

November 15, 1968

ROUTE 75 AND POLITICAL POWER IN NEWARK: FIRST CONCEPTION

I

On November 5, 1968, Black communities all over the country were focusing attention on the councilmatic election held in Newark. The stakes were high because this was seen as a test run of the voting strength of the 61% Black majority existing in Newark. If the Black community could elect three Black candidates for city council in a special election, the chances of electing a Black mayor in the year 1970 were just that more encouraging. No other city in the country was as close to achieving this important political goal as Newark.

Unfortunately, many onlookers were very disappointed. None of the three Black candidates were elected. Instead, three whites took the council seats, thereby assuring the extension of Italian power at least until 1970, when all nine seats are vacated for re-election. One of those elected was Anthony Imperiale, famed for his statement that where law and order prevail, justice need not be considered.

There is quite obviously great cause for alarm. How could three whites be elected in the face of such an impressive Black majority? How could three whites be elected, one of them proclaimed an extremist by Governor Hughes of New Jersey and under state investigation for his vigilante activities, win in the City of Newark, where 19,000 new non-white voters had been registered in time for the election? The extremist in question, Mr. Imperiale, won with an impressive total of 29,400 votes, while Leon Ewing, the highest Black vote-getter, received 24,862 votes, 79

short of Anthony Giuliano, a Newark policeman and a law and order candidate.

Research into the matter reveals an answer typically "American" in terms of the response Black people have gotten in their attempts to attain power via the electoral process in this country: (1) Many people were unable to locate the councilmatic candidates on the "H" line, after voting for Vice-President Humphrey on the "A" line; therefore, they did not vote for any councilmen at all. (2) Many people were so unfamiliar with the voting machines that they could not vote intelligently on any line. (3) Still others knew of the councilmatic election, were familiar with the voting machines, but were uninformed about the choice of the Black community, vis a vis candidates, because of the superior advantage whites have with the news and other propaganda media. Many people were reportedly confused about the identity of the candidates and therefore, refused to participate in the local elections, or voted for political stand-ins, supplied with just enough campaign resources to wage a campaign to divide the vote of the Black community. (4) Furthermore, many informed voters went to the polls expecting to cast a vote, only to find their names not on the voting rolls. This happened in some cases whether the people had moved or not. To resolve this situation, it is necessary under New Jersey law to get a court pronouncement of legitimate residency; most Blacks were unwilling to stand in line for long hours for such a pronouncement and, therefore, went home without having voted at all. (5) Finally, there were the age-old overt attempts at voting fraud which nullified some of the Black vote: improper practices

with machines; inside-the-polling booth assistance for some voters; unfair electioneering; etc.

What can be done about this situation? Can Blacks ever get their candidates elected, when the institutional patterns of corruption and vice are used against them, and Black people can be divided and manipulated so easily?

There is one way to win; the volume of Black votes must be so great that the effect of any attempt to rig an election, ignore a set of candidates, and/or divide the community, will be negligible. If just eighty more Blacks had been unaffected by the barriers placed in their way, Leon Ewing could have been the winner, and not Giuliano. This is a perfect example of the need for volume.

The number of actual voters is the key, then. Despite an increase in the number of Black registered voters, the power structure was able to keep the number of actual voters minimized by the careful use of the methods outlined above. This proposal is a plan for combating just one of these tactics, but the most important one, in an effort to make Black electoral power a reality in the year 1970: NAPA proposes to fight the arbitrary dislocation and uprooting of thousands of potential and registered voters. Specifically, we plan to fight a highway proposed along a route through the densely populated, predominantly Black, Central and South wards.

II

To reiterate, many people came to vote but found that their names were not on the voting polls, and not on the challenge rolls either.

This was mainly because many people had been forced to move from their previous place of registration, either because of urban renewal or a system of highways coming through Newark. In moving, they were not told to re-register until they approached the polls on election day. Then, of course, it was too late to vote. In the Central Ward alone, the number of voters went down by 8,000 from the previous election due to urban renewal. There was no concomitant amount of re-registration throughout the city. Many of these people will never vote again in Newark because they opt to leave town once forced to move. (They move to East Orange, Patterson, Passaic, Montclair, etc., all towns with growing ghetto areas, chiefly due to the exodus of Blacks from Newark.)

This problem will occur a gain and again because of the insidious use of the urban clearance process in the City of Newark. A classic example is the case of the New Jersey College of Medicine and Dentistry, proposed for 150 acres of land in the predominantly Black Central Ward district of Newark. Had the community allowed this demand to go unchallenged, 22,000 Black people would have been displaced. This would have put quite a few voters in limbo, just in time for the 1970 election. This is to say nothing of the potential voters that might have no conception of "neighborhood pride," "civic duty," "Black responsibility," or "power." As long as they are kept on the run they will never understand these ideas. That is to say, they will never become registered voters, and thus, a threat to the power structure.

The bulldozer was curtailed, but not stopped forever because of the community's successful attempt against the medical school proposal; we merely limited the acreage to be taken.

All during the negotiations about that proposal, plans were evidently being made to achieve Black removal by other means, namely, a network of super highways.

III

Three highways are planned for the Newark area : Interstate Highways 2⁹⁰ and 78, and Route 75 connecting the two. All total, when completed, the three highways will have displaced a total of 30,000 Black people. Unless we want to stick Welfare mothers under the bulldozers, there is nothing that can be done to stop Routes 78 and 280; they are in the execution stage. However, it is not too late to address our attention to Route 75, which is singly the most costly in terms of the uprooting of people; it will carry away 15,000 - 17,000 Black individuals in its wake.

Route 75 will have 6 lanes (if plans are allowed to proceed). It will start in the area of what is now Watson Ave. near Elizabeth Ave., intersecting Route 78 at that point. Route 78 will then run north between Belmont Ave. on the west and Hillside Ave. on the east for about 3 miles, curving towards an interchange with Route 280 (the East-West Freeway), between Central Ave. and Orange St. In addition to the huge number of people, it will consume approximately \$15-20 million in rotables.

The proposed route was approved by the Federal Bureau of Public Roads in July, 1964. The absence of money has kept the highway from going through up to this point. However, with the passage of the state Bond issue on November 5, 1968, the State Highway Department now has the money it needs to start acquiring property along the right of way.

Time is therefore, of the essence. It is the opinion of the author that this road can be stopped if the following affirmative steps are taken:

(1) The entire Black community must be educated about the threat the highway poses in terms of the 1970 election, and the general misuse of land. We must unite people from the highway right-of-way. In addition, city-wide groups must show their displeasure with the road. The rallying cry must be a protest against diluting of Black voting power, as well as the absence of houses (as was the case with the medical school). Presented with the high stakes involved, I believe city-wide leadership will respond (especially those who are potential mayoral and councilmatic candidates). Through a series of carefully engineered confrontations, the city, state, and federal officials must know that they are fighting not only "militants", but ministers, teachers, mothers, home-owners, established politicians, teenagers, both black and white. Public officials need not be reminded that unity of this type preceded the Newark rebellion in 1967. Then the issue was the medical school fight.

(2) The fight against Route 75 must be taken to the courts. It is not enough to have a community protesting without any attempt to touch bases with the formal process of adjudication of grievances. The 1968 federal highway regulations are in our favor. They place a heavier duty on the Highway Authority to relocate all the displaced persons as the result of any proposed route. It can be shown, as in the case of the medical school fight, that Newark cannot house all of its poor Black people. Secondly, the proposed road passes through the Model Cities neighborhood. Our challenge will simply point out the higher degree of citizen-participation called for in by this new program, as well as a different set of standards used to determine the feasibility of roads.

These mandates have not been honored by the Highway Authority. Thirdly, there is the matter of the way by which the state will acquire money for aquisition of property. Did the voting public really understand what they were asked to decide, given the language on the voting machine? Finally, we can attempt to show that this highway is indeed a design to inhibit the voting power of the majority of the Blacks in the city.

(3) A propaganda campaign is necessary. We must use the established news media, and devise other means to tell people of the political stakes involved. We must advise them against moving hastily, as done daily by the Highway Department through illegal means of coercion. This is the most urgent of our tasks.

(4) The level of understanding of the problem of land must be increased. It is necessary to use the momentum gained from the togetherness within the coalition to demand more land from the Housing Authority in the city for the building of houses and other related resources. In between the confrontations, the same cohesiveness can be used to force urban renewal land from within the grasp of the city, as was preceded by the medical fight. With the help of the same technical assistants which put together the technical aspects of the legal fight, the unified community should be able to come forth with bonafide proposals for building, using the muscle acquired during the initial stages of the highway fight to win back some of the land.

IV

In sum, a collective unified dynamic, political and legal thrust is necessary to save the balance of power in Newark, i.e., the Black votes. While we of NAPA attempt to save the voter from disbursement, another

voter registration campaign will be conducted by other groups, such as the Committee for a Unified Newark; intensive voter education projects are being outlined by the traditional Black political party leadership, aimed at the 1970 non-partisan election; legal action is being contemplated to combat the rampant voter fraud.

In other words, NAPA's effort to save the voter is a necessary but not a sufficient endeavor. We will be working in a concerted effort to relieve the City of Newark from further corruption, misery, and decay by putting people into office who care about these problems.

As was emphasized earlier, time is of the essence. To fight an operation as big as the power structure takes money for staff and expenses. Temporary money was, therefore, given by the Citizens' Crusade Against Poverty, enough to last into (but not through) the month of January. We need resources to maintain a fight just begun. NAPA has made contact with Edgar Kahn of the Citizens Advocate Center in Washington, D.C., to serve as legal council; students have been contacted at Rutgers Law School, in Newark, to provide the day to day expertise necessary. Mr. Yale Rubin, architectural and city planning consultant for the NAACP Legal Defense Fund and veteran of many highway fights around the nation, has also agreed to help. And most important, preliminary steps have been taken to lay the ground work necessary to build the unified political coalition desired.

" WE SHALL NOT BE MOVED."

Junius Williams

BUDGET

STAFF

Director	<u>\$12,000</u>
Research Associate	<u>9,000</u>
Secretary	<u>6,000</u>
Trainees (10)	<u>48,000</u>
Fringe benefits (@ \$1,260 per month)	<u>15,120</u>

CONSULTANTS

Lawyer	<u>10,000</u>
Planner	<u>10,000</u>
Architect	<u>10,000</u>

OFFICE COSTS

Telephone	<u>1,800</u>
Equipment (mimeograph, Xerox, typewriters-2)	<u>5,000</u>
Furniture	<u>600</u>
Consumables	<u>3,600</u>
Contingency Fund	<u>3,600</u>
Travel	<u>6,000</u>
TOTAL	<u>\$140,720</u>