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Memorandum: Letter to Todd Johnson
From Sam Matchett, 1983 August 18

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UUID: 83ADB3F-53FC-52B6-4EDC-A19439DBC7BD

Recommended Citation:

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GEORGIA LEGAL SERVICES PROGRAM

Willie

MEMORANDUM

TO: TODD JOHNSON, LEAD COUNCIL - VOTING RIGHTS ACTION
FROM: SAM MATCHETT - SUMMER INTERN
DATE: AUGUST 18, 1983
RE: VOTING RIGHTS STRATEGY

On 17 August 1983, it was my distinct pleasure to conversate with a Councilman/businessman in the City of Milledgeville. This gentleman upon assuming first that I was caucasian and second that I was supportive of at-large voting systems, spoke candidly, if not stupidly, with me regarding a scheme for subverting ward system objectives.

The following is an outline summary of this rather enlightening discussion. Interestingly, the method is quite ingenious.

- I. FIRST, determine immediately what the chances are that the City and/or County would win if the proposed voting rights suit is filed in District Court. If the balance appears to be about 50-50 then it should be conceded that the Blacks will eventually win. Now is the time to begin "putting your ducks in a row".
- II. SECOND, At the point where it may be conceded that the City and/or County will lose if the action goes to Court, two white groups should be formed. The first group should be adamantly against single-member district voting in any form or fashion. The second group, comprised of fewer members, should be the liberal, "swayable" group that is friendly to the Blacks. These two groups should be well defined. The local newspaper editor will probably be helpful in this regard.
- III. THIRD, the first group (FG), viewed by Blacks as the powerful, bad guys, should intimate that they will relentlessly fight a ward system with every breath and every taxpayers' dollar. The second group (SG) viewed by Blacks as the good guys, should present themselves as the peacemakers. The SG should make it appear to the Blacks as though they might be able to convince the FG to meet with representatives from among those who advocate changing from at-large to single-member districts. The key feature at this juncture is for the

Blacks to feel as though they have won a great victory in getting the FG to the negotiation table. It is anticipated that the Blacks will now be more easily satisfied rather pacified, with less.

- IV. FOURTH, both FG and SG should sit down with a list of the registered voters. It is important to know who actually votes, where they live and what color they are. It might be the case that you want to put poor, non-voting whites in a district with the Blacks. The White districts should be compact and thoughtfully drawn. The Black district(s) should be drawn with two thoughts in mind.
- V. FIFTH, in a district that would be almost totally Black and where the land area is substantial, the SG should suggest to the Blacks that they fight for this one district to be split into two. Seemingly, this would provide for two Black councilmen; however, there is a method to the apparent madness. When drawn into two districts the first Black district should be drawn tightly around the Black community. The second district should be drawn to include the Black community and large areas of vacant land. Initially, two Blacks will be elected from these two districts. But in the second district developers can come in, put up apartments and multi-family dwellings, assess high rents and other financial arrangements thus assuring that only Whites will move in. By the next election the racial composition of this district will have changed and a White candidate can be elected.
- VI. SIXTH, in a district that will have close percentages of Whites and Blacks, it is advisable for (White) businessmen and political figures to "line up a few good Blacks" who may be counted on to show White candidates around in the Black sections. These Blacks should be "looked after" as far as their jobs are concerned.

The above outline has hopefully been of interest to you. I only wish that the gentleman with whom I spoke had been a member of the Valdosta City Council. I'm confident that the attitudes & ~~thought~~ processes are similar.

You have no doubt noted my omission of the name of the subject Milledgeville Councilman. For your further inquiry or otherwise the same is attached.

cc: Mr. Christopher Coates
Mr. Bob Cullen