

A PROPOSED PLAN FOR INCREASING THE NEGRO VOTE IN THE
COUNTIES OF MONTGOMERY, BULLOCK, AND BARBOUR, ALABAMA

- by -

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HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE OF THE PROBLEM

The practice of segregation has always prevailed in Alabama. Recent protests against the practice have provoked tensions that, at time, appear to be near the point of explosion. An inhibiting factor that has frustrated efforts to abolish segregation is the lack of communication channels for arbitration of the issue. At the present time all avenues of communication are virtually closed.

Political leaders of the State have not forgotten that the Civil War is over; they reverently refer to the practice of segregation as "Our Way of Life". In support of their views, the leaders have pledged themselves to use "all available legal means". Based upon recent incidents, the available legal means include: false arrest; bombing of homes; coercions and intimidations of varying degrees; and physical violence.

Among the Negro group, older persons have been able to survive the viciousness of segregation, though dissatisfied with the practice. Their attitudes have been described as "passive acquiescence". Other members of the Negro group have reasoned that compliance with the practice of segregation was a cross to be borne; that in due time the Great Creator of mankind will straighten the situation out.

The "new Negro", as called by proponents of his cause, and "crazy Nigger" by the reactionary group, wonders why the injustices of segregation must be suffered after the Negro's brilliant record in two World Wars and the Korean skirmish. Most noteworthy is the unity among Negro leaders, including laymen, in their fight for First Class Citizenship — freedom from discrimination in transportation, housing, public accommodations, job opportunities, education, and voting.

The writer, though interested in all areas of First Class Citizenship, has a special interest in improving the status of registration and voting among Negroes. This special interest grows out of the recognition that many, if not all, problems associated with the practice of segregation may be dissolved when Negroes become factors in political campaigns, especially, election of local and state officials. Based upon personal experiences, eligible Negro voters are given some recognition

local political affairs. Candidates for political office do not overlook the balance of power which often rests in Negro voters.

History of Legal Reuirements for Registration and Voting

From 1798 to 1910, the only requirement for voting in Alabama was that "... the individual be worth three hundred dollars"¹. In tr acing the history of voting in Alabama, Malcom C. Miller identified several components of the evolutionary ^{PROCESS} process. The components included: (1) history of experiences and practices in government; (2) cross fertilization; and (3) efforts of each generation to solve its problems.

As the legislation has been enforced, one group has enjoyed the blessings of liberty for themselves and their posterity, whereas, the other group has suffered in an environment which reduced its members to subservient roles.

In 1946, the Boswell Amendment was passe d by the referendum vote of Alabamians. This amendment replaced former requirements for voting, enacted after 1910. The requirements were: " a person must be twenty years of age, be able to read and write, and must have been a resident of the state one year and a resident of the community in which he lives for six months"².

Of particular importance in the registration and voting of Negroes is the provisions of the Boswell Amendment which sets up an educational requirement for voting qualification. Purportedly, nondiscriminatory with respect to race as a qualification for voting, the provision requires that "all applicants, both colored and white, must be able to read, write, and explain certain articles and amendments of the United States' Constitution and the Alabama Constitution, to the satisfaction of the Board of Registrars"³.

¹McMiller, Malcom C., The History of the Constitution of the State of Alabama. Atlanta, Ga.: Associated Press,

² ATLANTA CONSTITUTION, ASSOCIATED PRESS JUNE 4, 1947

³Atlanta Constitution, September 3, 1947, from Files of Institute of Human Relations, ~~New York University~~. BLAUGSTEIN LIBRARY 165E 567A 47.
AND JAE SCHOMBERG LIBRARY 103W 1357A

The Boswell Amendment has been a useful tool in circumventing the equal protection clause of the Fourteenth Amendment of the U. S. Constitution. Likewise, other amendments to the Alabama Constitution have served well the purpose of restricting registration and voting among Negroes. The restrictive amendments include: (1) poll tax of \$3.00; (2) endorsement of one white qualified voter (voucher); (3) endorsement of two Negro qualified voters.⁴

In addition to use of the amendments enumerated for the purpose of circumvention, Boards of Registrars have devised numerous techniques to limit registration and voting of Negroes. The most familiar circumvention techniques are:⁵

1. Repeatedly failing applicant, under the presumption that he will lose interest, eventually, and give up efforts to register
2. Waiting on all white applicants as a means of "tiring out" Negro applicants
3. Closing registration office after all white applicants have been served
4. Resigning membership on the Board of Registrars when too much pressure is exerted by the minority group.

Efforts to remove barriers and to overcome circumventions to registration and voting of Negroes have been made by diverse groups and leaders. Among the groups and leaders participating in the efforts, the following seem worthy of identification:⁶

1. United Veterans for Equality . Wrote Governor John Patterson and the Department of Justice, requesting removal of registration barriers
2. Emory O. Jackson. Led a group of Negroes in the "March on Board of Registrars, Birmingham, protesting unfair practices in registration of Negro voters. The group also filed five suits against the Board
3. Tuskegee Civic Association. Sponsored a boycott of white merchants in Tuskegee in protest of the gerrymandering to exclude Negro voters
4. U. S. Civil Rights Commission. Investigated registration and voting records in several counties to determine whether Negro applicants were discriminated in certifying voters.

⁴Ibid., Loc. Cit

⁵Ibid., Loc. Cit

⁶Ibid., June 5, 1959

Status of Registration and Voting Among Negroes in Alabama

Effectiveness of legal barriers and circumvention techniques in restricting registration and voting of Negroes in Alabama may be observed in the per cent of Negroes who are qualified to vote. The writer did not collect data on all counties of the State; however, the statistics presented are considered representative of the general distribution.

The Montgomery Improvement Association compiled a report on registration and voting in several counties of Alabama. The statistics reveal a comparatively low per cent of Negro voters. An exhibit of the report shows the following:⁷

County	Negro Population	Negro Voters
Barbour	7 231	432
Bullock	7 325	8
Montgomery	52 235	6,235 3,500
Macon County: Negroes are 86 per cent of total population; only 29 per cent of the registered voters		
Wilcox : Negroes are 56 per cent of total population; no Negro voters		

TOTAL REGISTERED NEGRO VOTERS IN THE STATE: 78,000

Though a limited sample of registration and voting among Negroes in Alabama, the relatively low per cent of qualified Negro voters support the conclusion that, heretofore, officials have been effective in the use of legal barriers and various circumvention techniques. Remedying the situation is considered by the writer an important task.

Several variables will influence the success of efforts to improve the status of Negro voters in Alabama. Proposing a plan of action for that purpose will require consideration of the factors and conditions which tend to inhibit efforts of Negroes to register and stimulate the dominant group to resist all efforts to secure suffrage rights for Negroes.

⁷Montgomery Improvement Association, Report on Registration and Voting,
 June 30, 1950

A PLAN TO PROMOTE REGISTRATION AND VOTING OF NEGROES IN THE STATE OF ALABAMA

Basic Assumptions

Based upon viewpoint of reporters, authors, and scholars who have written on the subject, the problem of promoting registration and voting among Negroes in Alabama is complex. The writer assumes that the present status of Negro voters is the product of several related factors: (1) sociological, psychological, and historical views of the dominant group; (2) socio-economic conditions of Negroes; and (3) limitations of local, state, and federal statutes for protection of citizenship rights.

An effective plan for promotion of registration and voting among Negroes in Alabama should include all social and economic levels of the group. It must provide for widespread participation, even among the grass roots group. It should clearly discriminate functions and duties of all persons who will be engaged in the project. And, moreover, the plan must take into account the lack of communication between the dominant and minority groups and the vulnerability of many Negroes to aggressive action in the area of civil rights.

The Proposed Plan

Basic structure of the plan is centered in committees. Committees are proposed for different levels of action and for definite duties and responsibilities. The proposed committees are:

1. Executive Committee, or Board of Directors
2. County Committee
3. Ward or Township Committee
4. Neighborhood or Precinct Committee
5. Street or Settlement Committee
6. Block and Rural Route Committee

Functions of the committees and duties of membership personnel will be presented in subsequent discussions.

Executive Committee

It is proposed that the Executive Committee be composed of three ministers, representing the Counties of Bullock, Barbour, and Montgomery. This proposal is based upon practical considerations.

First, ministers are less vulnerable to economic, social, and political pressures. Salaried workers, public school teachers or principals, owners of small businesses would be vulnerable to coercions and intimidations which have characterized reprisal efforts of the dominant group in umerous instances.

In addition to less vulnerability than other groups, ministers have the advantage of "a following"; their church congregations as well as friends in the community. Neglecting the actions of extremists, it may be assumed that ministers will most often enjoy prestige of their high calling and respect for their spiritual leadership.

A second consideration which dictated suggesting ministers for membership of the Executive Committee is that of established contacts. In performance of their ministerial duties, they have more than casual acquaintance with their group members. Further, their duties require affiliations at the national level, national meetings of their church connections and other organizations in fraternal and business fields. Such contacts could prove helpful in maintaining essential communications with national figures, in the government and other areas, who might be called upon for various services.

Functions of the Executive Committee

The Executive Committee would function as a policymaking body; empowered to plan and direct activities of the organization.

Among the duties of the Executive Committee particular importance is given to the following: (1) employment of legal counselors; (2) plan research projects; (3) provide for special instruction on suffrage rights; (4) promote public relations for the organization; and (5) serve as parent body for all other committees.

County Committees

County Committees are suggested for each of the counties included in the plan, namely, Barbour, Bullock, and Montgomery. Membership of the committees would be determined on the basis of communities; that is, members would be selected to represent each of the communities within the county.

Functions of the County Committee would be, primarily, liaison in nature. The committees would receive instructions from the Executive Committee and assume major responsibilities for implementation of plans and policies.

Ward Committees and Township Committees

In nature of functions, Ward Committees and Township Committees, would act on the same level as County Committees -- receiving instructions and implementing plans and policy of the Executive Committee. With respect to organization, the Ward and Township Committees would operate under supervision of the County Committee.

Neighborhood, Precinct, and Rural Committees

Plans, policies, and instructions of the parent body (Executive Committee) will be channeled to Neighborhood, Precinct, and Rural Committees through Street and Settlement Committees. Implementation activities shall be conducted on a personal basis, whenever possible.

Institution of the Plan

The writer proposes the following procedures for institution of the plan: (1) conference with selected ministers for the purpose of describing the plan and encouraging support of the ministers; (2) survey of neighbors, church members, and friends to determine their interest in a Registration and Voting Clinic; and (3) collection of information concerning registration and voting in the counties of Barbour, Bullock, and Montgomery.

Summary and Conclusions

Protests against the practice of segregation has provoked tensions of varying degrees. An inhibiting factor in efforts to abolish the practice centers in lack of communication channels between the dominant and the minority groups.

Negro leaders exhibit unity in their efforts to attain First Class Citizenship -- freedom from discrimination in transportation, housing, public accommodations, job opportunities, education and voting.

The problems related to segregation may be dissolved, if Negroes, in appreciable numbers, are able to qualify and use their voting rights.

In the history of legal requirements for voting in Alabama, several barriers and circumventions have been employed to restrict the registration and voting of Negroes. Despite concerted efforts on the part of Negroes and interested groups, barriers and circumventions have been very effective in minimizing registration and voting of Negroes.

The proposal to promote registration and voting of Negroes in Alabama is based upon the assumptions that numerous factors influence the present status of Negro voters; that an effective plan must include Negroes of all socio-economic levels and provide for widespread participation.

Organizational structure of the plan provides for several committees, proposed to function at county, city, ward, precinct, community, and street levels. The plan would be administered by an Executive Committee, composed of three ministers. This committee would be empowered to establish policy and propose plans for promotion of registration and voting of Negroes in the counties of Barbour, Bullock, and Montgomery.

The plan would be instituted by conferences with ministers; soliciting participation of associates; and collection of information on registration and voting.

The plan offers practical benefits which come from widespread and wise use of suffrage rights -- more equitable treatment as citizens in the distribution of public services and protection of individual rights.

APPENDIX A

STATISTICS ON REGISTRATION AND VOTING*

PER CENT OF TOTAL POPULATION AND PERCENTAGE OF VOTERS:

In Alabama, Negroes are 50 per cent of total population in twelve counties, yet, they are only four per cent of the voters in those counties

In Tuskegee (Macon County), Alabama, Negroes are 85 per cent of the total population, and only 28 per cent of the voters

PROGRESS IN REGISTRATION AND VOTING

In Tuskegee, 1 585 Negroes applied for voting certificates, only 510 were certified

Citizens Council stated: "Negro registration is well past the danger point"

Justice Department made its own investigation of registration and voting among Negroes in the South

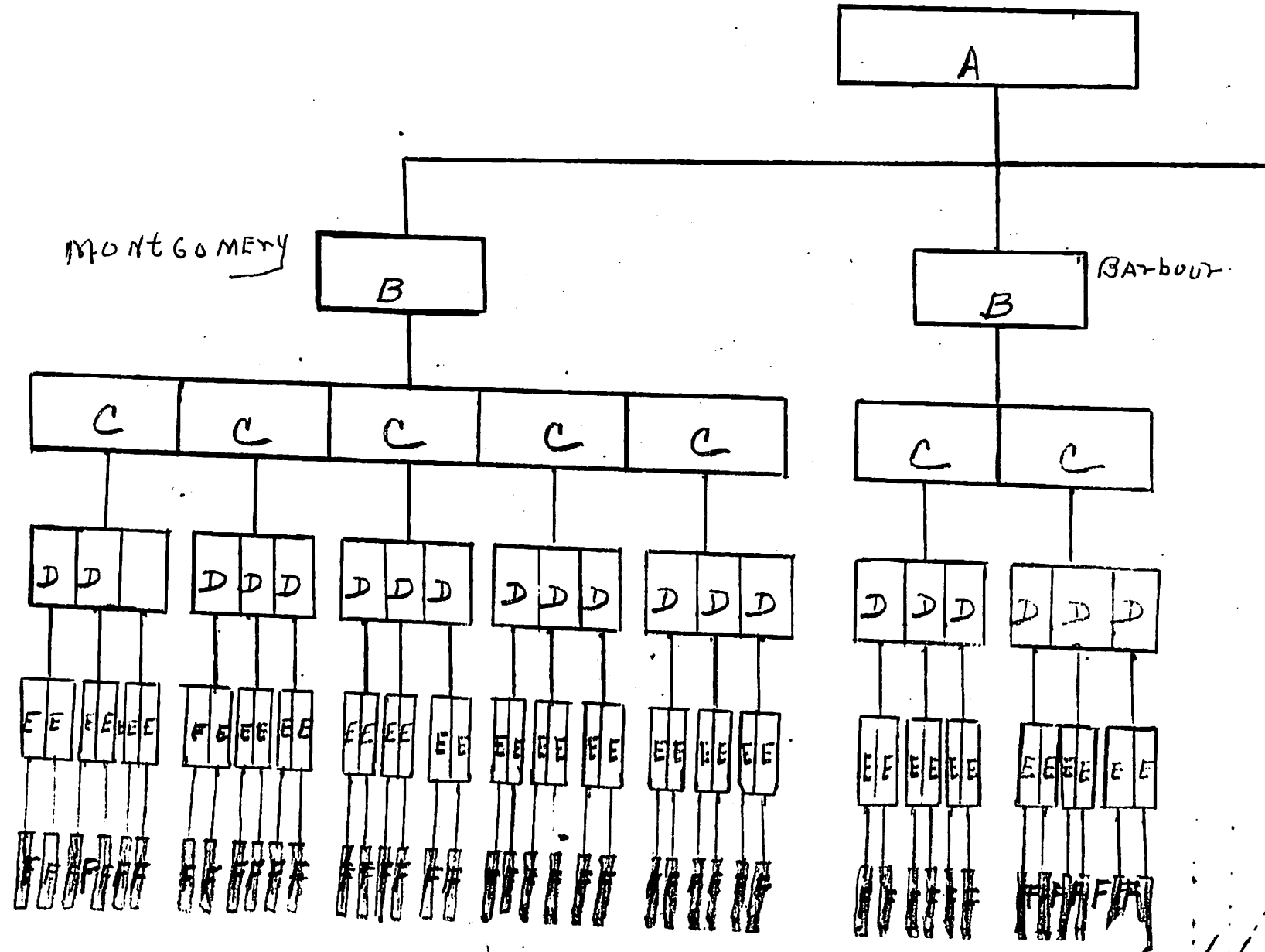
Barbour, Bullock, Dallas, Wilcox, and Lowndes, Counties have populations of Negroes which range from 53 to 82 per cent of the total population. There are no registered Negro voters in Wilcox, Lowndes, and only a few vote in Barbour, Bullock, and Dallas.

* Southern Regional Council, Report on Registration and Voting, Atlanta, Georgia, July 17, 1957.

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A PROPOSED PLAN OF THE NEGRO VOTE FOR MONTGOMERY BULLOCK AND



ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE FOR INCREASING FIVE COUNTIES IN ALABAMA BARBOUR

A = EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

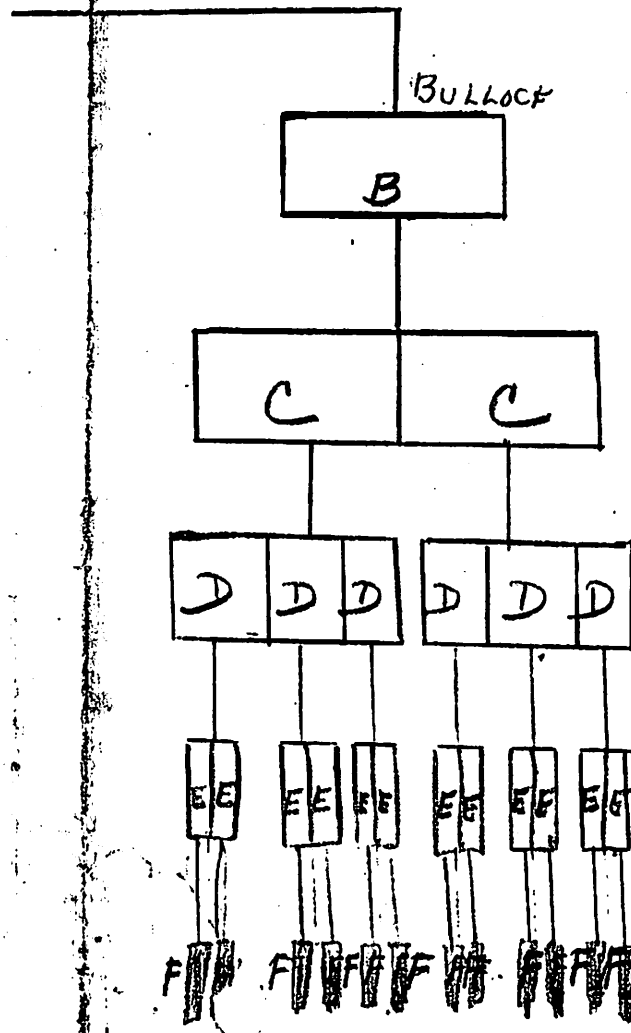
B = COUNTY COMMITTEE

C = WARD or TOWNSHIP COMMITTEE

D = NEIGHBORHOOD or PRECINCT COMMITTEE

E = STREET or SETTLEMENT COMMITTEE

F = BLOCK or RURAL ROUTE COMMITTEE



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