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The 2002 South Carolina Democratic Coordinated Campaign: Canvassing and the African-American Constituency

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In 2002, the South Carolina Democratic Party needed to reconnect with and rejuvenate the party's largest and most loyal voting base: African Americans. By relying on methods of campaigning that were minority-centered, the Coordinated Campaign also hoped to revitalize the Democratic Party within this conservative state. However, the African American constituency in South Carolina is an impoverished demographic, the most susceptible to political apathy, aversion, and disenfranchisement. This article investigates the Coordinated Campaign's efforts to address these challenges, namely to marshal a large and organized front of canvassers who could communicate with constituents through personal dialogue and conversation. Participatory and observational research methods produced this case study, which describes the ways minority-centered campaigns canvass for political opinions and votes.

Authors' Note: This is a revised version of Anna Bengel's Honors thesis, prepared and presented for graduation from the undergraduate Honors Program at the College of Charleston in 2003 in the Department of Communication. Professor Lamb, an Associate Professor in that Department, has provided ongoing guidance and assistance. The authors wish to thank the Managing Editor for his encouragement and help.

In the six months leading up to Election Day 2002, national polls showed uncommonly high numbers in job approval and performance ratings for Republican President George W. Bush, especially in South Carolina. However, historically the President's party has fared poorly in midterm elections; former Democratic President Bill Clinton lost a landslide of Congressional seats in 1994. The 1994 election served to remind Democrats that ignoring the party's base voters, or taking their votes for granted, meant that many would stay home on Election Day, and the Democratic Party's base voters, especially in the South, are largely African Americans.

When African Americans cast ballots, they vote overwhelmingly Democratic. Exit polls in southern states show that African Americans support Democratic candidates from at least 80% and upwards of more than 90% of the time (Parent 1999, 270). Consequently, winning the African-American vote is the highest priority of Democratic campaigns in the South because Democrats know that mobilizing African Americans considerably increases the likelihood that they will be elected. In the modern South, the Democratic Party must combine "virtually all the black vote with enough of the white vote to produce a majority," and the importance of "black voting" has created a new campaigning style for Democrats trying to attract African Americans (Black and Black, 1987, 143). Democratic campaigns that have been successful in the modern era have mixed themes of conservatism, to attract Caucasians, with more progressive and liberal ideas, such as the growing entrepreneurial and individual opportunities for advancement in the African American middle class, the government's responsibility for quality public education, job creation and welfare, and the possibility of increasing status and living standards with the government's help (Black and Black, 1987, 143, 315).

Voter Turnout Issues

While the African American community can ensure the success of Democratic campaigns, this constituency is still at high risk of disenfranchisement and often displays low levels of voter turnout. The reasons African Americans abandon voting are largely social, and the indicators of non-involvement are mainly socio-economic. African American neighborhoods are often poor and highly transient. Low-income jobs are unstable. Many low-income residents have served time in the prison system and are removed from voting rolls. This particular group of constituents survives on inadequate incomes and under the elevated social pressures of crime, drugs, and gang activity. Environmental stresses abound. The neighborhoods themselves are often in disrepair, an ironic display of another form of abandonment and disinterest.

Race relations in southern politics also clearly play a role in African American voting behavior. In the modern era, the disinterest, distrust, and skepticism surrounding politics and political campaigning on the part of the majority of African Americans, combined with an overall reluctance to participate in political affairs and voting, can be charted and examined through the development of southern politics. Although many African Americans do, nevertheless, vote, many are more concerned with the struggles of daily existence than with exercising voting rights.

This article investigates the communication strategies associated with structuring an African American-centered campaign in the South, specifically in terms of African American voter turnout and with regards to African Americans' unique political and socio-economic status in southern politics. The 2002 Democratic Coordinated Campaign in Charleston County, South Carolina, was concerned with African-American turnout exclusively. The Coordinated Campaign was not concerned with undecided or independent voters; the sole objective was to convince African

Americans to go to the polls on Election Day and vote for Democratic candidates. Party canvassers inundated African Americans with messages specifically designed and implemented to mobilize their vote. An essential part of their strategy required that campaign communication be designed to elicit, interpret, and then make use of this constituency's opinions on relevant political and social issues.

The Grass Roots and Public Opinion

The Coordinated Campaign relied on local, grassroots canvassing methods, involving extensive outreach and immersion within African American communities in order to discover the political and social viewpoints of the African American constituency.

Discovering and analyzing public opinion is a tricky business. One way of determining opinion involves the relatively new sub-field of political psychology called political cognition. According to Susan Herbst (1998, 4), political cognition addresses the specific ways "citizens reason about political parties, candidates for elective office, and particular issues." This article adopts Herbst's conception of public opinion. First and foremost, "public opinion is a social construction." This means that opinion is relative with respect to specific groups and is connected to the concerns of a specific culture (Herbst 1998, 14; 188). In addition, "a culturally informed political psychology takes talk seriously." Dialogue and conversation are seen as the best ways to determine public opinion. Herbst maintains that research in the field of political cognition "does not often enough use qualitative or interpretive methodologies that allow researchers to probe informants," and she states that "what is missing...is social and cultural perspective." (Herbst 1998, 24; 4).

This article answers Herbst's call for qualitative investigations into the social and cultural aspects of public opinion re-

search by describing how the kind of public opinion research she favors impacted a specific campaign strategy with regards to a particular group of voters. The 2002 Coordinated Campaign involved a systematic effort to interpret public opinion within the African American constituency's unique social network and to employ those interpretations in mounting a major Democratic campaign. Ultimately, the Campaign's goal was to convey the message that Democrats cared about the same issues that Charleston County's African Americans found important.

Grass Roots Fieldwork

This case study is based on five months of canvassing experience for the Coordinated Campaign, from June 1 to November 5, 2002, in approximately 30 neighborhoods in Charleston County. The primary author canvassed approximately 3,000 households. The Campaign focused on five candidates running for national or state offices: incumbent Governor Jim Hodges, United States Senate candidate Alex Sanders, Secretary of State candidate Rick Wade, incumbent Superintendent of Education Inez Tenenbaum, and Attorney General candidate Steve Benjamin. Wade and Benjamin are African Americans.

The methodology for this research is participatory and observational, and is guided by several key questions. How did the Coordinated Campaign approach and mobilize African Americans? How did the Campaign determine what the target constituency cared about? This was a critical component in structuring the campaign, a starting point for its entire communicative strategy. How did Campaign canvassers interpret dialogue and conversation between constituents, thereby gathering information and obtaining feedback from the community? Once the Coordinated Campaign actually determined African American opinions and issues of concern, how did it structure and streamline communication to target these voters?

Herbst's perspective provides a helpful framework for understanding and evaluating the Campaign's methods for interpreting African American opinion. She explores the problem of ascertaining public opinion with regard to three major political actors: legislative staffers, journalists, and partisan activists. Activists are most relevant to this study because these people, like canvassers, have direct knowledge of and contact with the actual "public." In fact, partisan activists rely on interpersonal communication above all else as they undertake to ascertain public opinion by interacting with individuals belonging to certain segments of the population. Dialogue and conversation allow partisan activists "to locate the voice of the people" directly, on a first-hand basis (Herbst 1998, 133; 138). Key virtues of this type of interpersonal communication include the fact that it offers activists an appreciation and awareness of public opinion's multiple layers and also some sense of its intensity in a given population (Herbst 1998, 137). Since each community possesses unique cultural and social contexts, partisan activists spend the majority of their time within the boundaries of specific neighborhoods. This face-to-face time is crucial to public opinion assessment. External polling has its place, but "the conversation people make within their social network provides the real color and texture of the popular will" (Herbst 1998, 125).

Groups that share culture—location, environment, and social conditions—also share opinions and behaviors. Local communities are places of shared knowledge, value systems, attitudes, and common activities. Like partisan activists, canvassers view a particular community as a microcosm of unique political, social, and environmental factors, especially with regard to voting behavior. Like partisan activists, canvassers are interested in voters as both individuals and members of a unique constituency group. Yet the basic methods for organizing a local, grassroots, and constituency-specific canvassing campaign have remained essen-

tially unchanged throughout the modern political era, which saw the transformation of the traditional political structure of the "old" South.

FROM TRADITIONAL TO MODERN SOUTHERN DEMOCRATIC POLITICS

"Traditional" southern politics actively promoted the disenfranchisement of African Americans, as well as uneducated and poor whites. Poll taxes, literary tests, registration, and residency requirements demonstrated the belief in the South that African Americans were not part of the political community (Black and Black, 1987, 3-4). In the early twentieth century, almost no African Americans bothered to vote, and this trend lasted through mid-century (Kousser 1974, 224, 226). The Democratic Party of the South in the first half of that century was the party of the white elite and encouraged white partisan solidarity, a far cry from the Democratic Party of today that relies heavily on the African American vote in southern states. Traditional southern politics, in which most adults were ineligible and/or disinclined to vote, was a product of the South's small, rural, and agrarian economy (Black and Black 1987, 4f).

The growth of industry and urban life brought the re-shaping of southern life and the practice of southern politics. As V.O. Key, Jr. observed in 1949 (4), "the growth of cities contains the seeds of political change for the South." The Blacks (1987, 23) echo this sentiment, noting that industrialization and urbanization "created a new socio-economic class structure" that would ultimately change African Americans' socio-economic and political status in the modern era. By the mid-twentieth century, the growing concentration of urban African Americans and their improved and improving economic status and resources generated a form of socio-economic leverage with which they could "foster

challenges to the one-party system in the long run" (Black and Black, 1987, 24). With the Voting Rights Act of 1965, the political status of African Americans was slowly but dramatically transformed, and urban grassroots politics became "a practical necessity." Certainly by the late 1980s, massive voter registration and widespread voting were visible signs of the "new" politics in the South (Black and Black, 1987, 44; 127). Of course, despite this attention, African Americans remain disadvantaged, a firmly entrenched minority whose influence and access to power are still limited.

The Democrats have found that they have much at stake and much to lose if they neglect African American voters. First, there has been a dramatic increase in the number of registered African American voters since the Voting Rights Act, and this has meant mostly Democratic voters. Second, African Americans have in general become increasingly concerned with and engaged in political activities over the last four decades. Since the 1950s, "southern blacks...have changed from a largely apathetic, uninterested group to a concerned, involved, politically motivated group" (Flanigan and Zingale 1998, 116). However, in the early 1990s, African American voter turnout suddenly declined dramatically. By the mid-1990s, the assumption that African Americans would represent Democratic votes was over. A firmly established political era had come to an end. Why?

The most accurate description of the political shift signaled by the 1994 elections is that African Americans began to feel that the Democratic Party had abandoned them. According to Donna Brazile (1999, 261), "the reasons for lack of motivation among black voters were understandable: Democrats took their votes for granted and the Republican Party ignored them." African American leaders and voters were under-funded and under-appreciated at the state and local levels, where voter registration and turnout efforts are entrenched, while a select few national personalities

such as Jesse Jackson were touted as spokespersons for the entire constituency (Brazile 1999, 262).

The 1994 elections were a watershed moment for the Democratic Party in re-thinking the strategies of American racial politics, with special regards to southern states (Brazile 1999, 261). The Democrats recognized the need to re-inspire the confidence and conviction that African Americans once had in the Party. By the 1998 elections, the Democratic Party had re-shaped its campaign strategies accordingly. Brazile's research shows that African Americans responded "positively" to Democratic campaign messages of "providing better schools, protecting Social Security, raising the minimum wage, and providing high-quality health care." A key piece of evidence to this effect was the fact that Democrats gained and retained important Congressional seats in the 1998 elections (Brazile 1999, 263-6). In the political climate of South Carolina, in the months leading up to the elections of 2002, the Democratic Party's future political success rested on reproducing this strategy.

Back to the Grass Roots: The Canvassers

Election results for Democratic candidates have important meanings and implications in the Republican stronghold of South Carolina. The Coordinated Campaign wanted a strong showing from registered Democratic voters: enough to win, certainly, but at least enough to lose without having taken a beating from the Republicans. High voter turnout, even in defeat, lends legitimacy to a campaign and salvages the opportunity for Democrats to win future races.

The Campaign consisted of a team of activists: staffers, volunteers, and canvassers. Canvassers link candidates, campaigns, and constituents. They are best equipped to know constituents and to understand their political and social priorities and preferences. They implement the campaign where it counts the most,

by making extended and personal contact with voters. Canvassers are responsible for constructing campaign messages that are organized, informative, concise, thoughtful, consistent, and that will entice and motivate constituents to vote. In this way, canvassing is participatory democracy in action. Done effectively, canvassing can win back the apathetic. The most important people in any political campaign are constituents, and constituents are unique beings with distinctive opinions, concerns, issues, and agendas. Canvassers must remember to take constituents' perspectives into account at all times: especially as they attempt to anticipate and predict voting behavior by analyzing the effectiveness of all their communication with the voters up to Election Day.

Over the course of the Campaign, the overwhelming majority of canvassers were Caucasian, the primary author included. Out of approximately 25 members, only three African Americans were regularly employed with the Campaign (12%), and only two at any one time. The obvious lack of racial diversity within the Campaign was an enormous challenge, and canvassers experienced first-hand the lingering tensions between the Caucasian and African American communities. Racial oppression in the South, according to the Blacks (1987, 80), established a general attitude on the part of many African Americans of "alienation and fear," which has persisted to this day. Caucasian canvassers are ill equipped to overcome the lingering effects of segregation and the Jim Crow South, because many African Americans continue to exhibit an "intense estrangement from white affairs and institutions" (Black 1987).

Caucasian canvassers, therefore, are at a serious disadvantage while campaigning in African American southern communities. In order to overcome a strong sense of wariness and skepticism, Campaign canvassers in Charleston County sought to convince

African Americans that voting for Democratic candidates would make positive differences in their lives.

Stage One: Voter Contact

The Coordinated Campaign canvassed in African American neighborhoods in Charleston County beginning March 1, 2002. In order to ascertain community sentiment surrounding key political issues, the Campaign placed staffers, canvassers, and volunteers directly into the African American community. Canvassers sought direct access to community sentiment because the initial assessment of African American opinion would shape the extended communication strategies of the campaign. Canvassers' assessments of constituency opinion were based on analyses of conversation and dialogue; they tried, in other words, to tap into the internal voice of the community. What political issues were African Americans talking about? The daily focus of the Campaign was voter contact—asking questions, listening, and establishing personal relationships with the target audience. Personal contact, with regards to assessing public opinion, was the most important aspect of the Campaign's communication strategy.

Face-to-face contact with voters establishes relationships, furthers trust, and increases credibility. Voter contact was designed and implemented in two stages. The initial stage was geared towards establishing personal relationships and trust, in order to ascertain opinion. The second stage of extended contact focused on furthering Democratic issues and candidates within the community, then mobilizing and organizing voters for Election Day. One of the Campaign's primary objectives in the voter contact stage was to build better relationships with the voters, so that they would believe that they were involved in the political process and had a real chance to make a difference in an important election.

The Coordinated Campaign considered internal dialogue and conversation within the African American community to be extremely important and valued it more highly than surveys or external polls in determining public opinion and agendas. Even if African Americans do not express their concerns at the ballot box, they express them on their front porches, at their dinner tables, in their grocery store lines. To that end, canvassers engaged in "porch talk," a specific type of dialectic communication that entails simply standing at constituents' doors and hoping that they would spare a few moments to talk. Porch talks revealed what African American voters genuinely cared about. Canvassers recognized the need to engage in porch talks because such conversations would help incorporate canvassers, as political actors, into the voters' lives.

During the voter contact stage, canvassers went into the field with one clear purpose in mind: make every citizen feel as important as possible in the shortest amount of time. Several African Americans with whom I had extended conversations were friendly and spoke with ease about political and social issues. On a few occasions, after conversing for a few moments, people invited me into their homes, sat me in the "good chair," and brought me a glass of water or iced tea. One person, a woman of approximately 65, stood out. Upon my initial contact with her, she spoke at length about her participation in political rallies and demonstrations in support of the late Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. She displayed with a quiet pride a plaque she had recently been awarded, by Governor Jim Hodges, in appreciation of her role as a citizen activist. When I left her home, she gave me a button that she had worn during the Civil Rights Movement in the 1960s. It said simply, "I registered." On our second meeting, she told me that her primary issue of concern was improving the educational system for the poor and the alienated, those who do not believe government works for them. When she opened the

door wearing her nightgown, I knew that I had successfully established a "personal relationship." However, this woman was the exception, not the rule.

Over the course of the Campaign, canvassers spoke with hundreds of African Americans whose viewpoints ranged from apathetic to curious to distrustful to angry to tentatively hopeful, viewpoints that often matched the Blacks' description of this group as often wary, alienated, and skeptical. To propose that these individuals were suspicious of law enforcement and government would be an understatement. Many young women and men spoke to me politely enough but through closed doors. Many citizens were reluctant to confirm their names and the members of their households. Many citizens wanted to know why I even had their names listed on my clipboard—the clipboard itself brought instant suspicion. I was never ordered outright to leave, but most citizens did not encourage me to stay after I had delivered my message.

Canvassers found that African Americans' most immediate concerns were job creation, unemployment, and crime. I encountered numerous unemployed citizens, many of whom asked me if the Campaign would consider hiring them as canvassers. In areas of high transience, where residents might not know their neighbors, citizens consistently expressed concerns about crime, drug and gang activities, and neighborhood safety. Many young men had criminal records, and many women had sons in prison. On one occasion, I listened to a young man's thirty-minute account detailing his arrest for drug possession with intent to sell.

Aspects of the Intermediate Color Line—the issues of employment opportunities, access to quality public education, and neighborhood maintenance and safety—played out extensively during the first stage of the Campaign. The Intermediate Color Line is a term used by Herbert Blumer who, in 1965, concluded that African Americans were suffering massive discrimination in

three broad categories, labeled the Outer Color Line, the Intermediate Color Line, and the Innermost Ring (Blumer, 1965, 323f). The Innermost Ring represents the reservations and tensions involved in Caucasians accepting African Americans in personal friendships and private associations. The Outer Color Line represents the public arena: access to public institutions, equal protection of the laws, and the exercise of voting. The Intermediate Color Line represents economic subordination and the restriction of opportunities. Progress in these latter areas has been inherently more difficult for African Americans, Blumer maintained, as they have remained less educated than Caucasians in the South and especially in the Deep South of Charleston County.

Blumer predicted that the Intermediate Color Line would become a more important component of southern politics than the issue of civil rights (1965, 331). In fact, Coordinated Campaign canvassers encountered the difficulties associated with penetrating the Intermediate Color Line in African American neighborhoods where both rural and urban citizens expressed pointed concerns over what they viewed as sub-standard public education, insufficient employment opportunities, and unstable and unsafe residential neighborhoods compared to the perceived opportunities afforded Caucasians. Canvassers noted during the Campaign that traditional southern politics still felt all too real for many Charleston County African Americans, who remain largely working class, uneducated, and poor.

For all of the political messages so important to campaigning, the specific contextual aspects of African American neighborhoods ultimately determine voter turnout on Election Day. The Coordinated Campaign viewed the African American community of voters, in theory, as uniquely valuable, possessing a collective power over the ultimate outcome of the election. A political campaign is fleeting, and canvassers cannot expect to go into a

minority community and shape how particular political agendas are going to play out there. The goal of dialectic communication during the Campaign's voter contact stage was to incorporate canvassers into the community rather than to impact on it. In practice, however, the Campaign substantially neglected the internal forces of the community and failed to take into consideration what African American lives were like. Canvassers were assured that simply telling African Americans about the Democratic campaign efforts would attract them to the Democratic cause. Much of the Campaign management and staff reasoned that recruiting would be easy, and the campaign would amass a huge core of African American volunteers from the community. This never happened, probably due to the dominance of white faces among canvassers and the too common feelings of suspicion and resentment of Caucasians on the part of many African Americans.

An additional problem was that Caucasian canvassers were not adequately instructed in how to acknowledge where community issues and concerns were established, discussed, ruminated, and revealed in the African American community. The places within the African American community where the most easily accessible and extended communication occurs are the churches. Churches are the epicenters of African American community activities. They serve as natural hubs of communication activities. Campaign staff members approached church leaders and asked them to help get the message out that the Democratic Party wanted to empower African American voters in the upcoming election. The Campaign used these leaders as loudspeakers, but it did not consider recruiting volunteers from the congregations. Furthermore, the Campaign decided not to extend dialectic communication to churchgoers specifically and not to send canvassers to church services or meetings. This management decision probably arose from a sense of uneasiness over sending

upper- and middle-class Caucasians into lower class, African American congregations with the express purpose of telling these voters what was good for them politically.

Nevertheless, the Coordinated Campaign would have been better served by approaching African American congregations. Addressing church congregations would have put canvassers in direct contact with the most likely voters in the shortest amount of time and most efficient manner. Although the vast majority of church congregations register voters (congregations hold their own independent registration drives), registration was not what the canvassers were primarily after. Organizing neighborhood canvassing by churches could have been easy, efficient, reliable, and practical. Instead, Campaign management decided to focus dialectic communication at the doors of individual houses exclusively.

The Campaign favored communication organized by precinct, which groups voters according to district lines: purely physical borders. Communication by precinct organization can be effective. However, precinct organization is not effective or efficient in rural areas, which make up parts of Charleston County, because of the often significant distances between households. Even communication by precinct organization in African American neighborhoods in the cities of Charleston proved difficult, because most of those neighborhoods are lower class. In these lower class urban areas, there were many seemingly abandoned or deserted apartment complexes and government housing structures, which made it difficult for canvassers to determine if residents were home or if anyone resided in those households at all; consequently, canvassers did not know if they should return to these neighborhoods. It would have been more convenient for canvassers to return to churches, where they were sure to encounter a large group of voters, than to search for individual voters in rural or deserted neighborhoods. In general, people, at

least the African Americans in Charleston County, do not organize themselves along precinct lines; the Campaign's communication methods for ascertaining public opinion did not respect the internal tendencies of the African American community.

Precinct organization for this constituency, therefore, proved unsuccessful in the field. Certainly this canvasser was acutely aware of lost time and wasted energy; a general inefficiency and sense of frustration stemmed from the precinct organization method. In rural areas, my three hours canvassing often brought me to the doorsteps of only about a dozen households; in downtown areas I would spend a significant portion of my three hour shift searching for voters in extremely dilapidated apartment complexes. I could also sense the indifference and impatience on the part of many African American voters while standing on their front porches, voters who were not willing to accept the Campaign's message. I believe that churchgoers would have been more receptive to and motivated by canvassing efforts, and, therefore, organizing canvassing by churches would have proved ultimately more fruitful on Election Day.

Stage Two: Delivering the Message

As canvassing entered the second stage of voter contact, dialogue and conversation remained significant but the preferred methods of communication changed. As the campaigning months wore on, canvassers moved away from communication designed to assess public opinion in favor of detailed message-driven communication. This form of verbal and visual communication was called message-driven communication because it focused on structuring and delivering messages to voters regarding Democratic candidates and issues; securing our candidates' name recognition in African American neighborhoods was among the key goals. Canvassers began to engage in message-driven communi-

cation slowly and in distinct phases by emphasizing the use of scripts and street literature.

The Campaign determined that scripts and street literature were the best ways to reach the African American electorate. Street literature included pamphlets, brochures, and leaflets distributed to the constituency while canvassing certain neighborhoods. This form of outreach communication focused on crafting specific vocabulary, design, and aesthetics to convey Democratic messages. The second stage was designed specifically to mobilize base voters from the field, specifically those voters who did not vote very often. How do campaigns get voters to just go to the ballot box on Election Day? The Campaign's answer was to continue contacting voters persistently and often.

The mantra of the Coordinated Campaign was contact, contact, and more contact. Canvassers have the best chances of finding, tracking, and engaging constituents from within the community. But canvassing has flaws. Contacting constituents means bothering them, and engaging in too much voter contact risks alienating voters. Balancing the risk of bothering constituents with the risk of not being available or sufficiently responsive is challenging. Constituents should never have to seek out canvassers. Canvassers attend to the constituents, not the other way around. However, constituents should never feel harassed by canvassers, no matter how enthusiastic. Unfortunately, the Campaign sometimes mixed up precinct lists, and as a result some voters were contacted by telephone exorbitantly, two or three times in one day, while others were only contacted once or twice, total. However, telephone canvassing was not the central activity of the Campaign. Canvassers were in the field much more than they were on the telephone, especially in the final campaign stage.

Door-to-door canvassing was by far the most significant facet of Campaign efforts in the second stage, and this activity re-

quired the use of specific verbal communication called scripts. Scripts featured the issues that canvassers had deemed important to African Americans in the initial stages of voter contact featuring extended dialogue and conversational communication. Scripts also served as specific forms of verbal communication designed to cement the candidates' names and key messages in the minds of the potential African American voters. The Campaign put much consideration into the specific vocabulary, syntax, and structure of the scripts.

Scripts helped voters relate and connect to canvassers as local citizens by dictating exactly what was said when constituents opened their doors. For example, canvassers always referred to themselves as the "Charleston County Democratic Party" rather than the "South Carolina Democratic Party." All scripts mentioned the five top tier candidates' names immediately, and contained the statement "Steve Benjamin and Rick Wade could become the first African American candidates elected for state-wide offices in modern history." This was a significant fact to emphasize with regards to the target electorate. Based on responses to such statements, canvassers could determine if individual voters were interested in continuing and extending communication by speaking in more detail about the candidates.

Scripts provided verbal examples of how to extend communication if individual voters desired. They were designed to allow canvassers to shape both brief, exact communication and longer, more comprehensive communication. Canvassers were instructed to defer to the voters with respect to the length of contact. Unless voters decided to extend communication, the rule was that more than a minute was too much. One minute allowed canvassers to mention the two African American candidates, briefly highlight their accomplishments, mention the three remaining Caucasian top-tier candidates, hand over a piece of campaign literature, and move on without expending too much

of the voter's time or patience. Canvassers were also equipped with highly detailed scripts if constituents seemed willing to engage in extended conversation, but very rarely used them. The majority of voters did not engage in communication lasting more than a few minutes.

The street literature utilized by canvassers was designed both to complement and to supplement the scripts. This form of communication, in the form of brochures, became more elaborate as the scripts became more detailed. The scripts were designed to impact the voters verbally, the brochures, visually. At the outset of the Campaign, canvassers handed out small, square pieces of light-blue-colored paper with only the names of the candidates listed in bold under the words "South Carolina Democratic Candidates, Election 2002." As the scripts began to outline the candidates and the issues more specifically, the street literature followed suit. Professional brochures were developed for use during the final stages of the Campaign, in late August. This communication was deliberately designed to feature photographs and backgrounds in bright, eye-catching colors. Brochures featured mug shots of the five Democratic top-tier candidates across the bottom. The decision to physically represent the candidates on the cover gave Democrats an advantage with base voters. The Campaign made sure to emphasize the two African American candidates on the brochures by placing them on the cover. Charleston County's voters had never seen African Americans on the South Carolina ballot as viable candidates before.

Although the Coordinated Campaign was not involved in the individual campaigns of African American candidates Steve Benjamin and Rick Wade, canvassers were responsible for shaping messages that would resonate with voters, and this included the message that these two candidates best represented African Americans based on the issues canvassers knew the voters cared about most. African Americans wanted to make substantive gains

in jobs and income and increase neighborhood safety and preservation; therefore, the Campaign targeted its communication regarding Benjamin and Wade to these issues exclusively. The scripts and brochures accordingly emphasized that Wade's primary interests were job creation, reducing unemployment, and promoting economic improvements for the working class. The same logic led the Campaign to emphasize Benjamin's law background. Since African Americans repeatedly expressed concerns over neighborhood safety and criminal activity, the brochures detailed Benjamin's law enforcement experience, his work as an assistant prosecutor, and his "tough on crime" attitude.

Similarly, because Charleston County's African Americans consistently expressed concerns over the quality of public schools, the Campaign also emphasized how incumbent gubernatorial candidate Jim Hodges cared about this issue, emphasizing his First Steps and after-school programs as well as his plan for bringing teachers' salaries to the national average.

The brochures' verbal and visual communication was also deliberately personalized in the hopes of encouraging African Americans to go to the polls. The dialectic and message-driven communication tactics were designed to solidify the link between African American voters and the Democratic Party. The brochures contained one key headline to that end. The headline, visible upon opening the brochure for the first time, read "making history in South Carolina." This mimicked the script statement that Benjamin and Wade were poised to "make history" in the upcoming election. The Campaign wanted to address the African American constituency personally and directly by acknowledging these individuals expressly. Each phase of voter contact and communication revolved around inspiring and mobilizing voters as the campaign hastened toward Election Day.

Stage Three: GOTV

A campaign's final and most important stage is called GOTV (Get Out The Vote). GOTV requires that a campaign shift from being interested in voters as individuals to classifying voters as collective groups of either action or inaction with regards to voting behavior. GOTV is the "make or break" moment in any campaign. GOTV efforts are where all communication efforts culminate, where words become actions. This final stage began for the Coordinated Campaign when voter registration ended on October 5, 2002. Communication activities in the campaign's two preceding stages focused on directing African Americans to go to the polls; GOTV emphasized the ways in which canvassers could physically get them there.

Communication in the GOTV stage was designed to be speedy, simple, and, by definition, highly impersonal. The period of voter registration was over. Public opinion assessment had long since been completed. Personal communication had been scripted, specified, and spoken. GOTV scripts and brochures were designed to reach the most voters in the least amount of time, taking no more than sixty seconds. Extended communication was abandoned in favor of simply stating the five candidates' names and the date of the election *ad nauseum*. Canvassers were centralized in precincts with the highest density of African American voters, mostly in North Charleston. Canvassing lives and dies by GOTV activities because these efforts determine how many votes are actually cast.

Six days before the election, Campaign members believed that success would be defined as getting out as many voters as possible to the polls, and that the two African American Democratic candidates had good chances of winning. On Election Day, the Coordinated Campaign put 300 canvassers and volunteers in the field. Campaigners canvassed in groups of four, and many had an additional canvasser trailing in a car. This provided voters

the chance to be taken immediately to the polls if they desired and gave canvassers the opportunity to offer that incentive to any reluctant constituent. Brochures were dropped at every residence: small, yellow leaflets that listed all the Democratic candidates and told constituents where to vote in their district. Certain canvassers, stationed in specific neighborhoods, continuously drove small groups of voters to the polls.

CONCLUSION

On the day after the 2002 elections, the Coordinated Campaign was left to assess its accomplishments as a minority-driven, local-level, grassroots canvassing campaign. What happened? The election results provide some one-dimensional answers. Only one of the five top-tier Democratic candidates won: Superintendent of Education Inez Tenenbaum. Hodges, Sanders, Benjamin, and Wade all lost their races, and the elections were not close. Cold numbers show failure vividly. The Campaign failed on several accounts by neglecting and misinterpreting the internal factors of the African American constituency.

The Campaign neglected African American churches as voting and volunteer bases and never established personal relationships with church leaders or congregations. Campaign management should not have been hesitant to send canvassers into the churches to speak directly with their congregations. In addition, the student bodies from surrounding schools, colleges, and universities would have been an excellent recruitment resource for attracting younger African American voters and volunteers—student government or the Black Student Unions, for example. The Campaign could have benefited enormously from involving more African American volunteers in the Democratic cause.

Additionally, canvassers were not prepared for how difficult it would be to convince poor, disenfranchised, and disinterested

African Americans to vote. I will never know how many voters went to the polls to cast their ballots for Democratic candidates because they had spoken to me, or listened to me, or promised me that they would. But polls show that not many went. Minority voter turnout statewide actually fell in the general elections, from 26% in 1998 to 25% in 2002. Worse still, in Charleston County the minority voter turnout fell from 31% to 28% between these two elections, a decrease of approximately 1,200 minority votes (South Carolina Statistics, 2003). Clearly, the Campaign's communication strategy failed in many ways, but should Democrats and canvassers be utterly disheartened?

Perhaps success cannot be measured in numbers. The intrinsic values of personal relationships, dialogue and conversation, and trust between voters and campaigners cannot be measured by exit polls. The election outcome neither reflects the Campaign's communication efforts nor adequately represents canvassers' dedication and hard work, but it does indicate a failure to mobilize voters on the day it really counted. Southern Democrats undoubtedly suffered a setback in the 2002 elections. Perhaps the Campaign was doomed from the start. The 2002 elections were likely influenced by President Bush's high approval ratings and the overall popularity of his conservative Administration in South Carolina, as well as the general popularity of the Republican Party and conservative politics in the state, factors outside of the Campaign's control.

The outcome of the 2002 elections begs the question: What is keeping the African American constituency from casting their votes for African American candidates? As a political activist, I know that African American voters in Charleston County woke up on Election Day with full knowledge of how important Democratic candidates and issues were to their lives. I know because I told them. African Americans chose not to vote, and, as a result, African Americans are still not being adequately repre-

sented in South Carolina politics. If the Coordinated Campaign's canvassing efforts could not convince African Americans living in South Carolina to vote, what will? What will it ultimately take to empower this particular constituency in this particular state? Perhaps the answer is just more of the same: continue to engage this constituency in the political discussion by bringing the Democratic Party and its platform back to African American neighborhoods. The Democratic Party is still trying to mend the wounds of racial segregation and oppression, correct the political mistakes of the mid-1990s, and win back the trust and loyalty of African Americans. Canvassers must remember that no campaign is entirely without merit, as it might sow seeds for the future.

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