

MEMORANDUM

CONGRESS OF RACIAL EQUALITY  
38 Park Row  
New York, New York 10038  
January 22, 1965

TO: All NAC Members  
  
FROM: Eric Mann  
  
RE: The Baltimore Project

The preliminary outline which I am submitting is for more than the usual field secretary's trip, both in terms of scope of project and amount of time spent. The project is an attempt to use the Baltimore chapter as the nucleus of an effective community organization and political action program along the lines proposed by James Farmer in his position paper recently presented to the NAC. The problem as it appears in Baltimore is not the factionalism and in-fighting which characterize many of our chapters, but rather the lack of an ongoing, community oriented program which is capable of capturing the imagination and interest of the Negro community. Thus, the goals of the project are two-fold and inextricably related: 1. providing organizational and programmatic advice for the chapter, 2. the chapter providing a series of programs which will win new members for the chapter, and most importantly win victories for the Negro community.

Organization:

At this point in the program there are two leadership components: the field secretary and the chapter leadership. Every attempt will be made, and this is essential to the success of the project, to emphasize the need for indigenous chapter leadership, and the responsibility of the Baltimore chapter to make as well as implement policy decisions. As the first step in this process I have sent copies of this report, special delivery, to all members of the chapter's executive committee prior to my arrival in Baltimore for the first planning session of the project. This is to give the members time to read and study the material and to be able to come to the meeting prepared with any opinions and suggestions they may have. This will allow the first meeting to be a discussion of the program, rather than a speech by a field secretary presenting it.

Later on in the program, as it becomes operational, a third leadership group will come into existence: local community groups composed of members of the low-income Negro community. Intensive efforts will have to be made to give this group a dominant role in the decision-making process despite our "vested interest" in the project. This type of outlook has been stated many times, but is rarely put into practice. It will have to be if our project can expect to achieve any meaningful, lasting results.

Program:

The theory behind this program is that the primary participants in the project will be fighting, not for the rights of others, but to better their own immediate position. Thus the primary emphasis of the project will not be to elicit sympathy and support from middle-class Negroes and whites, but to rally a group of low-income Negroes around a project which vitally affects them. Two potential projects which seem to fulfill these criteria come to mind.

I. Urban Renewal

It is quite clear that all over the country there is a malicious pattern to urban renewal, which further aggravates the situation of the urban low-income Negro. Due to lower land values and undesirable physical appearance, low income areas are chosen to be renewed. Quite often these areas are primarily populated by Negroes, not only because a disproportionate percentage of the poor are Negro, but because the Negro has been traditionally the least politically organized, and thus least able to put successful pressure on members of the power structure.

The essence of this project would be to find an area that is in the initial stage of consideration for urban renewal. The process of designating an area is a long one, and it is necessary to find out about the city's plans long before the project reaches the public hearing stage, for at such a time the hearing is usually a formality. Information on early stages of urban renewal programs, when successful opposition can be mounted, is available, usually in public bulletins issued by the agencies involved. Such information, however, is infrequently studied by members of civil rights groups.

As soon as such information is obtained, the emphasis of the project should center around the neighborhood which is about to be renewed. Door to door discussion will be necessary to fully bring to the attention of the residents the existence and the immediacy of the problem. Special emphasis will have to be given to involve those residents who are most interested to participate actively in the decision making process. Most likely this will take the form of local groups, working but not affiliated with CORE.

Finally, the specific demands of the group should be more than the usual demands for adequate relocation and low-income housing. This is because the demand for "adequate" relocation is usually impossible to meet because of the tremendous waiting lists for public housing, and the persistent discrimination in private housing. In every city, no matter how seemingly crowded, there is a great deal of available land which is sparsely utilized, and frequently not used at all. An acceptable alternate site should be found on available, non-populated land, and an alternative plan should be fully publicized and presented to the city. This plan should not be a general, morally oriented plan, but rather should be a detailed, professionally designed one which can meet all technical criteria established by the city.

Thus, instead of asking the city to "humanely" modify a project which even at best will entail extensive relocation problems, we will be able to place the city administration on the defensive, and place the burden of proof on the city to show why our plan, which involves no relocation costs and less cost to clear the existing property, is not acceptable.

This type of program will provide an important role for non-ghetto people, and in fact will certainly depend on support from these people especially in the more technical areas of the program. But if and when demonstrations and other displays of public support for the project become necessary, the primary source of our strength will be from people whose commitment is intensely personal, since it is their homes which are in jeopardy. By using situations such as this, we hope to provide a small part of the Negro community in Baltimore with some direction and support which we hope will not only result in an important short-term victory (better housing) but a first step in the use of the latent political power which the Negro community possesses.

## II. The War on Poverty

Another program which could successfully involve many members of a low-income Negro neighborhood is a full-scale attack on the administration of the war on poverty. Like urban renewal, the federal poverty program in many cities is not serving the needs of the urban Negro. Despite all public statements from Shriver and others that the poverty program is dependent on the active involvement of the poor, for the most part, in practice, such involvement is negligible or non-existent. Usually, a board of leading citizens is set up, by the power structure, to plan and administer the program. As a rule, a few hand-picked "responsible" Negroes are appointed to the committee, as though by their race alone they qualify to represent the poor. Their presence usually serves only to limit the effectiveness of criticism from more militant social action groups in the community, who as a rule are excluded from the board.

The basis of any meaningful anti-poverty program which truly expects to attack some fundamental causes of poverty must involve the poor 1. in the initial discussion of the myriad specific forms the program will take, 2. in the planning of the specific approaches chosen, and 3, in the staffing of the project at all levels of administration. The formal criteria of the Office of Economic Opportunity regarding local qualification for federal funds should be carefully examined, with the possibility in mind of demanding the withholding of funds from a project which violates the criteria concerning community involvement. After bringing these facts into the Negro community through working with local community groups and approaching individuals door to door in areas where such groups are weak, a dramatic demonstration of the lack of support for the plan by the poor themselves should be considered.

Once again, as in the above example of urban renewal, opposition to a city dominated and initiated project is not

enough, CORE should initiate a program of organizing the poor which will compete with that of the city, and which will vividly accentuate the inadequacies of the original plan. It will not be necessary, nor possible, to organize a large group of low-income Negroes in Baltimore. But a successful pilot program working with a small group in a few square blocks, truly based on and dependent on local participation, planning, and administration, with the aid of outside people with specific skills can apply for federal funds and provide a viable alternative to the city's program. In reality this may not replace the city's program, but it certainly can significantly affect the direction of that program. For implicit in the formation of a board composed of prestigious affluent citizens, is that the poor are incapable of planning their own destinies and eradicating their own poverty. A pilot project by Baltimore CORE could visibly challenge this concept.

In this project one of the keys, beside actual performance, will be proper publicity. If handled properly, such publicity could be forthcoming in great quantities, not because of the sympathetic attitudes of the news media, but because our project is newsworthy. Suggestions: A news film of a group of Negro citizens meeting to plan their war on poverty, because the city would not include or consult them in its program. Negroes picket poverty board, declare a "War on Charity" by the poor.

The above suggestions do not claim to be the rigid model for the Baltimore project. Despite the general occurrence of the problems which would motivate the two programs presented, there is some chance that neither of these situations are particularly acute in Baltimore, or even if they are acute for some reason they may not be considered that important by the specific community we are trying to reach. That is hardly important. It is inherent in the present situation that in every city in our country Negroes are being denied equal access to the world of their white contemporaries, and it is up to us to find one specific manifestation of this condition which a Negro community in Baltimore can rally around. The programs presented were described in some detail to show some specific, and, hopefully, meaningful examples of the loosely used term, community organization.

#### Other Goals:

The emphasis on the members of the ghetto as the backbone of the project does not in any way preclude a meaningful role for middle-class Negroes and whites. On the contrary, the Baltimore project cannot hope to succeed without reaching a balance between the members of the ghetto and those from the outside who have come to help. There are four major functions which we hope will be served by those outside the ghetto.

1. **Fund raising.** This project will attempt to combine a true grass roots movement with a professional and sophisticated approach to the problems. This approach will involve considerable amounts of money, enough to sustain an ongoing program. At present the Baltimore chapter has access to two offices in the city. Whether or not these offices are in any way convenient for the residents of the area in which we will work, and whether it is equipped with mimeograph and other equipment will greatly influence our budget. But we can be sure that for the project to prove successful a regular source of income will be necessary. Also, after the project has gotten off the ground and hopefully gains true community support, the residents of the community should share in financing the project. At first, asking them for financial help will obviously inhibit their interest, but if we can choose and organize a project which concerns them and involves them, then even with their limited means, a small weekly or monthly sum would 1. help support the project, and 2. give them a feeling that in all ways they are not the objects of the program, but essential to the program.
2. **Technical advice.** Both of the projects suggested above will involve technical knowledge in the formal drafting of anti-poverty and urban renewal proposals. Attempts should be made to make contacts with people at Morgan State and Johns Hopkins as well as city planners, lawyers, architects, and other members of the professional community.
3. **Manpower.** The initial stages of the project are going to involve many weeks and perhaps months of politically orienting the members of the ghetto to even begin to conceptualize the latent political strength which they possess, and to carefully choose a program as the vehicle for this latent power.
4. **Political support.** The specific projects which develop from this community organization will need more political support than the residents of the specific community with which we are working can provide. Baltimore CORE must begin a program to consolidate and lead the liberal forces in the city. This can be done by taking the initiative in sponsoring projects around which individuals and organizations in the city can unite. By demonstrating true mass support for the project CORE can certainly increase its prestige and power within the liberal community. Intensive efforts should be made to develop and maintain contacts in the labor movement, among social workers, fraternal groups, and church groups, which will be of great value in our attempts to pressure public officials to accept our proposals.

Amount of time requested: Approximately three days a week in Baltimore for at least three months.

Target date for beginning the program: February 1, 1965