott reached out to executives within the Field and Ford Foundations, and both told him they were reconsidering their relationship to the VEP. The next year, the VEP lost its Field Foundation funding, and Thompson laid off 11 staff members, leaving only herself and her deputy director.[745] By the summer of 1986, Thompson had resigned, and the VEP was in shambles with no one left on staff. A Ford Foundation report concluded that poor leadership was to blame, along with unrealistic budget aims and unfulfilled promises to local groups requesting funds. The VEP also "suffered severe cash flow problems," the report's author, Tonya Lewis, wrote. "Because of matching requirements and the uncertainty in arrival of funds, VEP could not accurately predict the amount of money it would have at any given moment."[746]

Even with financial problems and a ruined reputation, the VEP held on through the early 1990s. Clarence D. Coleman, a retired educator and former staff member of the SRC, took over as the VEP's executive director and only employee. "I was determined that this organization not

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May 26, 1984; Karen Russell, "Black Women Focus on Getting Out the Vote," *Afro-American*, August 25, 1984; "Grants Available for Women's Voter Education Workshops," *Atlanta Daily World*, May 16, 1985; and VEP Annual Report, 1984.

[744] Peter Scott, "Report Criticizes Strategy, Spending of Voter Project," *Atlanta Constitution*, May 3, 1985.

[745] Peter Scott, "Voter Education Project Lays off 11 of 13 Workers for Lack of Funds," *Atlanta Constitution*, unknown date, Frame 2347, Reel 4960, Series OVP-Finance and Administration, Ford Foundation Records.

[746] Tonya Lewis, "Voter Registration and Education Projects: A Profile of Ford Foundation Grantees," August 29, 1986, Unpublished Reports, #013830, Ford Foundation Records.

be allowed to just wither away and die," he told a reporter at the VEP's 25-year anniversary celebration in 1987.[747] But the VEP did wither. In 1986, it was more than $160,000 in debt. The Ford Foundation provided some relief, and Coleman worked without a salary for much of his tenure. He moved the VEP to Atlanta University in 1987, where faculty members in political science provided some assistance. But Coleman could do little more than to keep the VEP from folding. In 1990, Ed Brown became the VEP's final executive director, working largely without a salary. His stint was short, for by late 1991, it was clear to him that the VEP could no longer operate. He requested and won a grant worth $65,000 from the Ford Foundation for the "orderly closing down of the organization and disposition of its records" to Atlanta University's archive.[748] Quietly, the VEP shut its doors for good.

During the VEP's 25-year anniversary celebration back in 1987, newly elected U.S. Congressman John Lewis told a reporter, "I think there's a feeling in America that voting is no longer the 'in' thing to do...[but] I think the Voter Education Project is needed now more than ever before."[749] His words echoed the sentiment he expressed on the tenth anniversary of the March on Washington 14 years earlier: hope combined with realism. Ever since the Tax Reform Act of 1969 destabilized the VEP's finances, local movements organized around acquiring the ballot decreased, even as more African Americans registered and won political office. To some extent, the VEP was a victim of its own success. Civil rights had been won, spurred along by the VEP and the activists it supported during the 1960s. But the southwide movement that the VEP

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[747] Lorri Denise Booker, "At 25, Black Voter Project Has Same Goals," *Atlanta Constitution*, May 8, 1987.

[748] Galloway-May to Sutton, February 26, 1992. See also Ford Foundation Précis, Request No. USIAP-116, n.d., Frames 2404-2408, Reel 6389, Series OVP-Finance and Administration, Ford Foundation Records; Taconic Foundation Grant Application Review, December 8, 1987, Folder "Voter Education Project, Inc. 1986-1987," Taconic Foundation Records; "Voter Education Project Set to Close," *Washington Post*, February 15, 1992; and William Raspberry, "End of the Voter Education Project," *Washington Post*, March 2, 1992.

[749] Booker, "At 25, Black Voter Project Has Same Goals."

helped tether together waned, and full social and political equality for African Americans remained elusive. The Tax Reform Act of 1969 undermined the Voting Rights Act of 1965, but few people outside the VEP, civil rights leaders, philanthropic supporters, and conservative legislators realized it.

With more limitations, the VEP continued through five more presidential administrations. The VEP funded grassroots registration campaigns, supported black candidates and officeholders, opposed conservative tactics to dilute the black vote, encouraged Latino voting power, and strove to realize the full potential of the civil rights revolution. With help from the VEP, black southerners moved from the fringes of political involvement to the center. In the process, American politics shifted—African Americans gained greater strength, the two major parties were transformed, and conservatives found new ways to hold onto power. Even though the VEP's accomplishments were impressive, it could have done more had its funding not been attacked. The VEP tried taking the civil rights movement to its logical conclusion, but conservatives obstructed it along the way.

CONCLUSION

On June 25, 2013, the Supreme Court of the United States invalidated a key section within the Voting Rights Act of 1965. In a five-to-four decision, the Supreme Court ruled in *Shelby County v. Holder* that Section Four (b), the coverage formula, was outdated, and therefore, unconstitutional. By striking down Section Four (b), the Supreme Court rendered Section Five moot, the foundation of the legislation that required counties and states to receive federal approval before changing local election laws. Chief Justice John Roberts, on behalf of the conservative majority, wrote, "voting discrimination still exists; no one doubts that," but defended their view that enough racial progress had occurred to warrant the decision.[750] Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg disagreed, and in her dissent, she opened by writing, "In the Court's view, the very success of Section Five of the Voting Rights Act demands its dormancy."[751] The conservative Justices, according to Ginsburg, had destabilized the Voting Rights Act, blind to the possibility that the law had been the major reason why much racial progress had been accomplished since 1965, and why it remained necessary. States under the Voting Rights Act would no longer need federal approval before changing electoral laws, an open door to the return of voter suppression.

Within weeks of the *Shelby County* decision, Texas, North Carolina, and other states introduced legislation to amend elections laws—the kind which the Department of Justice would

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[750] *Shelby County, Alabama v. Eric H. Holder, Attorney General,* et al, June 25, 2013, 570 U.S.__(2013), Chief Justice John Roberts – Majority Opinion, 2.

[751] *Shelby County, Alabama v. Eric H. Holder, Attorney General,* et al, June 25, 2013, 570 U.S.__(2013), Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg – Dissenting Opinion, 1.

have likely rejected under an unaltered Voting Rights Act. Republican-dominated state legislatures quickly passed election laws with the pretext of preventing voter fraud, but with the implicit aim to make it more difficult for people of color, low-income citizens, and students to vote. In North Carolina, the Legislature passed restrictions on early voting, same-day registration, out-of-precinct voting, and pre-registration for 16 and 17-year-olds. The law also required voters to present a form of photo identification to election officials, a constraint that barred hundreds of thousands who have no driver's license or similar credentials. Conservatives defended these measures as bulwarks against fraud, but just as segregationists defended the poll tax and literacy test during the Jim Crow era, the reason was to dilute the electoral power of black and liberal voters.[752]

Today, voting restrictions appear more common than in the recent past, but the history of the Voter Education Project demonstrates that the right to vote for southern African Americans has never been simple. Obstacles to full citizenship have been numerous, and for 30 years, the VEP worked to make it easier for African Americans to vote and compete for political power. Drawing on philanthropic foundation money, the VEP financed hundreds of local registration campaigns, empowering communities with the funds to orchestrate sustained movements for the ballot. Between 1962 and 1964, VEP efforts led to nearly 700,000 African Americans registering in the South—the groundswell that precipitated the Voting Rights Act. During the late 1960s, with federal protections won, the VEP helped increase black political power, but conservatives undermined this approach through the Tax Reform Act of 1969 by compromising the VEP's

[752] House Bill 589, Session 2013, General Assembly of North Carolina. See also Alan Blinder and Ken Otterbourg, "Arguments Over North Carolina Voter Identification Law Begin in Federal Court," *New York Times*, January 25, 2016, http://www.nytimes.com/2016/01/26/us/arguments-over-north-carolina-voter-id-law-begin-in-federal-court.html?_r=0; and Ari Berman, "North Carolina's Voter ID Law Could Block 218,000 Registered Voters from the Polls," *The Nation*, March 14, 2016, http://www.thenation.com/article/north-carolinas-voter-id-law-could-block-218000-registered-voters-from-the-polls/.

philanthropic support. As a result, the VEP's finances became unsteady, and while it endured during the 1970s and 1980s, the VEP was unable to maintain the pace for black political empowerment. Not every goal of the civil rights movement came to fruition, but because of the VEP, hundreds of grassroots campaigns had money to launch registration campaigns. The VEP helped upend the Jim Crow system and reshaped American politics.

Looking around today, one might question the results of the civil rights movement. Conservatives gerrymander seemingly without restraint, condensing black voters into disfigured districts and isolating their political influence. Police brutality against African Americans persists, prompting massive demonstrations in places like Ferguson, Baltimore, and Chicago. Economic inequality grows ever sharper, deepening racial injustice as poverty affects African Americans at higher rates. Mass incarceration, proclaimed journalist and activist Michelle Alexander, is the latest form of Jim Crow. Even with President Obama in the White House, a post-racial society has not come close to emerging.

If so many problems endure, what did the VEP accomplish? Not all is lost, for the VEP has echoes today. The national eligible black voting population stood at 27,908,000 in 2014, with 17,700,000 registered—over 63 percent.[753] In the 11 states where the VEP operated, 9,044,000 African Americans are registered to vote.[754] Thousands of southern African Americans have served in local, state, and federal elected positions since 1965. While SNCC is gone, the NAACP, CORE, NUL, and SCLC continue, each devoted to black voter registration and political activism. The NAACP in particular has thrived, and in states like North Carolina, it

[753] Table 2, "Reported Voting and Registration, by Race, Hispanic Origin, Sex, and Age," U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, November 2014.

[754] Table 4b, "Reported Voting and Registration, by Sex, Race and Hispanic Origin, for States," U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, November 2014.

leads the charge against voter suppression. Other movements have formed, including Black Lives Matter in 2013. Organized online and without a hierarchal structure, Black Lives Matter activists have started to enter the political arena, such as DeRay McKesson running for mayor of Baltimore.[755] Civil rights activism combined with the pursuit of black political power—the VEP's legacy remains today.

As the right to vote faces new attacks, one can imagine what impact the VEP could have if it were still around today. Vernon Jordan wondered about the possibilities, less than one month after the *Shelby County* decision. "The VEP should be alive and well right now…It faded, and it never should have. And it faded in part on the theory that our work was done. It is very clear now that our work is not done. And were it still in existence as it was under Wiley [Branton], me, and John [Lewis], the Supreme Court decision may have been justified."[756]

[755] Jelani Cobb, "The Matter of Black Lives," *New Yorker*, March 14, 2016.

[756] Interview with Vernon E. Jordan by Evan Faulkenbury, July 19, 2013, in author's possession.

APPENDIX 1: BLACK VOTER REGISTRATION BY STATE, 1962-1970
(% = Registered Out of Total Black Voting Age Population)

	1962	**1964**	**1966**	**1968**	**1970**
Alabama	68,317 (13.4%)	110,000 (22.8%)	246,396 (51.2%)	273,000 (56.7%)	315,000 (65.4%)
Arkansas	68,970 (34%)	80,000 (41.5%)	115,000 (59.7%)	130,000 (67.5%)	153,000 (79.4%)
Florida	182,456 (36.8%)	299,960 (63.8%)	286,446 (60.9%)	292,000 (62.1%)	302,000 (64.2%)
Georgia	175,573 (26.7%)	270,000 (44.1%)	289,545 (47.2%)	344,000 (56.1%)	395,000 (64.4%)
Louisiana	151,663 (27.8)	163,041 (31.7%)	242,130 (47.1%)	305,000 (59.3%)	319,000 (62%)
Mississippi	23,920 (5.3%)	28,500 (6.7%)	139,099 (32.9%)	251,000 (59.4%)	286,000 (67.7%)
North Carolina	210,450 (35.8%)	258,000 (46.8%)	281,134 (51%)	305,000 (55.3%)	305,000 (55.3%)
South Carolina	90,901 (22.9%)	144,000 (38.8%)	190,609 (51.4%)	189,000 (50.8%)	221,000 (59.6%)
Tennessee	150,869 (49.8%)	218,000 (69.4%)	225,000 (71.7%)	228,000 (72.6%)	242,000 (77.1%)
Texas	111,014 (26.7%)	375,000 (57.7%)	400,000 (61.6%)	540,000 (83.1%)	550,000 (84.7%)
Virginia	110,113 (24%)	127,000 (29.1%)	205,000 (46.9%)	255,000 (58.4%)	269,000 (61.6%)
Total	1,344,519 (26.8%)	2,074,461 (40.8%)	2,620,359 (52.2%)	3,112,000 (62%)	3,357,000 (66.9%)

Sources: Appendix II in Pat Watters and Reese Cleghorn, *Climbing Jacob's Ladder: The Arrival of Negroes in Southern Politics* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1967); Voter Registration in the South, Summer 1966, Box 563, Folder 3, SCLC Papers, MARBL, Emory University; Voter Registration in the South, Summer 1968, Folder 7607, NCF Papers; and VEP Annual Report, 1970, Reel 177, SRC Papers. Total population figures for percentages based on 1960 census.

APPENDIX 2: TOTAL VEP FINANCES, 1962 – MAY 1, 1965

Sponsor	**Total to VEP**		**VEP Expenditures**	**Total Dispensed by VEP**	
Taconic Foundation	$339,000		Grants-in-Aid	$633,943.41	
Field Foundation	$225,000		SRC Overhead	$27,200.52	
Stern Family Fund	$219,000		Operating Costs	$194,692.66	
Organizations and Churches	$9,686.98				
Individuals	$16,561.85				
Foundation Share of Internship Program	$2,500				
Interest on Treasury Bills	$438.57				
Refund from Bail	$500				
	Total - $888,237.40			**Total - $855,836.59**	
					VEP Bank Balance as of May 1, 1965 - $32,400.81

Source: VEP Financial Statement, January 1962 – May 1, 1965, Frame 1477, Reel 173, SRC Papers.

APPENDIX 3: VEP SUMMER CRASH PROGRAM, MAY – JULY 1962

Organization	**Place(s)**	**Grant Amount from VEP**	**People Registered**
All Citizens Registration Committee	Atlanta, GA	$3,600	5,015
Durham Committee on Negro Affairs	Durham, NC	$2,500	3,700
CORE	Baton Rouge, LA; Jackson, MS; Clarendon, Sumter, & York County, SC	$8,625	1,557
SCLC	Waycross, Liberty County, Macon, & Washington County, GA; Shreveport, LA; Chowan County & Elizabeth City, NC; Charleston, SC; Knoxville & Chattanooga, TN; 4th Congressional District, VA	$11,500	6,410
SNCC	Jackson, Hattiesburg, Marshall County, 3rd & 4th Congressional Districts, MS; Orangeburg County, SC	$6,375	41
NAACP	Shreveport, Baton Rouge, Lake Charles, & Monroe, LA; Jackson, MS; High Point, Fayetteville, Charlotte, Rocky Mount, Wilmington, & Edenton, NC; Beaufort, Columbia, Greenville, & Charleston, SC; Memphis, Knoxville, Chattanooga, Clarksville, Fayette County, & Haywood County, TN	$17,250	7,436
NUL	Winston-Salem, NC; Richmond, VA	$5,750	147
Davidson County Independent Political Council	Davidson County, TN	$3,000	N/A
National Student Association	Raleigh, NC	$1,140	1,641
American Friends Service Committee	Jackson, TN	$2,000	969
Federated Organization for the Cause of Unlimited Self-Development	Baton Rouge, LA	$1,000	297
Alabama State Coordinating Association for Registration and Voting	Alabama (statewide)	$1,500	1,742
		Total - $64,240	**Total – 27,839**

Source: Leslie W. Dunbar and Wiley A. Branton, "First Annual Report of the Voter Education Project of the Southern Regional Council, Inc. for the Fiscal Year April 1, 1962 through March 31, 1963," Box 1, Folder 1, Financial Records, VEP Records.

APPENDIX 4: VEP GRANTEES, AUGUST 1962 – MARCH 1963

Organization	Total Grant	Grant by State	County	People Registered
CORE	$13,800	Florida - $2,800	Dade	3,078
		Louisiana - $4,500	Pointe Coupe	92
			St. Helena	131
			Iberville	126
			W. Feliciana	0
			E. Feliciana	0
			E. Baton Rouge	65
			Tangipahoa	5
			Washington	N/A
			W. Baton Rouge	N/A
		South Carolina - $6,500	Marlboro	12
			Georgetown	30
			Lee	62
			Florence	433
			Dillon	18
			Sumter	73
			York	467
			Horry	67
			Williamsburg	148
			Darlington	510
			Spartanburg	47
			Fairfield	6
			Marion	18
			Clarendon	N/A
			Hinds	8
NAACP	$22,000	Florida - $6,000	Duval	N/A
			Escambia	126
			Bay	N/A
			Alachua	1,076
			Broward	N/A
			Columbia	N/A
			Dade	N/A
			Hillsborough	N/A
			Leon	N/A
			Orange	1,450
			Polk	442
			Pinellas	169
			Volusia	660
		Georgia - $ N/A	Richmond	1,947
		North Carolina - $4,000	Mecklenburg	N/A
			Edgecombe/Nash	N/A
			New Hanover	N/A
		South Carolina - $1,000	Richland	N/A
		Tennessee - $5,000	Shelby	1,472
			Fayette	8
			Montgomery	158
			Lauderdale	N/A
			Tipton	25
			Knox	795
			Bolivar	27

			Hardemon	14
			Haywood	92
		Mississippi - $ N/A	Jackson	41
			Harrison	180
			Hinds	112
			Jones	157
		Louisiana - $3,000	Lincoln	16
			E. Carroll	40
			Madison	115
			Ouachita	34
			Morehouse	10
			Tensas	N/A
			Richland	10
			Bienville	8
			Jackson	16
		Texas - $ N/A	Bowie	2,531
			Smith	8,680
		Virginia – $ N/A	Fredericksburg (city)	N/A
			Lynchburg (city)	N/A
			Roanoke (city)	N/A
			Portsmouth (city)	N/A
			Buckingham	N/A
			Cumberland	N/A
			Greensville	N/A
			Isle of Wight	N/A
			Surry	N/A
			Sussex	N/A
			Nansemond	N/A
			Prince Edward	N/A
			Suffolk (city)	N/A
NUL	$ N/A	Texas	Tarrant	5,832
		North Carolina	Forsyth	147
		Virginia	Richmond (city)	N/A
SCLC	$15,700	Louisiana - $3,400	Caddo	N/A
			Claiborne	N/A
			Desoto	N/A
			Bienville	N/A
			Webster	N/A
		Alabama - $2,000	Etowah	N/A
			Calhoun	N/A
			Montgomery	N/A
		Florida - $600	Leon	N/A
		Tennessee - $700	Hamilton	N/A
		North Carolina - $2,000	Chowan	N/A
			Pasquotank	N/A
			Northampton	N/A
			Bertie	N/A
			Hertford	N/A
		Virginia - $ N/A	Amelia	N/A
			Appomattox	N/A
			Brunswick	N/A
			Dinwiddie	N/A
			Lunenburg	N/A

			Mecklenburg	N/A
			Nottoway	N/A
			Powhatan	N/A
			Prince George	N/A
			Southampton	N/A
			Petersburg (city)	N/A
			Hopewell (city)	N/A
		Georgia - $4,000	Mitchell	200
			Sumter	0
			Spalding	90
			DeKalb	0
			Rockdale	15
			Telfair	15
			Hall	150
			Greene	200
			Morgan	40
			Wilkes	40
			Muscogee	950
			Ware	200
			Floyd	85
SNCC	$8,254	Alabama - $1,500	Dallas	N/A
		Georgia - $6,054	Baker	N/A
			Calhoun	N/A
			Early	N/A
			Lee	N/A
			Marion	N/A
			Peach	N/A
			Randolph	N/A
			Terrell	N/A
			Worth	N/A
		South Carolina - $700	Orangeburg	N/A
Council of Federated Organizations (COFO)	$23,000	Mississippi - $23,000	Bolivar	N/A
			Coahoma	N/A
			Leflore	N/A
			Marshall	N/A
			Sunflower	N/A
			Washington	N/A
Jefferson County Voter Registration Campaign	$9,000	Alabama - $9,000	Jefferson	957
Madison County Coordinating Committee	$1,200	Alabama - $1,200	Madison	752
Southeastern Georgia Crusade for Voters	$4,000	Georgia - $4,000	Chatham	2,800
			Liberty	N/A
			Screven	N/A
			Tattnall	123
			Bullock	N/A
			Emanuel	N/A
			Bryan	N/A
Warren County Citizens Improvement League	$150	Mississippi - $150	Warren	N/A
Womanpower Unlimited	$1,000	Mississippi - $1,000	Hinds	N/A
All Citizens Registration	$200	Virginia - $200		N/A

Committee of Northern Virginia (canceled)				
Bibb County Coordinating Committee	$750	Georgia - $750	Bibb	99
Greater Little Rock Voter Registration Movement	$1,511.60	Arkansas - $1,511.60	Pulaski	3,742
Middle Tennessee Voter Registration Project	$ - N/A	$ - N/A	Davidson and adjacent counties	3,407
Dougherty City Voter Education League	$4,000	Georgia - $4,000	Dougherty	1,000
	Total – $111,787.60			**Total – 51,165**

Source: Leslie W. Dunbar and Wiley A. Branton, "First Annual Report of the Voter Education Project of the Southern Regional Council, Inc. for the Fiscal Year April 1, 1962 through March 31, 1963," Box 1, Folder 1, Financial Records, VEP Records.

APPENDIX 5: VEP GRANTS TO THE BIG FIVE THROUGH DECEMBER 1963

Organization	**Operating States**	**Grant Total**
CORE	Florida, Louisiana, Mississippi, & South Carolina	$51,425
NAACP	Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, & Virginia	$75,830
NUL	Winston-Salem, NC; Forth Worth, TX; & Richmond, VA	$15,960.98
SCLC	Alabama, Georgia, Louisiana, North Carolina, & Virginia	$32,700
SNCC	Alabama, Arkansas, Georgia, Mississippi, North Carolina, & South Carolina	$23,844
		Total - $199,799.98

Source: Financial Summary of the Voter Education Project, January 7, 1964, Folder "Southern Regional Council: Voter Education Project, 1962-1964," Taconic Foundation Records.

APPENDIX 6: INDEPENDENT ORGANIZATIONS RECEIVING VEP GRANTS THROUGH DECEMBER 1963

State	Organization	Grant Amount
Alabama	Madison County Coordinating Committee	$2,700 ($1,200 of total before April 1963)
	Jefferson County Voter Registration Committee	$20,999.26 ($9,000 of total before April 1963)
	Alabama Coordinating Association (certain rural counties)	$3,779.05
	Tuskegee Civic Association	$3,000
	Montgomery Voter Education Project	$1,712
	Colbert County Voters League	$500
	Mobile County Voter Education Project	$2,250
	Citizens' Improvement League (Gadsden)	$300
Arkansas	Greater Little Rock Voter Registration Movement	$1,511.60 (all before April 1963)
	Pine Bluff Council on Community Affairs	$270
Georgia	Dougherty County Voters League	$4,000 (all before April 1963)
	Bibb County Coordinating Committee	$3,750 ($750 of total before April 1963)
	All Citizens Registration Committee (Fulton County)	$14,995
	Southeastern Georgia Crusade for Voters	$4,577.35 ($4,000 of total before April 1963)
Louisiana	Federated Organizations for the Cause of Unlimited Self-Development (Baton Rouge)	$1,000 (all during Summer 1962 Crash Program)
	Coordinating Council of Greater New Orleans	$7,500
	The Grail (Lafayette Parish)	$200
Mississippi	Council of Federated Organizations (COFO)	$18,000
	Mississippi VEP (affiliated with COFO)	$21,000 ($23,000 before April 1963, combined with COFO grant)
	Warren County Citizens Improvement League	$150 (all before April 1963)
	Womanpower Unlimited	$1,000 (all before April 1963)
	Mississippi Human Rights	$2,500
North Carolina	National Student Association (Raleigh)	$1,140 (all during Summer 1962 Crash Program)
	Durham Committee on Negro Affairs	$2,500 (all during Summer 1962 Crash Program)
	American Friends Service Committee (Guilford County)	$952.74
	Non-Partisan Voting Project (Charlotte)	$2,000
	Voter Registration Project of Winston-Salem	$1,500
South Carolina	VEP of Charleston County	$2,802
	South Carolina VEP (Second Congressional District)	$5,000
	First Congressional District Voter Education Project	$1,535

Tennessee	YWCA-National Student Christian Federation-VEP (Nashville)	$1,519.23
	American Friends Service Committee (Jackson)	$2,000 (all during Summer 1962 Crash Program)
	Middle Tennessee Voter Registration Project	$3,000
Texas	Voters of Texas Enlist (VOTE)	$40,400
Virginia	All Citizens Registration Committee of Virginia	$400 - Cancelled
	Virginia Voters League	$500
	Peninsula Coordinating Committee (Newport News)	$1,800
	Tidewater Voter Registration Project (Norfolk)	$3,280
		Total - $186,023.23

Source: Financial Summary of the Voter Education Project, January 7, 1964, Folder "Southern Regional Council: Voter Education Project, 1962-1964," Taconic Foundation Records.

APPENDIX 7: VEP GRANTEES IN 1964

Project Number	Organization	Place(s)
4-1	Virginia Voters League	Richmond, VA
4-2	Citizens Committee of Wilson and Wilson County	Wilson, NC
4-3	Middle Tennessee Voter Registration Project	Nashville, TN
4-4	SNCC	Lee, Sumter, and Terrell Counties, GA
4-5	Alabama State Coordinating Association for Registration and Voting	Montgomery, AL
4-6	Educational Film Associates	Madison, WI
4-7	All-Citizens Registration Committee and SCLC	Atlanta, GA
4-8	Crusade for Voters	Richmond, VA
4-9	SCLC	Albany, GA & Montgomery, AL
4-10	CORE	Louisiana and South Carolina
4-11	NAACP	Lake Charles, LA
4-12	6th Congressional District VEP	South Carolina
4-13	5th Congressional District VEP	South Carolina
4-14	Halifax Voter Education Project	Enfield, NC
4-15	Warren County Voter Registration Project	Warrenton, NC
4-16	SCLC	Eastern NC
4-17	College Park Voter Registration Committee	College Park, GA
4-18	Asheville-Buncombe Voter Project	Asheville, NC
4-19	Nansemond Voter Project	Suffolk, VA
4-20	3rd Congressional District VEP	South Carolina
4-21	Madison County Coordinating Committee	Huntsville, AL
4-22	NAACP	Tennessee
4-23	Coordinating Council of Greater New Orleans	New Orleans, LA
4-24	The Grail	Lafayette, LA
4-25	4th Congressional District VEP	South Carolina
4-26	NAACP	Florida
4-27	SCLC	Tuscaloosa, AL
4-28	All-Citizens Registration Committee	Atlanta, GA
4-29	NAACP	Georgia
4-30	United Church Board for Homeland Ministries	New York, New York
4-31	SCLC	Georgia
4-32	Arkansas Voter Project	Little Rock, AR
4-33	SCLC	Petersburg, VA
4-34	SNCC	Panola & Tallahatchie Counties, MS
4-35	SCLC	St. Augustine, FL
4-36	Dallas County Voters' Project	Selma, AL
4-37	NAACP	Greensboro, NC
4-38	Louisville Urban League	Louisville, KY
4-39	CORE	Arlington, VA
4-40	Bibb County Coordinating Committee	Macon, GA
4-41	Peach County Political Action Committee	Fort Valley, GA
4-42	Central Civic Voter Project	Portsmouth, VA
4-43	Lynchburg Voters League	Lynchburg, VA
4-44	Crusade for Voters	Richmond, VA
4-45	South Carolina VEP	Columbia, SC
4-46	NAACP	Virginia

4-47	Virginia Voter's Registration League	Richmond, VA
4-48	NAACP North Carolina VEP	North Carolina
4-49	Unknown	
4-50	Calhoun County Improvement Association	Anniston, AL
4-51	Lee County Voters League	Marianna, AR
4-52	Durham Committee on Negro Affairs	Durham, NC
4-53	Jefferson County Voters League	Pine Bluff, AR

Source: Mitchell F. Ducey, ed., *The Southern Regional Council Papers, 1944-1968: A Guide to the Microfilm Edition* (Ann Arbor: University Microfilms International, 1984), 151-154. For this table, I arranged projects according to the VEP's classification number. The first digit in each, 4, represents the year, 1964. The second digit is the project number, assigned to each new grantee once the VEP approved the application. Some projects overlap with previous projects between 1962-1963, but no other document lists all VEP projects for 1964.

APPENDIX 8: VEP GRANTS, 1966-1968

Year	State	Organization	Grant Amount	Registration Results (1966 only)
1966	Alabama	Hale County Improvement	$715	134
		Tuscaloosa Citizens for Action Committee	$710	700
		Lee County Voters League	$1,200	N/A
		NAACP (under W.C. Patton)	$5,240	N/A
		Auburn League of Women Voters	$975	2,500
		Tuskegee Civic Association	$2,675	
		Conecuh County Improvement Association	$652.50	298
		Marengo County VEP-SCLC	$490	243
		Perry County VEP-SCLC	$490	195
		Barbour County VEP-SCLC	$490	146
		Sumter County VEP-SCLC	$490	250
		Jefferson County VEP-SCLC	$720	298
		Choctaw County VEP-SCLC	$490	600
		Rural Advancement Project	$1,650	
	Arkansas	Operation Registration Clean Up Drive	$1,500	2,940
		Phillip County NAACP	$1,000	2,500
		Arkansas Council on Human Relations (16 counties)	$8,500	4,035
	Florida	Opa-locka NAACP	$250	200
		Pensacola Improvement Association	$1,925	590
		Big Bend (12 counties)	$6,000	521
		Sarasota NAACP	$1,200	183
		Jacksonville NAACP	$2,240	1,907
		St. Petersburg NAACP	$1,805	125
	Georgia	Bibb County Coordinating Committee	$1,975	1,010
		Griffin NAACP	$1,047.50	342
		Augusta-Richmond County VEP	$2,195	4,367
		All-Citizens Registration Committee	$4,775	7,682
		Savannah NAACP	$2,500	3,704
		Brunswick NAACP	$1,420	1,120
		Houston County Voters Committee	$1,350	1,892
		Non-Partisan Voters League	$1,524.30	575
		Thomasville NAACP	$1,500	1,572
		Hancock County Democratic Club	$905	406
		Fort Valley Citizens Education Commission	$1,000	305
		Keystone Voters League	$1,000	322
		Dougherty County Resources Development	$3,700	479
		Dublin NAACP	$500	789
		Valdosta & Laurens County Voters League	$500	175
		Bullock County NAACP	$1,400	464
		NUL	$5,000	N/A
		Georgia Council on Human Relations	$465	224
	Mississippi	Coahoma County NAACP	$3,745	856
		Forrest County NAACP	$900	$2,500
		Issaquena County Improvement League	$2,770	128
		Washington County Voters League	$1,320	299
		Warren County Improvement League	$1,280	152
		Laurel Cooperative Voter Registration Committee	$1,530	360
		Madison County Movement	$2,000	936

		Sharkey County Improvement Association	$1,375	331
		Brookhaven NAACP	$950	381
		Gulfport NAACP	$1,275	194
		Leake County NAACP	$1,000	824
		Marion County NAACP	$1,000	656
		Marshall-Benton County NAACP	$1,300	538
		Lauderdale County NAACP	$1,300	1,079
		Jackson NAACP	$3,000	1,698
		Walthall NAACP	$950	106
	North Carolina	Mr. & Mrs. Joseph Tieger	$600	148
		Longhill Linden NAACP	$795	550
		Durham Council on Negro Affairs	$2,765	350
		Greensboro NAACP	$1,350	395
		Asheville-Buncombe County	$850	1,701
	South Carolina	South Carolina VEP	$5,503	N/A
		Aiken County Registration Committee	$900	183
		Beaufort County Voters League	$400	251
		Sumter County Voters League	$250	985
		Richland County Voters League	$600	728
		Citizens Committee of Charleston	$720	783
		Williamsburg County Voters League	$400	863
		Clarendon County Voters League	$500	281
		Calhoun County Voters League	$250	268
		Florence County VEP	$1,120	376
		Laurens County VEP	$400	150
		American Friends Service Committee	$750	1,531
	Tennessee	Memphis NAACP	$2,930	4,037
		Jackson NAACP	$1,200	1,798
		West Tennessee VEP (19 counties)	$5,000	2,818
		Knoxville Council on Human Relations	$2,635	1,194
	Virginia	Richmond NAACP	$2,495	1,253
		Northern Virginia VEP (cancelled on August 2, 1966)	$8,420	400
		Lynchburg Voters League	$2,475	1,376
		Norfolk NAACP	$2,575	1,927
		Hampton NAACP	$1,700	1,165
		Virginia Students Civil Rights Committee	$3,000	1,189
		Lunenburg NAACP	$800	205
		Caroline County NAACP	$800	195
		Powhatan County NAACP	$800	250
		Fredericksburg NAACP	$545	190
	Special	National YWCA	$500	1,490
		Student Internship Program in Atlanta	$375	N/A
		Scholarship and Education Fund for Racial Equality (CORE)	$750	1,797
			1966 Total - $170,787.30	**1966 Total – 93,655**
1967	Alabama	NAACP Regional Office, Birmingham	$3,460	
		Auburn League of Women Voters	$200	
		Russell County VEP	$500	
		Pike County Voters League	$500	

		Talladega Improvement Association	$2,321	
		Madison County Voters League	$2,000	
		Greene County Civic Association	$1,500	
	Arkansas	Arkansas VEP	$10,140	
		Arkansas VEP Statewide Meeting in Camden	$1,549	
	Florida	Fort Lauderdale NAACP	$2,500	
		Marion County Voters League	$1,820	
	Georgia	YWCA Atlanta – Student Interns	$3,027	
		Screven County VEP	$1,500	
		Terrell County VEP	$1,000	
		Richmond County VEP	$500	
		Houston County SCLC	$1,800	
		All-Citizens Registration Committee	$3,500	
		Burke County Improvement Association	$2,663	
		Toombs County VEP	$1,000	
		B.R. Brazeal (research)	$1,201.25	
		Crisp County VEP	$1,000	
		Urban League Regional Office - Atlanta	$6,600	
		Dublin NAACP	$950	
		Douglas County NAACP	$2,000	
		Ben Hill County VEP	$1,000	
		Grady County VEP	$1,000	
		American Friends Service Committee - Atlanta	$250	
		Lee County VEP	$1,000	
	Louisiana	Mansfield NAACP	$1,410	
		Caddo Parish VEP	$3,590.37	
		New Iberia NAACP	$1,000	
		St. John the Baptist Parish Organization	$2,200	
		New Orleans Youth Council NAACP	$1,750	
		Community League for Citizenship Education and Voter Registration – New Orleans	$2,000	
		Four Parish VEP (Iberville)	$3,500	
		East Baton Rouge Parish VEP	$2,000	
		Madison Parish Voters League	$1,000	
		East Carroll Branch NAACP	$750	
		Louisiana Workshop for Candidates	$1,000	
	Mississippi	Bolivar County VEP	$1,920	
		Holmes County VEP	$1,985	
		Quitman County VEP	$1,830	
		Sunflower County VEP	$2,100.44	
		Tallahatchie County VEP	$1,790	
		Yazoo County VEP	$1,000	
		Amite County VEP	$1,200	
		Issaquena County Voters League	$2,000	
		Holmes County NAACP	$750	
		Coahoma County NAACP	2,500	
		Clay County Community Association	$1,001.85	
		Carroll County Improvement Association	$1,020	
		Pike County NAACP	$1,000	
		Grenada County Voters League	$2,200	
		Warren County Improvement League	$1,200	
		Civic League of Simpson County	$2,000	
		Sharkey County Improvement Association	$1,500	
		Voters League of Jefferson Davis County	$2,050	

		Wilkerson County Voter Education League	$2,200	
		Hinds County Registration League	$3,500	
		Rankin County Movement	$2,000	
		Lawrence County Civic League	$1,000	
		Leake County NAACP	$1,000	
		Lauderdale County VEP	$1,500	
		Forrest County NAACP	$1,500	
		North Gulfport Political Action Committee	$1,000	
		Mississippi Council on Human Relations	$600	
		Dave Emmons (research)	$250	
	North Carolina	Lumbee Citizens Council	$4,150	
		Charlotte Area Fund	$2,000	
		Greensboro NAACP	$1,000	
		Halifax County Voters Movement	$1,500	
		North Carolina VEP	$13,000	
		North Carolina Leadership Training Program Statewide Meeting in Durham	$2,000	
		Citizens Voter Registration Project – Rocky Mount	$2,000	
		Martin County VEP	$1,500	
		Goldsboro NAACP	$1,200	
		Bertie County VEP	$2,000	
	South Carolina	South Carolina VEP	$13,000	
		Lee County VEP	$850	
		Sumter County VEP	$1,000	
		Greenville County VEP	$2,000	
		Orangeburg County VEP	$2,050	
		Laurens County VEP	$1,500	
		Clarendon County VEP	$2,000	
		Allendale County VEP	$750	
		Anderson County VEP	$1,000	
		Darlington County VEP	$1,000	
		South Carolina VEP Leadership Conference	$3,095.60	
		Richland County VEP	$2,000	
		Charleston NAACP	$2,000	
		Newberry County VEP	$1,000	
		Hampton County NAACP	$1,000	
		Williamsburg County Voters League	$2,000	
	Tennessee	Nashville NAACP	$2,592	
		A.L. Robinson (student intern in Memphis)	$500	
		Ripley NAACP	$2,000	
		Memphis NAACP	$2,565	
	Texas	Texas Leadership Conference in San Marcos	$5,000	
	Virginia	Virginia State Conference NAACP	$200	
		Danville VEP - SCLC	$3,300	
		Lynchburg Voters League	$1,000	
		Galax NAACP	$1,110	
		Petersburg Improvement Association - SCLC	$3,000	
		New Kent County VEP	$1,050	
		Amelia County NAACP	$1,000	
		Brunswick County League for Progress	$1,175	
		Richmond NAACP	$3,495	

		Powhatan County NAACP	$820	
		Greensville County NAACP	$1,750	
	Special	Scholarship and Education Fund for Racial Equality (CORE)	$2,000	
		Law Students Research Council of Mississippi	$2,500	
			Total - $222.331.51	
1968	Alabama	West Macon County Improvement Association	$2,200	
		Bullock County Improvement Association	$2,200	
		Montgomery County NAACP	$1,500	
		Ad Hoc Committee for Voter Education	$1,000	
	Arkansas	Lee County NAACP	$1,500	
		Phillips County NAACP	$1,500	
	Florida	Palm Beach County Voters League	$2,200	
		Lee County NAACP	$1,500	
		St. Petersburg NAACP	$1,400	
		Volusia County NAACP	$1,800	
		Greater Miami Council on Human Relations	$1,000	
		Liberty City Community Council	$1,000	
		National Council of Negro Women	$800	
		South Dade County Community Action	$1,200	
	Georgia	Hancock County Democratic Club	$1,000	
		Clay County Voter Education Program	$1,500	
		Calhoun County VEP	$1,500	
		Emory Conference	$500	
		Houston County Voters Committee	$1,000	
		Community Organization for Progress and Education	$2,000	
		Savannah NAACP	$2,200	
		Rising Star Voters League (Flovilla)	$1,000	
		Houston County Development Committee	$1,250	
		Taliaferro County Voters League	$1,200	
		Columbus Council on Human Relations	$2,000	
		Floyd County VEP	$1,600	
		Wayne County NAACP	$1,500	
		Dougherty Council Voter Registration	$2,500	
		Dodge Council NAACP	$675	
		Bibb-Jones County VEP	$2,500	
		Burke County Improvement Association	$2,000	
		Milledgeville NAACP	$1,125	
		All Citizens Registration Committee	$2,500	
	Louisiana	Mansfield NAACP	$1,000	
		Louisiana VEP	$13,000	
		Bossier Parish VEP	$1,500	
		Louisiana Institute, New Orleans	$4,198.92	
		Alexandria NAACP	$2,200	
		The Louisiana Rights Organization to Sustain Equality	$1,000	
		Second Ward Voters (Baton Rouge)	$1,500	
		East Carroll Branch NAACP-VEP	$1,500	
		New Roads NAACP-VEP	$1,200	
		West Feliciana Voters League	$2,000	
		Ringgold NAACP	$1,800	

	Mississippi	Humphrey County VEP	$200	
		Bolivar County NAACP	$1,000	
		Glen Allan Improvement Association	$1,200	
		Meridian NAACP	$2,000	
		Amite County VEP	$800	
	North Carolina	Raleigh NAACP	$2,500	
		Northampton County Voters Movement	$1,450	
		Nash County VEP	$1,520	
		Burlington NAACP	$1,400	
		Hoke County VEP	$1,400	
		Southport NAACP	$630	
		Iredell County Voters League	$1,385	
		Citizens League of Wilson County	$850	
		Person County Voters League	$880	
		Green County VEP	$495	
		Warren County NAACP	$1,200	
		Pitt County NAACP	$1,000	
		Rockingham NAACP	$1,000	
		Fayetteville Area Poor People	$478	
		Asheville-Buncombe County Citizens Organization	$1,300	
		Halifax County Voters Movement	$1,000	
		Herford County VEP	$1,350	
		Bertie County VEP	$1,150	
		Vance County Voters League	$1,200	
		Edgecombe County VEP	$760	
		Greensboro Students VEP	$200	
		Durham Committee on Negro Affairs	$2,500	
		North Carolina VEP Meeting	$1,000	
		North Carolina VEP Developmental Project	$1,600	
		Chapel Hill Students, VEP	$100	
	South Carolina	Progressive Democrats (Georgetown)	$1,200	
		Richland County Voters League	$1,500	
		Orangeburg County VEP	$3,000	
		Beaufort County VEP	$1,500	
		Berkeley County Citizens	$750	
		Westside Improvement League (West Columbia)	$1,000	
		Sumter County Voters League	$1,500	
		Clarendon County Voters League	$1,000	
		Williamsburg County Voters League	$800	
		South Carolina VEP Candidate Workshop	$800	
	Tennessee	Lincoln County Voter Registration Project	$1,600	
		Knoxville NAACP	$2,500	
		Giles and Lawrence Counties, VEP (Pulaski)	$3,000	
		Bedford County Voter Education Council	$1,500	
		Memphis NAACP	$3,500	
		Franklin County VEP	$1,500	
		Chattanooga NAACP	$2,000	
		West Tennessee Self-Help Development Corporation	$10,750	
		Maury VEP	$1,600	

	Virginia	Lynchburg Voters League	$1,500	
		Danville Voters League	$1,000	
		Pittsylvania County Voters League	$1,000	
		Halifax County Voters League	$1,000	
		Mecklenburg County Voters League	$1,000	
		Galax NAACP	$1,000	
		Richmond NAACP	$1,500	
		Lunenburg County NAACP	$1,000	
		Charlottesville NAACP	$1,250	
		Martinsville County Voter Registration Council	$1,000	
	Special	National YWCA	$1,500	
			Total - $186,946.92	
			Grand Total – Total - $580,065.73	

Sources: Statistical Summary, Voter Education Project, January-October, 1966, Box 2T25, Folder "SRC Inc. (VEP) Fall 1966," Field Foundation Archives; A Report on the Voter Education Project, October 19, 1967, Box 2T79, Folder "SRC (VEP) Fall 1967," Field Foundation Archives; Voter Education Projects, State-by-State Distribution, 1968, Box 43, Folder 4, Office Files, VEP Records; for 1969, no record for each, but SRC Annual Report 1969 counted 98 projects: Annual Report of the Executive Director of the Southern Regional Council for 1969, January 1970, Box 2S415, Folder "SRC General 1971," Field Foundation Archives. Registration results were only tallied by project in 1966.

APPENDIX 9: FOUNDATION GRANTS TO VEP, 1966-1968

Year	**Sponsor**	**Total to VEP**	
1966	Field Foundation	$100,000	
	Taconic Foundation	$150,000	
	Rockefeller Brothers Fund	$50,000	
	Ford Foundation	$24,000	
	Marion Ascoli Fund	$1,000	
		Total - $280,000	
1967	Field Foundation	$150,000	
	Rockefeller Brothers Fund	$50,000	
	Mary Reynolds Babcock Foundation	$50,000	
	New World Foundation	$25,000	
	Ford Foundation	$24,000	
	New York Foundation	$10,000	
	John Heyman	$1,045	
	Anonymous	$500	
		Total - $310,545	
1968	Field Foundation	$375,000	
	Ford Foundation	$24,000	
	New York Foundation	$10,000	
	North Carolina Fund	$4,000	
	Taconic Foundation	$5,000	
	Mary Reynolds Babcock Foundation	$15,000	
	The Abelard Foundation	$2,500	
	Philip M. Weightman	$1,000	
	Joseph D. Sapp	$1,000	
		Total - $437,500	
			Total - $1,028,045

Source: Contributions to the Voter Education Project of the Southern Regional Council, Inc., received November 5, 1968 by Vernon Jordan, Box 65, Folder 20, Office Files, VEP Records.

APPENDIX 10: FOUNDATION GRANTS TO VEP, 1970 (POST-TAX REFORM ACT OF 1969)

Sponsor	**Grant Total**	**Percentage of Total Income**
Ford Foundation	$73,000	24.9985%
Field Foundation	$72,920	24.9711%
Carnegie Corporation	$55,703	19.0753%
Rockefeller Brothers Fund	$50,000	17.1223%
Irwin-Sweeney-Miller Foundation	$16,000	5.4791%
New World Foundation	$10,000	3.4245%
Aaron E. Newman Foundation	$7,000	2.3971%
Board of Social Ministry, Lutheran Church of America	$4,400	1.5068%
Metropolitan Women's Democratic Club	$2,000	.6849%
Sales of Literature	$569	.1948%
Broadway United Church of Christ	$250	.0856%
Southern Education Foundation	$150	.0514%
National Council, Churches of Christ	$25	.0086%
Total	**$292,017**	**100%**

Source: John Lewis to Thomas W. Wahman, March 23, 1971, Box 1078, Folder 6579, Record Group – 3.1 Grants, RBF Papers.

APPENDIX 11: VEP GRANTEES, 1970

State	Organization	Grant Amount
Alabama	Alabama Center for Elected Officials	$24,200
	Bessemer Voters League	$650
	Greene County Voter Registration Committee	$500
	Barbour County Registration Committee	$500
	Marengo County Voter Registration Committee	$500
	Lowndes County Voter Registration Committee	$500
	Dallas County Voter Registration Committee	$500
	Perry County Voter Registration Committee	$500
	Sumter County SCLC	$500
	Wilcox County SCLC	$585
	Hale County Progressive Organization	$500
	Morgan County Organization for Voter Education	$150
	All-Macon County Voter Registration Committee	$150
	Concerned Citizens for Voter Education (Greensboro)	$500
	Bullock County Improvement Association	$250
	Marengo County Coordination Association	$100
	Alabama Christian Movement for Human Rights	$250
	Alabama State Coordinating Association for Registration and Voting	$150
	Clarks County Civic Association	$100
	Neighborhood Organized Workers (Mobile)	$250
	Pickens County NAACP	$100
	Alabama Training Program – Sheriffs (Hayneville)	$400
Arkansas	Arkansas Council on Human Relations VEP	$13,971.07
Florida	Citizens Coordinating Committee of Daytona Beach	$1,200
	Seminole VEP	$1,000
	Voter Registration and Citizenship Education Inter-Civic Council of SCLC (Tallahassee)	$1,000
	Clearwater NAACP	$500
Georgia	Georgia Center for Elected Officials	$19,300
	Title I Conference (Atlanta)	$328.68
	Black Citizens Organization of Crawford County	$500
	Houston County Voters Committee	$500
	Stewart County Voter Registration Workers	$500
	Citizenship Education Commission (Fort Valley)	$500
	Coweta County VEP	$500
	Rising Star Voters League (Indian Springs)	$500
	Citizens Participation Council for Action (Athens)	$500
	United Association for Progress (Milledgeville)	$500
	John Hope University Homes Registration Committee (Atlanta)	$432
	Heeman E. Perry Homes Registration Committee (Atlanta)	$400
	Webster County VEP	$500
	Black United Group of Griffin	$500
	Burke County VEP	$600
	Eleanor Crittenden (Morgan)	$500
	Meriwether County VEP	$500
	Pike County VEP	$500
	Crisp County VEP	$500
	Warner County VEP	$500
	Taliaferro County VEP	$200
	Washington County VEP	$1,320
	Jefferson County VEP	$500

	Southwest Georgia VEP	$1,800
	YWCA's Youth Voter Education Action Project (Atlanta)	$1,000
Louisiana	Public Affairs Service Center, Southern University	$23,810
Mississippi	Mississippi Center for Elected Officials	$19,750
	Coahoma County Youth Council NAACP	$1,250
	Washington County Improvement Association	$1,285
	Humphreys County Union for Progress	$1,700
	Sharkey County VEP	$1,640
	Sunflower County Voters League	$2,500
	Greater Jackson Area Committee	$1,950
	Yazoo County Voter League	$1,500
	Tunica County Union for Progress	$1,440
	Holmes County United for Progress	$1,500
	Madison County Union for Progress	$1,000
North Carolina	North Carolina VEP	$23,213.46
	Wilson Community Improvement Association	$700
	Wayne County VEP	$800
	Citizens Committee for Increased Voter Registration and Participation (Charlotte)	$1,000
	Greensboro NAACP	$1,000
South Carolina	South Carolina VEP (2 projects)	$15,580.80
	Florence County Voter Registration	$1,000
	Charleston County VEP	$1,200
	Laurens County VEP	$1,000
	Edgefield County VEP	$1,000
	Greenville VEP	$1,000
	Sumter County Voter Registration Committee	$1,000
	Richland County Voter Registration Council	$1,000
Tennessee	Maury County VEP	$1,000
	West Tennessee Self-Help Development Corporation	$1,000
	Knoxville NAACP	$2,000
	Nashville Frontlash	$1,515
	Wilson County Council on Human Relations	$500
Texas	Young Minds in Action (San Antonio)	$2,000
	Houston West End Development Cooperation Voter Registration Fund	$2,000
	Project Voter Registration and Education (Houston)	$1,000
	San Patricio and Bee County Voter Registration Council	$1,500
Virginia	Isle of Wight Committee	$582
	Southampton Committee	$582
	Southside Portsmouth Committee	$582
	Amelia Committee	$582
	Prince Edward Committee	$582
	Charles City Committee	$582
	Lunenburg NAACP	$500
	Cumberland County Voter Registration Committee	Unclear
	Hopewell Improvement Association - SCLC	$500
	Dinwiddie County Civic League	$500
	Greenville County Citizens Group	$500
	Sussex Improvement Association	$500
		Total - $210,513.07

Sources: VEP Annual Report, 1970, Reel 177, SRC Papers; and VEP Annual Report, 1971, Reel 177, SRC Papers.

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