

Marietta Court Ruling Could Affect Racial Gerrymandering

A federal District court ruling on February 26, 1976 accepting a redistricting plan drawn by black plaintiffs in a Marietta, Georgia case, could have dramatic effects Southwide if used as a model for action against racial gerrymandering which denies political representation to minorities, according to the Voter Education Project, Inc. (VEP).

"The court-approved redistricting plan for political subdivisions which had been gerrymandered on Marietta is a long-awaited answer to the petitions of black people who have been unlawfully denied representation, said John Lewis, executive director of the Voter Education Project. "The Ma-

rietta case demonstrates that local citizens can organize and achieve redress of such grievances and inequities and that's a lesson we can pass on to minorities in hundreds of similarly situated local municipalities throughout the South said Lewis.

In a ruling for the U.S.

District Court for the Northern District of Georgia, Atlanta Division, Judge Charles A. Moye, in effect approved a redistricting plan submitted by Donald P. Edwards, attorney for local black plaintiffs who began their court challenge three years earlier. The same court had earlier ruled in favor of the plaintiffs that the existing city council ward boundaries unlawfully excluded minority political representation.

Stanley Alexander, VEP's research director who provided the local plaintiffs

with consultation in preparing both the court action and the redistricting plan, asserted that the Marietta case should serve as a warning to the "hundreds of racially malapportioned municipalities in the South and especially those local governments which have consistently refused to comply with provisions of the Voting Rights Act."

One of the local plaintiffs Hugh Grogan, pointed out that the Marietta decision mean that blacks need not be in a majority in a city

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or town to achieve equity in political representation. "Blacks in Marietta constitute only about 15 or 16 per cent of the population," Grogan states "but now, after all these years of work and waiting, we finally have a situation where it is not virtually impossible for a black candidate to be elected to public office."

"We have achieved our rights only because we, as a local community group, pressed the issue and shouldered the burden of our own defense," said Grogan.

gan, "Our efforts were helped immeasurably by the willingness of the Voter Education Project to provide research and technical assistance and by the close cooperation of the NAACP Legal Defense Fund.

The Voter Education Project is a nonprofit organization which promotes minority political participation in the 11 southern states from Virginia to Texas. Its programs include citizenship education, voter registration, research, technical assistance and leadership development.