EDUCATING FOR FREEDOM: THE HIGHLANDER FOLK SCHOOL IN THE CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT, 1954 TO 1964

by

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(ABSTRACT)

This study explores how the Citizenship School Program of the Highlander Folk School shaped the grassroots leadership of the Civil Rights Movement. The thesis examines the role of citizenship education in the modern Civil Rights Movement and explores how educational efforts within the Movement enfranchised and empowered a segment of Southern black society that would have been untouched by demonstrations and federal voting legislation. Civil Rights activists in the Deep South, attempting to register voters, recognized the severe inadequacies of public education for black students and built parallel educational institutions designed to introduce black students to their rights as American citizens, develop local leadership and grassroots organizational structures.

The methods the activists used to accomplish these goals had been pioneered in the mid-1950's by Septima Clark and Myles Horton of the Highlander Folk School. Horton and Clark developed a successful curriculum

structure for adult literacy and citizenship education that they implemented on Johns Island off the coast of South Carolina. The popularity of the schools spread to neighboring islands and continued to grow. Ella Baker, acting executive director of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, brought the program to the attention of Martin Luther King, Jr. and in 1960, when the state of Tennessee closed Highlander Folk School, the SCLC adopted the Citizenship Education Program as its own. Under the auspices of the SCLC, Clark's program became the paradigm for citizenship education throughout the Civil Rights Movement, up to and including the Freedom Schools incorporated into the Mississippi Summer Project of 1964.

Dedication

I wish to dedicate this thesis to the memory of two people whose belief in me, and the importance of American History, changed my life forever. Frances McNulty Lewis and Charles S. McNulty, Jr., taught me the symbiotic relationship between American history and American life, and showed me an ambition I never knew I possessed. Aunt Frances' quiet confidence and Daddy Mac's vociferous enthusiasm, catapulted me onto an academic path that seemed simply normal for a McNulty. But I am not a McNulty, and their faith in my ability still astounds me. I wish they were here.

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Now, I wish to leave the academic arena and thank the people that truly made this all possible. Bill, Kara and Maia have been, and will continue to be, the wind beneath my wings. The support of my family gave me the strength to continue when I had no strength left. Bill has always held me when I "hit the wall." Kara spent her adolescence with a Mother buried in a book. Maia believes Mothers are *supposed* to be buried in books. The unconditional and unfailing support of my husband and my daughters, propelled me past moments of mental paralysis, simply because they never questioned the importance of my choices. I hope that I have taught them as much as they have taught me.

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This thesis will address the question "How did the citizenship education program of the Highlander Folk School shape the grassroots leadership of the Civil Rights Movement?" The thesis will examine the role of citizenship education in the modern Civil Rights Movement and explore how educational efforts within the Movement enfranchised and empowered a segment of Southern black society that would have been untouched by demonstrations and federal voting legislation. Civil Rights activists in the Deep South, attempting to register voters, recognized the severe inadequacies of public education for black students and built parallel educational institutions designed to introduce black students to their rights as American citizens, develop local leadership and grassroots organizational structures.

The methods the activists used to accomplish these goals had been pioneered in the mid-1950's by Septima Clark and Myles Horton of the Highlander Folk School. Horton and Clark developed a successful curriculum structure for adult literacy and citizenship education that they implemented on Johns Island off the coast of South Carolina. The popularity of the schools spread to neighboring islands and continued to grow. Ella Baker, acting executive director of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, brought the program to the attention of Martin Luther King, Jr. and in 1960, when the state of Tennessee closed Highlander Folk School, the SCLC adopted the Citizenship Education Program as its own. Under the auspices of the SCLC, Highlander's program became the paradigm for citizenship education throughout the Civil Rights Movement, up to and including the Freedom Schools incorporated into the Mississippi Summer Project of 1964.

The historiography of the Civil Rights Movement traditionally has dealt with marches, mass demonstrations and highly visible, charismatic leaders such as Martin Luther King, Jr. A major secondary source for the era even

refers to the Civil Rights Movement as "The King Years."[1] Feminist authors such as Gerda Lerner and Darlene Clark Hine have put together excellent collections of the often neglected female leaders of the Movement, but these anthologies also focus on individual leaders rather than the groundswell of support they helped to mobilize.[2] Secondary sources on the Highlander Folk School address these issues but fall short of tracing Highlander's influence throughout the entire Movement.[3] Histories of the Mississippi Summer Project of 1964 ignore the genesis of the pedagogical theory behind the Freedom Schools.[4]

The study of the historical dynamics of a social movement that brought serious change to the political institutions of America, must examine the motivation of the common people that risked the security of the status quo to fight for change. Non-institutional education provided a cornerstone in mobilizing massive and sustained support for the Civil Rights Movement. African American activists within the Movement helped educate the average black citizen of the South and to instill in those individuals the ability to recognize ignorance as a form of tyranny and to appreciate the need to eradicate that ignorance.

The educational methods pioneered by Horton and Clark enabled local leaders to build grassroots support for the Civil Rights Movement within their

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[1] Taylor Branch, Parting the Waters: America in the King Years, 1954-1963 (New York: Simon & Schuster Inc., 1989)

[2] Gerda Lerner, Black Women in White America (New York: Pantheon Books, 1972); Darlene Clark Hine, ed. Women in the Civil Rights Movement: Trailblazers and Torchbearers, 1941-1965 (Brooklyn: Carlson Publishing Inc., 1990).

[3] Aimee I. Horton, The Highlander Folk School: A History of Its Major Programs, 1932-1961 (Brooklyn: Carlson Publishing Inc., 1989); Frank Adams, Unearthing Seeds of Fire: The Idea of Highlander (Winston Salem, N.C.: John F. Blair, 1975).

[4] Doug McAdam, Freedom Summer (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988); William McCord, Mississippi: The Long Hot Summer (New York: W.W. Norton and Co., 1987).

own communities. The SCLC network of community alliances throughout the South provided a web of contacts uniquely suited to Septima Clark's 'ripple effect' theory. Clark believed that if each individual touched by the Citizenship Education Program committed to bringing one other person into the program, then citizenship education would continue to widen throughout the South in ever expanding concentric circles "like a pebble dropped into a pond." Local civic organizations such as Hosea Williams' Crusade for Southeastern Georgia Voters as well as field secretaries from the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) attended CEP and Highlander workshops and contributed to Clark's 'ripple effect'. SNCC participants would eventually utilize the curriculum structures used on Johns Island, as well as adopt and expound upon Horton's belief in the importance of "a nucleus of informed [local] leaders."[5] These local leaders continued the political struggle for equality long after the media events ended and the national figures left.

SNCC's original attempts at community organizing in the Deep South occurred in the early 1960's, under the aegis of the Voter Education Project. Robert Moses, a SNCC field secretary, began a voter registration project in Mississippi using the methods of the Highlander Folk School and the constant support of Myles Horton. Three years later, Moses would be a visible leader in the Mississippi Summer Project which included the Freedom Schools. Moses, as well as local Mississippians such as Fannie Lou Hamer and Arnelle Ponder, attended training workshops sponsored by the Citizenship Education Program of the SCLC. Freedom Summer volunteers in the Biloxi area attended a retreat at the Highlander Folk Center, relocated to Knoxville, in order to learn Horton's organizing methods.[6]

The Mississippi Summer Project took place in 1964, ten years after the

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[5] Aimee Horton, 204.

[6] Len Holt, The Summer That Didn't End (London: William Heinemann, Ltd., 1966), 138.

Citizenship Schools began on Johns Island. That decade saw Horton and Clark's methods and philosophies succeed and spread throughout the local level of the Civil Rights Movement. Highlander Folk School developed a structure for Citizenship education that proved to be a dynamic force in the process of reclaiming the rights of black citizens and building a political power base.

Chapter One

"The Origins of the Highlander Folk School and the Citizenship School Program on Johns Island"

In the early 1950's, a small private school in Tennessee sought to provide the growing Civil Rights Movement with a method for building indigenous leadership by teaching uneducated African Americans the citizenship skills they needed to empower themselves and tear down the barriers created by a power structure based on racism. This Tennessee school, the Highlander Folk School, introduced many struggling black citizens of the South to a method of education designed to teach people how to empower themselves. Myles Horton, the founder of the school, believed that citizens must be taught to analyze power and control in order to fight oppression and injustice. Individuals should be educated in the use and abuse of power to fight their own battles against inequity. Horton originated his method of building local leadership to address local problems during the labor movement of the 1930's, and adapted the concept, in the 1940's and 1950's, for the developing Civil Rights Movement. The school's techniques and philosophies spread throughout the Civil Rights Movement and helped develop a system of civic education that provided a broad base of informed black citizens that formed the core of the Civil Rights Movement.[1]

In 1932, Myles Horton proposed a "Southern Mountain School" to train local leaders in labor organizing and to "further assist them in developing

[1] Thomas Bledsoe, Or We'll All Hang Separately: The Highlander Idea (Boston: Beacon Press, 1969), 6; Guy Carawan and Candie Carawan, Ain't You Got a Right To the Tree of Life? (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1966; 1989), 198.

programs for improving the welfare of all people."[2] Horton, a native Tennessean, chose to work in the South because the area was politically and economically more backward than the rest of the country. Southerners scraping together a living off of overworked farms, or struggling to maintain families in severely depressed mountain communities, provided a cheap labor pool for Northern industrialists, and a small segment of elite white men dominated most local political structures. Horton's background as an educator led him to conclude that the laborers could stop this exploitation if they learned the skills necessary for union organization. He viewed education in a social movement as a nondisruptive form of protest for change, yet the most pervasive and enduring. [3] Horton wanted to "empower the poor by educating [them] to assume leadership in a mass movement designed for social change."[4]

Horton's dream of a Southern Mountain School, designed to educate the Southern poor in methods of self-empowerment, became a reality in 1934. In October, 1934, Tennessee issued a charter for Highlander Folk School to operate in Monteagle, Tennessee on property belonging to Professor Lillian Johnson of the University of Tennessee at Knoxville.[5] The charter contained the purpose of the school. "We reaffirm our faith in democracy as a goal that will bring dignity and freedom to all .... The purpose of the Highlander Folk School is to assist in creating leadership for democracy." Highlander aimed to "utilize education as one of the instruments for bringing about a new social

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[2] Aimee Horton, 23; Myles Horton, "Training and Job Opportunities" 6 July 1953, Highlander Folk School Collection, Tennessee State Library and Archives, Nashville, [HFS] Box 2, Folder 10.

[3] Rhoda Lois Blumberg, Civil Rights: The 1960's Freedom Struggle (Boston: Twayne Publishers), 198.

[4] Aimee Horton, 27.

[5] Septima Poinsette Clark, Echo in My Soul (New York: E.P. Dutton & Co., 1962), 123-126.

order."[6]

At that time, Horton believed that this new social order, based on political and economic equality, rested on a strong labor movement.[7] Horton's college years had provided the genesis for his unique method of building labor leadership. During college, Horton spent three summers among the Tennessee mountain people performing informal social work. These mountain folk came to Horton with problems dealing with jobs or farms. Horton had few answers, but discovered that if he could gather a group of people together who had similar problems, and initiate dialogue and discussion, the group usually discovered their own answers to their specific questions.[8] Upon his return to college, Horton began to research this participatory approach to education and discovered a similar school of thought, led by Professor John Dewey of Columbia University.[9]

Dewey articulated the American Democratic philosophy of education, widely used in teacher education programs today. It claims, "the value of knowledge is in how it facilitates [and] enables the individual in living a life with dignity." [10] Dewey wrote that democracy education "gives individuals a personal interest in social ... control, and the habits of mind which secure social changes without introducing disorder." [11] Dewey endorsed a life-centered approach to education as a means of empowerment and insisted that

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6 Ibid., 197; Aimee Horton, 11.

7 Aimee Horton, 26-27.

8 Sandra Brenneman Oldendorf, "Highlander Folk School and the South Carolina Sea Islands' Citizenship Schools' Implications for the Social Studies" (Ph.D. diss., University of Kentucky, 1987), 47.

9 Aimee Horton, 20.

10 Eduard C. Brandt, Jr., "Notes on Philosophy of Education" (Radford University: Unpublished Text Supplement, 1990), 13.

11 Oldendorf, 11.

effective education must account for the needs of the students and the communities in which they lived. Dewey's philosophy profoundly influenced Horton's development of education programs designed to resolve issues on a local level. [12]

Horton also studied the works of Reinhold Niebuhr, a contemporary philosopher who referred to himself as a 'Marxist Christian.' Niebuhr argued that the members of a society who held power would never willingly relinquish their control. The oppressed members of that society must learn how to take power. Niebuhr claimed that true democratic equality could only be achieved through political and economic equality.[13]

Horton synthesized such philosophies into his own unique brand of educational activism. He founded Highlander to help people discover a way to solve their own problems in their own way.[14] The School hosted week long workshops designed to utilize Dewey's philosophy of participatory education. Highlander workshops "weren't set up merely to theorize and ponder problems, they expected and demanded that theory and discussion and decision be galvanized into action and achievement."[15]

At Highlander, Horton developed the dialogue method of problem solving he had first used during his college summers in the Tennessee mountains, and adopted Dewey's belief that democratic education must "take account of the ... needs of the existing community."[16] The community needs, in the area around Highlander, were economic. Horton believed a strong

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[12] Aimee Horton, 20.

[13] Oldendorf, 48.

[14] Carl Tjerandsen, Education for Citizenship: A Foundation's Experience (Santa Cruz, Ca.: Emil Schwarzhaupt Foundation, Inc., 1980), 139.

[15] Clark, Echo In My Soul 134.

[16] Aimee Horton, 20.

Southern labor movement could alleviate some economic hardships, so throughout the Great Depression he steered Highlander in the direction of labor union organizing.[17]

The workshops were designed to teach labor union doctrine and the skills needed to organize and run a local labor union. Many Tennesseans were interested in the labor movement but lacked basic skills such as the ability to interpret, or even read, a contract. Highlander taught local laborers practical skills such as how to organize a shop and the best procedure for presenting grievances to management.[18] The workshops addressed the local problems of the participants and discussed various methods of solving them. The Folk School expected the participants to return to their communities and use the ideas and skills they learned at Highlander to act for the betterment of their communities.[19] Horton believed that conflict and crisis can better a society by bringing controversial issues to the surface, where they could be discussed and possibly solved.[20]

Problems were discussed at Highlander in classes with no formal structure. Each workshop centered around individual themes where participants would explain specific issues and ask if others had found a way to solve similar problems. For example, by the mid-1930's, industrial management increasingly used 'speed up' tactics to force workers to increase production without increased pay. In 1936, Highlander held a workshop to address this problem and invited labor leaders from all over the South, including several from Texas, North Carolina, and Alabama who had

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[17] Ibid., 26-27.

[18] Clark, Echo In My Soul 179.

[19] Ibid., 134; Lerner, 145.

[20] Oldendorf, 50.

successfully fought 'speed ups' in their own shops. The workers held strategy sessions where they discussed a variety of solutions to their difficulties. One participant of the 'speed up' workshop explained, in a letter home, how the Highlander classes worked. "You see, we never took one man's opinion or experience on a subject. Instead, we worked under the theory that it's much more likely that thirty people will be right and the one individual wrong."[21] Horton encouraged an unstructured curriculum because he believed it fostered a greater understanding of democracy. He wanted Highlander to develop its own "structure and form." [22]

Highlander workshops welcomed participants of any race or class, and throughout the thirties and forties provided whites and blacks with a microcosm of a successfully integrated community. This philosophy often caused trouble in segregated Tennessee. In 1935, the integrated All Southern Civil and Trade Union attempted to hold a labor rights conference in Chattanooga. Under pressure from staunch segregationists in Chattanooga, the meeting hall owners backed out of the rental agreements. A black proprietor finally agreed to rent his establishment for the convention. A white mob attacked the labor meeting and the Union members fled to Monteagle to continue their conference at Highlander, where nondiscrimination was the official policy.[23] Horton insisted that the Southern labor movement needed to include the black laborer to achieve a position of strength and true democracy.[24]

This commitment to an interracial labor movement brought Highlander

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[21] Adams, 42.

[22] Tjerandsen, 140-141.

[23] Clark, Echo In My Soul 178; Aldon Morris, The Origins of the Civil Rights Movement: Black Communities Organizing for Change (New York: Free Press, 1984),148.

[24] Aimee Horton, 195, 196, 198.

increasing criticism from all-white unions in the segregated South. Horton adamantly opposed racial exclusion and believed interracial organizing provided the key to a successful Southern labor movement. Most efforts to build strong Southern labor coalitions and pro-labor political movements met with the practically insurmountable problem of racism.[25]

Racism hindered the development of the Arkansas based Southern Tenant Farmer's Union, founded to educate tenant farmers and sharecroppers in organizational methods.[26] The Farmer's Union espoused the radical view that all sharecroppers and tenant farmers must band together, regardless of color, to demand a fair share of their own labor and "that the landlords used racial bias to divide laboring people and thus make easier the economic exploitation of both whites and blacks."[27] Horton and his wife, Zylphia, incorporated black farmers, from the area surrounding Highlander, into the Farmer's Union and met virulent local opposition. Localized antagonism to integration, such as Horton encountered in Grundy County, contributed to the Union's inability to achieve tangible goals on a local level.[28]

World War Two brought tremendous changes to the labor movement as well as to the South as a whole. Wartime mobilization called millions of rural blacks into defense factories located in large Northern cities, causing a huge shift in black demographics. This population shift, along with advances in agricultural mechanization, as well as natural disasters such as a boll weevil scourge on cotton, combined to undermine the traditional 'Southern Way of

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25 Ibid; John Mathew Glen, "On the Cutting Edge: A History of the Highlander Folk School, 1932-1962" (Ph.D. diss., Vanderbilt University, 1985), 418.

26 Glen, 418.

27 John Egerton, Speak Now Against the Day: The Generation Before the Civil Rights Movement in the South (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1994), 156.

28 Glen, 348,367.

Life' based on white control and a segregated underclass of blacks. [29]

Cold War ideologies also undermined the labor movement and by the late 1940's, Horton determined that Highlander Folk School must revamp its goals and move into a different direction altogether.[30] Highlander had always maintained a loose, non-official affiliation with organized labor, but after World War Two, the frenzied anti-Communism that swept the U.S. prompted national Unions, such as the CIO [Congress of Industrial Organizations], to demand public compliance with its anti-Communist ideologies.[31] Highlander Folk School refused to publicly condemn Communism with the zealotry mandated by the CIO. Horton viewed such injunctions as blatant attempts to manipulate Highlander into a "partisan school," with centralized Union control that contradicted Horton's core theories of developing indigenous leadership, as well as hindering the School's amorphous ability to respond to specific social crises on a local level.[32]

By the early 1950's, Highlander Folk School began to move in a very new direction as the school shifted away from labor organizing and focused on civil rights. Horton considered this transition a natural evolution for a school dedicated to teaching democracy by dealing with current social crises, and he claimed that Highlander's pursuit of democracy had not changed, only the method of pursuit.[33] Highlander's continuous quest for an integrated labor movement had given Horton an acute awareness of impending developments in the Southern race issue. In 1953, the Highlander Executive Council declared

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[29] Richard Lawrence Busacca, "Social Movements and Construction of Reality: A Study of the Civil Rights Movement and Its Role in the Transformation of American Politics: 1954-1968" (Ph. D. diss., University of California at Berkeley, 1976), 75-85, 124.

[30] Glen, 344.

[31] Ibid., 392, 395.

[32] Ibid., 379, 395.

[33] Bledsoe, 22.

segregation "the most pressing problem for the people of the South."[34]

Horton emphasized Highlander's commitment to democracy for all "regardless of race or creed" by initiating workshops on desegregation in 1953, in anticipation of the possibility that the Supreme Court would outlaw segregated public schools when it finally ruled on *Brown v. the School Board of Topeka, Kansas,* scheduled to be heard in 1954.[35] The integrated workshops provided a secondary benefit in that Highlander became "important as a symbol [because] - the Negro must know that there is such a place in the South where he can discuss his problems with members of the white race." The small group workshops offered the first biracial experience for many of the Southerners, both black and white, in attendance. [36]

The first integration workshop, entitled "The Supreme Court Decisions and the Public Schools," continued the Highlander tradition of seeking practical answers to local problems, in this case, the implications of desegregation in the individual communities of the participants. The *Brown* decision provided a signal that the federal government was becoming less tolerant of sanctioned segregation. Horton hoped to use the integration issue to build black community leadership which could eventually tackle other issues, such as economic oppression, black illiteracy and voting rights. Many of these early workshops dealt with voting as the key to integration and education as the first step towards full citizenship.[37]

White controlled segregated school systems placed no priority on black education. Illiteracy presented the biggest obstacle to citizenship education

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[34] Glen, 423-24.

[35] Bledsoe, 246; Aimee Horton, 191.

[36] LaVerne Gyant, "Contributions of African American Women to Nonformal Education during the Civil Rights Movement" (Ph. D. diss., Pennsylvania State University, 1990), 24; Glen, 572.

[37] Busacca, 91; Aimee Horton, 200; Oldendorf, 41; Glen, 476.

among most segments of Southern black society. Horton understood that literacy was necessary for Southern blacks to achieve full citizenship. To facilitate Highlander's evolution into the field of citizenship education, Horton hired Septima Clark, a South Carolina educator, as Director of Education. [38] Clark's experience as a public educator gave her unique insights into the educational abyss endured by most black Southerners.

Septima Clark, the daughter of a former slave, was born in Charleston, South Carolina in 1898.[39] She wanted to be a teacher all of her life and credited her parents' belief in the power of education with fostering this ambition.[40] In 1916, Clark began teaching on Johns Island, a remote isolated island off the coast of Charleston, where she faced appalling educational conditions, typical throughout the South. The school buildings were ramshackle, dirty and cold. Textbooks were old books discarded by white students. Clark had to buy her own materials and received $25 per month for teaching 53 students. The only white teacher on Johns Island received $85 a month to teach three white students. [41] Clark's later civic work in Charleston would center on addressing such educational inequities.

In 1919, Clark left Johns Island to teach in Charleston. Since black teachers were not allowed to teach in the city, she taught at the private Avery Institute where she had received her own early education. After World War I, during Clark's employment at Avery, she began to organize to petition Charleston to allow black teachers to teach black children in the city school

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[38] Tjerandsen, 140.

[39] Cynthia Stokes Brown, ed., Ready From Within: Septima Clark and the Civil Rights Movement (Navarro, Ca.: Wild Tree Press, 1986), 85.

[40] Clark, Echo In My Soul 17-19.

[41] Ibid., 37.

system.[42] The door-to-door petition obtained over 10,000 signatures and succeeded in changing the policy.[43] Clark's civic activities continued in the 1930's and 1940's, when she worked with the NAACP, attending interracial human relations meetings in Columbia. Clark had always understood the injustice inherent to segregation, but these interracial meetings helped her to understand that the status quo was changeable. These meetings were a turning point for Clark because she began to link social reform with education. She returned to Charleston and began working with illiterate black soldiers returning from World War II.[44]

After World War II, Clark joined the swelling ranks of black Americans agitating for social reform and increased her own civil rights activities. In the early 1950's she helped to organize a protest against unequal pay for black teachers. As a result, Federal Court Judge J. Waities Waring ordered Charleston County to pay black and white teachers equally.[45] Clark also participated in Charleston's black YWCA where she met Anna Kelly, the organization's executive secretary. Kelly had attended Highlander workshops on desegregation in 1952 and returned to Charleston to recruit other community leaders to attend similar workshops.[46] Clark accompanied Kelly to the 1953 workshop on "Public Schools and Desegregation." When Clark returned home, she used the Highlander technique of discussion workshops to organize a PTA seminar on family health.[47]

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[42] Sylvia G.L. Dannett, ed., Negro Heritage Library, Vol. 2, Profiles of Negro Womanhood in the Twentieth Century (Yonkers, NY.: Educational Heritage, Inc., 1966), 306.

[43] Clark, Echo In My Soul 60-61.

[44] Lerner, 86, 88-89; Clark, Echo In My Soul 76-77.

[45] Ibid., 95, 105-107.

[46] Ibid., 119-120.

[47] Tjerandsen, 149; Clark, Echo In My Soul 120-121.

Clark invited Myles Horton to observe another workshop she organized on health and social welfare. There, the two of them passed out pamphlets on desegregation, and the ensuing furor contributed to the Charleston City School Board's demand that all of its teachers renounce any affiliation with the NAACP. Following the *Brown* decision, South Carolina had passed a law, that no state or local employee could participate in civil rights actions. Charleston used this law to fire Clark when she refused to repudiate her NAACP membership. Following her dismissal from the Charleston schools, Clark accepted Horton's offer of employment as Highlander's Education Director.[48]

Clark ran Highlander's education program in accordance with Horton's educational philosophy. Workshops began with a discussion to define a specific problem, analyze the root causes of the problem, and devise a plan of action to solve it. Clark expanded the method to emphasize the next stage, which was to teach and motivate participants to return to their communities and work to solve their local problems. Participants were also asked to recruit other local leaders to attend Highlander workshops. This procedure created a "nucleus of informed leaders who [were] able to start and carry forward a plan of community action ...." [49]

One of the first local leaders that Clark recruited was Esau Jenkins, of Johns Island. Johns Island had not changed much from the primitive place Septima Clark encountered in 1916. The geographic isolation of the area gave it a distinct and different culture from the mainland. Johns Island is one of a chain, that stretches from southern North Carolina to northern Florida. The islands are separated from the mainland by the intercoastal waterway, rivers and swamps. Because of extreme seclusion, a distinct dialect, known as Gullah,

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[48] Ibid., 113-114, 117-119; Lerner, 89.

[49] Clark, Echo In My Soul 183; Aimee Horton, 204.

developed on the islands. Gullah uses archaic and corrupted phrases, along with rapid, staccato speech that renders communication with outsiders difficult. No bridges connected the South Carolina Sea Islands to the mainland and until the 1940's, few outsiders undertook the eight hour boat trip needed to get there. Bridges ended the physical isolation, but the cultural isolation remained.[50] Clark commented on the deprivations suffered on the islands due to the extreme isolation: "Being isolated so long, these island folk knew very little about the few public benefits that even the Negroes of the mainland have come to have."[51] For example, in 1952, 68 children died from a diphtheria epidemic. The parents never asked Charleston County for a nurse, treatment or inoculations.[52] Esau Jenkins knew that education and voting could improve conditions such as these.

Jenkins' formal education, like that of most Sea Island black children, was cut short after he left the fourth grade to work. Black schools were only in session for four months because the children had to help on farms and plantations. White farmers would often knock on the black schoolhouse door to remove a child from class when his fields needed extra hands.[53] No high school existed on the islands and one elementary teacher taught as many as fifty children in one room of a building actually creosoted black to signify the race of the students. Clark once commented that on Johns Island you could teach astronomy through the holes in the roof. Pride prevented many children from continuing their education under such conditions, and in the

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[50] Oldendorf, 23,25,35.
[51] Ibid., 38.
[52] Tjerandsen, 151-152.
[53] Carawan, 202-203.

mid 1950's, Jenkins estimated the adult illiteracy rate at 80%.[54]

Jenkins cotton farmed with his father after he quit school. He was self motivated to continue to educate himself because he knew he "couldn't have done anything out of a fourth grade education." [55] Jenkins' mathematical abilities prevented his father from being cheated by a cotton merchant, but he still could not convince his father, nor many other older people, of the necessity of education. Septima Clark observed that few older Islanders seemed interested in bettering themselves.[56]

Jenkins considered education simply a pragmatic tool for bettering himself. For example, when he ran a truck farm, Jenkins taught himself Greek in order to converse with Greek restaurant owners in Charleston.[57] Then he encountered the judicial system of the white power structure. Jenkins explained, "Two evil things that happened motivated me to get involved in my work on Johns Island." In 1938 two black men accidentally ran over a white man's dog. The dog's owner killed them. In the 1940's, a black man's male dog mated with a white man's female dog against the owner's wishes. The white man shot and severely wounded Sammy Grant, the owner of the male dog. The white men never faced charges for either action. That Jenkins turned his anger into energy for teaching citizenship skills, rather than direct protests, implied his basic understanding of ignorance as a tool of oppression.[58]

Jenkins asked himself, "Am I my brother's keeper? and the answer that I got was, You are ... I decided to do anything I can to help people in order to

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[54] Ibid., 142.

[55] Ibid.

[56] Bledsoe, 226-227; Clark, Echo In My Soul 40.

[57] Bledsoe, 226-227.

[58] Carawan, 142.

help myself."[59] Jenkins understood that illiteracy presented the biggest obstacle to full citizenship for the people of his community. He tried to promote literacy and voter registration with all of his Island neighbors. In the early 1950's, Jenkins owned and operated a bus line from Johns Island to Charleston. As he drove, he spoke with his passengers about reading and writing. He tried to make them understand that if they passed the voter registration literacy test that they could vote to improve conditions on the Island. He turned his bus into a "school on wheels" and taught patrons to memorize sections of the Constitution so that they could register.[60]

Alice Wine, a passenger on Jenkins' bus, wanted to vote but could not read. She told Jenkins, "I cannot ... [read] these words. But if you are willing to help me, I will show you that I would be one that would be willing to vote in every election."[61] Jenkins helped Mrs. Wine and several others to memorize the South Carolina constitution passage required to pass the literacy test. Mrs. Wine passed the test and "read" so well that the registrar complimented her reading skills. Jenkins was delighted with the progress his passengers made, but he knew that memorizing was no substitute for literacy and civic education. [62]

Jenkins promoted other civic actions, along with voter registration. In 1948, he founded the Progressive Club on Johns Island, in response to the 1944 Supreme court decision, Smith v. Allright, that struck down the Southern practice of all white primary elections. All club members had to vote and

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[59] Ibid., 141.

[60] Bledsoe, 227-228; Bernice Robinson, "Reading , Writing and Voting: An Interview with Bernice Robinson," Interview by Eliot Wigginton and Sue Thrasher. Southern Exposure 10 (September-October, 1982), 28-29.

[61] Carawan, 149.

[62] Robinson, 28.

strive towards political sophistication in order to wisely cast their votes in the best interests of themselves and their community.[63]

In 1954, in order to boost community awareness of the importance of voting and to prove to the Islanders that a black man could enter politics, Jenkins ran for the school board of Charleston County. Jenkins knew he would lose, but his campaign motivated many blacks to try to register. From 1944 to 1954, only 200 out of 6000 eligible black voters on Johns Island had registered. In the six months before the election, 50 registered and 99% of those registered voted in the 1954 School Board election.[64] Jenkins used these results as a "stepping stone to tell people, 'see, if you were registered to vote, I could have made it."[65]

Most of these new voters joined The Progressive Club and attended meetings to discuss methods for achieving full citizenship and ways to organize rural electorates to agitate for community improvement. Members presented the Club with problems that ranged from farm tools to world affairs. The Progressive Club activities provided a nucleus of leaders for community action and problem solving within the same philosophical tradition as Highlander Folk School.[66] Recognizing this, Septima Clark invited Jenkins to attend a Highlander workshop with her in the summer of 1954.[67]

This Highlander workshop, entitled 'World Problems, The United Nations and You,' discussed human rights around the globe.[68] Participants debated specific methods to achieve full human rights for the people of their own

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[63] Oldendorf, 59; Edmund L. Drago, Initiative, Paternalism, and Race Relations: Charleston's Avery Normal Institute (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 1990), 270.

[64] Bledsoe, 231; Carawan, 152; Tjerandsen, 153.

[65] Robinson, 28.

[66] Glen, 512; Tjerandsen, 153.

[67] Clark, Echo In My Soul 121.

[68] Glen, 435.

communities. One question put before the group asked, "What are you going to do for the United Nations?" Esau Jenkins replied, "I don't want to do a thing for the United Nations. I want to do something for Johns Island. I want black people of Johns Island to learn to read and write, so they can register to vote."[69] Jenkins asked how to arouse 6000 physically and psychologically isolated people to work for their own rights.[70] He appealed to Highlander to help him establish a program for adult literacy and citizenship education on Johns Island.[71]

Myles Horton, Septima Clark and other members of the Highlander staff, visited Johns Island in November, 1954, to determine the feasibility of such a program. Horton also wanted to investigate Jenkins' potential for democratic leadership training, establish local contacts, and decide if Johns Island could serve as a citizenship education demonstration community.[72] Horton concluded that Johns Island provided a natural place to build a power base. Isolation protected the black citizens from the more violent forms of racism found in other parts of the South, and 85 to 90% of the farmers owned their own land and need not fear economic reprisals for their civil rights activities.[73] As his primary goal, Jenkins advocated literacy in order to vote. Horton expanded this goal to include full citizenship education to build "sophisticated suffrage" in order to prevent pointless voting and exploitation by the politically ruthless. Literacy, however, remained the cornerstone of the project. Highlander gave Jenkins $1500 to buy an abandoned school house, and he hired Bernice Robinson, a Charleston beautician and seamstress, to

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69 Morris, 150.

70 Tjerandsen, 151-152; Aimee Horton, 205.

71 Bledsoe, 230.

72 Tjerandsen, 152.

73 Oldendorf, 37.

teach.[74]

Robinson, a Charleston native, had spent much of her early adult life in New York. She left the Charleston area because of poor job opportunities for black women. In New York, she sold real estate, studied cosmetology and worked as a campaign aid for a New York politician. When her parents fell ill in 1947, Robinson returned to Charleston. Once again, job opportunities were scarce so she ran a beauty shop from her home and took in sewing. Her years in the North gave Robinson a heightened awareness of discrimination and she became active in the NAACP and the YWCA. In 1954, Robinson attended Highlander workshops with Clark and spoke at length with Esau Jenkins about adult literacy for voting registration.[75] When Jenkins received Highlander's backing for the citizenship education project, Robinson was his only choice for teacher.[76]

Robinson refused the offer at first because she had no formal training and did not feel qualified. Highlander, however, did not want a professional teacher but a concerned citizen familiar with its philosophy.[77] Regular teachers who used traditional classroom tactics had failed with adult education on Johns Island because classroom lessons designed for small children humiliated the illiterate adults. Horton wanted an inexperienced teacher that would approach the project experimentally. He believed Robinson's inexperience added a positive factor to the project.[78]

Robinson respected the island people, did not pass judgment and tried

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74 Tjerandsen, 153; Bledsoe, 230.

75 Oldendorf, 64; Darlene Clark Hine, ed., Black Women in America, Vol. 2, (Brooklyn: Carlson Publishing, Inc., 1993), 987-988.

76 Robinson, 28.

77 Ibid.

78 Oldendorf, 63; Carawan, 198.

very hard not to embarrass the people of Johns Island who were illiterate. Upon her arrival at Johns Island, Robinson began recruiting students through the churches, the center of the Island's social life. She approached possible students with caution and sensitivity. Robinson would explain the program and ask the potential pupil to help out an illiterate friend by bringing that person to the class.[79]

Robinson entered the first classroom armed with a box of reading material she had borrowed from her sister, a first grade teacher. She took one look at her pupils and realized that the elementary school lessons were too juvenile for these adults. She began by saying, "I am really not a teacher, we are here to learn together. You're going to teach me as much as I am going to teach you." [80] Then, in the tradition of Horton's belief that people with a problem could, with help, solve their own problems better than an outsider, Robinson asked the students what they wanted to learn. The islanders inundated Robinson with requests. Many wanted to fill out mail order forms or DMV papers. Some requested help with checks or bank drafts. Most of the islanders had children or other loved ones who had left the island seeking better opportunities. These people wanted to correspond with those loved ones privately, without help from a literate neighbor. Robinson proceeded to devise a curriculum centered around the specific needs of the students.[81]

Robinson emphasized the practical use of education. Math problems required students to figure "How many gallons of gas does it take to get from here to Charleston?" or "If the grocery store normally sells milk for 50 cents and this coupon gives you 10% off, how much will you pay?" Students told

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[79] Oldendorf, 71.

[80] Carawan, 198.

[81] Bledsoe, 233; Hine, Black Women in America 987-988.

Robinson stories about their own lives, and she wrote them out and taught them to read utilizing these stories. With Septima Clark's assistance, Robinson devised a system of 'whole language learning,' or the process of teaching the students reading, writing and arithmetic using problems they encountered in their daily lives. This curriculum allowed them to use their new learning and see immediate results from their efforts.[82]

Seeing quick results motivated the students to learn more. Robinson motivated them in other ways as well. Several islanders requested lessons in sewing and other crafts. Robinson taught them how to sew and invited local experts to teach other subjects in which the students showed interest, such as quilting or 'fancy baking.' Though these skills had little to do with citizenship, they helped convince the students of the value of learning.[83]

Robinson included lessons on citizenship with the more mundane skills the students desired. She used South Carolina election and voter registration laws, as well as the state and U.S. constitution, to teach reading and writing. Voter registration remained a focal point as Robinson attempted to instill in uneducated, rural citizens the idea that they could become part of the government by enabling themselves to vote.[84] The second stage of classes placed special emphasis on political education. Robinson sought to teach her students that "the power was in the hands of the people." [85]

Because material dealing with these topics proved hard to find, Robinson and Clark developed a textbook entitled "My Reading Booklet." It contained information on Highlander and lessons on the workings of the

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82 Oldendorf, 73; Carawan, 198.

83 Oldendorf, 66.

84 Clark, Echo In My Soul 147, 153; Lerner, 152, 157.

85 Carawan, 203.

United States government. The booklet helped teach the students about social security and voting requirements, and also contained material dealing with income tax and government services. Clark and Robinson eventually renamed the text "My Citizenship Booklet" and included lessons on the developing Civil Rights Movement. One math problem in the revised edition asked, "If 115 students are arrested in the sit-in movement and were fined $75 each, how much fine was paid?" Other math problems, as well as stories and writing lessons, also concerned real life situations. Robinson had determined that these methods worked, and the project remained committed to her curriculum structure as a proven technique for citizenship education.[86]

The original class grew from 14 to 37 students in two months, and it was followed by a second with close to 50 participants. Of this original group of 87, two thirds passed the literacy test to register to vote.[87] In 1955, Esau Jenkins had convinced 50 citizens of Johns Island to attempt to register. In 1958, more than 400 registered to vote and by 1960, the new registrations grew to 700 with a 99% voter turnout. These new voters demanded and received improvements from the county and state governments. A high school was built, and the school children rode buses to school for the first time on Johns Island.[88] The voting strength of Johns Island prevented a segregationist judge from being reelected. Esau Jenkins commented on the success of the project: [The people of Johns Island are] "civic minded now, and they want to take part in it. I think so much progress has been made in the last few years due to the citizenship school that was started here by the Highlander Folk School." [89]

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[86] Oldendorf, 66, 74.
[87] Carawan, 198.
[88] Bledsoe, 231.
[89] Carawan, 150.

Myles Horton's dream of democracy through education became a reality on Johns Island. Horton originally assumed that community development would interest the Islanders in learning to read, but the converse proved true. Learning to read interested the Islanders in community activity.[90] Jenkins explained the phenomenon; "No one wants anything more than to be a first class citizen. That is what makes you want to learn more."[91] Bernice Robinson added her insight. "It [the Citizenship School Program] just grew like crazy. When students got their registration certificates, they would be at school ahead of me, and as soon as I walked in the door, they were waving them in my face. 'I got it! I got it!' And their enthusiasm bubbled out into the community."[92] This 'bubbling out' continued as the Citizenship Project fed off of the growing publicity of the Civil Rights Movement and activists throughout the south utilized the techniques of political education pioneered on Johns Island.

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[90] Glen, 532.

[91] Carawan, 198.

[92] Robinson, 28.

Chapter Two

"The Expansion of the Citizenship School Program and the Creation of Southwide Connections and Networks"

The Highlander Folk School citizenship education project began to expand almost immediately after the successful experiment on Johns Island. New voters enthusiastically spread the word and the Citizenship School idea leaped to neighboring islands, such as Edisto and Wadmalaw. The citizens on these islands requested similar programs for their own communities.[1] In 1955, Esau Jenkins returned to Highlander to ask for help in setting up programs on Wadmalaw and Edisto. Horton saw Johns Island as a pilot program and the extension of the citizenship classes as a way to build a significant black political power base. He approved the expansion and in 1960, Wadmalaw registered more voters than in all its previous history.[2]

Other Island communities asked for help in setting up citizenship schools. Horton reported the "The adult citizenship school idea is 'island hopping' along the coast of South Carolina and Georgia. The idea is simple. Islanders, motivated by the desire to assume responsibilities of citizenship, are learning in three months of evening classes to read well enough to fulfil [sic] the requirement for voting registration."[3] The local leaders who expressed the most interest were invited to Highlander to attend workshops to learn to teach adults to read, write and understand the power structure. Robinson taught the future teachers how to use her curriculum and suggested the new schools bring in knowledgeable experts to teach local people how to manage

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[1] Carawan, 199.

[2] Tjerandsen, 155; Bledsoe, 231.

[3] Myles Horton, "News From Highlander Folk School" 12 January 1960, Highlander Research and Education Center Collection, State Historical Society of Wisconsin, Madison, [HREC] Box 38, Folder 2.

their own problems.[4]

The workshops discussed ways to organize the first citizenship class into a community group to meet and discuss local problems, such as how to pressure the local government. Specific locales presented specific problems and new citizenship schools sprang up for a variety of reasons. Mary Lee Davis of Charleston had tried for years to have the streets in her neighborhood paved, but to no avail. She approached Bernice Robinson, a resident of Davis' North Charleston community, with the problem. After attending a training session at Highlander with Robinson, Davis started a citizenship school in her beauty parlor. Faced with growing voter rolls and increased political activity, Charleston's city government began to show increased willingness to cooperate.[5]

Tangible results spurred many citizens to expand the goals of the program beyond registration and voting and into the realm of community improvement on a variety of levels. Clark worked with Jenkins to realize the potential of "growing the program" beyond literacy and voting. Jenkins recognized the importance of program expansion and continuation of momentum and set up 'second step' political education classes with three broad goals.[6] The first priority included the rights and responsibilities of first class citizenship with the premise that "If every voter can be made to feel individually responsible for their government, the improvement of government is more likely to result." [7] Those rights and responsibilities included the second goal of teaching adults to use their voting power effectively, such as precinct and party political activity as well as analyzing

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[4] Clark, Echo In My Soul 162.

[5] Ibid.; Oldendorf, 78.

[6] Glen, 528, 525, 548.

[7] Myles Horton, "General Reports and Memoranda" n.d., HREC, Box 38, Folder 2.

candidates. Second step classes even encouraged community groups to run and elect their own candidates to local governing bodies.[8]

The third goal urged citizens to work together for community development. Focus remained on citizenship and broad goals, but participants began to work toward individual ways to improve their neighborhoods.[9] In 1960, the Consumer's Union bestowed a $3000 grant to add consumer education to the curriculum. The Islanders spent the money on building a concrete-block house to teach others how to construct and finance sturdy, low cost housing. The Johns Island group established a credit union to financially support each other. Johns Island parents forced the Charleston County School Board to provide typing and shorthand classes at the newly built Island high school. After the school board rejected the original request for these classes, Jenkins and the Progressive Club threatened to send the Island students to the all white high school in Charleston County and to initiate a law suit if blocked from that action[10]

This type of successful community cooperation prompted Jenkins' praise for Highlander's methods. He wrote to Horton: "My ideas of community leadership have changed in many ways. I have found that giving others something to do in helping make better citizens in the community is very important."[11] Community leadership progress on Johns Island added credibility to Horton's theories of indigenous leadership. A report on the Island projects included his thoughts. "There is leadership whenever men and women gather, although often unrecognized. We start with people as they are. If a person functions as a leader or is thought of by his neighbors as a

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[8] Ibid.; Glen, 511.

[9] Myles Horton, "General Reports and Memoranda."

[10] Glen, 547-548, 442, 541.

[11] Tjerandsen, 155.

spokesman for them, he has a potentiality for democratic leadership."[12]

Highlander placed particular emphasis on continually expanding the potential democratic leadership to include as many students and projects as possible.[13] Alleen Brewer, the leader of the citizenship program on Edisto Island, initiated the "each man, get a man" concept. Each student in the class agreed to persuade one neighbor or friend to attend and learn to qualify to register. This networking scheme worked so well that it was adopted throughout the South. Robert Moses and Fannie Lou Hamer, two significant civil rights activists in Mississippi, attended Highlander workshops and learned about the "each man, get a man" concept. Moses and Hamer taught the concept to civil rights volunteers going into Mississippi in 1964, who used this technique with their 'Freedom Schools.' They called it "each one teach one."[14] Septima Clark called this burgeoning infrastructure a "ripple effect." "It's like the pebble thrown into the mill pond."[15] Myles Horton commented on the spread of the movement. " In the citizenship schools ... we are getting results not only in terms of reading and writing, but in terms of intelligent first class citizens - hundreds and hundreds of them - simply because we began by assuming that they *could* be citizens." Esau Jenkins said, "No one wants anything more than to be a first class citizen. That is what makes you learn what you have to learn." [16]

This enthusiasm for learning caused the citizenship schools to increase too quickly for Highlander to supervise so many individual programs, and

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[12] Myles Horton, "General Reports and Memoranda."

[13] Clark, Echo in My Soul 162.

[14] Branch, 717, 819; McAdam, 84; Oldendorf, 77.

[15] Clark, Echo In My Soul 162,167.

[16] Carawan, 198.

Horton refocused Highlander's role to one of training teachers.[17] This shift in Highlander's role in the flourishing citizenship education project gave Robinson, Clark and other staff members the freedom to help establish citizenship schools in more far flung Southern areas than the isolated South Carolina coast. By injecting a degree of flexibility into the program that allowed for countless local variations, this subtle change in the direction Highlander took, in relation to the continuance of the project, proved to be the cornerstone of Highlander's far reaching influence throughout the Civil Rights Movement.

This influence derived not only from the vast possibilities of the "ripple effect" networking scheme, but also through the process itself which provided a foundation for all types of community leadership development.[18] Grassroots development of political awareness and activism provided sustained and deep rooted support for the emerging Civil Rights Movement. Highlander's approach to activism, what Horton called a "percolator effect," or decentralized involvement that arose from ordinary people, gave individual Southern communities an opportunity to adapt the noble but vague rhetoric of the Civil Rights Movement into specific neighborhood goals.

This adaptability and flexible approach allowed Highlander's citizenship project to go into vastly different areas and "build a nucleus of informed leaders ... able to start and carry forward a plan of community action ...."[19] Leaders attended a series of one week teacher training workshops at Highlander. The sessions emphasized the importance of tailoring the proven successful methods to meet specific needs and building versatility into the program to promote concrete results. Future teachers learned to encourage

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[17] Oldendorf, 82.

[18] Gyant, 82.

[19] Aimee Horton, 204.

questions, active participation and creative input on lessons.[20]

Clark and Robinson updated materials to aid the future teachers attending the workshops. They wrote an expanded Citizenship Booklet to include the history and philosophy of Highlander Folk School, along with sections on African American history and culture. The curriculum centered on the needs and interests of the students themselves and always included room for specialized skill training such as woodworking, quilting or leather crafting. As always, the primary goal remained adult literacy for the purpose of voting and contributing to the community.[21]

By 1960, Jenkins reported that the Johns Island community registered close to 300 people to vote. The Progressive Club met monthly and had several projects in the works. Jenkins believed Johns Island no longer needed an adult school program.[22] Johns Island citizens agreed and committed to advancing their own political education without the shelter of the Highlander umbrella. In a 1961 grant application to the Schwarzhaupt Foundation, Horton used the thriving citizenship activities in the Sea Island communities to illustrate his point that "[The] adult education concept has now passed from the experimental, pilot stage to a second stage where we are now servicing any local or southwide organization ... by offering teacher training."[23]

The Madison County Voters League of Huntsville, Alabama, requested one of the first citizenship education programs outside of the immediate Charleston region. The original contact with Highlander Folk School provides a classic example of Highlander techniques reaching otherwise isolated concerned citizens. A Huntsville rabbi, familiar with Highlander, told Septima

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20 Glen, 556; Morris, 142; Gyant, 99-100.

21 Gyant, 95, 99-100, 4.

22 Septima Clark, "Recent Developments in 'The Citizenship School Idea'" 25 September 1960, HREC, Box 38, Folder 2.

23 Myles Horton, "Memorandum to Carl Tjerandsen" 1 January 1961, HREC, Box 38, Folder 2.

Clark of a woman from Huntsville who opened her home to "neglected Negro children." Clark invited this woman to a Highlander workshop on 'Social Needs and Social Resources,' a topic frequently included in the citizenship school curriculum. This unofficial social worker arrived at Highlander in March, 1960, "with a carload of men and women from her Community."[24] They invited Highlander staff to Huntsville to attend a mass meeting called to explore the possibilities of running a black candidate for city council. The Executive Council member from Highlander who attended, reported back that, "It was evident that not one of them knew anything about the government of their city or how to preside at a meeting." He determined their greatest need was more community leadership.[25]

The president of the Madison County Voters League requested help with fostering local leadership so Highlander agreed to establish two adult literacy classes and a leadership training class. Within five months, Huntsville established a total of seven classes with 114 participants.[26] The Huntsville operation sent prospective teachers to teacher training workshops at Highlander. Within a short time frame, Huntsville assumed responsibility for its own citizenship education program by sending the teachers to refresher courses held at Highlander at frequent intervals. The obvious benefit of the refresher courses for the eventual independence of local programs, prompted Clark and Horton to integrate these sessions into the core Highlander workshop program. This move facilitated other outside civic organizations using Highlander as a stepping stone for developing their own individual programs.[27]

Highlander sponsored several other civic organizations during the

24 Clark, "Recent Developments."

25 Ibid.

26 Ibid.

27 Myles Horton, "Memorandum to Carl Tjerandsen."

same time frame that Huntsville requested a citizenship program. Bernice Robinson spoke at a mass meeting in Savannah, Georgia in the fall of 1960, at the request of the South Carolina Council on Human Relations. She explained the Highlander citizenship education program, distributed literature and extended an invitation to attend Highlander workshops. Eleven interested people from Savannah visited Monteagle to participate in sessions dealing with voter education, political education and community development. These initial leaders formed the Chatham County Crusade for Voters League and set up several citizenship schools throughout the Savannah area.[28]

The citizenship education concept continued to spread. Hosea Williams, the first president of the Chatham County League, wrote to Septima Clark to thank her for helping set up the Highlander program. In that first letter he mentioned citizens from surrounding counties who had approached him with an interest in a citizenship education program in their communities.[29] The Southeastern Georgia Crusade for Voters originated from these contacts, and was formed for the specific purpose of establishing citizenship education programs. Clark and Robinson trained enough teachers to lead 54 classes with over 600 students, from nine different counties of Southeastern Georgia, attending.[30]

These students learned how to achieve practical results from their educational efforts, just as the original Johns Island students had. One of those 54 southeastern Georgian citizenship education classes initiated a project to provide school age children with presentable clothing. Hosea Williams reported to Septima Clark that many rural students dropped out around the seventh grade due to shame over tattered, old clothing. Another class began

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[28] Clark, "Recent Developments."

[29] Hosea Williams, "Savannah Georgia's Basic and Fundamental Literacy Education Project" 5 November 1960, HREC, Box 38, Folder 12.

[30] Myles Horton, "Southeastern Georgia Crusade for Voters" n.d., HREC, Box 38, Folder 2.

investigating industrial development in their region in order to provide jobs and a stronger economy. The citizenship group in Burroughs County, Georgia, encouraged their neighbors to develop their land, rather than to rely on the unsteady rural economy for employment. Williams delighted in such signs of progress and spent a great deal of time recruiting program supervisors as well as teachers.[31] Through these beginnings, the Southeastern Georgia Crusade for Voters evolved into a vital civic organization, instrumental in civil rights activism in Southern Georgia, and Hosea Williams became a dynamic leader of the Civil Rights Movement.

Other leaders of the Civil Rights Movement emerged through their involvement with Highlander citizenship education program. James Forman, the future Executive Secretary of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, worked with the citizenship education program in Haywood and Fayette counties, located in West Tennessee. Highlander began work in these two counties in 1960, after a locally sponsored voting drive among the black populace resulted in severe economic reprisals by local white merchants. "Negro farmers are unable to buy gasoline for their tractors, merchants are refusing to sell food and clothing, while Negro children and their mothers face literal starvation because of their fathers' efforts to vote."[32]

John McFerrin of Fayette County originally initiated these efforts to vote in West Tennessee. A.J. Porter of nearby Lane College directed McFerrin to Highlander to assist him in establishing citizenship education classes in the troubled area.[33] James Forman was among the twelve students from Lane College who participated in the teacher training workshops and conducted a class in Haywood County. Lane College originated the use of students to

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31 Hosea Williams, "Letter to Septima Clark" 9 February 61, HFS, Box 2, Folder 3.

32 "News from Southern Conference Educational Fund, Inc." 15 June 1960, HFS, Box 2, Folder 2.

33 "Haywood County Civic and Welfare League, Original Fayette County Civic and Welfare League" n.d., HREC, Box 38, Folder 2.

organize and teach citizenship education classes. In Haywood County, student led classes resulted in 141 adult students, 95 of whom successfully registered after the first set of classes. John McFerrin asked Porter for more students in order to expand the project.[34]

Across the South, the energy of students ignited the Civil Rights Movement, beginning with the 1960 sit-in movement initiated by four North Carolina A&T students. These four black youths sat down at a segregated lunch counter and refused to leave. More students joined them the next day and the furor created by this protest tactic began to draw national press attention.[35] National exposure of the Greensboro sit-in had an electrifying effect on college campuses throughout the South.[36] This method of direct action protest gave young people a way to vent their frustration over the injustice of institutionalized discrimination. The sit-ins fired their imaginations and provided an outlet for youthful impatience against the more traditional machinations of organizing within the mainstream political structure, exemplified by programs pioneered at Highlander. One young demonstrator explained the sit-in impact on students, "It's like waiting for a bus, man. You know where you're going all the time, but you can't get there 'til the right vehicle comes along."[37]

This fierce enthusiasm prompted prominent adult civil rights activists to search for a way to harness the energy that drove this powerful vehicle. Martin Luther King, Jr., sought a way to include the students under the organizational umbrella of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference

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34 Ibid.

35 Clayborne Carson, In Struggle: SNCC and the Black Awakening of the 1960's (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1981), 9-13.

36 Howard Zinn, SNCC: The New Abolitionists (Boston: Beacon Press, 1964), 16.

37 Ibid.; Carson, 10.

(SCLC). Ella Baker, Executive Secretary of SCLC, thought the impromptu student demonstrations could and should be coordinated. [38] Baker believed that people must continue demonstrating and protesting. However, she feared that without some type of organizational structure, the student commitment would fragment into diverse and ineffectual factions.[39] Myles Horton also believed the students' fervor should be channeled into a "sustained effort which will lead to fuller participation by Negroes in all phases of economic and political life."[40] In April of 1960, Baker called for a meeting of all interested students to meet at Shaw University in Raleigh, North Carolina, where the students voted to remain independent of existing civil rights groups and adopted the name 'Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, thereafter known as 'Snick.'[41]

At this original meeting, Baker advised the students against direct association with the middle class, male dominated, existing civil rights organizations. These organizations tended to operate on a centralized basis with a single prominent figure at the top of a well defined hierarchy.[42] Baker's ideas of leadership more closely paralleled those of Myles Horton. A leader should act as a facilitator to bring out strengths in people, but never dictate policy, and those people actually "under the heel of oppression" must decide the method of fighting that oppression. Indigenous local leadership must be fostered in order to empower people to save themselves.[43] SNCC adopted Baker's political philosophy as their own and dedicated their

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[38] Zinn, 32.

[39] Ellen Cantarow, Moving the Mountain: Women Working for Social Change (Old Westbury: The Feminist Press, 1980), 76, 83.

[40] Bledsoe, 7.

[41] Zinn, 33.

[42] Dorothy C. Salem, ed., African American Women: A Biographical Dictionary (New York: Garland Publishing, 1993), 26.

[43] Lerner, 91; Cantarow, 84; Charles Payne, "Ella Baker and Models of Social Change," Signs 14 (Summer 1989): 893.

organization to "participatory democracy," or the process of self empowerment from the bottom up.[44]

It was no accident that the founding members of SNCC adopted a philosophy of activism almost identical to Highlander's. Throughout the 1950's, Horton spoke at black colleges all over the South and initiated a series of college workshops designed to train Southern students in his ideology of education for democracy and the method of advancing local leadership from the 'bottom up.' Several future student leaders attended college student workshops. Marion Berry, James Bevel, Diane Nash, John Lewis and James Forman, would all go on to become instrumental leaders of SNCC and utilize Horton's theories in their work. After the initial explosion of sit-ins, Horton invited these leaders back to Highlander to reflect on this new direction of the Movement and plan strategy for the future. Horton advised the students to "evaluate the ... issues, to determine how to communicate those issues and how to organize around those issues."[45]

Baker was also familiar with Horton, Highlander and the amazing progress of the citizenship education program. In 1958, Highlander's success with training local activists, prompted Baker to explore the possibilities of incorporating the Citizenship School program into the broader based SCLC. Highlander's voter registration accomplishments impressed Baker and she suggested to King that SCLC should move in the direction of civic education and away from direct action, or public protests.[46] Septima Clark also pushed King to utilize the schooling system set up by Highlander. Clark told King, "Direct action is so glamorous and packed with emotion that most young people prefer

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[44] Lerner, 91.

[45] Alvin C. Hughes, "A New Agenda for the South: The Role and Influence of the Highlander Folk School, 1953-1961," Phylon 46 (March 1985): 242-250; Morris, 147; Emily Stoper, The Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee: The Growth of Radicalism in a Civil Rights Organization (Brooklyn: Carlson Publishing, Inc., 1968, 1989), 177.

[46] Branch, 264.

demonstrations over genuine education."[47] King showed little interest until the methods of the school spread dramatically and began to garner concrete results in such far flung areas as Southeastern Georgia and West Tennessee.[48]

These successful programs, as well as the burgeoning network structure they fostered, brought Highlander Folk School increased harassment from Southern racists. Highlander's sponsorship of integration and commitment to civil rights through black education, enraged many white Southerners. Segregationists called the school communist and Horton explained that white bigots considered Horton, and other white staff members of Highlander, as race betrayers, or "Southern whites betraying Southern whites." Many segregationists believed that Highlander was the "center of the cancerous growth, or the Civil Rights Movement," and that if they shut down Highlander, the Civil Rights Movement would fail.[49]

In July, 1959, local officials obtained a search warrant to look for whiskey at Highlander. They found nothing but a cooler of beer in the kitchen and one bottle of whiskey in the liquor cabinet of Myles Horton's private residence. Horton's home was located off of Highlander property, and the officials did not have a search warrant for those premises. The officers arrested Septima Clark and several others, and they filed charges for selling whiskey without a license, operating a school for profit, and breaking Tennessee's segregation laws.[50]

The arresting officers gave the student workshop participants an object lesson in oppression. At the time of the raid, the students had been watching a film, ironically entitled, "The Face of the South." An armed officer entered the

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[47] Morris, 152-156; David Garrow, Bearing the Cross: Martin Luther King, Jr. and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (New York: William Morrow and Co. Inc., 1986),162.

[48] Branch, 90, 264.

[49] Howell Raines, My Soul is Rested: Movement Days in the Deep South Remembered (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1977), 399, 396.

[50] Bledsoe, 107-112.

room and pulled the projector plug out of the wall, plunging the room into darkness and frightened confusion. Someone began to hum the preeminent freedom song of the Civil Rights Movement, 'We Shall Overcome,' and the students quietly began to sing, adding a verse that became a permanent part of the song; 'We are not afraid.' They had reason to fear the angry white police who arrested three others, along with Clark, merely because they inquired about Clark's rights. The police told the questioners, "We know how to take care of little men like you," and placed them in hand cuffs.[51]

The raid itself, boosted Highlander's visibility among other civil rights activists. The Montgomery Improvement Association(MIA), established at the time of the Montgomery Bus Boycott of 1955, sent a group of citizens to Highlander for teacher training workshops after the raid. The Reverend S.S. Seay, Executive Secretary of the MIA, told Clark that the oppressive legal tactics used against the school prompted his people to attend; "That raid ... did more educating of my Montgomery people than I could have done in ten years. This experience taught them the kind of things they'll be up against .... There are too many decent people in the South to let the forces of evil continue their abuses."[52]

By the time of the raid, Horton had already begun to shift financial responsibility for individual schools back onto the localities involved, due to the tremendous growth of the citizenship program. He began to push other civil rights organizations to administer the mushrooming adult education project. Horton claimed, "We weren't interested in administering a program .... It was swamping Highlander. We wanted to get out of it and let other people run it."[53] The continued legal persecution impelled Horton to approach Wyatt

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[51] Glen, 639-640.

[52] Clark, Echo in My Soul 208.

[53] Glen, 554; Morris, 154-155.

T. Walker, who became Executive Director of SCLC in July, 1960, and suggest the SCLC take over the successful adult education area of Highlander, "lock, stock and barrel."[54]

Around this time, the SCLC, along with the NAACP, announced a renewed commitment to voter registration. This commitment was predicated on the belief that a mass social movement must center around the vote. SCLC's continued growth throughout the late 1950's gave this organization a broad base of Southern affiliates from which to support a voting drive. The Petersburg Improvement Association, a Virginia affiliate of SCLC, investigated Baker's contacts with the Highlander Folk School and recommended to King, "the future consideration and adoption of this plan."[55] As the SCLC inspected the citizenship education classes, Highlander's legal troubles continued.

Much of the legal labyrinth centered around the murky waters surrounding the school's finances. For many years, Horton received no salary from Highlander and in 1957, the Executive council voted to deed him the property surrounding his house. This action insured Horton a home as well as provided retroactive pay. Under scrutiny by a Tennessee state legislative investigating committee, Highlander earlier claimed Horton's home belonged to the school. These discrepancies opened the door for charges of evading taxes and lying in order to protect the school's non-profit, tax exempt status. The complicated accounting problems provided Tennessee with enough semblance of financial wrongdoing to shut down Highlander Folk School.[56]

Myles Horton had been in Europe at the time of the original raid, but he attended the first trial. At one point in the proceedings, the Judge asked Horton why he was smiling. Horton replied, "I was just thinking what a waste

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54 Adam Fairclough, To Redeem the Soul of America: The Southern Christian Leadership Conference and Martin Luther King, Jr. (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1987), 66-68.

55 Glen, 550-551; Garrow,149; Morris, 102.

56 Glen, 627, 642, 665; Clark, Echo in My Soul 127.

this trial is. I know what you're going to do just as well as you do. You're going to convict us on what the state calls evidence, confiscate our property, and put Highlander Folk School out of business. But Judge, you won't have done a thing. Highlander isn't just a school. It's an idea, and you can't put an idea out of business by confiscating property."[57]

In 1961, the Tennessee Supreme Court upheld the order revoking Highlander's charter, and the state dropped the integration charge so that the United States Supreme Court refused to hear the case. Tennessee confiscated the property and closed the school, but the state did not put Highlander out of business. Horton chartered a new school, the Highlander Research and Education Center, in Knoxville, the day after the confiscation and turned the Citizenship School Program over to the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, where it became known as the Citizenship Education Project (CEP) and continued to expand and touch more and more civil rights activists on both a national and local level.[58] The idea, indeed, proved impossible to shut down.

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[57] Bledsoe, 4.

[58] Garrow, Bearing the Cross 149.

Chapter Three

"The Southern Christian Leadership Conference's Citizenship Education Project and Voter Education with the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee"

The Southern Christian Leadership Conference possessed a unique structure that provided fertile ground for the growth of the Highlander Folk School idea of self empowerment through education. Southern ministers involved in civil rights activities formed SCLC in 1957 to coordinate protest actions, and combine efforts to sustain the momentum of the dramatically successful Montgomery Bus Boycott of 1955.[1] Preexisting, as well as newly formed, civic groups throughout the South comprised the membership. SCLC did not have individuals on its membership rolls, but rather a loosely knit group of affiliates, such as the Montgomery Improvement Association and Petersburg Improvement Association. The Southeastern Georgia Crusade for Voters joined SCLC after Highlander lost its original charter. These affiliates gave SCLC a growing web of contacts from which to initiate local literacy and voting projects. In 1965, SCLC claimed credit for the registration of over 50,000 Southern voters, but without the impetus of the Highlander Citizenship School Project, this achievement might never have been reached.[2] SCLC's original thrust into voter registration ended in failure, despite the lofty goal of doubling black voters in the South.[3]

In 1958, Martin Luther King, Jr., told members of the SCLC Executive Council, "It is now imperative that we assemble and work out a clearly defined

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[1] Payne, 893.

[2] Septima Clark, "Southern Christian Leadership Conference Citizenship Education Program" 14 May 1965, HREC, Box 38, Folder 14.

[3] Morris, 101-102.

program ...."[4] The organization launched the Crusade for Citizenship "to arouse the masses of Negroes to realize that, in a democracy, their chances for improvement rest on their ability to vote."[5] Ella Baker coordinated Crusade kick-off rallies in 20 Southern cities, but the results were never impressive because SCLC lacked an extensive local community network dedicated to teaching such mundane details as the location of the registrar's office, or convincing citizens of the importance, or even the necessity, for voting. Rallies, mass meetings and demonstrations could not consistently sustain a social movement for great change and the Crusade garnered negligible results. A 1959 board of Directors meeting logged the complaint that *no* discernible progress had been made.[6]

Most of the SCLC Board of Directors surmised that the failure of the Crusade for Citizenship rested on the chaotic state of SCLC. Baker single handedly ran the office as well as the Crusade. Stanley Levison, a close advisor to King, commented in the late 1950's that SCLC "is now burning the furniture to keep the house warm." Out of a planned $200,000 start up budget, the Crusade received $5000 and the lack of funds and general neglect of the Crusade did contribute to its downfall, and many assumed it was the sole reason.[7]

That assumption clouded the core issue that a mass direct action movement "requires an extensive local organization, something the SCLC ... did not yet posses."[8] Nor did the SCLC possess the mechanism for initiating a

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4 Fairclough, To Redeem the Soul of America 48.

5 Garrow, Bearing the Cross 97.

6 Fairclough, To Redeem the Soul of America 47-49, 50-51; Emilie Schmeidler, "Shaping Ideas and Actions: CORE, SCLC and SNCC in Struggle for Equality, 1960-1966" (Ph. D. diss., University of Michigan, 1980), 107.

7 Fairclough, To Redeem the Soul of America 48.

8 Adam Fairclough, "The Southern Christian Leadership Conference and the Second Reconstruction, 1957-1973," The South Atlantic Quarterly 80 (Spring 1981): 179.

process of organizing individual localities into politically aware enclaves. Scattered voting clinics and rallies could not surmount the obstacles of "fear and ignorance," or educate masses of people in registration laws and political methods.[9] The Crusade attempted to organize through existing local political action groups, such as the Progressive Club on Johns Island. But the success of the voting drive depended on the vitality of these local groups and SCLC had no method of infusing enthusiasm into lethargic community action groups.[10]

Ella Baker believed Highlander's citizenship school program provided an excellent example of a successful method of developing local leadership and she urged SCLC to seriously consider adopting such a program.[11] Baker told King, "SCLC must offer, basically, a different 'brand of good' that meets unmet needs of the people. At the same time, it must provide for a sense of achievement and recognition for many people, particularly local leadership."[12] This description of the necessary ingredients for successful grassroots organizing almost exactly described the guidelines for citizenship curriculum developed by Septima Clark and Bernice Robinson.

Baker strongly disapproved of the hierarchical, centralized 'cult of personality' the Southern clergy leaders developed around Martin Luther King. She continuously urged exploring methods of advancing indigenous local leadership as opposed to "encouraging blacks to await a Moses figure to deliver them out of their bondage."[13] Baker had spent the better part of her adult life in New York City, active in the NAACP. These years of activism taught her about the dynamics of local politics and the interaction between leadership and literacy, as well as the necessity of local contacts for

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[9] Morris, 114.

[10] Fairclough, To Redeem the Soul of America 95; Morris, 109.

[11] Garrow, Bearing the Cross 120-121.

[12] Morris, 112.

[13] Fairclough, To Redeem the Soul of America 50.

encouraging indigenous leadership. Baker's male clergy colleagues on the SCLC Board of Directors ignored her ideas in the late 1950's, due to a combination of sexism, personality tensions and opposing views on effective leadership. But by 1960, the successes of the Highlander adult school program could no longer be ignored and King authorized Baker to pursue the literacy school idea and investigate the possibilities of SCLC establishing similar projects.[14]

Meanwhile, Horton began to vigorously pursue help with the Citizenship School Project from other civil rights organizations. SCLC affiliates, as well as SCLC itself, received invitations to send members to teacher training workshops. From its inception, SCLC leaders had often attended Highlander Folk School workshops and utilized a few of Highlander's philosophies. Meetings of SCLC affiliates set aside a time for sharing experiences, and they discovered that solutions could be found for local problems by discussion about similar problems in other localities. Ralph Abernathy, and SCLC Executive Board member, explained how SCLC discovered that "interaction among local protest groups diminished the opposition's effectiveness by minimizing the potency of its tactics."[15] James Wood, of the Petersburg Improvement Association, recognized these ideological parallels and recommended to King that the Folk School's "action device" method of instigating activism, combined with SCLC's southwide affiliate resources, opened up vast network possibilities that could be designed to "accelerate the momentum" of the Civil Rights Movement.[16]

Wyatt T. Walker also embraced the Highlander adult school program and recommended to King that SCLC simply adopt the program in toto.[17] James

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[14] Morris, 102-103, 114-115.

[15] Ibid., 95.

[16] Garrow, Bearing the Cross 151, 153; Fairclough, To Redeem the Soul of America 69.

[17] Ibid., 68.

Wood told King that "the need for a program through which affiliates may become active in other than fund raising capacities is very evident."[18] King met with Horton several times during the winter of 1960-1961, and 'meticulously' examined details Horton himself had never examined. King studied the cost of the program against the numerical results of actual voters and only after he determined the soundness and effectiveness of the program did he accept Horton's overture.[19] Horton and King set up a Citizen School Committee, that included Horton and James Wood, designed to administer, promote and coordinate the various local schools.[20]

The logistics of the transfer of the Citizenship School Project proved to be a bit complex, due to Highlander Folk School's pending legal problems and the funding apparatus of the Marshall Field Foundation. In February of 1961, Horton applied for a $31,000 grant from the Field Foundation for the purpose of "[training interested persons] in the skills of adult education using subject matter relevant to the social struggle."[21] The Foundation could not grant the money directly to the SCLC because the recipient must have tax exempt status. Horton assumed Highlander would disburse the funds for SCLC, but the Field Foundation expressed concern over that plan, in light of the Folk School's pending legal troubles. After extensive negotiations, the American Missionary Association agreed to administer the grant money, as well as donate an old school building in Dorchester, Georgia.[22]

Dorchester, located in McIntosh County, Georgia, provided an excellent location for the new Citizenship Education Program. The American Missionary

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18 Garrow, Bearing the Cross 153.

19 Morris, 237.

20 Glen, 565.

21 Ibid., 562-564; Clark, Echo In My Soul 215-216.

22 Eugene Price Walker, "A History of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, 1955-1965: The Evolution of a Southern Strategy for Social Change" (Ph. d. diss. Duke University, 1978), 91; Glen, 562, 564; Fairclough, To Redeem the Soul of America 68.

Association founded Dorchester Academy in 1870 as a school for the surrounding black land owners. The majority of the black residents in the County owned their own land, which insulated them from white economic reprisals for participating in civil rights activities and contributed to an unusually high percentage of black citizens in McIntosh County who voted. These factors combined to furnish the school with a supportive environment.[23] Until the school, rechristened the Dorchester Center, opened its doors in July of 1961, Bernice Robinson and Septima Clark continued to hold teacher training and refresher workshops at Highlander. Clark issued invitations to SCLC leaders to attend, and Dorothy Cotton, the future coordinator of the CEP, went to her first workshop in January to learn the methods used successfully in Highlander's adult education efforts.[24] Other future CEP staff members attended workshops that Spring, to insure continuity of the program during the transition from Highlander to the SCLC.

One major step towards continuity came in Myles Horton's announcement, barely three weeks after Dorchester Center began operating. The Highlander Executive Council granted Septima Clark an unspecified leave of absence to work for the SCLC. In a letter to A.J. Porter of Lane College, Horton explained, "Mrs. Clark and other members of the Highlander staff feel that this is the most effective means of spreading the Citizenship program."[25] Horton also recommended the talents of a Congregationalist minister from New York, Andrew Young, who had been under consideration for a position at Highlander. Wyatt Walker took Horton's advice and hired Young as head administrator for CEP.[26]

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23 Fairclough, To Redeem the Soul of America 68-69.

24 Glen, 558; Dorothy Cotton, "To Make the World We Want: An Interview with Dorothy Cotton," Interview by Eliot Wigginton and Sue Thrasher, Southern Exposure 10 (September-October, 1982), 25-31.

25 Myles Horton, "Letter to A.J. Porter" 2 August 1961, HREC, Box 38, Folder 8.

26 Walker, 92; Fairclough, To Redeem the Soul of America 68.

Young began proving the faith in his talents almost immediately. Barely one month after his appointment, Young released a proposed strategy report that struck at the very core ideology of Highlander's citizenship schools. Young sent copies to the SCLC, the Citizen School Committee, the American Missionary Association and the Field Foundation, urging each and every individual to "mention the program in visits throughout the South and impress local leaders with the importance of assigning someone within their organization to work with the Citizenship Schools as a local coordinator ."[27] Young realized that such connection contributed immensely to the ever widening web of contacts, or Septima Clark's 'ripple effect.' Young also grasped the importance of building local leadership from the 'bottom up.' He stated that, "The social, cultural, and civic development of the area will continue to be a problem even after voters are registered. A trained local leadership [should] be on hand to coordinate a wide variety of ... programs in the future."[28]

Local leadership provided a "sense of security" and fostered the idea that an individual community could better itself on a local level and at the same time, become a part of the dramatic, national Civil Rights Movement.[29] Young saw the role of SCLC in this wave of localized activity, as a link between communities, to share "resources and experiences;" a method pioneered by Horton in the 1930's with scattered Southern labor movements.[30] "Instead of one homogeneous civil rights movement, there were dozens of local movements" working toward common goals.[31] These dozens of local

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[27] Andrew Young, "A Proposed Strategy for the Citizenship School Program" April 1961, HREC, Box 38, Folder 2.

[28] Ibid.

[29] Gyant, 61.

[30] Morris, 91.

[31] Ibid., 40.

movements would create a true, "mass movement, not only in numbers but because it is a movement of the common man. It is the grass roots people who can bring change ...."[32]

During the fall of 1961, Dorothy Cotton, Septima Clark and Andrew Young toured the South searching for grassroots leaders interested in starting a citizenship education class. They looked for prospective teachers motivated to work to end discrimination in their communities and that understood that their neighbors presented the greatest resource for social change.[33] The trio recruited a wide variety of teacher trainees of all ages, educational levels, and occupations. The trainees ran the gamut from unemployed farm laborers to ministers. In particular, Clark and Cotton targeted barbers and beauticians. Their profession gave them distinct advantages in most African American communities, the foremost being economic independence from the white power structure. Members of this occupation traditionally carried intimate knowledge of the neighborhood dynamics as well as a host of local contacts.[34] This recruitment drive opened Young's eyes to the oppressive nature of the 'status quo' Southern educational system. He and Cotton and Clark "combed the South for those Ph.D. minds that have been wasted in the cotton patches."[35]

Clark returned to Dorchester Center once a month to hold week long training sessions for the 50-80 recruited teacher trainees.[36] The workshops remained virtually identical to those developed by Clark at Highlander, in that the crux of the program continued to be using literacy and voting as building

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[32] Anne Braden, "The Southern Freedom Movement in Perspective," David Garrow, ed., We Shall Overcome: The Civil Rights Movement in the United States in the 1950's and the 1960's, Vol. 1, (Brooklyn: Carlson Publishing, Inc., 1989), 108.

[33] Walker, 92; Gyant, 79.

[34] Glen, 502-503, 556.

[35] Braden, 108.

[36] Sam Heys, "Civil rights hero gets recognition decades overdue," The Atlanta Constitution 21 May 1987, B1, B4.

blocks for civic improvement. Cotton credited the "Highlander folk" with the CEP structure. "We kept the same model and probably expanded it some."[37] The introduction to the SCLC "Citizen Booklet" (a revamped version of Clark and Robinson's 'Reading Booklet') explained the concept of CEP to the newcomers:

> It [CEP] is devoted to helping adults help themselves by learning how to solve their community problems. Reading and writing skills are invaluable in such a program. It is in these ways that we strive to improve the lot of all citizens and extend the boundaries of democracy and full freedom for all.[38]

The workshops emphasized motivating neighbors to attend classes to enable themselves to work toward 'first class citizenship.' The trainees used role playing techniques to help each other evaluate their own area's specific needs.[39] The dialogue process taught them how to teach, by teaching them to question and explore their own answers; by making the student an integral part of the learning process as opposed to an "empty vessel."[40] Cotton discovered that if she told her students a fact, (for example, the definition of habeas corpus) few remembered it later. If she initiated a group discussion on citizenship and civil rights and then asked 'What is habeas corpus?' the group promulgated their own working definition of the term.[41] In this manner,

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37 Cotton, "To Make the World We Want," 26.

38 Gyant, 79.

39 Glen, 555.

40 Kay Mills, This Little Light of Mine: The Life of Fannie Lou Hamer (New York: Penguin Books USA, Inc., 1993), 52-53.

41 Ibid.

Cotton continued and expanded the flexible approach to adult education originated by Bernice Robinson on Johns Island.

CEP core curriculum also remained true to the lessons used on Johns Island. The emphasis stayed focused on mobilization for obtaining and using the ballot, and "teaching people the techniques to organize for action."[42] The primary lessons included such commonplace tasks as how to find the registrar's office and how to operate a voting machine. Preparation for registration literacy requirements continued as the principal goal, with follow up training to initiate 'second step' actions, or political sophistication and community organizing.[43] The recruits spent hours evaluating their own area's schools and educational priorities, as well as housing codes and other public services, such as sewage or street lights. They asked themselves, "How come the pavement stops where the black folk section begins?"[44] They learned how to approach public official to demand these equal rights.

The trainees analyzed media bias and methods used by the racist element of white society to prevent black citizens from voting; from the subtle comprehension tests used to "flunk" blacks' attempts to register, to the deadly violence used in many Deep South locales.[45] They learned that ignorance of the oppressed is the most vital instrument of oppression.[46] Cotton claimed, "Our purpose was to see how people could unbrainwash themselves .... [To] demystify the political process and build a base from which folks could operate."[47]

Many African American Southerners were indeed 'brainwashed' into

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42 Fairclough, To Redeem the Soul of America 69.

43 Ibid.

44 Cotton, "To Make the World We Want," 27.

45 Glen, 546, 476; Dorothy Cotton, "CEP: Challenge to the 'New Education,'" Freedomways 9 (First Quarter 1969): 66; Morris, 105.

46 Gyant, 82.

47 Mills, 54.

believing that politics was 'white man's business,' and "did not understand the system nor that their deprivation was indeed systematized."[48] Bernice Reagon, who became a leading civil rights activist in her own right, knew nothing of precinct meetings, city government or local and state party systems until she attended CEP workshops. Literally thousands of Southern blacks told similar stories after working with CEP.[49] CEP operated under the original Horton philosophy that "people ... have within themselves the stuff it takes to bring about a new order."[50] By concentrating on the practical aspect of 'first class citizenship,' CEP motivated its participants to return home to search for individually effective means of ending segregation and other forms of discrimination. The groundswell of political awareness and civic activity in town after town throughout the South, "meant just a whole new way of life and functioning."[51]

Cotton, expounding on this new way of functioning, wrote, "Classes ... range from the illiterate and poverty stricken to those who simply never thought of themselves as making a difference. The CEP graduate does not teach in a vacuum, but gets his students to register and vote, to run for public office, to confront the power structure and make demands."[52] Cotton uses an example of how students often changed their lives after a visit to Dorchester. A Macon, Georgia woman, Topsy Eubanks, said to Cotton after her first teacher training session, "I feel like I've been born again," and she returned home to establish herself as a poll watcher in the registrar's office of her local courthouse. Until CEP, it had never entered her head that she *could* do such a

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48 Cotton, "CEP: Challenge to the 'New Education,'" 66.

49 Carawan, 235.

50 Ibid.

51 Morris, 239.

52 Cotton, "CEP: Challenge to the 'New Education,'" 69.

thing.[53] Classes in every state of the South taught that 'first class citizenship' meant demanding and receiving the rights due them as citizens of the United States. These rights went far beyond the ability to eat at an integrated lunch counter and encompassed how to obtain state aid for a mentally retarded child, the right to a Social Security pension, the right to a decent job, the right to vote, and most important - the right to question the status quo and work to rectify inequity and injustice.[54]

Literally thousands of southern citizens began to work to change the Southern racial status quo. Dorothy Cotton, Andrew Young and other CEP leaders believe the education project laid the cornerstone of the Civil Rights Movement. Cotton said the CEP people had no idea, in 1961, of the eventual growth in scope and size the Movement would take, but that bus loads of people from every area of the South attended classes at Dorchester to learn to apply Civil Rights Movement rhetoric to their own neighborhoods, towns and lives and how to return home and recruit more neighbors to analyze their own problems and work for change.[55]

Momentous changes quietly occurred in cities with the most active CEP participation. For example, Chatham County public facilities peacefully desegregated in 1962. By 1963, Savannah began appointing blacks to the city commissions and doubled the number of black police officers.[56] Slowly, permanent alterations in the Southern racial class structure rippled out, on community wide levels, in towns all over the region. The CEP offered their services to leaders from a vast geographical area, and motivated them to return home and use their newly gained political proficiency.

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[53] Cotton, "To Make the World We Want," 27.

[54] Septima Clark, "Success of SCLC Citizenship School Seen in 50,000 New Registered Voters" 1961, HREC, Box 38, Folder 10.

[55] Cotton, "To Make the World We Want," 26; Cotton, "CEP: Challenge to the 'New Education,'" 67.

[56] Glen, 561.

In the first 16 months under the SCLC affiliate umbrella, over 240 teachers trained to run local classes. Septima Clark measured the program's success numerically, and by late 1961, estimated black voting rolls, Southwide, increased by approximately 10,000.[57] By 1964, statistics show that black Southern voters rose from 57,000 to 200,00.[58] Other organizations requested CEP training workshops. The Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) sponsored representatives from New Orleans. SNCC field secretaries attended many workshops and the NAACP sent several chapter presidents to CEP training classes.[59] By 1963, Dorchester Center received more applicants than they could handle and began to search for ways to further expand the rapidly progressing Citizenship Education Project.[60]

Once again, the Marshall Field foundation provided an impetus for expansion by granting the CEP another $15,000, in the hope that the CEP graduates could feed into the newly established Voter Education Project (VEP).[61] The VEP was the brain child of the Kennedy administration. In an attempt to manipulate the increasingly volatile Civil Rights Movement away from inflammatory and highly visible demonstrations, the federal government began to actively encourage voter registration efforts. Attorney General Robert Kennedy promised civil rights leaders, funds from the Taconic Foundation, a political philanthropic organization, if protest leaders turned their efforts towards voter registration. In August, 1961, leaders of the major civil rights groups, such as Charles McDew of SNCC, Roy Wilkins of the NAACP, James Farmer of CORE and Wyatt Walker of SCLC, met in New York to ratify a civil rights commitment to voter registration and building a solid black

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57 Garrow, Bearing the Cross 153; Clark, "Success of SCLC Citizenship Schools."

58 Schmeidler, 150.

59 Ibid.

60 Garrow, Bearing the Cross 223.

61 Ibid.

electorate to use as a power base for further progress through mainstream political channels.[62] Walker, in particular, embraced the VEP because he believed SCLC could utilize a voting project, set up and endorsed by the federal government and both national parties, to expand the CEP as well as the SCLC.[63] Failed attempts in cities such as Albany, Georgia, to force desegregation of facilities with sit-ins, marches and demonstrations, compelled King and Walker to recommit to the slower, less theatrical method of civil rights progress - voting.[64] Walker, Cotton and King initiated a VEP kick off campaign, entitled, "People to People," that utilized the 'each man get a man' concept to encourage continuous self perpetuation of local civic activity.[65]

In the winter of 1961-1962, VEP consisted mostly of door to door canvassing to discover why blacks didn't vote, but in the Spring of 1962, VEP received over $870,000 from the Marshall Field Foundation and the Edgar Stern Family Fund. Civil rights associations began assigning field secretaries to various Southern areas to begin setting up contacts and lobbying for voters.[66] SCLC sent five field secretaries into Louisiana, Alabama and Georgia, and began enthusiastically working with the VEP in conjunction with their own education program.

Many civil rights activists viewed VEP with hostility rather than enthusiasm, believing it to be a tactical maneuver by the government to "siphon off energy" from direct action programs, which indeed it was. Kennedy proposed VEP in response to the bloody 'Freedom Rides' of 1961, hoping to provide a natural 'cooling off period" - a concept anathema to

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[62] Robert Weisbrot, Freedom Bound: A History of America's Civil Rights Movement (New York: W.W. Norton and Co., 1990), 95; Garrow, Bearing the Cross 163.

[63] Ibid., 163-164.

[64] Fairclough, To Redeem the Soul of America 91.

[65] Garrow, Bearing the Cross 223.

[66] Busacca, 266; Frances F. Piven and Richard A. Cloward, Poor People's Movements: HowThey Succeed, Why Some Fail (New York: Vintage Books, 1979) 233-234.

dedicated civil rights workers in general, and the students of SNCC in particular. Nevertheless, voting rights played an integral role in the Civil Rights Movement and voting drives would prove to be just as incendiary to the more violent white racists of the Deep South, as marches and picket lines.[67] Some time would pass before the students of SNCC saw this reality and meanwhile the fledgling organization was racked with controversy over this seeming beneficial outcome of the Freedom Rides.

Almost immediately after the originating meeting at Shaw University, SNCC members disagreed on exactly how to implement participatory democracy into viable civil rights accomplishments. Bob Moses, along with many SNCC students with several Highlander workshops to their credit, believed Horton's philosophy that self empowerment equaled local civic action, brought about by access to the ballot. Moses represented a faction of SNCC that encouraged a grassroots build up of black political power to change the system from within. Diane Nash of Fisk University advocated dramatic direct action protests and massive demonstrations, designed to spotlight the immorality and injustice of discrimination.[68] Nash engineered SNCC's involvement in the Freedom Rides, originally sponsored by CORE, to send an integrated group of bus travelers into the Deep South to test compliance with recent ICC (Interstate Commerce Commission) regulation banning segregation in interstate travel and travel facilities. The CORE Freedom Riders met savage violence upon arrival in Alabama. Terrified, they appealed to Robert Kennedy to pressure local officials to provide safety. The city officials agreed to do so only if the Freedom Riders flew the last leg of the journey to New Orleans. Nash immediately called

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67 Fairclough, To Redeem the Soul of America 91; Bill Cutler, "Planting Seeds: The Voter Education Project," Southern Exposure 12 (February 1984): 41; Busacca, 208.

68 Zinn, 59-63.

for a new Freedom Ride, claiming that if violence destroyed this effort, then the racists would always prevail by using violence. SNCC Freedom Riders also met brutal white mobs in Alabama, but Mississippi chose to handle the protesters differently. Police protection in Jackson, Mississippi, translated into arrest and an armed escort straight to the Mississippi state prison penitentiary at Parchman.[69] Volunteers descended on Mississippi to march willingly into Parchman. The brutality and hatred encountered in Mississippi prisons molded these student Freedom Riders into the "front line shock troops" of SNCC, eager to confront Mississippi's virulent racism.[70] They knew they would return. The question centered on the direction in which to steer the movement in Mississippi.

Following the Freedom Rides and the Kennedy administration's announcement of the VEP, SNCC held a conference at Highlander to discuss this controversy over goals and methods. Ella Baker resolved the conflict by suggesting that SNCC divide into two 'arms.' One would concentrate on direct action protests and the other would focus on voter registration drives. Diane Nash remained in charge of the direct action group and Bob Moses volunteered to lead the return to Mississippi to begin organizing voter registration drives.[71] Not only did Moses whole heartedly believe in grass roots rural organization as imperative to breaking the white stranglehold on the power structure, he also was "never known to tackle a merely difficult task when a more daunting one was available."[72] Moses chose to begin voter registration drives in Mississippi deliberately. He knew that the severe white oppression in Mississippi would create just as much violence over voting as direct action

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69 Ibid., 43-45, 48-49.

70 Ibid., 41.

71 Cantarow, 87; Stoper, 187; Zinn, 63.

72 Weisbrot, 94.

tactics like the Freedom Rides.[73]

The NAACP encouraged voter registration and backed VEP. Ella Baker drew on her old NAACP associates and contacted Amzie Moore, a leading NAACP activist in Jackson, Mississippi. She put Moore in touch with Moses. This contact with Moore proved invaluable by providing Moses with useful knowledge of the area, as well as food and shelter.[74] Moore and Moses knew that overcoming fear would have to be the top priority. Since Reconstruction, Mississippi whites had terrorized blacks for attempting to vote. Moses planned to quietly work his way into Delta communities by participating in people's daily activities and gradually discuss voting.[75] Of the black Mississippians who actually faced the physical and economic reprisals involved in attempting to register, very few ever passed the literacy test. Aspiring registrants were required to interpret a section of the Mississippi constitution to the satisfaction of the registrar, and the white registrar was rarely satisfied with a black registrant's interpretation. Moses wanted to address this problem by starting citizenship classes to teach people how to register and learn who had the power in Mississippi and why and how that could be changed.[76]

Moses would draw on the experience of Myles Horton and Bernice Robinson for aid and assistance in surmounting the racist oppression in Mississippi that prevented black progress, and the fear and ignorance that perpetuated that oppression. Moses set up a citizenship education class in Pike County in 1961, fully a year before the first VEP project in McComb.[77] Progress proved to be tediously slow and each and every individual attempt at

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[73] Henry Hampton and Steve Fayer, eds., Voices of Freedom: An Oral History of the Civil Rights Movement from the 1950's through the 1980's (New York: Bantam Books, 1990), 150.

[74] Ibid., 140; Cantarow, 89.

[75] Raines, 239-240.

[76] McCord, 90; Mary Aickin Rothschild, A Case of Black and White: Northern Volunteers and the Southern Freedom Summers, 1964-1965 (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1982), 14.

[77] Blumberg, 96; Busacca, 212.

registration was fraught with the very real danger of violent reprisal. In Mississippi, voting became a matter of life and death. As Moses faced increasing obstacles built by centuries of violence and subjugation, he drew the obvious conclusion that civil rights in Mississippi would need an innovative and unique approach. Using tactics and methods learned through the Highlander Folk School, and the CEP at Dorchester, SNCC volunteers in Mississippi would conceive the most ambitious offshoot of the citizenship education movement - the Freedom Schools.

Chapter Four

"The Highlander Ideas in Mississippi"

The Voter Education Project, as a whole, proved moderately successful. VEP registered over one half million voters by 1964, but this accomplishment centered in largely urban areas where African American citizens could vote without fear of death. Out of the half million eligible black voters in Mississippi, VEP registered less than 4000 new voters in two years. In some Mississippi counties, such as LeFlore, over a year of VEP work produced no black voters.[1] White Mississippians claimed these citizens did not want to vote, but Robert Moses discovered that fear, rather than apathy, kept the black community at home.

A typical incident faced by black citizens in Mississippi occurred in Tylertown, in 1961. SNCC volunteers accompanied Mr. John Hardy to the courthouse to register. The registrar told Hardy that the office was "not registering" that day. The registrar then pulled out a pistol, hit Hardy in the head and called the local police. The authorities arrested Hardy for disturbing the peace. This was hardly an isolated occurrence. The U.S. Civil Rights Commission held hearings in Jackson in 1965 that documented hundreds of cases of the authorities arresting the victim, if that victim happened to be black.[2]

Violence against voter activists provided the theme for civil rights work in Mississippi. In Amite County, several weeks of workshops produced only a handful of people willing to take the risk of "the long walk to the Courthouse."

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[1] Weisbrot, 95; Piven, 234, 235.

[2] McCord, 26-27; U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, Police in America Series: Hearings Held in Jackson, Mississippi, February 16-20, 1965, Vol. 2, (New York: Arno Press and the New York Times, 1971).

Bob Moses was beaten many times as he accompanied the few willing to take that walk.[3] One aspiring voter, Herbert Lee, was shot and killed on the McComb courthouse steps. At Moses' urging, a black witness, Louis Allen, offered confidential testimony to the FBI. Allen was also murdered. Most federal agents in Mississippi were as strongly in support of 'The Mississippi Way of Life,' or white supremacy, as the state and local officials.[4] The extreme violence and oppression encountered in Mississippi reinforced SNCC's belief in developing local leadership and providing a mass base to support local efforts to end discrimination and brutality.[5]

The terrorism innate to Mississippi's brand of discrimination, forced Moses to concentrate exclusively on grassroots civic organization, because overt protest methods could bring on severe, violent retaliation. The danger made Mississippi "a psychological symbol" to civil rights activists and many committed to finding a way to break the cycle of terror and repression.[6]

The philosophies and methods of Highlander Folk School, would provide Moses and SNCC with valuable training in effective ways to mobilize grassroots efforts for change in such dangerous areas as Mississippi. In 1961, Horton offered to provide any aid at his disposal to keep the student protest movement going.[7] SNCC members often attended college workshops at Highlander Folk School. Jim Forman, in particular, worked extensively with the West Tennessee citizenship education classes and thoroughly understood Myles Horton and Septima Clark's paradigm of political education and civil rights. Forman met with Horton and requested the services of Bernice Robinson for teacher training workshops for SNCC people. Horton agreed and suggested

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3 Hampton and Fayer, 142.

4 Holt, 35.

5 Mills, 40.

6 Mills, 45; Stoper, 188.

7 Edward B. King, Jr., "Letter to Floyd Buckner" 17 April 1961, HFS, Box 27, Folder 8.

Forman also contact Dorothy Cotton. At that time, Forman's efforts remained focused on the Fayette and Haywood citizenship program, but his early request that Horton's assistance take the form of citizen education training, opened the door for an extensive series of Highlander and Dorchester workshops held for SNCC and VEP workers.[8]

Horton offered these young workers the benefits of his connections and networks among grassroots civil rights workers, established over almost a decade of citizenship education efforts. In the summer of 1961, Horton's newly chartered school, the Highlander Research and Educational Center, opened its doors in Knoxville, Tennessee.[9] In early spring of 1962, Ella Baker requested a week long training session in Knoxville for SNCC members currently working in Mississippi and those planning to go into the state. She wanted the student activists reap "the benefit of [Horton's] experience."[10] Horton offered to ask Hosea Williams to attend the June workshop in order to give the student volunteers his insights on rural community action in the Deep South. Bernice Robinson traveled to Terrell County, to observe SNCC voter education classes set up under the guidance of Jim Forman, in order to determine, first hand, how best to help the students and to plan specific areas of concentration for the Knoxville workshop.[11]

Robinson noted that the current projects in Mississippi and Alabama did not focus enough energy on literacy and remedial education. She used the Knoxville workshop to introduce SNCC members to her curriculum structure used successfully in other areas. Spelling lessons included words such as imprisonment, electorate, magistrate and amendments. She and Horton emphasized the importance of the process itself for teaching people that their

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8 "Memo on Talk with Jim Forman," 24 July 1961, HREC, Box 38, Folder 2.

9 Glen, 508.

10 Robert Moses, "Mississippi: 1961-1962," Liberation 14 (January 1970): 15.

11 Myles Horton, "Letter to James Forman," 1 May 1962, HFS, Box 27, Folder 8.

problems were solvable. Septima Clark continued to remind all of those involved in citizenship education that "the secret stems from the emphasis and the reliance on local leadership. Creative leadership is present in any community and only awaits discovery and development." [12] This philosophy took on special urgency in Mississippi where no amount of education guaranteed a black citizen the right to vote or protection from terrorism for attempting to vote. Education must be used to expand awareness and belief that individuals banding together in community wide efforts could bring change.[13]

Recognizing this concept as a valid approach to the unique problems presented by Mississippi's official sanctioning of a biracial class system, and the violence tolerated in defense of this closed society, Moses began to assemble a network of resource people to assist him in his efforts in Mississippi and contacted an Atlanta based expert on adult literacy to supplement the methods developed by Robinson and Clark.[14] Horton agreed to attend a SNCC run workshop at Tougaloo College to explain his philosophies and Robinson accompanied him to teach local workshop methods.[15] Moses instigated the formation of the 'Mississippi Adult Education Program' dedicated to "[imparting] to the participants an increased knowledge and awareness of the structures and forces that constitute official and unofficial government in Mississippi, [and relating] this information to the voter registration programs ... so that workers in these programs may begin to see an integrated picture of the problems they face."[16] The year 1962 was punctuated with similar efforts initiated by Moses with the cooperation and assistance of Bernice Robinson

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12 Septima Clark, "Literacy and Liberation," Freedomways 4 (Winter 1964): 118.

13 Daniel Perlstein, "Teaching Freedom: SNCC and the Creation of the Mississippi Freedom Schools," History of Education Quarterly 30 (Fall 1990): 297-324.

14 Holt, 152.

15 Robert Moses, "Letter to Myles Horton" 22 May 1962, HFS, Box 21, Folder 21.

16 ----------, "Memo to the Governing Board of the Mississippi Adult Education Program" 6 July 1962, HREC, Box 38, Folder 6.

and the guidance of Myles Horton.

Throughout the summer of 1962, Robinson encouraged Moses to continue to involve the local people of the individual Mississippi projects in workshops at Highlander and Dorchester, in order for these participants to become their own community resource people. Many of the locals Robinson met in Mississippi, seemed afraid of any association with the 'Freedom Riders'[17] Robinson reminded Moses that a "fully informed person is not a fearful person and some way must be found to reach these fearful people and eradicate their fears."[18] Robinson emphasized the fear in her reports on the Mississippi extension program to Highlander:

> Several people with whom I talked were interested in attending the workshop at Mount Beulah, but fear of reprisals and intimidations inhibited them. This fear is real, not imaginary. In Ruleville, Negroes must be off the street by the 12 p.m. curfew, or be arrested and held in jail until a fine is paid. In Greenwood, a Negro woman went to register, but the registrar told her to leave her name and address, and she would be called and told when to come back. However, a white couple living near her came to her house the next morning and told her that they would burn her house if she went back to register.[19]

Robinson's reports back to Highlander increasingly included

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[17] After the 1961 Freedom Rides, many Mississippians used the term 'Freedom Riders' to denote all civil rights workers.

[18] Bernice Robinson, "Letter to Bob Moses" 13 July 1962, HREC, Box 38, Folder 6.

[19] ----------, "Mississippi Voter Education Report by Bernice Robinson of Highlander Center" 19 July 1962, HREC, Box 71, Folder 12.

assurances of her own physical safety, but she continued her work in Mississippi for over a year, helping SNCC attempt to establish a voter registration campaign. She visited citizenship classes in several Delta towns and noted that the more successful, were implementing the Highlander techniques they learned at the June workshop in Knoxville.[20] These teachers used the state constitution to help prospective voters become familiar with the sections most often used for the interpretation section of the registration tests. Class leaders kept in contact with possible recruits and provided transportation and moral support for those attempting to register. Many of the SNCC members and local leaders involved in the more effective Delta classes, had attended another Highlander and SNCC sponsored workshop at the Mount Beulah Christian Center, where Robinson concentrated the sessions on recruitment methods and ways to overcome the overwhelming trepidation exhibited by most Delta citizens over visible civic activity. In a month of citizenship classes, six students registered, but Robinson expressed satisfaction with these meager results. She declared the classes a success because the few who registered made a serious commitment to continue working in their own communities, thus adding another building block to the step by step process of developing local leadership.[21] At the end of the summer of 1962, Robinson wrote Moses, expressing her hope that their efforts in Mississippi would continue to bear fruit, and asked that he send Horton a tentative prospectus on his future plans in voter education, so that the Highlander staff could continue to assist SNCC in the educational aspects of their work in the Deep South.[22]

Robert Moses planned more workshops for 1963. He requested financial support from Highlander, as well as Horton's presence for a few days to meet

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20 ---------- , "Summary of Mississippi and Louisiana Extension Report" August, 1962, HREC, Box 71, Folder 12.

21 Ibid.

22 Bernice Robinson, "Letter to Bob Moses" 13 August 1962, HFS, Box 21, Folder 21.

with key SNCC staffers and plan effective methods for running teacher training workshops in the Deep South. The Highlander methods had become so ingrained in SNCC's training programs that many SNCC members themselves could not differentiate between the two. Moses mentioned in a letter to Horton that Curtis Hayes, one of the SNCC workers in Hattiesburg, believed that Robinson had used SNCC material at the last workshop. This prompted Moses to congratulate Horton on the SNCC training workshops being a "complete success in getting [SNCC members] to think and do the work."[23] SNCC increasingly adopted Horton's philosophy of education as their own and spent the better part of 1963 attempting to build a solid and secure local political base in Mississippi.[24] The SNCC sponsored citizenship education classes emphasized that bringing people together to solve local problems, gained them regional and national power and that learning must have a purpose behind it, in order to motivate people to work to learn and change.[25]

Robinson continued to work with SNCC's citizenship education efforts in Mississippi, but progress persisted at a tedious and slow pace. Robinson reported that the Greenwood and Shaw projects seemed to have potential, but then the Greenwood SNCC office was burned by Mississippi racists, and several SNCC staffers barely escaped with their lives.[26] The vicious cycle of the citizenship education program in Mississippi, was that even the smallest amount of progress brought attention from the staunch defenders of the status quo and ever increasing violence from whites. Voter workshops and mass meetings were increasingly terrorized. Whites circled meeting sites and took down license numbers of the cars parked outside to determine who was

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23 Robert Moses, "Letter to Myles Horton" n.d., HFS, Box 21, Folder 21.

24 Fairclough, 213.

25 Gyant, 98.

26 Bernice Robinson, "Letter to Myles Horton" 25 March 1963, HREC, Box 38, Folder 6.

participating. Beating, burnings or economic reprisals often followed.[27] As the violence escalated, SNCC held workshops and mass meetings whenever and wherever they could to convince even a few citizens to attend.

One such mass meeting was held at the end of a voter education workshop in the Ruleville area, that was held in conjunction with the Greenwood project. Fannie Lou Hamer, a sharecropper born and raised in Mississippi, attended that meeting. James Forman addressed the crowd, attempting to explain the importance of voting in context with injustice and discrimination. Until that meeting, Hamer had not known blacks were allowed to register and vote. This prevalent belief proved to the early SNCC staffers the absolute necessity of reeducating Mississippi African Americans. Hamer, however, needed no further encouragement. She immediately volunteered to ride to Indianola, the county seat of Sunflower County, with Moses and 17 others, to attempt to register.[28]

The story of Hamer's first attempt to register and the subsequent retaliations, presents a typical illustration of the obstacles faced in Mississippi by black citizens attempting to gain voting rights. Hamer and the others rode in a bus to the county courthouse in Indianola. They had to take a literacy test that asked for their name and address. Local officials published this information in local newspapers and it was used to harass those black citizens who dared to register to vote. All of the volunteers with Hamer that day failed the registration test.[29] On the way home from Ruleville, a state trooper stopped the bus and arrested the driver because the bus was the wrong color. The plantation owner where the Hamer family sharecropped kicked Fannie Lou

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[27] Hampton and Fayer, 142.

[28] David Rubel, Fannie Lou Hamer: From Sharecropping to Politics (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Silver Burdett Press, 1990), 95, 96.

[29] Fannie Lou Hamer, "Tired of Being Sick and Tired: An Interview with Fannie Lou Hamer," Interview by Jerry DeMuth. The Nation 198 (June 1964), 549-551.

out because she would not withdraw her registration. She was shot at, while staying with friends in town, and then her husband faced eviction from the plantation. The Hamer family moved into a house with no running water but received a $9000 (nine thousand) water bill from the municipal government. The harassment did not deter Hamer. She returned to the registrar's office the next month and attempted to register again. She told the registrar, "You will see me every thirty days until I pass." Two months later she did pass, but still could not vote because she could not afford to pay a poll tax, another device used in Mississippi to prevent blacks from voting.[30]

Fannie Lou Hamer's subsequent devotion to the Civil Rights Movement would prove a shining example for Highlander Folk School's theories of self empowerment. Hamer became a field secretary for SNCC and began attending citizenship education teacher training workshops at Dorchester. Diane Nash accompanied Hamer on her first trip to Dorchester in March of 1963, and Hamer attended two more citizenship education classes the very next month. She improved her reading and writing skills by studying the Constitution and newspaper stories relevant to the Movement, and learned how to use these tools to return to Mississippi and help her neighbors see the connection between learning and civil rights.[31] Dorothy Cotton observed that Hamer "became the dynamic personality in the Mississippi group," and Andrew Young noticed that "Mrs. Hamer immediately took over a leadership role."[32] Fannie Lou Hamer, an unschooled Mississippi sharecropper, needed nothing more than the knowledge that first class citizenship was her right and there was no stopping her. As a revenge measure against such civil rights participation, Mississippi blocked federal aid to the poor. Hamer organized a

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30 Ibid.

31 Mills, 52-53.

32 Ibid.

program to distribute northern contributions of food and clothes. She used her work with this project as an opportunity to continue persuading people to join the civil rights effort and frequently told them, "If voting isn't important why does the white man come after us with guns to stop it?"[33]

Hamer vowed that the increasing violence against civil rights and voting efforts would not stop her. She told her neighbors in the Delta that she had often prayed for the Lord to give her a way to change things, meaning the oppressive burden of injustice, and that the Civil Rights Movement was the Lord's answer. She directly addressed the fear of violence that white Mississippians had used for a century to oppress its black citizens. She told her friends that God would take care of them. When asked if fear would drive her out of the Movement, she replied, "I told them if they ever miss me from the Movement and couldn't find me nowhere, come on over to the graveyard, and I'll be buried there."[34]

Hamer's courage was not idle rhetoric. In June 1963, she and a group of volunteers traveled to Johns Island to observe, first hand, how a successful citizenship education program operated. They left South Carolina to return to a Greenwood, Mississippi workshop, run by Robinson, and report on what they had learned.[35] The group stopped in the small town of Winona, Mississippi. Hamer stayed on the bus, but the others went into the station to test the segregated facilities. The local authorities arrested them all, including Hamer, who had never entered the bus station. The police took them to the county jail to beat them. Fourteen year old June Johnson recalled the experience, "The next thing I knew I was on the floor and they were all beating me with sticks and kicking me. One pulled me up and ... another came behind me and started

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[33] Hine, Trailblazers and Torchbearers 209.

[34] Zinn, 95; Hine, Trailblazers and Torchbearers 211-212.

[35] Bernice Robinson, "Report on Voter Registration and Political Education Workshop" HREC, Box 38, Folder 6.

choking me with a billy stick. By this time my eyes was all messed up, and my head was knocked open and I was just screaming and trying to protect myself some way."[36] Hamer fared no better and sustained injuries that permanently damaged her health, and suffered the added indignity of a vicious beating administered by a threatened black inmate, forced to attack her. Hamer heard one of the police officers say to the unwilling tormentor, "I want you to make that bitch wish she was dead ...."[37] The brutality did not dampen Hamer's belief in the Movement, and her fearlessness gave civil rights workers in Mississippi the hope that continued effort and education, could make a difference in even the most oppressive and tyrannical areas of the Deep South.

Regardless of the fearlessness of local leaders like Hamer, white violence, and the ensuing terror among the black eligible voters, effectively destroyed VEP in Mississippi. Civil Rights activists from SNCC, CORE, SCLC and the NAACP met to redefine the effort in Mississippi and they reactivated the Council of Federated Organization (COFO) to focus exclusively on the problems unique to Mississippi. The COFO prospectus called for a task force of size and strength to compel local governments to change, or to force the federal government to intervene to uphold the Constitution. Robert Moses of SNCC was named project director with Dave Dennis of CORE as his assistant and Aaron Henry of the NAACP became president of COFO.[38] COFO staffers, made up mostly of SNCC workers already active in Mississippi, set about the task of incorporating the small successes of VEP and the Highlander extension program, into a Mississippi movement.

Victoria Gray, another local leader who became active in the Civil Rights Movement through the VEP and Highlander style workshops, had

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36 Rubel, 90.

37 Ibid., 74; Zinn, 94.

38 Hampton and Fayer, 147; Holt, 48; Weisbrot, 95.

attempted to register to vote six times in 1963. After passing the test on the seventh attempt, she tried to attend Democratic party precinct meetings where the candidate selection process began. White party regulars banned Gray from attending county meetings. Knowing that the power to vote was useless without participating in candidate selection, Gray searched for a way to circumvent the exclusionary practice of the white Democrats. Gray's frustration spurred the idea of holding a parallel or mock election to prove that African American citizens were being denied access to democratic processes.[39]

The Freedom Vote, as the mock election was called, took place in the fall of 1963. COFO would present a candidate and hold an election inviting all eligible voters to participate. The central goal of the Freedom Vote was to dispel the apathy myth, or the widespread notion that blacks had no interest in voting. The Freedom Vote would also highlight potential black political strength and the process itself would lay a network of indigenous local leadership. If the black people of Mississippi were afraid to participate in politics, then the Freedom Vote would take politics to the people.[40]

The Freedom Vote project turned to Northern allies for help in recruiting volunteers to enter Mississippi and 'register' disenfranchised black citizens. Allard Lowenstein, a liberal political activist, had fought for civil rights for many years and traveled to Mississippi following the murder of Medgar Evers, a prominent NAACP leader in the Delta area. The trip proved shocking for Lowenstein, who later said, "It was as if the Constitution of the United States had been repealed in Mississippi .... People were being beaten and arrested and terrorized, and nobody seemed to know or care."[41]

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[39] Hampton and Fayer, 181.

[40] Rothschild, 20.

[41] William H. Chafe, Never Stop Running: Allard Lowenstein and the Struggle to Save American Liberalism (New York: Basic Books, 1993), 178.

Lowenstein agreed with Moses and other SNCC activists, that Mississippi needed dramatic and creative action to focus the nation's attention on the disregard for federal law in that state. Lowenstein believed the Freedom Vote offered just such an ingenuous maneuver and he volunteered to use his established Northern college connections to recruit volunteers.[42]

Lowenstein recruited over 100 volunteers from Yale and Stanford to canvass and register Freedom voters. Aaron Henry, the Freedom Vote candidate for governor, received 70,000 votes.[43] The Freedom Vote did draw national attention but it was quickly overshadowed by the death of John F. Kennedy. The Freedom Vote, however, garnered enough publicity to convince the project leaders that using a cadre of white college student volunteers, was a good idea.[44] The success of the Freedom Vote galvanized COFO into a commitment for a massive project for the summer of 1964, using the same methods, but including education and community centers designed to teach remedial literacy and citizenship.[45] The project itself, was dubbed the Mississippi Summer Project of 1964, but became known as 'Freedom Summer.' The educational centers, or Freedom Schools, expanded the concept of citizenship education to include the youth of individual communities who were too young to participate in political actions, such as the Freedom Vote.

As the COFO activists began working on the Freedom Vote, SNCC staffers persisted with efforts to establish citizenship education as a foundation for political activity. Jane Stembridge, a SNCC executive officer operating out of Atlanta, began developing a prospectus for a Southwide push for literacy and citizenship education. She contacted Horton for help, asking him to utilize his

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[42] Ibid., 180-181, 189.

[43] Holt, 36.

[44] Hampton and Fayer, 181; Raines, 287.

[45] Cleveland L. Sellers, Jr., "The Civil Rights Movement" (Ph. d. diss., University of North Carolina at Greensboro, 1987), 84, 98.

extensive contacts with people and institutions already proficient in this area. Stembridge emphasized the need to develop parallel institutions in the Deep South because of the extreme inadequacies of mainstream educational opportunities in these areas. Highlander staff replied with a list of possible contacts who could help, and once again offered SNCC any aid possible in the educational vein. Horton extended a personal invitation to SNCC staffers to attend Esau Jenkins' Southwide Voter Education Internship Program taking place on Johns Island and several attended, in order to participate actively in a successful citizenship education program.[46] SNCC continued efforts to broaden the citizenship education concept to incorporate the Deep South, and relied heavily on the methods learned from the network of similar projects, based on the original program on Johns Island.

The active workers of the Council of Federated Organizations, made up mostly of SNCC members, also sponsored citizenship education workshops, designed to continue the progress made in earlier efforts. In October of 1963, Bernice Robinson resigned from the extension program in Mississippi, partly due to the incessant violence against the civil rights participants in that state. Though her dedication and expertise would be sorely missed, the ability of those who had worked with her on workshop projects, to continue the program without her, gave testimony to the success of Robinson and Horton's goals of teaching others how to teach.[47]

Horton supervised a COFO sponsored workshop that took place in Greenville, Mississippi, in November of 1963. This workshop was completely run by SNCC and CORE activists who had learned their methods through

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[46] Jane Stembridge, "Letter to Myles Horton" 4 August 1963, HREC, Box 72, Folder 12; Conrad Browne, "Letter to Jane Stembridge" 15 August 1963, HREC, Box 72, Folder 12; Myles Horton, "Letter to John Lewis" 31 August 1963, HFS, Box 27, Folder 8; Myles Horton, " Letter to Bob Moses" 24 September 1963, HFS, Box 21, Folder 21.

[47] Myles Horton, "Letter to Bernice Robinson" 17 October 1963, HREC, Box 38, Folder 6.

Highlander Folk School and the Dorchester Center. This workshop dealt with current issues and specific methods of solving local problems, that community leaders themselves enumerated. These local issues included community health problems and the need for a community library, or access to the whites only library, as well as the need to set up classes to address remedial literacy and voter education. Horton's report on this workshop pointed out that "[This] COFO workshop was distinctive in that it was the first entirely run and planned by [workers] in Mississippi."[48]

After this workshop, Jim Forman wrote to Horton asking that Highlander and SNCC strengthen their ties in the area of citizenship education. Forman wrote, "There is no question in my mind that the increasing effectiveness of our Mississippi operation is due in part to these workshops. By comparison, we have not had similar workshops in others areas .... This is a tragic mistake. While we ourselves may be able to offer some guidance to each other and to new staff members, it is vital that someone with the experience ... assist us in this work. Consequently, I hope that we will be able to continue and develop more workshops."[49] Horton, believing the people working directly in Mississippi to be more in touch with specific needs, declined to broaden Highlander's role in SNCC's educational efforts, though he did agree to continue to make all of Highlander's resources available to SNCC and serve as a resource person at various SNCC sponsored workshops. SNCC continued their educational efforts in areas of the Deep South besides Mississippi, and during the winter of 1963, Horton served as supervisor for SNCC run workshops held in Selma, Alabama and Atlanta, Georgia.[50]

Through the winter of 1963 -1964, SNCC workshops began to focus on the

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[48] Myles Horton, "Highlander's Role in the Development of SNCC's Educational Program" June 1964, HREC, Box 71, Folder 12.

[49] James Forman, "Letter to Myles Horton" 22 November 1963, HFS, Box 27, Folder 8.

[50] Myles Horton, "SNCC Staff Workshops" 16 December 1963, HREC, Box 71, Folder 17.

upcoming Freedom Summer project. Under the sponsorship of the National Council of Churches, the Council of Federated Organizations planned a Curriculum Conference in New York City in March of 1964, to define the goals of the Schools in conjunction with the Summer Project and to design an agenda that would help the students meet those goals. Moses suggested that Horton's expertise in the area of education for citizenship, made his presence indispensable, and Horton rearranged his schedule to attend. COFO recognized the expertise of other long time citizenship education activists, and invited Septima Clark and Dorothy Cotton to join together with additional participants who "know and care about the educational side of the Mississippi Freedom Summer project...."[51] Horton, Clark, and Cotton joined Freedom School Director, Staughton Lynd, and a host of long time SNCC activists as well as educational experts, to develop specific methods to comply with the Freedom School prospectus, written by SNCC veteran, Charles Cobb.

Cobb stated that black "social paralysis" in Mississippi was due in large part to inadequate education. He proposed "to provide an educational experience for students which will make it possible for them to challenge the myths of our society." Conference leaders understood Cobb's belief that the Freedom Schools must free children's minds from white dictated curriculum to lay the ground work for future community leaders.[52] The unjustness of Mississippi's black school system was severe. In response to the 1954 Supreme Court decision, *Brown vs. the School Board of Topeka, Kansas,* which outlawed public school segregation, Mississippi built a few black schools where none had existed before. Financial disparity between black and white school systems illustrated the attitude toward education for African American

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[51] Lois Chaffee, "Letter to Myles Horton" 9 March 1964, HREC, Box 41, Folder 6; "Participants at the COFO Curriculum Conference" 21-22 March 1964, HREC, Box 41, Folder 6.

[52] Rothschild, 93,24; McAdam, 83.

children. In Holly Bluff, where blacks constituted the majority of the population, $191.17 per year was spent on each white student, with black students receiving $1.26.[53] Former governor of the state, James K. Vardaman, stated publicly, "Education would be a positive unkindness to [the black child] . It simply renders him unfit for the work he will be forced to perform."[54]

The Freedom Schools represented a concerted effort by civil rights activists to build up parallel, black educational institutions, to replace the unjust, white dominated system represented by Vardaman's sentiments. Vardaman's attitude toward educating African American children, illustrated the systematized method used by the racist white power structure, to deny black citizens even the most rudimentary method of overcoming their status as a permanent underclass. The Mississippi school system required its teachers to teach that slavery was a happy time for blacks, and voting was a privilege reserved for the white man. The Reconstruction Era of Southern history was simply deleted.[55] Over and above such indoctrination of white supremacist propaganda, the Mississippi school system insured that most black students would remain too ignorant to question these tenets. Many seemingly benign subjects were completely excluded from black curricula. These included all forms of higher math, foreign languages, art, drama or creative writing.[56]

Cobb's Freedom School Prospectus addressed all facets of the inadequacies of black education in Mississippi and called for remedial education in the basics, in conjunction with higher forms of learning, as well as dialogue on contemporary issues and leadership development. Cobb meant to give these children the tools with which to recognize ignorance as a form of

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53 Tracy Sugarman, Stranger at the Gates: A Summer in Mississippi (New York: Hill & Wang, 1966), 14; Rothschild, 99.

54 McCord, 36.

55 Holt, 98, 101, 103.

56 Rothschild, 102.

tyranny, and to enable them to forge a link between the reality of a "rotting shack" and the abstract concept of "a rotting America." Horton described Cobb's approach to the Freedom Schools in words that echoed his own consistent belief in the power of education. "Mississippi needed more, needs more, than that all Negroes 21 and over shall have the right to vote. The staff in Mississippi understood what Charlie [Cobb] was dreaming because they, too, were daring to dream that what could be done in Mississippi could be deeper, more fundamental, more far reaching, more revolutionary than voter registration alone: more personal, and ... more transforming, than a political program."[57]

Cobb's belief in the revolutionary power of education stemmed from extensive work in the educational programs set up by SNCC and modeled after the Highlander method forged by Horton, Clark, Robinson, Cotton and Jenkins.[58] Horton later commented that these early workshops changed "the whole concept of what could be done in Mississippi ...."[59] Echoing another of Horton's tenets (the belief that flexibility enables specific groups of people to come to grips with specific problems), Staughton Lynd later explained Cobb's approach to the Freedom Schools. "Our approach to curriculum was to have no curriculum and our approach to administrative structure was not to have any ...."[60] Lynd also tried to convey Septima Clark's ideas of community contacts, as an essential ingredient of success, to the volunteer teachers. "I kept repeating that when the Freedom School teachers got off the bus and found no place to sleep, despite previous assurances, and no place to teach, because the minister had gotten scared; when they were referred to an old

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57 Myles Horton, "Freedom Schools in Mississippi, 1964" n.d., HREC, Box 72, Folder 10.

58 Perlstein, 304.

59 Myles Horton, "Freedom Schools in Mississippi, 1964."

60 Staughton Lynd, "The Freedom Schools: Concept and Organization," Freedomways (Second Quarter, 1965): 302.

lady of the local church for help in finding lodging, and to a youngster hanging around the COFO office for help in finding students - as they did these things they would be building their schools ...."[61] But the Highlander seed that undoubtedly flourished in the Freedom Schools was the belief in self-empowerment through learning.

The Freedom Schools became the 'temple of questions' and volunteers urged students to question all facets of their society, and not simply accept the status quo as an unchangeable entity.[62] As students poured into the schools, far in excess of the original estimated numbers, SNCC trained teachers discovered that the majority of the youth craved education as a means of escape from the Deep South, rather than a tool for change. Using Highlander's problem solving techniques, the students slowly began to ask themselves why Mississippi could not change. Many teachers used Fannie Lou Hamer as a noteworthy example of a local citizen with opportunity to leave her despotic community, but instead, chose to stay and work for freedom in the very middle of a maelstrom of racist violence and oppression.

Gradually, these Freedom School students began to connect the esoteric to the concrete; to see that poetry or theater could communicate common rage, and focus energy on specific methods of change. Creative writing and foreign languages proved as popular as African American history. Students learned of a deep and rich vein of American history forbidden to them in the public schools.[63] Many used their newly tapped creativity to explore their own place in that history and the Civil Rights Movement, as exemplified in this poem written by a 16 year old Freedom School student.

You will not speak for fear of being heard,

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61 Ibid., 304.

62 Holt, 43.

63 Sally Belfrage, Freedom Summer (New York: The Viking Press, 1965), 89.

So you crawl in your shell and say, "Do not
disturb."
You think because you've turned me away,
You've protected yourself for another day.
But tomorrow surely will come.
And your enemy will still be there with
the rising sun.
He'll be there tomorrow as all tomorrows in
the past,
And he'll follow you into the future if
you let him pass.[64]

The Freedom Schools channeled this creative energy into devising specific methods to prevent a future Mississippi based on the past, using Myles Horton's two most important premises - communication and group problem solving. Most schools issued weekly newsletters to foster articulation, as well as exchange information with other students. Each school prepared platforms to present at a Freedom School Convention held in Meridian at the end of Freedom Summer.[65]

The students at the Convention coordinated committees to deal with particular issues and devise methods of problems solving, along with specific legislative proposals for common plights. These proposals addressed issues of immediate and commonplace need, such as adequate housing, desegregated public accommodations and an educational system that allowed for academic freedom and equal opportunities. The Convention participants did not limit themselves to Mississippi's unique brand of inequality, but also addressed

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64 Joyce Brown, "Freedom Schools in Mississippi," The Student Voice 64 (August 5): 2.
65 Lynd, 307.

United States foreign policy. The Foreign Affairs plenary committee demanded economic sanctions against the Republic of South Africa in response to government sanctioned apartheid, and called for the United States to withdraw support from dictatorships that ignored the will of the people.[66]

Staughton Lynd marveled at the seemingly limitless ability of these teenagers to use their broadened horizons to declare themselves a serious factor in the future of their nation. Lynd documented a moving illustration of the profound vision these children generated at the Freedom School Convention.

> With a joyful shout, the program was declared adopted. Then one young man asked for the floor. "Wait," he said. "I move that copies of this program be sent to every member of the Mississippi legislature, to President Johnson, and to the Secretary General of the United Nations (tumultuous applause), and -- wait! -- wait! a copy to the Library of Congress for its permanent records (Pandemonium)! [67]

Lynd believed that tomorrow's leaders would emerge from Freedom School students because they had discovered their own amazing abilities and the power of education. These Mississippi teenagers had discovered the source of education as well, that it is, above all, a meeting among people.[68]

Myles Horton's belief in education as the source of self empowerment bore fruit throughout the Civil Rights Movement, but nowhere as eloquently as in the Freedom Schools of Mississippi. Mississippi's younger generation of African Americans learned to 'challenge the myths of our society.' The

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[66] Ibid., 309.
[67] Ibid., 307.
[68] Ibid., 305.

Freedom Schools used Highlander's paradigm of political education to build a parallel educational institution that enabled the participants to confront the very sources of the cycle of fear and repression that Bernice Robinson and Robert Moses discovered had paralyzed the Civil Rights Movement in Mississippi. These teenagers came together and taught themselves how to cast off the mental stagnation of generations of oppression and fulfilled Horton's dream, passed through SNCC into the Mississippi Delta, that education itself is "more revolutionary than voter registration alone: More personal, and ... more transforming than a political program."[69]

[69] Myles Horton, "Freedom Schools in Mississippi, 1964."

Conclusion

By examining the very process by which a disfranchised segment of society achieved self-empowerment, this study extends the historiographical boundaries of the Civil Rights Movement. The historical literature of the Civil Rights Movement traditionally concentrates on people and events. Brave people instigated cataclysmic events, forming a social movement in the mid-twentieth century, which fundamentally changed the political and cultural nature of society. Yet, courageous people often instigate momentous events that do not lead to peaceful shifts in societal structure. In the past decade historians have searched for a less visible answer to explain the group experience known as the Civil Rights Movement. They have launched studies of the organizational infrastructures which sustained and nurtured the people and events of this social movement. Yet, foment for social change has often been sustained by strong organizational networks that could not bring about intrinsic changes in a complex society. An examination of the core method, used throughout the South to question and ultimately change the status quo, provides a new level of understanding the stimulus and the sustenance of the Civil Rights Movement, which surpasses the study of the SCLC, SNCC or Highlander Folk School, as institutions.

Highlander Folk School's citizenship education program helped transform the face of the South by providing the Movement with a workable model of self empowerment through education. This model furnished local leaders throughout the South with the means to initiate and maintain a political base capable of agitating the white supremacist power structure for favorable change. Myles Horton and Septima Clark, together with Bernice Robinson and Esau Jenkins, pioneered a curriculum structure that emphasized

flexibility and allowed "responses to oppression to grow out of the experiences of the oppressed."[1] Horton believed "the vitality of the educational process [itself] set in motion a liberating force that gave dignity and collective power to thousands of black people throughout the South."[2] Two decades later, Andrew Young echoed these sentiments and claimed Highlander's techniques provided the "foundation of the Civil Rights Movement. From 1960 to 1970, over 10,000 community leaders were trained. [The education program] covered every county in South Carolina, almost 90 counties in Georgia, the whole Black Belt of Alabama, Mississippi and northern Louisiana. These people are now grass-roots elected officials, and they got their introduction to politics through the [Highlander] program."[3]

Literally millions of black Southerners claimed their rights as American citizens in the 1960's. Highlander Folk School played a tremendous role in this dramatic revision of Southern society, yet the staff of Highlander did not set out to start or sustain a social movement. As Septima Clark explained it, "the staff at Highlander knew that the great need of the South was to develop more people to take leadership and responsibility for the causes in which they believed."[4] Bernice Robinson revealed that she personally "had no idea of the school spreading. We were just doing what Esau asked us to do for his people on Johns Island."[5] Horton accepted the integral role his methods played in the Civil Rights Movement, but claimed no credit for Highlander's historical part in the Movement. He reflected that "Highlander's main emphasis has always been on a very simple thing. It isn't just civil rights. It isn't just labor education. It isn't just community organization. It's

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1 Perlstein, 306.
2 Carawan, 199.
3 Heys, B4.
4 Clark, Freedomways 115.
5 Carawan, 202-203.

democracy. The arena changes. The goal never does."[6]

The decade from 1955 to 1965 saw Highlander enter many arenas of the Civil Rights Movement, spreading seeds of democracy. Horton believed this was a natural outcome of the Highlander method, because "the process that evolved was simple, easy to explain and could easily be adopted elsewhere, making the multiplying process easy."[7] This type of sentiment, an almost dismissive attitude, helps explain why the Highlander role in the Civil Rights Movement has gained little attention from historians. "Few, if any, major works on [that] crusade for social justice mention the Highlander Folk School, much less give it credit for shaping the character of the Movement."[8]

As Aldon Morris points out in The Origins of the Civil Rights Movement, his ground breaking study of the Movement's organizational infrastructure, "[The Highlander] program was revolutionary from an educational, political, and social standpoint and was directly involved in the mobilization of the ... movement."[9] Stepping outside of his own premise that the viability of a social movement depends on a hierarchical organizational structure, Morris acknowledges that citizenship education provided a key resource for mobilization and that "indigenous populations must be able to assume leadership roles" outside the structure of the formal organizations.[10] Highlander developed the framework of education which allowed local communities to grow into the demands of the national Civil Rights Movement, and establish formal civil rights organizations in areas without the traditionally strong activist groups that evolved into the vanguard of the Movement.

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6 Bledsoe, 246.
7 Carawan, 198.
8 Hughes, 242.
9 Morris, 141.
10 Ibid., 278, 280.

The Southern Christian Leadership Conference, affiliated with traditionally strong activist groups, grew to be dominant among civil rights organizations. Since the mid 1980's, more historians have followed the lead of Morris and studied the organizational structure of SCLC. Many histories of the SCLC, however, continue to be glorified biographies of Martin Luther King, Jr., and rarely mention Highlander, or acknowledge the original citizenship education staff as a vanguard of the Movement in their own right. Primary sources and archival material must be studied in order to discover that many of SCLC's strongest affiliates, such as the Southeastern Georgia Crusade for Voters or the Haywood County Civic League, came to the SCLC through Highlander and its citizenship program. Such glaring omissions occur because historians focus on the institutions themselves, rather than the process itself and the methods used by organizational activists to coalesce the goals of the institutions with the needs of the people they represent.

Histories of Highlander also tend to focus on the institution rather than the process. John M. Glen's Highlander: No Ordinary School, presents a comprehensive view of Highlander, but stops with the revocation of the original charter and the founding of the Highlander Research and Education Center. Glen explores Horton's methods within the context of the Folk School's role in the Civil Rights Movement, but fails to examine the path this paradigm took outside the direct control of Highlander's institutional structure. Glen claims in his Epilogue that Highlander "initiated a massive literacy campaign." Highlander did no such thing. Highlander developed a successful model of literacy and citizenship education that supplied other civil rights organizations with the foundation on which to initiate a massive literacy campaign. The study of that model allows historians to see the irreplaceable function these organizations served by providing Horton's ideas with a

formalized network from which to build a mass base, on a scale unmatchable by Septima Clark's "ripple effect."

The SCLC provided the Highlander idea with a viable means to reach thousands of Southerners whose daily lives would not have been affected by demonstrations and marches, but the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee took the citizenship school concept into an area almost untouched by the overlapping networks of organizations utilized by the SCLC. Mississippi represented a bastion of Southern racist terrorism that effectively nullified the meager progress in citizenship education cultivated by Bernice Robinson and Robert Moses.

Observers noted that areas with Robinson's extension programs in place, fared better than other communities, but the results were scant and the consequences for the participants often dire. John Dittmer's recent account of civil rights in Mississippi,[11] points out that activist efforts prior to Freedom Summer had created a slowly growing base of supporters, without whom SNCC would have been hard pressed to support the efforts of the white Northern volunteers they imported in 1964. Dittmer's work is a reaffirmation of the necessity of a grassroots base of support for any type of dramatic direct action, including Freedom Summer, which garnered massive outside support. Yet Dittmer failed to explore the influence of Highlander and Horton on the struggle in Mississippi.

By 1964, Horton's ideas had influenced two generations of civil rights activists. His direct and indirect influence on the Freedom School curriculum shaped the direction and character of the schools. Horton's pedagogical theories helped Mississippians expand voter registration drives into a method of community development based on knowledge and self awareness. The

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[11] John Dittmer, Local People: The Struggle for Civil Rights in Mississippi (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1994).

Highlander idea in the Freedom Schools provided another generation of civil rights activists with the tools needed to empower themselves through education.

Epilogue

The Highlander idea did not end with the conclusion of Freedom Summer in August of 1964. On the contrary, the process of self empowerment by means of education continued throughout and beyond the Civil Rights Movement, in conjunction with, as well as independent of, the institutions that introduced the methods into the Movement. The crux of the process, an emphasis on flexibility and decentralized local development, allowed the method to flourish dramatically when coupled with strong institutions. On the other hand, the Highlander idea lost visibility as its vehicular institutions lost strength. 1964 is an arbitrary cut off date, chosen because increasing radicalization of many Movement activists after this year began to impede Highlander's efforts to continue the momentum gained in the first years of the decade.

Throughout the decade, the Highlander Center itself continued to struggle with local racism and the widespread belief that Highlander fostered communism, but Highlander maintained its place as an influential civil rights institution by encouraging the same educational endeavors the Center had always fostered. Before his retirement in 1970, Horton began to return to his Appalachian roots and spend more time and energy on the social and economic concerns of the communities surrounding Highlander's new location in New Market, Tennessee. After Horton's retirement, Highlander foundered in its search for a new social movement, possibly because the new leaders strayed from Horton's tenets and initiated a quest for a stage with the drama of the Civil Rights Movement, rather than the small local venues on which Highlander built its foundation.[1]

In 1965, however, Highlander Center continued efforts to assist the

[1] John M. Glen, Highlander: No Ordinary School, 1932-1962 (Lexington: The University of Kentucky Press, 1988), 210-223.

educational endeavors of civil rights activists. The Center held Freedom School workshops for local Mississippians who wanted to continue the work begun during Freedom Summer. Participants learned ways to open and run their own schools, without the assistance of SNCC volunteers, and these local leaders left the workshops with confidence and enthusiasm. Many of the community run schools developed from Highlander's continuing workshops were eventually adopted by the Child Development Group of Mississippi, a federally sponsored kindergarten that became one of the working models for the Headstart Program, a lasting legacy of Lyndon Johnson's Great Society. Many former SNCC volunteers joined with local Mississippians to continue this work, but as the Highlander idea itself adapted and endured, another organization that had previously fueled the original system began to falter.[2]

The Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee gave the Highlander idea one of its most effective conduits into the heart of the Deep South. SNCC provided the Highlander idea with a multidimensional framework to test Horton's theories and methods, but as the decade progressed SNCC's increasingly radical leadership began to erode the delicate balance between method and structure, pioneered by Horton and early SNCC leaders such as James Forman and Robert Moses. Horton concluded that by 1966 SNCC possessed enough experienced leadership to assume responsibility for its own educational efforts and he began to turn down continued requests for Highlander led workshops, and offered the Center for SNCC retreats, and the Highlander personnel for resource use only. Correspondence between SNCC and Horton, during the latter part of the sixties, showed Horton's increasing frustration with SNCC's fragmentation and breakdown as a viable and dependable organization. Bernice Robinson and Septima Clark began to

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2 "Freedom Workshop reports and memos" 9 April 1965, HREC, Box 81, Folder 1; Polly Greenberg, The Devil Has Slippery Shoes: A Biased Biography of the Child Development Group of Mississippi (London: the Macmillan Company, 1969).

openly and vocally criticize the new direction of the splintering organization, calling the radical rhetoric a waste of energy.[3]

Robinson, Clark and Horton continued to expend their energy on the methods and efforts they believed contributed more than idle rhetoric to the struggle for equality. Septima Clark reported to the Highlander Board of Directors that 1965 was proving as productive for the SCLC Citizenship Education Program as years past. She claimed success from examples as small as a long dreamed of nursing degree for one Mississippi woman influenced by the program, to statistics on volunteers and new voters that grew in size every year. Clark's belief in the method she helped develop never faltered, even during cataclysmic historical events that completely overshadowed localized increments of progress, such as the emergence of the Black Power movement in 1965, or the assassination of Dr. King in 1968. Clark maintained that obscure local struggles for equality constituted the real meaning of the Civil Rights Movement by helping so many to achieve seemingly small, but concrete, improvements to their lives and communities. Clark continued working with the Citizenship Education Program until she retired from the SCLC in 1970 to serve on Charleston's School Board. Clark often pointed to her service on the same School Board that fired her in 1956 for her membership in the NAACP, as proof of the tremendous changes that took place in her own community due to patience and local efforts.[4]

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[3] Myles Horton, "Letter to Stokely Carmichael and Ruby Doris Robinson" 25 May 1966, HFS, Box 27, Folder 8; Bernice Robinson, "Report on SCLC Citizenship Education Program" 14 May 1965, HREC, Box 38, Folder 14.

[4] Septima Clark, "Report on SCLC Citizenship Education Program" 14 May 1965, HREC, Box 38, Folder 14; Heys, B-4.

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