To: David Danzig  
From: Alfred L. Bernheim  
Subject: AJC'S MASS MEDIA PROGRAM — UNREALIZED POTENTIALS

Date: October 27, 1958

I am sending you herewith thirty copies of the final draft of the above titled memorandum for distribution to the Budget and Evaluation Committee mailing list. It does not embody any material changes from the first draft, which you saw.

Please let me know when this memorandum is in the mail, as I would like to send copies to certain MMEC members after the BEC members have received theirs.

Do you think there ought to be any distribution among staff?

ALB:RB
Encs. (30)
To an outside observer versed in modern approaches to public opinion, AJC's budget for mass media activity might well conjure up the image of Rip Van Winkle.

Until ten years ago, no organization was more awake to the importance of communicating with the public at large. We invested an appreciable proportion of our money and manpower to inject our viewpoint into the mainstream of popular thought — to air it on the networks, visualize it on the screen, bring it into mass-circulation print.

It proved a profitable investment — alike to the AJC and to the causes AJC advanced. Our agency came to be regarded as one of the most enterprising in the burgeoning field of mass education. Other institutions — the U. S. Office of Education, the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the U.S.A., the National Conference of Christians and Jews, the AFL-CIO, the American Association for the United Nations, and many more — looked to us for guidance in building media programs of their own. Among the media themselves we gained a reputation for integrity in furnishing unvarnished data, and for ingenuity in transmuting "high-brow" and "do good" concepts into even the earthiest of formats — soap operas, cartoon books, pulp magazines and "comics."
In 1948, we spent well over $2140,000 for media activities.* We engaged in film production, pamphleteering and broadcasting. We maintained a variety of services to the general circulation magazines and newspapers; also to the "special-interest" press beamed at some 100 million members of churches, labor unions, veterans posts and youth groups. This work was handled by a professional staff of 18,** plus numerous free-lance writers and artists.

*This is a conservative estimate since many expenses are "buried" in budget items not clearly identifiable. The following, however, are plainly recorded:

Production Division (predecessor to the Publications Division) $ 81,000
Film Division 36,000
Radio Division 20,000
Magazine Division 7,000
Community Service materials -- pamphlets, "calendar scripts," reprints 55,000
Materials for youth agencies 9,000
Veterans press service 600
Labor press service and educational material for unions 30,000
Religious press service 1,200
Materials on foreign affairs 2,000
$241,800

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Professional Staff

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Soon thereafter, we began to close our eyes -- and at the very juncture when opportunities were opening up on all sides -- when television was establishing itself as the most influential of all the media; when AJC's interests were broadening; when the American public was beginning to show increasing receptivity to the programs we espoused and the issues we were bringing to the fore.

We dropped our expert in pulp magazines and comic books just as his stories of adventurous, heroic, patriotic and humanitarian Jews were increasingly in demand. It was at this time, too, that the comics we had turned to record-breaking use (our very first venture, depicting the history of scapegoats, topped 5 million in circulation) were coming into universal vogue, among even the most strait-laced educators. No field had proved more rewarding, not only in terms of material placed and circulated, but also -- and perhaps more important -- in terms of attitudes noticeably transformed among those who had been the die-hards of journalism in perpetuating stereotypes. Thanks to AJC's missionary work, it was the pulp writers themselves -- formerly the most recalcitrant of all -- who led the crusade during the 1940's that brought racial and religious stereotypes into universal disrepute.

Similarly with the networks. Having done yeoman's work in winning acceptance of our philosophy and subject-matter, we sank fiscally asleep at the very threshold of the most spectacular era in the history of broadcasting.
Radio -- already a fixture in practically every household -- was taking to the road in 36 million cars. TV was being installed in 42 million homes -- outstripping the bathtub. And, all the while, we were abandoning the services that had gained us hundreds of thousands of dollars worth of free time on the air -- parent-education scripts, book reviews, quiz questions, special-events commentary, speeches for veterans' commanders and women's club leaders, animated "spots" for television.

Furthermore, with the budget for out-of-pocket radio and TV expenses remaining virtually frozen, opportunities for programming were drastically curtailed. During this period of sky-rocketing costs, even without TV, the buying power of our $6,000 for production would have brought ever diminishing returns. Small wonder then, in the face of television's unparalleled capacity to devour the broadcasting dollar, that our activities are now all but strait jacketed. Alert as the TV networks are to their public-service responsibilities, they consider themselves fully in the clear when they contribute highly prized time, and when, in addition, they meet the lion's share of production costs. Thus, they usually expect the sponsoring agency to supply the script, pay the cast, and sometimes contribute toward other expenses. This calls for a minimum of $3,000 for a half-hour dramatic program, and sometimes for a sum which is greater than our total annual budget.
Our performance in motion pictures was likewise brought to a stand-still at the most inopportune time. Having pioneered in producing educational films, we began to retrench just as they were beginning to attract an unprecedented following. Today, no less than 12 million people flock to see purposeful pictures every week -- in schools, churches, clubs and other non-commercial centers. In addition, television's appetite for visual material has opened up a vast new market for films. Our own Make Way for Youth, one of the earliest film treatments of intergroup relations, has been seen by some nine million movie-goers here and abroad, plus uncounted viewers of telecasts. After 11 years, it is still going strong. Regrettably, the same cannot be said of AJC's film operations which are now threatened with discontinuance.

The value of the Film Section to AJC's status and to its program has been explained at length to the Budget and Evaluation Committee by members of the Mass Media Education Committee -- Mrs. Ruth Langner, spokesman for a special sub-committee which considered this question; Richard S. Salant, vice-president of the Columbia Broadcasting System; and Victor Ratner, vice-president of Benton & Bowles. Therefore, the reasons why AJC should remain in the educational film field -- even at the present bare subsistence level of $12,500* -- need not be dwelled upon here.

Our media activities are often described as "across the board," which means that they relate to every segment of AJC's program, as well as to the life of the institution itself. The term applies with special cogency to the Publications Division,

*This figure does not include $3,750 for the West Coast Project, as this is an AJC grant and not at the disposal of the Film Division.
where not only the production of pamphlets and other literature takes place, but also the writing of much of the material required by all other media. Besides a steady flow of "spots," commentary and "salting in" scripts for radio and television, we formerly turned out a very considerable volume of fact sheets, editorials, cartoons and articles for daily and weekly newspapers. We also maintained monthly feature services which enjoyed continuous acceptance in hundreds of publications issued by mass-membership organizations, notably the labor unions and the churches.

Here again, there could hardly have been a more ill-timed withdrawal. Today, with an estimated 100 million citizens reading the daily newspapers, and with organizations of all kinds attracting members as never before, we find ourselves incapable of utilizing these channels. Our writing staff, which formerly numbered seven, now consists of two. Provision for free-lance writers is removed from the budget.

In short, throughout the past ten years, while the appeal of the mass media was steadily reaching a new high, their interest in our program steadily growing, and the potential audience steadily increasing, our ability to use these media was steadily sinking lower and lower.

Deplorable as this situation would be for any agency not courting oblivion, it is especially disastrous in our case. For, unlike many organizations whose main purpose in addressing themselves to the public is to secure institutional prestige, we have an additional and far more difficult objective -- namely, to interpret the issues and causes which constitute AJC's raison d'être.
To an organization like ours, which treads on sensitive ground, dealing with issues, attitudes and relationships often charged with controversy and emotion, it is essential that editors, broadcasters and producers be enlisted as allies in our cause. Their cooperation in extending the dissemination of truth, and in cutting down the circulation of falsehood and distortion -- their willingness to publish, broadcast, exhibit and distribute -- must begin with an understanding of AJC and its aims.

Therefore, the first concern of our media divisions is to see that those who man the gateways to public opinion know what we are trying to do, and why.

This may mean briefing a Columbia Pictures producer on stereotypes, so that he will want to modify the delineation of a Jewish character in a forthcoming picture. It may mean explaining to a CBS program director that a broadcast on prejudice as a social disease would be right in line with the latest thinking of mental health experts. It may mean giving Redbook chapter and verse on anti-Semitism in the U.S.A, or documenting the achievements of American Jews for Look.

We have been successful in this process of informing, consulting and advising -- cultivating responsive friends within the communications industry -- because the media personnel respect us as professional colleagues who speak their language. They know that we ourselves are practitioners in radio and tele-
vision production, in the creation of literature, in the making of motion pictures. They know we are familiar with their techniques, sensitive to their problems, and accustomed to the ins and outs of the business.

A recent case in point is the briefing session which we sponsored in cooperation with the Southern Regional Council to give network newscasters an off-the-record slant on the desegregation picture in the South. It proved something of an historic event; for, as several participants commented, never before had the top public affairs experts of all three networks assembled in this manner. The calibre of the turnout was a token of confidence in the competence of our agency; likewise the fact that many who were present said they would appreciate more of these enlightening sessions.

But good will of this kind is not self-perpetuating. Nor can it be maintained on a catch-as-catch-can, who-do-you-know basis. On the contrary, it requires unremitting, day-to-day effort -- and on the part of persons recognized by the media as "insiders." This is a rule of the game too often overlooked by non-professional persons, many of whom cling to the illusion that anyone with a "contact" can commande a network show or a Life article.

Actually, it would be hard to find any group more status-conscious, in a professional sense, than those who work in mass communications. The familiar stereotype of the newspaper man viewing all comers with a cynical eye from his sanctum of the
Fourth Estate has counterparts by the score, even though perhaps more smoothly mannered, in all the other media. Overtures from outsiders are received, by and large, with skepticism verging on disdain. Anyone not "in the business" stands little chance of gaining more than a half-hearted hearing at best.

Conversely, simply by staying officially "in the business," much can be accomplished. This has been demonstrated time and again by our Film Section. Even though reduced to a one-man enterprise with no money for production of a film, it is recognized throughout the non-theatrical branch of the industry as a consequential force in audio-visual education.

The latest evidence of this inner-circle impact is the appointment of the Film Section's director to the steering committee of a new inter-organizational body formed by the Department of Audio-Visual Instruction of the National Education Association at the request of the State Department, in order to evaluate non-theatrical films sent by the U.S.A. to international film festivals. This body (the Committee on International Non-Theatrical Events) includes representatives of education, business, industry, government, social welfare and religion. Through our film director's presence, AJC will have a hand in formulating cultural and educational standards which are bound to influence future non-commercial film productions.

Thus, in contrast to commercial advertisers, we need not saturate the market in order to make our media investment worthwhile.
Moreover, experience has proved that the programs we put forth have a life-expectancy far beyond their initial presentation, especially among those leadership elements of the population which we designate as "nerve centers" and whose work is mainly "face to face" with their own groups.

The Trophy, for example, our prize-winning TV drama on social discrimination, has been shown at Indiana University in connection with a discussion of "Racial Discrimination in College Fraternities and Sororities." The Princess in the Tower has been shown repeatedly in public-school classrooms, and will continue to be shown, especially where there are mixed racial groups, to help children understand their relationships with one another. The use of In Your Hands, our community-action handbook on human rights, by the Methodist Women alone will bring it to some 10,000 discussion groups.

Certainly no one would argue that the media are the answer to all of AJC's problems. Whether the air waves, the screen or the printing press can by themselves reduce deep-seated hostilities is debatable; but their potency in impressing images and issues upon the public mind and creating a climate of opinion is undisputed.

These points are underscored by the Educational Policies Commission of the National Education Association in its recent publication, Mass Communication and Education, which synthesizes some of the significant research findings in this field. Says the Commission:
The things heard and watched and read influence the behavior of today's American from the time he rises until he goes to bed; they affect the way business is operated, courtship conducted, freedom defined and public policy made...

To a considerable degree, the workings of this influence are still in the realm of mystery; for, in the Commission's words, "The knowledge of human attitudes and motivations is about at the same stage as was chemistry at the time of Lavoisier." Furthermore, "Relatively few observations or conclusions as to the overall impact of mass communications on American society can be documented or put on tables." Thus, concludes the Commission, "It is an influence often difficult to identify and more difficult to assess and control, but it is constantly present."

This all-pervasive influence can accomplish great things for us in three ways -- by projecting affirmative images of the Jew, of Judaism, and of the AJC itself; by clarifying the many national and international issues that affect the welfare of Jews; and by stimulating wholesome activity.

Of late, the media's hospitality to material of the kind we are qualified to provide has been further encouraged by popular curiosity about the different groups that comprise the American people. The warm public response to several articles on religious and national-origin groups recently published in major national magazines indicates that this interest embraces not only customs and beliefs, but personalities and achievements as well. Certainly, as far as Jews are concerned, their roles in medicine,
nuclear science, politics, industry and the arts are being highlighted to a degree never before equalled.

Today, thanks to TV, millions of Americans, many of whom have had neither the opportunity nor the inclination to make the acquaintance of Jews, are now meeting them face to face. Be the man of the moment an Eban or a Lewis Strauss on an interview program, or a fictional character somehow identifiable as Jewish in a dramatic show, his profile is projected, and doubtless often dissected, in the place which is the very nerve-center of social attitudes -- the family living room.

Likewise to be reckoned with is the neighborhood movie theatre where minority-group characterizations and intergroup situations are seen more and more frequently as part of the regular entertainment fare.

If true and faithful, the impressions thus conveyed serve to encourage wholesome attitudes towards Jews and favorable reactions to situations and issues in which Jews are involved. For common sense tells us that the Christian citizen's outlook, and indeed his receptivity to anti-Semitism, must be influenced to some degree by the manner of man that "Jew" and "Jewish" conjure up in his mind.

The problem is not deciding what to do, but rather securing the wherewithal to get it done -- to secure, for example, $30,000 for an educational film on the Judeo-Christian tradition, stalled these many years for lack of funds; or even $7,500 to restore to our staff a writer able to produce vivid human-interest stories of Jewish personalities for placement in magazines and adaptation to TV.
Replete as the media are with treatments of public affairs, there are nevertheless many questions of grave importance that will not be handled adequately — if at all — without stimulus from us. Prejudice and mental health is one example; to bring our Studies in Prejudice findings out of the academic ivory tower and into the thinking of parents and teachers is a task that could well consume a large proportion of AJC's resources. Yet we are still waiting to make a start with one film for TV — and subsequent use in group discussions — for lack of $15,000.

Social discrimination is another subject which has barely scratched the surface of the public mind. To create a two-reel film for use in clubs, churches, fraternities and other organizations would take about $35,000.

Given lesser sums for less penetrating treatments, we would at least be able to put these and a host of other topics on the agenda of popular discussion. With $1,500, we could conduct six weekly TV panels on public issues. Another $1,500 would underwrite a lending library of TV kinescopes on human relations themes which could be used all over the country. A fund of $1,000 would permit modest subventions to popular writers who often hesitate to delve into subjects which they cannot be certain will find a remunerative market.

The children's world especially invites our attention. The snowballing of radio and TV in the schools has opened up new vistas. Given $15,000 to start with, we could create six half-hour dramatic shows reaching literally millions of young people.
Even in children's publications there are gaps which we should fill, especially in the realm of human rights. Plays for youngsters of junior high-school age; pamphlets for primary-school children and also for teen-agers are urgently needed. With $6,000 we could create two such plays and a pamphlet.

For teen-agers in the South, a comic-book treatment of the desegregation issue has long been contemplated by a number of organizations. Some have already asked us to undertake this project, which they would undoubtedly help support. Having neither the funds to launch it -- some $4,000 -- nor the manpower to handle it, we are unable to move ahead. The latter disability, due to a cut-to-the-bone writing and editorial staff in the Publications Division, strains our capacity to produce even those programmatic materials which the budget provides for, much less undertake new ones.

In terms of non-salary expenses, the Publications Division is better off than most, mainly for the reason that we recover through sales over half of our gross outlay for production and distribution. But we are still unable to publish more than a small proportion of the materials that are needed to advance AJC's program. With more staff time available for distribution and promotion of materials, and for the development of publications projects with other organizations -- in which we have experimented with signal success -- there is no doubt that the scope and impact of our work could be greatly extended.
The same truth emerges with dismaying clarity from every corner of AJC's mass media activities. No matter where one looks, the potential is tremendous and the means of realization painfully puny.

One can only hope that there will come a time when looking will give rise to decisive and tangible action.