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THE WHITE HOUSE
WASHINGTON

December 12, 1970

MEMORANDUM FOR: H. R. HALDEMAN
FROM: TOM CHARLES HUSTON 
SUBJECT: Ethnic Workers

I have discussed with Chuck Colson and George Bell the extent of their ethnic-oriented operations and our concern about the Gardner-Baroni organizational effort.

I gather that to date Chuck has moved on two fronts: (1) maintaining contact with ethnic groups and leaders in what constitutes essentially a stroking effort, and (2) submitting programmatic suggestions to the Domestic Council on a continuing if unsystematic basis.

The thrust of my concern is that we are only hitting the surface of the ethnic problem -- the cosmetics if you will -- while Gardner, et. al. are mobilizing at the grass-roots. The other side has a decided advantage, of course, in terms of outside resources available, but it is the very nature of this advantage that should concern us.

As I see it, our principal concern should be directed toward those geopolitical areas with large ethnic concentrations of significant electoral importance, e. g., Buffalo, New York City, San Francisco, southside Chicago, the Pennsylvania Black Country, etc. And our concern should be not merely symbolic, but substantive: programmatically and organizationally.

We have two alternatives with regard to the Gardner-Baroni operation (assuming that we don't opt for doing nothing). They are: (1) attempt to sabotage the organization and (2) establish a competing organization. These are not mutually exclusive, and perhaps we could do both. Additionally, we could attempt to infiltrate, although I am dubious of the success of such an effort.

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Any coalition that has 142 member organizations is bound to have factions and tensions. If we had people on the ground we could identify these factions and tensions and seek to exploit them. The big "if" is finding people on the ground.

Whether we could establish a competing organization depends upon access to people prepared to do the job. We are woefully lacking in such resources and to muster them would require one hell of a major effort -- an effort, by the way, which we should undertake not only with respect to this problem but with respect to a number of additional ones.

With your approval, I plan to take the following action:

1. We need more detailed information about the composition, organization, and plans of the Gary organization. I have some contacts in the area and will ask them to gather as much detailed information as possible. A friend of mine owns a weekly newspaper in Lake County and perhaps he can assign a reporter to check the thing out. Also, the Indiana State Attorney General is a former GOP Lake County chairman and may be of assistance.

2. Once we get this type of information, I will see if we can identify those groups that may be willing to bolt under the proper circumstances. In this regard, we can doubtless count on the county Democratic organization which views this outfit with contempt and apprehension. There is also the possibility that the blacks may be skeptical; this should be checked out.

3. We need to smoke John Gardner out. He is hardly the type of fellow who has displayed real concern about ethnics in the past. The recent Washingtonian piece on Gardner pointed out his aloofness from the common folk, and it is a theme which we could develop. I will talk with Clark Mollenhoff and Vic Lasky to see if they can do columns calling Gardner's sincerity into question.

4. Apparently Chuck has some due bills with the national ethnic leaders which he can call in. I suggest that he arrange for several of them to attack this thing as a callous attempt by Gardner, Kennedy and Muskie to politically exploit the ethnic community.

5. I don't want to trespass on someone else's territory, but I think the scope of the ethnic problem from the President's perspective is broader than the attention it is presently receiving. We need more than some stroking sessions and an occasional programmatic gesture; we need a programmatic appeal and an organizational base to recruit ethnic support. We have had a so-called "Middle America Group" in being in the White House for a year, but not much has come of it. I think we should consider a more concentrated and systematic approach to this problem -- something along the lines that Kevin Phillips has been urging with such regularity in his columns. The problem is not so much the lack of perception or concern, but the lack of resources and priorities. If you think it worthwhile, I will develop this idea further along with some specific suggestions as to how we could profitably approach this ethnic problem in a more comprehensive way.

A theme which I would like to develop further in another memorandum is the inherent disadvantage of the President by virtue of the absence of auxiliary resources on the outside. The opposition has a vast array of foundations, citizen organizations, research operations, front groups, media outlets, etc., which enables it to move on a dozen fronts at once, while we are normally limited to surface contacts -- a one for one approach -- and organizational resources lacking depth and breath and, most importantly, credibility.

Looking ahead over the next two--and hopefully six--years, I don't see how we are going to make it unless we can develop outside resources that can give the President the type of support he so obviously deserves. We can run newspaper ads, generate some columns or editorials, but I question whether we can really sustain much in the way of momentum with the resources presently available. The liberal-left laid the foundation for the New Deal in the 1920s and the durability of that foundation is all that holds the Establishment together today. Without the media, the foundations, the "cause" groups, Liberalism (and its political manifestation, the Democratic Party) would be dead as a door nail. It is ironic, I think, that so many of us understand the political importance of the Viet Cong infrastructure in South Vietnam, yet don't fully appreciate the importance of the liberal-left infrastructure in this country -- or if we appreciate it, don't recognize the importance of a systematic effort to root it out.

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We're a lot like the poor SOB in a slaughter house who spends his day swatting flies instead of cleaning up the mess on which they breed. Its great exercise, but rather distracting.

Why not give some serious thought to a comprehensive, long-range plan to rout these fellows who cause us so much trouble? It can't be done overnight, but I think we would be surprised how much progress could be made by 1972 if we really decided to do something about it.

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