

voter education project / press release

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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MARIETTA, GEORGIA -- PLAINTIFFS IN A COURT ACTION TO REAPPORTION COUNCIL-MANIC WARDS IN THE CITY OF MARIETTA HAVE SUBMITTED TWO PLANS DESIGNED TO RE-DRAW POLITICAL BOUNDARY LINES WITHOUT DILUTING THE POWER OF THE BLACK VOTERS.

THE PLANS, SUBMITTED TO MARIETTA CITY OFFICIALS BY THE BLACK ACTION COUNCIL OF MARIETTA, WERE IN RESPONSE TO AN OCTOBER 7, 1974 ORDER FROM JUDGE CHARLES MOYE, JR. OF THE U.S. DISTRICT COURT FOR THE NORTHERN DISTRICT OF GEORGIA.

JUDGE MOYE HAD RULED THAT THE CITY COUNCIL'S PRESENT WARD BOUNDARIES WERE MALAPPORTIONED AND MUST BE RESTRUCTURED TO EQUALLY DISTRIBUTE THE POPULATION. THE LAWSUIT, FILED IN DECEMBER, 1973, BY PLAINTIFFS HUGH GRÓGAN, ERNEST CHRISTIAN, HAROLD ADAMS, AND THE BLACK ACTION COUNCIL, CONTENDED THAT THE WARD LINES DRAWN IN 1964 DILUTED BLACK VOTING POWER IN VIOLATION OF THE 1965 VOTING RIGHTS ACT.

IN ADDITION TO THE PLAINTIFF'S TWO PLANS, THE DEFENDANTS, MARIETTA MAYOR JAMES HUNTER AND MEMBERS OF THE CITY COUNCIL, WERE ALSO ORDERED TO SUBMIT A REVISED WARD BOUNDARY PLAN FOR REVIEW BY THE PLAINTIFFS. IF PLAINTIFFS AND DEFENDANTS CANNOT AGREE ON AN APPROPRIATE REDISTRICTING PLAN BY FRIDAY, DECEMBER 6, A COURT HEARING WILL DETERMINE THE BEST PLAN TO ADOPT FOR FUTURE ELECTIONS.

IN A MEETING OF PLAINTIFFS AND DEFENDANTS ON NOVEMBER 26, 1974, NO AGREEMENT ON PLANS WAS REACHED. WALTER MOON, PRESIDENT OF THE CONCERNED BLACK CITIZENS OF MARIETTA AND A PARTICIPANT IN THE MEETING, STATED, "WE

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HAVE TRIED EVERYTHING IN OUR POWER TO COME TO AN AGREEMENT WITH CITY OFFICIALS."

MR. HUGH GROGAN, PRESIDENT OF THE BLACK ACTION COUNCIL, INDICATED THAT THE COURT WOULD PROBABLY HAVE TO TAKE THE ISSUE UNDER CONSIDERATION IF NO MAJOR POINTS OF AGREEMENT WITH CITY OFFICIALS ARE REACHED. HE SAID, "WE CANNOT CONTINUE TO PLAY WITH THE POLITICAL FUTURE OF THIS COMMUNITY. THE CITY OFFICIALS APPARENTLY DON'T UNDERSTAND THE SERIOUSNESS OF THIS ISSUE. IT HAS BEEN OUR TASK, AS COMMUNITY LEADERS, TO CONSTANTLY REMIND OUR ELECTED OFFICIALS THAT THEY HAVE AN OBLIGATION TO THE TOTAL ELECTORATE, INCLUDING THE BLACK COMMUNITY."

PLANTIFFS IN THE MARIETTA REDISTRICTING SUIT REQUESTED AND RECEIVED THE TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE OF THE RESEARCH STAFF OF THE VOTER EDUCATION PROJECT (VEP), A NONPARTISAN, SOUTHWIDE ORGANIZATION WHICH ASSISTS MINORITY POLITICAL PARTICIPATION. VEP EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, JOHN LEWIS, DESCRIBED THE MARIETTA CASE AS "A MAJOR EXAMPLE OF THE NEED FOR CONTINUED VIGILANCE ON THE PART OF MINORITIES TO PROTECT THEIR VOTING RIGHTS IN THE SOUTH."

"DEBATE WILL SOON BE BEGINNING IN CONGRESS ON WHETHER TO EXTEND THE VOTING RIGHTS ACT OR MAKE IT A PERMANENT LAW," SAID LEWIS. "IN MARIETTA, AND IN MANY OTHER AREAS ACROSS THE SOUTH, COURTS IN RECENT MONTHS HAVE UPHELD THE LEGITIMATE PETITIONS OF MINORITIES WHO WERE BEING DENIED EQUAL ACCESS TO THE POLITICAL PROCESS. DENIAL OF VOTING RIGHTS IS NOT A THING OF THE PAST, AND THE MARIETTA CASE IS JUST ONE MORE EXAMPLE OF THE CONTINUED NEED FOR THE VOTING RIGHTS ACT."