

PROSPECTUS

SELMA LITERACY PROJECT

INTRODUCTION

The 1960 census indicates that over 22 million Americans 25 years of age and older have less than eight years of education. Due to the impact of automation and technology, these people are without the skills necessary for an independent and dignified life. They are functionally illiterate.

This problem of illiteracy has been found to be most severe in the Deep South "black belt" region where illiteracy seems settled at an alarmingly high rate. Two other facts of contemporary American life intersect with this problem. One is that nearly all employable work skills in the United States require the basic ability to be able to read and write; and the second is that in many areas of the South the inability of adult Negroes to read and write has been used in state statutes to disenfranchise them.

Present trends indicate that the problem of functional illiteracy will be virtually unchanged in two decades without large scale adult literacy programs. According to a projection by the Department of Health Education and Welfare from Census Bureau statistics, in 1980 more than five million persons, 25 and over, will have less than five years of education.

Before a comprehensive program can be developed to significantly reduce these figures, literacy materials and techniques for training adults must be developed in areas of the country where basic educational skills are deficient. The urgency of such a program lies in both the real and potential changes in the political, social, and economic situation of the South. It is imperative that the Negro electorate be assisted in developing its talents and abilities to meet these changes in southern society in order to prepare for the more significant role that Negroes will play in that society.

BACKGROUND

In the United States, one out of every four Negroes is functionally illiterate. The comparable ratio for whites is one to 16. In the southern "black belt" region where Negroes outnumber whites, several factors help to account for this. Vestiges of the old plantation system of white superiority continue to mark the people and their social system. But most of all, Negro educational facilities and opportunities are vastly inferior to those of the whites.

Thirteen counties in the Negro "black belt" region have no Negroes

registered to vote, and 35 have three per cent or less of the Negroes of voting age registered.

Voting and literacy are bound together in a significant way in the South. Many southern states barr functionally illiterate people in order to preserve a political system limited in its representation to white people only. For example, in Dallas County, Alabama, where non-whites comprise 57.7 per cent of the population and whites number 42.3 per cent of the 13681 illiterates. 10735 are Negroes. Out of 9195 total registered voters in Dallas County (1962) 242 or one and seven-tenths per cent are Negroes.

The city of Selma in Dallas County has been selected as the site for a pilot project in adult literacy training for several reasons. Not only does it lie in the heart of the "black belt" region where illiteracy problem is acute, but in Selma motivation among illiterates to learn basic skills has been sparked by the activities of a voter registration movement.

Negroes want to pass literacy tests. One of the critical barriers to a successful adult literacy program is lack of motivation. Adults who have not learned to read and write as children often believe they are incapable of learning these basic skills. Many non-literates also associate a stigma to trying to learn. They perceive that their community will ridicule "grown people going back to school". These problems, while always difficult to surmount, are eased when an interest in voting has been created.

A community campaign to register voters will frequently develop group norms to support Negro learning. In sociological terms, voter registration work can legitimate participation in a literacy program among non-literates and so help to overcome the stigma often attending such programs.

Selma, Alabama, in Dallas County, is well suited for a pilot project in adult literacy training for Negroes. Out of 7060 non-whites, over 21 years of age in Selma, 4278 or 66 per cent are illiterate. Many of these people are eager to learn to read and write for the first time, stimulated by an active voter registration campaign in their community. The campaign, which began in February, 1963, was organized by the Dallas County Improvement Association, the Dallas County Voter's League, and the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee.

No private or public program now exists which is designed to eradicate the problem of functional illiteracy among adults in the "black belt" region. Present government programs are not only few in number, and inadequate, but require that application for aid be made through state or local government apparatus. Officials in the "black belt" area are not inclined to welcome such programs and would be even more reluctant to extend them to the Negro population in an amount proportionate to the population's needs. Selma, for instance, has traditionally resisted government programs as "governmental interference".

In order to plan an effective adult literacy program for the "black belt" region, more must be known about literacy techniques and more must be learned in the way of developing visual aids and adult reading texts. The existing literacy materials are almost exclusively planned for children, as are the tested techniques and visual aids.

In addition to this, material which might be composed for the northern illiteracy problem would be for the most part ineffective in the southern Negro community -- as the mores and modes of expression are quite different.

PROJECT PURPOSE

The purpose of the Selma pilot project is to provide the research and to develop the materials which a larger "black belt" literacy program would receive at a later date. More specifically, the project work would include the following: 1) to translate local customs and idioms and other familiar occurrences in Selma into literacy materials for teaching; 2) to recruit and train a team of four to six students to use the developed materials with Negro illiterates in Selma; 3) to build a second literacy team in Selma comprised of local Negro leaders who could continue the program in several other cities; 4) and to publish a report on the basis of the project's research in volunteer literacy teamwork, and to evaluate the possibility of a larger year's length program in other areas. Such research would include information on the usefulness of various teaching techniques (programmed learning, case study approach, visual aids, group dynamics) and of teaching materials (case studies, fiction, biographies, Negro history).

PROGRAM

The project personnel will consist of a director and four to six student teachers chosen from colleges and institutions through applications and interviews administered by the United States National Student Association. The project director will have full responsibility for the programs and preparation of the materials in cooperation with skilled professionals in the field. The director will begin teaching in late January, and will and will be responsible for determining what materials will be used during the summer project.

The selected tutors will receive an intensive four day session in teaching methods for adults and then will apply this theory by working in adult literacy programs in northern cities on weekends during the spring semester. These classes will be organized and will be administered by the Northern Student Movement.

During this time they will also be expected to read from a prepared reading list, and will receive various background mailings on the South, specifically on Selma and Dallas County. In June, the tutors will attend a two week orientation seminar at a southern university preparing them

for the role that they will play in the community of Selma. They will then proceed to Selma for two and one half months of work in adult literacy. The project director will be responsible for completing a research project on the pilot program.

Two and a half months cannot bring an adult to functional literacy. However, for testing purposes it can measure an important change or an increased degree of independence on the adult's ability to read and write and comprehend. It will aid in evaluating the merits of a long term literacy project aimed ultimately at mitigating or wiping out the rampant illiteracy of the "black belt" region, leaving behind a competent and mature Negro electorate.

CONCLUSION

This project is to be carried out under the auspices of the United States National Student Association, working in close cooperation with the Northern Student Movement and the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee. Personnel from each organization will be used to carry out various facets of the project. NSM will help locate and train the tutors in the North, and will make available their adult educators to help prepare materials for use in the South. SNCC will make contacts in the South, and will help to establish, by means of its already existing voter registration project in Selma, a working relationship with the people of the area. USNSA will be responsible for the grant, will oversee the work of the director, and will carry out the administrative details of the project.

USNSA represents a federation of some 400 American colleges and universities. While the thrust of its programs is directed toward the college campus and other national unions of students, it has a record of deep interest, involvement, and experience in civil rights. For eight years, it has organized and sponsored Southern Human Relations Seminars to bring together student leaders on a bi-racial basis to discuss and to set up programs in civil rights. For four years, USNSA has conducted Southern Human Relations Projects for training young people to work in race relations in the South. In addition, the Association has held two civil rights leadership institutes, in Atlanta and Nashville respectively, and one voter registration and education project in Raleigh. USNSA maintains a year-round regional office in Atlanta for civil rights purposes.

Under Title 30, Section 501 of the Internal Revenue Code, USNSA is, as an educational organization, granted tax exempt status for grants to support its programs and administrative operations.

BUDGET - SELMA LITERACY PROJECT

Project Director's Travel	\$ 2700.00
Recruits' Travel (New York as median point 5 recruits as median number)	1000.00
Recruits' Room and Board (For 12 week period of summer project)	900.00
Recruits' Personal Allowance	400.00
New York Teaching Methods Seminar	250.00
Miles College Seminar	1400.00
Assistance to Dr. Randolph	750.00
Telephone	800.00
Postage	400.00
Teaching Supplies	300.00
Insurance	200.00
Equipment Rental	200.00
NSM Assistance Fee	300.00
NSA Administrative Fee	<u>1,000.00</u>
Total	10,600.00

EDUCATORS INVOLVED IN
SELMA LITERACY PROGRAM

- Blyth, Dr. John -- Director of the Programed Learning Department of the Diebold Group in New York City. Dr. Blyth is presently directing a Programed Learning project for the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee at Tougaloo College. Dr. Blyth would like to use the Selma project to help test the Programed Learning materials constructed by the Tougaloo group.

- Long, Dr. Charles -- Professor at the Banks Street Teacher's College in New York City. Dr. Long has indicated his support of the Selma Literacy Program, and will aid the director in determining the teaching methods to be used in Selma. He has agreed further to cooperate in conducting the seminar on teaching methods for the project recruits before they begin their semester's part time training with the northern tutorials.

- Randolph, Dr. Harland -- Director of Communications of the Board of Fundamental Education operating in Indianapolis, Indiana. Dr. Randolph will prepare the initial materials to be used in the literacy program beginning in January. During the summer program, he will come to Selma in an attempt to evaluate the effectiveness of the materials and the teaching methods.

VITA

MARY VARELA

Born -- 1940, in Newell, Pennsylvania, and currently a resident of
Wilmington, Delaware.

School -- Alverno College, Milwaukee, Wisconsin. Received a Bachelor
of Arts in speech and secondary education in 1961.

Activities -- 1) practise teaching experience was with a group of "low
achievers" or vocational group. Volunteer teaching during
college career with a home for juvenile boys, and with
primary grades in religion.
2) student body president of Alverno College
3) post-graduate work with the Young Christian Students
as a National Field Secretary for three semesters
and as editor of the YCS Journal for one semester.
Helped in such program areas as human relations,
politics, international life, higher education,
ecumenism, and economics. Worked with voter
registration activities on Chicago's South side
for YCS and on a tutorial in a ghetto area there.
4) staff position with NSA Civil Rights Leadership Project
in Atlanta, Georgia with a duration of six weeks.
5) staff position with SNCC