TO Dr. Slawson  
FROM Ethel C. Phillips  
SUBJECT Attached Memorandum on Mass Media Program

In case your interest in seeing this memorandum again is related to Wednesday night's meeting, please remember that I was exploring the question of how we could develop an effective mass media program. I was not attempting to evaluate the mass media themselves.

[Signature]

ECP:RB
Enc.
Consultations Re Mass Media Program

During the past few weeks I have consulted a number of men, including the president and vice-president of one of the major networks; a top-ranking TV writer; an NYU professor with considerable mass media experience; a vice-president of Earl Newsom and Co.; the media research director of McCann-Erickson; a member of Benton and Bowles, and the director of one of the largest educational agencies active on TV.

Two questions were put to these people: (1) Is it possible for an organization such as AJC to develop and put across a mass media program, especially in television, that will be planful and penetrating, rather than opportunistic and pot-shot? (2) If so, what would be the best way of gaining the know-how to do it?

Reactions were fairly unanimous on several counts:
1. The field is wide open; no educational organization has come close to making any appreciable dent on TV.

Even the most active educational organizations have not accomplished much. One person deeply involved in this effort declared very heatedly that the more one gets into TV, the more plainly one perceives that it is under jungle law and all but impervious to civilizing influences. In contrast, an important network official said categorically that the most potent educational force is TV.

2. Courses in mass communications would offer no useful insight. The few that might be pertinent are conducted at a sophomoric level since most of the students are novices. A man who himself
teaches such courses at Columbia was the most outspoken on this point. Everything worthwhile on the theoretical side may be gleaned by studying a fairly small body of literature.

It is quite apparent that the thinkers and the doers are poles apart. The thinkers can't "do" and the doers don't think. One big job yet to be accomplished is to build a bridge between the two.

Even such "intellectual" contributions as public opinion polls, attitudes tests and rating reports, to which the media supposedly attach great importance, are evidently viewed with considerable mistrust. For example, one agency man says he commissions exhaustive research through Roper and many others to discover what impression his clients' public relations campaign are making. He claims practically nothing conclusive comes out in the way of guidance. The television writer with whom I conferred recently undertook to report on TV trends for the Writers' Guild; he says the analysts and testers themselves admit off-the-record that they hold no brief for their own findings and anyone with common sense can shoot them full of holes. Practitioners seem to use them mainly as a sop to Cerberus -- to impress clients.

3. The best way to become oriented in TV is to talk to top working people in the networks, in the agencies, and among writers and film producers.

We are warned that this is a painfully tedious undertaking; while numerous people will profess great interest, only a
few feel a sense of personal concern and even fewer are
gifted enough to help put across something effective. One
trouble with social-cause programs is that they usually
cannot compete in technical and artistic excellence with the
regular TV fare. We must ferret out top brains and top skill.

A network president says the greatest unlicked problem is how
to use entertainment for education; he does not agree that
never the twain shall meet; what Disney has done for science
and American history via entertainment can be done for inter-
group relations, providing people with comparable genius can
be discovered and cultivated. Otherwise, we will simply go
on reaching a mere 1% of the population (still a huge number
by normal standards) who watch highbrow programs and who, by
and large, are on our side to begin with.

4. Before making any move, it is essential to formulate quite
explicitly what we wish to accomplish. Practically every person
immediately asked, "exactly what are you trying to say on TV?"
The broadest and least sectarian objectives will attract the most
interest and support.

5. Money is essential; unless a very sizeable budget is in view,
there is no point in developing a plan, asking outsiders to waste
their time discussing it and making ourselves look like babes in
the woods.

Everyone stressed this point most emphatically. For example,
a man who directs public affairs programs on TV says the
prime opportunity for our kind of activity is films which
can be used repeatedly, providing they are of top-notch quality.
Every such venture, he says, would cost at least $100,000...
Another said, "Don't make a move unless you have money to back it up; otherwise, no one can afford to listen to you." Still another cautioned against the whole enterprise unless given the greatest latitude in expenditure of time and money, especially the latter...

To Sum Up

On the plus side:
1. This is a challenging enterprise. Providing our objectives are broad enough not to be discounted as sectarian and self-serving, we will find many key people interested in helping us figure out ways of attaining them.

On the minus side:
1. Without money, the prospect is quite hopeless.
2. In the absence of reliable gauges of effectiveness, there is no way of knowing we are doing the right thing. In any event, no rabbits can be pulled out of hats; the problem is to use the established popular entertainment techniques for the purpose of intergroup education.
3. Others have tried; in fact, one organization has spent the equivalent of our entire budget without making much headway.

Ethel C. Phillips
7/15/57