

More Than Mrs Robinson: Citizenship Schools in Lowcountry South Carolina and Savannah, Georgia, 1957-1970

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Abstract

The first “citizenship school” (a literacy class that taught adults to read and write in order that they could register to vote) was established by Highlander Folk School of Monteagle, Tennessee on Johns Island, South Carolina in 1957. Within three years, the schools were extended across the neighboring Sea Islands, to mainland Charleston and to Savannah, Georgia. In 1961, after Highlander faced legal challenges to its future, it transferred the schools to the fledgling Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC), who extended the program across the South. Historians have made far-reaching claims for the successes and benefits of the schools. For example, they claim that they recruited inexperienced but committed people and raised them to the status of community leaders; that they encouraged civic cooperation and political activism and formed the “foundation on which the civil rights movement” was built and they argue that the schools were an unprecedented opportunity for women to develop as activists and as leaders. Yet, they base these claims on certain myths about the schools: that the first teacher Bernice Robinson was an inexperienced and uneducated teacher, that her class was a blueprint for similar ones and that Highlander bequeathed its educational philosophy to the SCLC program. They make claims about female participation without analyzing the gender composition of classes. This dissertation challenges these assumptions by comparing and contrasting programs established in Lowcountry South Carolina and in Savannah. It argues that not only was Robinson more skilled and better educated than historians have assumed, but that she was not typical of early teachers. On the Sea Islands, teachers tended to be established community leaders, such as ministers. In Savannah, they were young college students involved in direct action spaces. It analyzes the gender composition of classes, the gendered nature of the spaces in

which classes were taught, and the different models of black masculinity (based on class, location and generational identity) that the schools emulated. It argues that while Robinson may have been influenced by Highlander philosophy, the educational materials used in classes indicate that the schools drew more on Septima Clark's experience of African American educational history than on Highlander's ethos of education for social change. Local variations, including gender, class, location and age, also shaped teaching curricula. Finally, it examines the reasons for the schools' failure in the mid to late 1960s. Far from fading away because they became superfluous after the 1965 Voting Rights Act, the schools failed both because of factors at the administrative level (disorganization, mismanagement and gender conflict) and at the local (conflict between generations and local groups.)

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Introduction

Myles Horton, Highlander Folk School, Septima Clark and the citizenship schools are familiar topics for historians interested in the movements for social change, working-class rights and the African American freedom struggle. Founded by Myles Horton in 1932, Highlander Folk School used a range of participatory learning techniques, such as workshops, discussion groups and field trips to local pickets and strikes in order to train grassroots leaders to challenge injustice and introduce social change from the “bottom up.” The school has been received scholarly attention both because of its innovative teaching methods and the contributions it made to training grassroots social movements. Although the school had originally focused on training labour leaders, in 1954, Horton refused to stop working with unions expelled from the amalgamated American Federation of Labor/ Confederation of Industrial Organizations (AFL-CIO) for supposed Communist activity. Ostracized from the labor movement, Horto applied Highlander’s educational principles to support other causes and issues, including the nascent African American freedom struggle. One of Highlander’s most famous “graduates” was Rosa Parks, an NAACP secretary from Montgomery, Alabama, whose refusal to give up her seat on a city bus initiated the Montgomery Bus Boycott and the emergence of Martin Luther King as a civil rights leader.¹

¹ John Glen, Highlander: No Ordinary School (Knoxville, TN: University of Tennessee Press, 1996); Frank Adams, Unearthing Seeds of Fire: The Idea of Highlander (Winson-Salem, NC, 1975); Aimee Isgrig Horton, The Highlander Folk School: A History of its Major Programs, 1931-1962 (Brooklyn, NY: Carlson Publications, 1989); Carl Tjandersen, Education for Citizenship: A Foundation’s Experience (Santa Cruz, CA, 1980) pp 166-181.

The citizenship schools are possibly Highlander's most celebrated project and historians reiterate the same, appealing, account of these schools, their proliferation, and their contribution to the African American freedoms struggle. In 1954, Esau Jenkins attended a Highlander workshop and outlined his plans for an adult literacy school that would teach local people to read and write in order that they could pass South Carolina's literacy test and register to vote. Highlander had recently acquired a grant from the Emil Schwartzhaupt Foundation in order to develop local leadership and staff were looking for a suitable project to support. Over the next three years, Highlander staff trained local Johns Islanders in its democratic leadership techniques and helped to secure a space in which classes could be held. They also recruited the first teacher, Bernice Robinson, a beautician without formal teacher training but with a natural gift for engaging her students and an inherent understanding of Highlander's participatory teaching methods. When she stood in front of her first class in January 1957, Robinson told her students that she was not really going to be their teacher, but that they would learn together and teach one another. She designed a curriculum based around the skills that students wanted to learn, such as filling in mail order catalogues, reading the bible and writing letters to their children who were living and working away from home.²

Highlander apparently unleashed a powerful force in this rural community. Over the next three years, men and women in nearby communities saw how effective the Johns Island project was and resolved to establish similar schools in their own communities. The schools, in Myles Horton's words, "island-hopped" their way along the Sea Islands on the South Carolina coast as far as the city of Savannah, Georgia. As they were exported, they spread Highlander's democratic ethos across Southern communities. Citizenship school students and teachers learned

² Peter Ling, "Local Leadership in the Early Civil Rights Movement: The South Carolina Citizenship Education Program of the Highlander Folk School", *Journal of American Studies*, 29, 3 (1995), pp 399-422, pp 417-8.

sufficient reading and writing skills to register to vote and improve their own lives in concrete ways, such as finding better jobs. Graduates also became active in a range of civic, political and community activities. They joined civic associations, led voter registration drives and took part in protest activities.³

By 1960, Myles Horton was satisfied that Highlander had given local African Americans a toolkit they could use to develop a community project for themselves, but felt that the project was now “too big” for Highlander. Highlander also faced legal challenges to its own future because it was being investigated by the Tennessee courts for charges of communism, interracial living arrangements and fiscal mismanagement. In 1960, Horton arranged to transfer the program to the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC), which launched the Citizenship Education Project (CEP). Under SCLC, citizenship schools flourished across the Deep South. Again, citizenship school students and teachers became community activists and provided a groundswell of popular support for SCLC’s direct action campaigns. For example, sharecroppers and citizenship school trainees Fannie Lou Hamer and Victoria Grey founded the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party (MFDP).⁴ The CEP ran its course by the late 1960s, but it left a significant legacy across the South, as former students led Office of Economic Opportunity (OEO) projects, such as Head Start and ran for political office.⁵

Not surprisingly, these accounts of events are attractive to historians of Highlander, SCLC and of women in the civil rights movement. For Highlander’s historians, this story of the schools demonstrate that Myles Horton bequeathed an ethos of grassroots leadership and

³ Myles Horton, The Long Haul: An Autobiography (New York, NY: Doubleday, 1990), p 105

⁴ Charles Payne, I’ve Got the Light of Freedom: The Organizing Tradition and the Mississippi Freedom Struggle (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1995), pp 278-9, John Dittmer, Local People: The Struggle for Civil Rights in Mississippi (Chicago, Urbana, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1995), pp 190-210, Deanna Gillespie, “They Walk, Talk and Act Like New People: Black Women and the Citizenship Education Program, 1954-1970,” (Unpublished PhD Dissertation, Binghamton University, New York, 2008), pp 230-8.

⁵ Ling, “Local Leadership,” pp 420-2.

participatory education not only to Sea Island communities but to a highly prominent civil rights organization.⁶ For scholars of SCLC, the schools are a redeeming, democratic feature in an organization usually known for hierarchical, charismatic leadership centered on Martin Luther King Jr.⁷ Women's historians point to African American women who led the CEP (Septima Clark and Dorothy Cotton), taught schools (Bernice Robinson) and emerged as local leaders by taking part in Highlander-inspired training (Fannie Lou Hamer).⁸ With few exceptions, scholars cite the citizenship schools as an example to support their analysis, without challenging the prevailing myths that surround the program. They assume that because the schools grew out of Highlander Folk School that they used similar teaching methods and leadership training techniques. They seize upon the fact that Bernice Robinson lacked formal teacher training to assert that the sole quality teachers needed was a commitment to social justice and affinity with

⁶ See Bob Edwards and John McCarthy, "Review: Social Movement Schools," Sociological Forum 7, 3 (September 1992), pp 541-550; Aldon Morris, Origins of the Civil Rights Movement: Black Communities Organizing for Change (New York: Gollanzc, 1984), pp 139-140.

⁷ Payne, I've Got the Light of Freedom, pp 3, 77; Morris, Origins of the Civil Rights Movement, pp 238-9.

⁸ For studies of Clark's life and work, see Grace Jordan McFadden, "Septima P; Clark and the Struggle for Civil Rights," in Vicki L. Crawford, Jacqueline Anne Rouse and Barbara Woods, Women in the Civil Rights Movement: Trailblazers and Torchbearers (Bloomington and Illinois: Carlson, 1990), citation on p 96. Katherine Mellon Charron, "Teaching Citizenship: Septima Poinsette Clark and the Transformation of the African American Freedom Struggle," (Unpublished PhD Dissertation, Yale University, 2005); Carolyn P Jenkins, "Septima Clark and the Citizenship Schools: Implications for Critical Pedagogy," (Unpublished EdD Dissertation, The University of South Carolina, 2005); Gail Curtis Greene, "Working Towards Literacy for a New Social Order: Human Agency and the Curriculum Work of Septima Poinsette Clark, 1898-1987," (Unpublished EdD Dissertation, The University of South Carolina, 2001). Belinda Robnett argued that citizenship schoolteachers fit her model of female bridge leaders because they "bridged" their students to SCLC and the civil rights movement. Lynn Olson suggested that the program trained hitherto inexperienced women to become community leaders, while Joe Street suggests that female citizenship schoolteachers transgressed traditional gender roles by discussing politics. Donna Langston and Sandra Oldendorf argue that women at Highlander and on the Sea Islands formed the program, while Deanna Gillespie focuses on local women, their contribution to the program and the opportunities they derived through participating in the schools. Finally, Rhea Estelle Lathan argued that women applied religious "call and response" practices to their school teaching. Belinda Robnett, How Long, How Long: African American Women in the Struggle for Civil Rights (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), especially p 92; , (Gainsville, Florida: Florida University Press, 2007), p 30. Lynn Olson, Freedom's Daughters: The Unsung Heroines of the Civil Rights Movement (New York, NY: Scribner, 2001), pp 213-224; Sandra Oldendorf, "The South Carolina Sea Island Citizenship Schools, 1957-1961 and Donna Langston, "The Women of Highlander," in Crawford et al., Women in the Civil Rights Movement. Rhea Estelle Lathan, "Writing a Wrong: A Case of African American Adult Literacy Action on the South Carolina Sea Islands, 1957-1962," (Unpublished PhD Dissertation, The University of Wisconsin, 2006), pp 87-96

local people. They argue that the majority of citizenship school teachers, students and organizers were women, without analyzing the gender composition of individual classes and programs. They assume that Myles Horton happily relinquished the program because Highlander staff lacked the capacity to sustain it as it spread across the South and because he was confident that under SCLC, it would continue to use Highlander's tried and tested methods. They cite a handful of examples of former teachers and students going on to local politics or social welfare activities as "evidence" that the schools had a lasting legacy in the post civil rights era. Most crucially, they argue that the earliest school that Bernice Robinson taught in the Johns Island Progressive Club – its organization, ethos, teaching methods and legacy - was a blueprint for other schools that developed across the South without considering variations between and within citizenship school programs. Most accounts end with the 1961 transfer and many do not analyze any schools beyond the Sea Islands.

Some recent work has expanded the scope of scholarly treatment of the citizenship schools. David Levine's 1999 doctoral dissertation analyses the history of the schools from their origins both in Highlander Folk School and the cultural traditions of the Sea Islands through to their expansion, transfer to SCLC and their legacy. Levine uses program records from SCLC and Highlander's archives, supplemented with oral history interviews with former students and teachers from across Georgia, Mississippi and South Carolina. Levine's dissertation offers the first extensive account of the SCLC years and of schools beyond South Carolina and Mississippi. However, the broad scope of his research makes it impossible to analyze individual schools in detail, or to observe similarities and differences between them. He also gives only brief accounts

of significant events and processes in the schools' history, such as the transfer from Highlander to SCLC and the decline of the schools by 1970.⁹

Katherine Mellon Charron, in her dissertation on Septima Clark, includes narrative accounts of schools established in Montgomery and Huntsville, Alabama; Savannah, Georgia during the Highlander stage of the schools' history; and in Mississippi during the SCLC years. She also analyzed Septima Clark's experience as a woman in SCLC. Her intention, however, was to highlight Septima Clark's role in developing the schools; her contribution to the civil rights movement; and her relationship with her male colleagues. She was not situated to recognize that although local people took Clark's advice, they often made citizenship school programs their own, especially where so many local supervisors were male, like Esau Jenkins and Benjamin Mack in South Carolina and Hosea Williams in Savannah.¹⁰

Most recently, Deanna Gillespie's dissertation includes detailed case studies of citizenship school programs in three locales: South Carolina, southeastern Georgia and Mississippi. She makes important contributions to the narrative of the citizenship schools. She draws attention to schools, programs and individuals in southeastern Georgia, which had previously been understudied and she includes an unprecedented account of the transfer of the program in a local community. She also recognizes that schools took place in different local contexts. However, she suggests that African American women continued to create schools very much like Bernice Robinson's first class on Johns Island despite varying local conditions. Most problematically, she asserts that through taking part in citizenship schools, black women in

⁹ "Citizenship Schools," (Unpublished PhD Dissertation, The University of Wisconsin, Madison, 1999), passim.

¹⁰ Charron, "Teaching Citizenship," passim.

Savannah carved out roles for themselves within a movement usually dominated by men.¹¹ In fact, this dissertation will demonstrate that, contrary to established wisdom about the citizenship school program as a whole, in Savannah, black men featured prominently as citizenship school organizers, students and (occasionally) teachers. Indeed, the involvement of black men, with specific class and generational backgrounds, determined the way that schools were organized, the topics they taught, and the spaces in which they operated.

This dissertation argues that citizenship schools changed as they were extended across the Sea Islands, introduced in Savannah, and transferred to SCLC. It is not true that Bernice Robinson's first class on Johns Island was replicated across the South and, hence, allowed for a groundswell of Highlander-inspired democratic leadership that formed the "foundation" on which the civil rights movement was built.¹² Classes and programs varied both because of the relative levels of support Highlander and SCLC offered them and because of the nature of local resources such as the personalities of citizenship school organizers, the individuals chosen to teach classes, the spaces in which they were held and the gender composition of the staff and students. Thus, the study will analyze differences in teaching materials and styles, the kinds of social activities that accompanied citizenship school training, and the sustainability of schools. A single work or volume cannot do justice to the breadth and range of citizenship schools organized between 1957 and 1970, so I focus on two case studies: Lowcountry South Carolina and Savannah. These were two of the earliest programs, and organizers had experience working with both Highlander and SCLC staff. Savannah and Charleston had many similarities in terms

¹¹ "They Walk, Talk and Act Like New People," passim, "They Walk, Talk, and Act Like New People" Citizenship Education in Southeastern Georgia, 1960-1965," in Charles Payne and Carol Sills Strickland, Teach Freedom: Education for Liberation in the African-American Tradition (New York, NY, London: Teachers College Press, 2008).

¹² Andrew Young, An Easy Burden: The Civil Rights Movement and the Transformation of America (New York, NY: Harper Collins, 1994), p 144.

of racial culture, geography and economy; however, the citizenship schools were very different because of the personalities and resources involved.

In these case studies, I trace the long histories of these programs. While historians have hitherto ended their analysis of the Sea Island program in 1961, I examine the history of both programs from their inception to their eventual decline. I demonstrate that Esau Jenkins' Lowcountry South Carolina program was not "transferred" from Highlander to SCLC in the same way as it was in Savannah; I examine Highlander's continued interest in Jenkins and Johns Island after the transfer; and I account for the decline of local programs at different times in different communities. Not only does this approach enable a fuller history of the programs, but it also means that similarities and differences can be examined more accurately, and it highlights the relative importance of external support and local conditions.

Second, I use gender analysis to compare and contrast the two programs. Historians of the citizenship schools often discuss gender to some extent, but they rarely go beyond recognizing that women made valuable contributions to the program and that Septima Clark and Bernice Robinson complained about their treatment by male colleagues at both Highlander and SCLC.¹³ This study follows the argument that gender history is more than women's history and should include men and masculinity too.¹⁴ It examines the contributions that women and men made in different locales and at different levels and the relationships between them. It studies the ways in which gender intersected with race, class, location (urban and rural) and the less

¹³ Olson, *Freedom's Daughters*, p 233; Robnett, *How Long, How Long*, pp 94-5; Levine, "Citizenship Schools," pp 219-224; Charron, "Teaching Citizenship," pp 547-551; Greene, "Working Towards Literacy," pp 123; Laverne Gyant and Deborah Attwater, "Septima Clark's Rhetorical and Ethnic Legacy: Her Message of Citizenship in the Civil Rights Movement," *Journal of Black Studies*, (1996), 26, 5, pp 577-592, especially pp 587-90.

¹⁴ See especially Peter Ling and Sharon Monteith, "Introduction," in *Gender and the Civil Rights Movement* (Rutgers, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2004, 2nd edition; 1st edition Garland Publishing, 1999), p 4.

often analyzed category of age and generational identity to shape different kinds of masculinities seen throughout the citizenship school program.

The dissertation begins with a discussion of the background to the citizenship schools. The assumption that the schools embodied the ethos and philosophy of Myles Horton and Highlander Folk School has been perpetuated at least in part because of the school's role in pioneering the early schools. However, I will demonstrate that the schools also grew out of pre-existing organizations with their own interests, ethos and resources. In Chapter 2, I explain why these pre-existing resources, combined with different levels of investment by Highlander, created different kinds of programs in Lowcountry South Carolina and Savannah. I focus on the teachers selected, the spaces in which they taught classes, and the gendered character of the schools and programs. In Chapter 3, I continue to examine the interlocking relationship between external support (relationships with Highlander and SCLC) and local conditions (such as local conflict) in explaining differences resulting from the transfer of the citizenship school program in each community.

Chapter 4 illustrates changes to the citizenship school program, not only between local communities, but before and after the transfer to SCLC and over the course of the 1960s. I examine teaching materials used by students and in training workshops, supplemented with oral history evidence, to analyze what was being taught in the citizenship classes themselves.

Although historians have implied that the schools were a continuation of Highlander's participatory education for social change, I demonstrate that the school curricula reflected the interests and experience of black women like Septima Clark and Ethel Grimball who had been trained in public school systems. The schools had more in common with Booker T.

Washington's ethos of education for self improvement and racial uplift than with Myles Horton's

principles of education for social change. Yet again, gender, class and generational characteristics of teachers and students affected what students asked to learn and the ways in which teachers delivered their classes. Finally, I will examine the decline of the program at the administrative level and in both communities in the mid to late 1960s. Few historians have studied the decline in any depth and it might seem logical to assume that they ran their course simply because the 1965 Voting Rights Act meant that tackling voter restrictions through literacy tests was no longer required. On the contrary, after 1965, schools were required to educate African Americans about the benefits they could acquire from political participation and the decline of the schools was a disservice to newly enfranchised voters. Yet, poor administration and office politics strained SCLC's relationships with funding bodies, with local people and between male and female staff and undermined both available funding for, and local commitment to, the schools. Meanwhile, at the community level, conflict between different personalities, social groups and generations subverted local programs as well.

There is far more to the story of citizenship schools than the first Highlander-sponsored class taught by Bernice Robinson in the Johns Island Progressive Club. The comparative case studies in this dissertation are far from the full story either; however, they are a useful starting point for understanding the differences between local programs and over time. From the outset, citizenship school organizers drew on different resources, depending on the local context and character of their communities and resources available in pre-existing organizations. These pre-existing organizations and resources are the subject of the first chapter.

Chapter One

Roots of the Citizenship Schools: The “Early Civil Rights Movement” in Charleston and Savannah

In order to understand the development of citizenship schools, variations between them and their contributions to the civil rights movement, it is necessary to begin by explaining the context in which they developed. In subsequent chapters, I dispute the established assumptions that local people eagerly seized the Highlander model of education for social change; that the schools spread rapidly across the South Carolina Lowcountry region and that they taught a curriculum that encouraged students to challenge the status quo and become political activists. In South Carolina and Savannah, schools usually only took root when there were interested local people, often experienced community activists, who were willing to implement them. Local teachers designed school curricula, often drawing on their own educational experiences as much as on their Highlander and Dorchester training. Local programs varied in length and left different legacies. Because local conditions explain local variations in the programs, it is logical to look at the local *origins* of the schools as well.

The chapter will begin by critiquing the historiography of the citizenship schools. Compared to work on subjects such as the content of classes and the failure of the program, the historiography of the origin of the citizenship schools is relatively rich and varied. However, historians have not explained adequately how citizenship schools embodied, or changed from, the “early civil rights movements” out of which they developed or how different local movements created different kinds of citizenship school programs. I will trace the differences

between “early civil rights movements” in both locales. I will first examine the histories of the local NAACP branches and their relative contributions to citizenship school programs, then explore the ways in which political and economic changes in both cities and states created “opportunities” for emerging citizenship school programs and finally, consider the gendered character of the “early civil rights movement.”

Reading the Citizenship Schools' History

Until recently, scholarly accounts of the citizenship schools took one of two forms. Historians of Highlander Folk School and its founder Myles Horton argued that by devising schools, training teachers and developing students' workbooks, Highlander staff bequeathed to the fledgling Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) an educational program that trained leaders to implement social change. The underlying assumption in such accounts is that the citizenship schools were an outgrowth of Highlander's work and Myles Horton's educational philosophy.¹⁵ Meanwhile, civil rights scholars argued that citizenship schools, by training local, grassroots leaders and carving out opportunities for female participation, were in many ways a redeeming feature in SCLC, an organization usually noted for its hierarchical, overwhelmingly male, leadership. Again, this argument rests on the assumption that Highlander bequeathed to SCLC its philosophy of running workshops and classes for people to develop solutions to their problems and to develop as grassroots leaders.¹⁶

¹⁵ Horton, Long Haul; Myles Horton and Paulo Friere, We Make the Road By Walking: Conversations on Social Change (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 1990); Glen, Highlander, Adams, Unearthing Seeds of Fire, Horton, Highlander Folk School, Tjandersen, Education for Citizenship, pp 166-181.

¹⁶ Payne, I've Got the Light of Freedom, pp 3, 77; Morris, Origins of the Civil Rights Movement, pp 238-9; Sara Evans and Harry Boyte, Free Spaces: The Source of Democratic Change in America (Chicago, IL and London: University of Chicago Press, 1986), pp 64-7.

Over time, however, these assumptions have been challenged. Historians of women argue that Septima Clark was at least as influential in the citizenship schools' formative years as Myles Horton had been, and that she sustained the program even when support was not forthcoming from her male colleagues in SCLC or Highlander. Recognizing Clark's significance, historians have considered the range of influences on her career and early life, including her experience as a civil rights activist in her native Charleston and her relationship with Judge J. Waties and Elizabeth Waring. Unlike Horton, Clark was trained in the South Carolina public school system and, hence, potentially had very different experiences and ideas to bring to the citizenship school program than those espoused at Highlander Folk School. Yet, although historians recognize that she did not always agree with Horton, they do not evaluate how these differences may have informed the ideology and teaching style of local citizenship schools.¹⁷ Nor do they consider whether other local female citizenship schoolteachers or students had prior experience as civil rights activists in their communities.

A limited number of historians have begun to recognize that there were other influences on the nascent citizenship schools than Myles Horton and Highlander. Peter Ling acknowledged that political and economic developments, such as the opening of the previously all-white primaries, new job opportunities in the city and government policies aimed at securing "separate and equal" schools, encouraged local civic action.¹⁸ David Levine, meanwhile, departed from standard accounts of the citizenship schools' origin when he argued that the development of citizenship schools was due as much to local conditions on the South Carolina Sea Islands as to

¹⁷ Septima Clark, *Echo in My Soul* (New York, NY: E.P. Dutton and CO., 1962); Septima Clark and Cynthia Stokes Brown, *Ready From Within: A First Person Narrative* (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 1990); Robnett, *How Long, How Long*, especially p 92; Olson, *Freedom's Daughters*, pp 213-224; Oldendorf, "The South Carolina Sea Island Citizenship Schools," McFadden, "Septima P. Clark and the Struggle for Civil Rights and Langston, "The Women of Highlander," in Crawford et al., *Women in the Civil Rights Movement*, Charron, "Teaching Citizenship," Jenkins, "Septima Clark and the Citizenship Schools," Greene, "Working Towards Literacy."

¹⁸ "Local Leadership," pp 403-5

the commitment and interest of Highlander Folk School. He argued that the program was able to develop because the Sea Islands were relatively isolated, that their inhabitants included relatively large numbers of independent landowners who could act without fear of economic reprisal, and because there were several pre-established community institutions and social practices, including participatory storytelling and praise meetings. Yet, while he gives a detailed background to the origins of the first Sea Island schools, he does not explain in anything like the same detail the background to citizenship schools in other regions, towns and communities.¹⁹

Deanna Gillespie built upon Levine's narrative on the origin of the schools. She reiterated the significance of the islands' communal traditions to the origins of the citizenship schools; discussed the role that teachers like Septima Clark played in civic life both on the islands and in the city of Charleston; and acknowledged that the NAACP had a presence in the city prior to 1954. Although she provides an important narrative account of the "early civil rights movement" in Charleston County, she does not analyze or contrast the relative contributions that different local organizations and Highlander Folk School made to the development of citizenship schools. More significantly, in her discussion of Savannah's citizenship schools, she explained that

By the time Robinson arrived in 1960, Savannah's community had mobilized. The citizenship schools would not provide the spark for the local movement as they had on the Sea Islands. Instead they would keep pace with a movement that was already in motion.

She provides overview to the history of the NAACP in the city and explains that in 1960, the local branch was overseeing a direct action protest led by local people. However, Gillespie's dissertation presents the citizenship schools as alternative spaces in a city in the

¹⁹ David Levine, *Citizenship Schools* (Unpublished PhD Dissertation, The University of Wisconsin, 1999); "Birth of the Citizenship Schools: Entwining the Struggles for Literacy and Freedom," *History of Education Quarterly*, 44, 3 (Fall 2004), pp 379-414.

midst of a direct action protest led by men. Therefore, while she appreciates that there was a history of civil rights protest in the city, she does not consider the influence of pre-existing organization on the schools themselves.²⁰

This chapter will not merely describe the precedents to citizenship schools, but analyze the ways in which they made the development of citizenship schools more or less likely, and how they shaped the kinds of programs that would develop. Highlander successfully established schools in these communities because in some communities there were individuals and organizations sympathetic to voter registration and educational programs that had the capacity and resources to implement them and not because its democratic educational model was so persuasive and influential that local people eagerly seized and implemented it. There were also differences between the pre-existing organizations, individuals and local conditions in Lowcountry and Savannah which influenced the ways in which citizenship schools were taught and organized.

In discussing the “early history” of civil rights program that began in the 1950s, I am drawing on traditions in both social movement theory and civil rights historiography which trace the links between different social movement organizations. Social movement scholars cite various and wide-ranging examples where people who join a social movement often have prior experience in other organizations and pre-existing ties to their fellow activists.²¹ Civil rights

²⁰ Gillespie, “They Walk, Talk and Act Like New People,” pp 13-140, citations on pp 95, 140.

²¹ For example, Jo Freeman has proposed that a pre-existing communication network of like-minded people within the social base of a movement is necessary to form a new social movement when a crisis occurs or when one or more persons disseminate a new idea. Like Sara Evans, she argues that such a network was created among women within the civil rights and New Left movements, which was then mobilized for the women’s liberation movement. Jo Freeman, “The Origins of the Women’s Liberation Movement,” *The Journal of American Sociology* (January 1973), 77, 4, pp 792-811; Sara Evans, *Personal Politics* (New York: Vintage Books, 1980). Similarly, .McAdam found that ninety percent of the white students who participated in SNCC’s 1964 Freedom Summer had experienced some form of activism and argued that students who had a close affinity with other social groups had “strong social constraints” that dissuaded them from leaving the project. *Freedom Summer* (New York, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), pp 51, 63-4. Kate Dossett has recently found that by black women who participated

historians have made similar assertions when they argue for a “long civil rights movement,” where “modern civil rights organizations” like SNCC and SCLC had precursors at least as early as the New Deal Era.²² However, a problem with “long civil rights” histories is the tendency to depict a progressive development of ever-burgeoning social movements prior to 1954 and to imply that modern civil rights movements “flowed” from older ones. Chapter Three will demonstrate that there was often considerable tension at the local level between NAACP officials who had been active for several years and newer local associations as well as national organizations, like SCLC, who attempted to engage with local protests. “Early civil rights” organizations fluctuated in membership and significance and sometimes became inactive. It is therefore important not simply to note the existence of an “early” civil rights movement, but to understand the trajectories in which they recruited and retained members and developed various tactics and approaches, and to understand their position in local communities by the time that Highlander staff recruited them to citizenship training workshops.

The NAACP in the “Early Civil Rights Movement”

In many cases, work on the “early civil rights movement” has called attention to the history and work of the National Association of Colored People (NAACP.) Aldon Morris, for example, credits the organization as being the “dominant black protest organization” prior to the “outbreak of the modern civil rights movement.” It waged campaigns against voting restrictions, such as white primaries and the poll tax; unequal, segregated schools; lynching and unfair

in YWCA branches or the National Council of Negro Women in the 1920s and 1930s went on to work for civil rights organizations or in political bodies. *Bridging Race Divides* (Tallahassee: University Press of Florida, 2008), pp 63, 105-6.

²² Jacqueline Dowd Hall delivered a succinct argument for a “long civil rights movement” in her 2004 address to the Organization of American Historians. See “Long Civil Rights Movement and the Political Uses of the Past,” *The Journal of American History* 91.4 (2005), pp 1233-1263.

employment practices through legal action and public relations campaigns.²³ Manfred Berg argues that the NAACP has been unfairly neglected in civil rights historiography and defends its goal of racial integration through legal and political means as being “distinctly radical, even revolutionary, by most white Americans” during the organization’s history.²⁴ Meanwhile, most local studies devote one or more of their early chapters to the work of NAACP branches prior to 1960s. This may be partly because the NAACP’s extensive archival records mean that this information is more accessible to researchers than that of other local organizations, but it is also due to Ella Baker’s assiduous work as Director of Branches developing a grassroots constituency for the Association.²⁵

Yet, while the NAACP was the most prominent national civil rights organization in the early civil rights period, associations that were not explicitly concerned with racial equality or legal and political rights were also important precursors to modern civil rights movements. For example, historians argue that labor unions were a forerunner to civil rights organizations. Claiming on the one hand that the “long civil rights movement” should be seen as a move for economic justice and democracy as well as legal and political rights, historians also argue that

²³ Origins of the Civil Rights Movement, pp 12-14. For studies of active NAACP local branches and State Conferences, see Adam Fairclough, Race and Democracy: The Civil Rights Struggle in Louisiana: 1915-1972 (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1995), p xiv-xv, Lee Sartain, Invisible Activists: Women of Louisiana’s NAACP and the Struggle for Civil Rights, 1915-1945 (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 2007), Stephen Tuck, Beyond Atlanta: The Struggle for Racial Equality in Georgia, 1940-1980 (Atlanta, Georgia: University of Georgia Press, 2001), Peter Lau Democracy Rising: South Carolina and the Fight for Black Equality Since 1865 (Lexington, KY: University of Kentucky Press, 2006), Dittmer, Local People, William Chafe, Civilities and Civil Rights: Greensboro, North Carolina and the Black Struggle for Freedom (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990); Timothy Tyson, Radio Free Dixie: Robert F Williams and the Roots of Black Power (Chapel Hill, N.C.: University of North Carolina Press, 1999), John A Salmond, “Flag Bearers for Integration and Justice: Local Civil Rights Groups in the South, 1940-1954,” in Glenn Feldman (ed.), Before Brown: Civil Rights and White Backlash in the Modern South (Tuscaloosa, Alabama: University of Alabama Press, 2004), pp 222-237 and Michael Honey, Micheal Honey, Southern Labor and Civil Rights (Champaign, Il: University of Illinois Press, 1993) that African Americans developed political interests and relevant skills in local labor organizations that they applied to civil rights organizations too.

²⁴ “The Ticket to Freedom: The NAACP and the Struggle for Black Political Integration (Gainseville, FL: University Press of Florida, 2005), citation on p 9.

²⁵ See Barbara Ransby, Ella Baker and the Black Freedom Movement: A Radical Democratic Vision (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2003).

African Americans gained skills, experience and contacts through labor organizing that facilitated future civil rights activism.²⁶ Others suggest that histories of the “long civil rights movement” should include interracial organizations like the Southern Council of Human Welfare (SCHW), the Southern Regional Council and the YWCA, despite the internal segregation in many such associations.²⁷

Social movement scholars also point out that precedents for social action can lie in grassroots groups with only loose ties to formal social movement organizations that coordinate movement activity. Sidney Tarrow, for example, has demonstrated that large-scale protests organized by professional social movement organizations tend to rely less on mass membership, as the NAACP sought to cultivate, but on social networks that could be mobilized at opportune times.²⁸ Other theorists have distinguished between different forms of formal movement organizations that initiate and create these networks. John McCarthy distinguished between “independent” local volunteer or “grassroots” groups and those groups tied to national or, increasingly in the 1980s and 1990s, international professional Social Movement Organizations (SMOs).²⁹ Hanspeter Kriesi, moreover, has defined different forms of movement organizations

²⁶ For example, Philip Foner argues that the major precedent for the emergence of civil rights organizations was the activities of the Negro-Labor Alliance in the World War II era, Organized Labor and the Black Worker, 1619-1973 (New York, NY: Praeger, 1974), while Robert Korstad and Michael Honey explain that working class African Americans in Winston-Salem, North Carolina and in Memphis, Tennessee gained their first experience of political action through labor activism. Robert Korstad, Civil Rights Unionism: Tobacco Workers and the Struggle for Democracy in the Mid Twentieth-century South (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2003), Honey, Southern Labor and Civil Rights.

²⁷ Patricia Sullivan, Days of Hope: Race and Democracy in the New Deal Era (Chapel Hill, NC, London: University of North Carolina Press, 1996), John Egerton, Speak Now Against the Day: The Generation Before the Civil Rights Movement (New York, NY: Knopf, 1994), Morton Sosna, In Search of the Silent South: Southern Liberals and the Race Issue (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1977).

²⁸ Power in Movement: Social Movements, Collective Actions and Politics (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994).

²⁹ “Constraints and Opportunities in Adopting, Adapting and Inventing,” in Doug McAdam, John McCarthy and Mayer Zald, Comparative Perspectives on Social Movements: Political Opportunities, Mobilizing Structures and Cultural Framings (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp 141-151. This builds on older work which defined “social movements” as broad coalition working for social and/or political change using some non-institutional methods, such as demonstrations and marches, and social movement organizations (SMOs), which are

according to the roles and contributions that they make. Pertinently, he defined “movement associations” as self-help and/or voluntary organization that meet the needs of a social movement’s constituency, mobilize support and commitment for social movements, but do not pursue political goals themselves.³⁰ For example, Christina Greene noted that a number of these organizations were active in Durham, North Carolina, including “the Cosmetology Club, the Merry Wives, the Model Mothers Club, the Friendly Circle Club of St Joseph’s African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Church, the Pearsontown Needle Craft Club, and the West End Jolly Sisters.” Although “political protest was not the primary purpose of many or even most of these groups, African American women in Durham, as elsewhere, saw no need to separate their community work or even their social and leisure activities from racial justice work.” Social groups served as an “invisible network of grassroots supporters for black demands.”³¹

A key distinction between the precursors to citizenship schools in Savannah and Charleston is the relative significance of the NAACP and other organizations to the development of citizenship schools. In the former, the NAACP branch was in the midst of forming a voter registration organization and believed that citizenship schools would complement this wider program. In the latter, although some citizenship schoolteachers and organizations had prior experience in the NAACP, the schools were largely an outgrowth of the work of a grassroots organization on the rural periphery of the city of Charleston. This distinction is important because it determined the kinds of citizenship school programs which would develop – their priorities, the curriculum covered, gender relations and the local impact of the transfer from

formal organization that pursue movement goals. See Doug McCarthy and Mayer Zald, “Resource Mobilization and Social Movements,” *American Journal of Sociology*, 82 (1977), pp 1212-1241.

³⁰ “The Organization Structure of New Social Movements in a Political Context,” in McAdam, McCarthy and Zald, *Comparative Perspectives on Social Movements*, pp 152-184, especially pp 152-3.

³¹ *Our Separate Ways: Women in the Black Freedom Movement in Durham, North Carolina* (Chapel Hill, NC, London: University of North Carolina Press, 2005), citation on p 27.

Highlander to SCLC. Therefore, it is important to contextualize the history of the NAACP, the existence and relevance of other associations, and the local character of the African American freedom struggle shortly prior to the introduction of citizenship schools.

The NAACP in Lowcountry South Carolina

In 1932, Robert W. Bagnell of the NAACP had been disappointed with racial activism in the South Carolinian cities he visited. He reported “a complacency and satisfaction” of poverty, deprivation and inequality” among African Americans, that he found “puzzl(ing) under the circumstances.”³² By 1939, however, moves were underway to “reorganize and organize branches” in the state.³³ Yet, not only did the numbers of NAACP members in South Carolina fluctuate, but the geographic center of the organization shifted over time. The Charleston branch struggled at times to sustain itself locally, and to gain significance in the statewide movement. Early movements for voting rights began in Columbia, the state capital. Septima Clark perceived this disparity in the respective cultures of the two cities. While Charleston was “deeply rooted in tradition,” Columbia was “more democratic.” When she moved to the capital, she found a vibrant club culture, PTA and NAACP branch. Living in Columbia, she became involved in her “first effort in social action challenging the status quo,” the teacher salary equalization suit.³⁴ In 1944, NAACP members formed the Progressive Democratic Party (PDP) with John McCray, Avery graduate and editor of the Lighthouse and Informer as its president. Claiming that by refusing to include black delegates, the Democratic Party had “illegally, unlawfully, maliciously,

³² “Lights and Shadows in the South,” The Crisis, xxxix, April 1932, pp 4-5.

³³ Letter from Reverend A. Wright to William Pickens (December 19, 1939), NAACP Papers, Part 26, Series A, 18: 430.

³⁴ Echo in My Soul, pp 78-80, Tinsley Yarborough, A Passion for Justice: J Waties Waring and Civil Rights (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2001), p 43. A Charleston teacher had initiated the suit, but she did not pushed it after she married. The Columbia NAACP branch then took up the case. In February 1944, Waring ruled that current wage disparities were illegal and the school board conceded that African American teachers’ salaries would be raised incrementally.

deceitfully laid claim to entire representation for the State of South Carolina,” the PDP attempted to send a delegation to the State Democratic Party Convention in Columbia and, four years later, unsuccessfully appealed for representation at the national Convention in Philadelphia.³⁵

The ending of the all-white primary inspired African Americans across the state to join NAACP branches and it was a significant legal precondition for the introduction of citizenship schools. However, the activities of the PDP and the voting rights movement illustrate that the center of civil rights protest was in Columbia rather than in Charleston. In 1942, the Columbia branch had 964 members and supplied state level leadership in the form of State Conference President James Hinton and branch president Reverend Adams, described by Thurgood Marshall as “the power behind the throne.”³⁶ Charleston, meanwhile, had only 57 members in 1942 and 86 in 1944, while national office members were pessimistic about levels of commitment and enthusiasm displayed by the city’s black population.³⁷ Thurgood Marshall believed that while Charleston’s African Americans were militant, they lacked leadership. The branch President, Dr Miller, had in Marshall’s eyes, “outlived his usefulness.” Nevertheless, he argued that nobody had the time to take over his responsibilities. Five years later, he expressed incomprehension

³⁵ “Before the Democratic National Convention” (July ’48), NAACP Papers, 2, A, 9:513-8

³⁶ Letters from Thurgood Marshall to Walter White and Roy Wilkins (June 17, 1942), James Hinton, Bouleware and Beard (September 30, 1947) and John Wrihten (September 29, 1942), NAACP Papers, 26, A, 18: 519, 454, 455-6.

³⁷ Memo from Thurgood Marshall to Walter White, Roy Wilkins and Morrow (June 17, 1942), Letters from Thurgood Marshall to James Hinton (September 30, 1947) and to James Hinton (September 29, 1947), NAACP Papers, Part 26, Series A, 18: 455-6, 454, 450-1. John H. Wrihten, from Edisto Island, was a graduate of the Avery Institute and a member of the youth branch of the NAAP. When the College equivocated over his application, he entered the State College at Orangeburg, but it had no facilities for studying law. In 1947, Judge Waties Waring ruled that unless the State College introduce a satisfactory law program, Wrihten must be admitted to Charleston. When a law department opened in Orangeburg in September, it had a dean and three faculty members, but no building. Wrihten would not attend and Waring issued another order to ensure better facilities. The State General Assembly then allocated \$200,000 for a building and \$30,000 for a law library for a law school in Orangeburg that only eight students attended. Yarborough, Passion for Justice, pp 57-60.

that local officials did not support John Wrighten's appeal for admittance to study law at the College of Charleston.³⁸

Yet, in the late 1940s, the State Conference took measures to organize branches throughout South Carolina, including in Charleston County and the Lowcountry region. In 1947, the State Conference employed Eugene Montgomery as an executive secretary who would supervise membership drives in six individual South Carolinian districts.³⁹ By 1950, under Montgomery's supervision, Charleston's membership rolls climbed to 1,442, a youth chapter was established in the city and smaller branches were revived or established throughout the Lowcountry, including Jack Primms and Mount Pleasant in Charleston County; Monck's Corner in Berkeley County; and in Port Royal and Hilton Head islands and Beaufort, Beaufort County.⁴⁰ A branch was organized on Wadamlaw Island in 1953.⁴¹ In 1948, PDP activist Arthur Clement was elected as the Charleston branch President. In 1950, Clement challenged Mendel Rivers for his congressional seat, offering a rare attractive choice to newly enfranchised blacks in his electoral district.⁴² At the same time, Charleston's African Americans took part in other forms of civil agitation to improve their social and economic condition. In 1945, members of the Food and Tobacco Workers Union went on strike for better wages, during which participants (overwhelmingly African American and female) sang a traditional spiritual and future anthem of

³⁸ Letter from Thurgood Marshall to James Hinton, Harold Bowuleware, Beard (September 30, 1947) and to John Wrighten (September 29, 1947), NAACP Papers, 26, A 9:454, 455-6. John H. Wrighten, from Edisto Island, was a graduate of the Avery Institute and a member of the youth branch of the NAAP. Although he entered when the school opened in September with a dean and three faculty, but no building, Wrighten would not attend and Waring issued another order to ensure better facilities. The State General Assembly then allocated \$200,000 for a building and \$30,000 for a law library for a law school in Orangeburg that only eight students attended.

³⁹ Letter from Modjeska Simkins to local branches (November 3, 1947), letter from J.M. Hinton to Gloster Current (November 24, 1947), letter from Gloster Current to Eugene Montgomery (July 14, 1948), NAACP Papers, 26, A, 18: 647, 666, 729.

⁴⁰ "South Carolina State Taxes;" memo from Eugene Montgomery to Gloster Current (n.d.), report for July 1948; memo from Ruby Hurley to Gloster Current (n.d., c. October 1948), memo from Eugene Montgomery to Gloster Current (November 1948), NAACP Papers, 26, A, 18:764-7, 808, 888-91, 19:90.

⁴¹ Letter from Gloster Current to Reverend A.C. Reed (November 6, 1953), NAACP Papers, 26, A 19: 564.

⁴² Press Release (April 9th, 1953), NAACP Papers 26, A, 18:535, Cohodas, Strom Thurmond, p 217.

the civil rights movement, “We Will Overcome” on their picket lines. The union made some moves towards political organizing, even going as far as teaching African Americans to read the South Carolina Constitution so that they could register to vote.⁴³

Enthusiastic new branch chapters, like Monck’s Corner and Jack Primms, lost members and/or became inactive in relatively short spaces of time.⁴⁴ In the late 1940s, both the national Association and the South Carolina branches lost members. Nationally, membership fell dramatically from 540,000 in 1946 to 35,000 just two years later. Berg posits that this represented a “return to normalcy” after burgeoning membership rolls during World War II. However, the following year, the Association doubled membership dues from one dollar to two, and its membership was halved.⁴⁵ Eugene Montgomery suggested that the rise in fees was a particular problem in South Carolina, which was in the midst of cotton harvest problems.⁴⁶ Efforts to reorganize branches were sometimes frustrated by inadequate facilities and transport. In 1949, Montgomery hoped to revive an inactive branch on Daufuskie Island, near Beaufort; however, he had to postpone organizing meetings as the isolated island took three days to reach from Columbia.⁴⁷ While local leaders successfully recruited twenty members in 1949 and nine in 1950, the following year membership rolls dropped to 12 and the branch was “reorganized.” By 1952 it was again inactive with no members.⁴⁸ During these challenging times, committed individuals centered in Columbia persevered to sustain the movement in both the city and the

⁴³ Lillie Doster, quoted in a transcript of “South Carolina Voices of the Civil Rights Movement,” (November 1982, Avery Research Center), p 67.

⁴⁴ “Membership Status lists” (May 18, 1951), (July 1951) (October, 1951), letter from Lucille Black to Eugene Montgomery (October 8, 1951), NAACP Papers, 26, A, 19: 337, 355, 372, 375

⁴⁵ Berg, Ticket to Freedom, p 111.

⁴⁶ Letter from Eugene Montgomery to Lucille Black (December 12, 1949), NAACP Papers, 26, A, 19:139.

⁴⁷ Letter from Eugene Montgomery to Gloster Current (October 28, 1948), memo from Eugene Montgomery to Gloster Current (November 1949), NAACP Papers, 26, A, 18: 837, 888-91. Septima Clark had similar problems organizing on the island, as outlined in the next chapter.

⁴⁸ “South Carolina State Taxes,” “Membership Record, South Carolina Branches” (October 6, 1950), Membership Status (July 1951), membership status (October 1951), NAACP Papers, 26, A, 19: 90, 249, 355, 372, 440.

state. In 1949, Director of Branches Gloster Current reflected that Hinton was a rare leader who, with “selfless devotion, with energy and enthusiasm, with sacrifices and genuine interest in his fellow men strives to make things better for all men.”⁴⁹

However, the 1952 Clarendon County suit, and the ensuing Brown vs. Board of Topeka Supreme Court decision, inspired and encouraged activists in and around Charleston. The Charleston branch also elected a new President, Joe Arthur Brown. Between 1955 and 1956, the branch more than doubled its membership and embarked on a range of activities, such as petitioning the school board, campaigning for integrated beaches and better housing and sending baskets to poor families.⁵⁰ Later in the decade, Brown was elevated to statewide influence after he replaced James Hinton’s as State Conference president.⁵¹ By the time that citizenship schools were being expanded across the region, then, the local NAACP held a strong leadership position. It also conducted registration drives, which complemented literacy programs. The citizenship schoolteacher Mary Lee Davis was an active participant in the Charleston branch.⁵³

Associational Life on Johns Island

On Johns Island, the community in which the first citizenship school was established, there was no NAACP branch or any organizations explicitly concerned with legal and political rights for African Americans. Yet, there was a rich associational life that helped island residents to develop social networks and to take part in activities that improved their community’s

⁴⁹ Letter to Eugene Montgomery (December 22, 1949), NAACP Papers, 26, A, 19:162.

⁵⁰ “Report on Charleston, South Carolina, 1955-6” (n.d.), NAACP Papers 29, D, 37:683-4.

⁵¹ Letter from James Williams to Lucille Black (February 22, 1958), letter from Ruby Hurley to Gloster Current (May 23rd, 1958), Letters from Gloster Current to Roy Wilkins (October 26, 1958) and J. Arthur Brown (September 26, 1960), NAACP Papers, 27, A, 13:773, 796-7, 991, 14:62.

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⁵³ “Forty-Eighth Annual Meeting of the South Carolina Conference of Branches NAACP, October 22, 1959,” NAACP Papers, 27, A 13:971-990.

wellbeing. The Sea Islands have drawn attention from anthropologists and linguists interested in the development of island culture and the local dialect, Gullah, particularly in the 1970s when Sea Island culture and established community norms were threatened by migration and the purchase of island land for resorts and holiday homes.⁵⁴ For example, Charles Joyner and Patricia Jones Jackson argue that cultural institutions and traditions like participatory storytelling and worship in praise houses developed strong community ties that have been conducive to the foundation of social welfare organizations.⁵⁵ The folk singer Guy Carawan, song leader for Highlander folk school, did not merely study and write about Sea Island culture, but attempted to develop community ties by organizing song festivals and sessions for people on the island.⁵⁶ David Levine posits that one of the reasons why citizenship schools began on the Sea Islands was because of their history of cultural institutions, which served as a “free space” where social bonds, trust and reciprocity were formed.⁵⁷ Septima Clark also lived through significant changes in associational life. For example, men became interested in fraternal groups and “had to know the rituals, had to make speeches to their fellow members, even had to keep books.” This fuelled

⁵⁴ The most influential study of the dialect is Lorenzo Dow Turner, Africanisms in the Gullah Dialect (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 2002, 1st edition, 1949). In 1980, the Journal of Black Studies published a special issue on Sea Island culture, with essays by activists Septima Clark and William “Bill Saunders” and articles on music and culture. See Journal of Black Studies, 10, 4 (June 1980).

⁵⁵ Patricia Jones Jackson, When Roots Die: Endangered Traditions on the Sea Islands (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1987), Charles Joyner, Shared Traditions: Southern History and Folk Culture (Urbana and Chicago, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1999), pp 228-239. Local people have not always welcomed studies of Sea Island culture. For example, when Pat Conroy published an autobiographical account (subsequently made into a film) of teaching children on Daufuskie Island, local people asked the author to leave the island in the summer of 1972 when he came to present them with copies of his book. Juanita Jackson, Sabra Slaughter and J. Herman Blake describe his account as “shallow and distorted as well as inaccurate.” “Sea Islands as a Cultural Resource,” The Black Scholar, 5,6 (March, 1974) pp 32-9, citation on p 39.

⁵⁶ See Guy Carawan and Candie Carawan, Aint You Got a Right to the Tree of Life: The People of Johns Island – Their Faces, Their Words and Their Songs (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1989, 1st edition 1966). See chapter three for the folk festivals.

⁵⁷ “Birth of the Citizenship Schools,” pp 412-3, “Citizenship Schools,” pp 57-89. Sara Evans and Harry Boyte argue that the emergence of democratic social movements depend on the existence of “free spaces” or “settings between private lives and large-scale institutions” where people “learn a new self respect, a deeper and more assertive group identity, public skills and values of cooperation and civic virtue.” Free Spaces, citations on pp 18, 17. These can be physical spaces, such as African Americans, or forums in which people develop these skills and responsibilities. Jenkins’ bus gave people like Wine the opportunity to articulate what they wanted from civic action and served as a precursor to a social movement organization like the citizenship schools.

Clark's interest in adult literacy and gave local people skills that were applicable to future civic associations.⁵⁸

While all of these associations illustrate the extent of social organization on the island prior to the establishment of citizenship schools, the schools grew explicitly from the Progressive Club and its founder Esau Jenkins. A native of Johns Island, Jenkins was a "self made man" who established several businesses, including a motel, restaurant and gas station. Despite leaving school after the fourth grade, Jenkins valued education, put himself through night school for four years, taught himself Greek in order that he could trade with Greek fishermen and ensured that each of his five children finished high school. Two of his daughters subsequently became teachers and one of his sons was a music professor. When he was asked why he chose to dedicate himself to community work, he cited three sources of inspiration. As a young man, he had been pleased when the community had rallied to find land and build a home for a woman called Elizabeth Scott who worked on a plantation from "sunup to sundown." Second, on one occasion, he was driving a truck from Charleston to Johns Island when a white woman drove into the back of his car, yet convinced law officers that the accident had been his fault. Finally, on two occasions, he witnessed white men shooting black men because they had inadvertently killed their dogs. On one of these occasions, he had been able to save the black man's life by donating blood. "These are the things," he argued, "that motivated me to form a political movement, make people better citizens, take pride in themselves, get an education and work in a political movement."⁵⁹ In 1948, Jenkins founded the Progressive Club, a credit union that aimed to provide parents living on other people's land with small lots on which they could build homes

⁵⁸ [Echo in My Soul](#), pp 51-2.

⁵⁹ Interview with Guy Carawan, [Carawan Collection](#), FT3618

for themselves.⁶⁰ “Two or three hundred” people became members, met in the local worship center, Moving Star Hall, every Sunday and paid twenty-five cents each time towards their plot. When they had paid enough to own their piece of property outright, they ceased to pay dues.⁶¹ Members were also able to make improvements to their homes. For example, John Smalls explained that he was using Progressive Club money to expand his cellar.⁶²

Why, when Septima Clark was recruiting community leaders to attend the Highlander United Nations workshop did she turn to Esau Jenkins and the Progressive Club rather than to Brown and other members of the NAACP? After all, by 1954 the local branch was attracting greater numbers of members and starting to build a local movement. Perhaps she recognized greater potential in Jenkins than in leaders like Brown. Jenkins may have also been a closer approximation of the grassroots community leaders which Highlander sought to cultivate. However, she also turned to Jenkins because she had become frustrated with the NAACP. In 1955, she complained about the “general attitude of what we call our intelligent people” who she perceived as being hostile to J Arthur Brown, and at “the complete apathy of the people in general over the Mississippi tragedy” (the murder of Emmett Till). She was, however,

elated to see that the men from the countryside are now taking a part. There were only four teachers, not one principal and not one doctor at either of those meetings but the membership has climbed over 1,000 an increase of about 55%. Thanks to Bishop Reid, the Methodist preachers are taking a big part and influencing their organizations. Those who have climbed the social ladder are still at the top sitting on the last round doing absolutely nothing.

Clearly, Clark had stronger affinities with poor rural, working class men and women than she did with middle-class NAACP leaders. She equated being “middle-class” with living in the city and expressed an affinity towards working with the rural poor, rather than the urban working class.

⁶⁰ Jenkins, “My job is enjoyable to me...” handwritten notes, Jenkins box, folder 12

⁶¹ Alice Wine, “He is a wonderful conqueror,” in Carawan and Carawan, Ain’t You Got a Right, pp 155-6.

⁶² Robert Smalls, interview with Guy Carawan, Carawan Collection, FT3619

She explained that “the countryside is developing ... and the little insignificant man is coming to the front. Then I think we’ll get somewhere.”⁶³ Strikingly, at the same time, Esau Jenkins became increasingly active in the city. In 1959, he established the Citizens Committee of Charleston County (CCCC) which had an office on Spring Street in central Charleston. The Committee carried out many of the same activities as the Progressive Club had done, such as establishing credit unions, running voter registration classes and, eventually, administering the county’s citizenship schools.⁶⁴

NAACP branches in Lowcountry South Carolina had mixed successes prior to 1960. Usually, state leadership and significant campaigns were centered in the state capital, while the Charleston branch struggled to sustain members and smaller branches in the region were often short lived. In the post Brown era, this had begun to change with J Arthur Brown’s election to the branch and State Conference presidency. However, when Septima Clark recruited local leaders to attend Highlander, she looked not to the NAACP or to organizations within the city, but to a grassroots self-help organization on a nearby rural island. Both the “self-help” character and the rural location of the Progressive Club influenced the kind of citizenship school program it organized and distinguished it from the one in Savannah.

Spreading like Wildfire: The NAACP in Savannah

In 1939, the Savannah NAACP branch had its membership charter revoked because of a drastic decline in membership; however, in 1942, Ralph Mark Gilbert of Savannah’s First African Baptist Church revived an NAACP branch in the city. The branch had problems

⁶³ Letter from Septima Clark to Elizabeth Waring (October 6, 1955), Waring Papers, box 4, folder 53.

⁶⁴ Esau Jenkins, handwritten notes, “A Short Background of the Citizens’ Committee of Charleston County,” (n.d.), Esau Jenkins box, folder 15.

attracting workers during membership and registration drives and Gilbert argued that this was because Savannah was just a “sleepy old town.” Yet, Ella Baker and the branch office were impressed by Gilbert’s dynamism and innovation in attracting new members.⁶⁵ Gilbert also worked to build a movement across the state. In 1943, he organized the Georgia State Conference and over the course of the decade, made field trips across the state to encourage the development of other branches.⁶⁶ A 1945 report to Walter White indicates the extent of Gilbert’s fieldwork. He explained that he had established branches in Moultrie, Fort Gaines, Thomasville, Lifton and Claxton, as well as establishing committees to set up branches at Fort Valley, Cordale and Statesboro and asserted, “Our movement is spreading like wildfire over Georgia.”⁶⁷

Yet, by the late forties, the Georgia movement was floundering. The Savannah branch dropped from a membership of 1,085 in 1946 to 563 in 1949. Gilbert explained that it was extremely difficult to keep people interested in the NAACP and its work, and “nearly impossible” to recruit volunteers because people were “not interested enough.” He explained that “the same people” seemed to be “doing everything,” while he reported having to do a great deal of work by himself.⁶⁸ In 1947, national office staff members were disappointed by what he perceived to be insufficient action by the branch to attract new members.⁶⁹ This decline might have been due to a fear of white hostility, disillusion with political action after Eugene Talmadge’s election or African Americans may have been vaguely sympathetic to the NAACP

⁶⁵ Letter from Ralph Mark Gilbert to Ella Baker (May 22, 1944), letter from Ella Baker to J.S. Delaware (April 10, 1945), NAACP Papers, 26, A, 9: 474, 428.

⁶⁶ Letter from Ralph Mark Gilbert to the editor of “The Crisis” (January 24, 1943), NAACP Papers, 26, A, 9:280.

⁶⁷ Letter from Ralph Mark Gilbert to Walter White (June 4, 1945), NAACP Records, 26, A, 9:364-5.

⁶⁸ Letter from Gloster Current to Ralph Mark Gilbert (December 29, 1949), letter from Ralph Mark Gilbert to Ella Baker (November 17, 1949), letter from Ralph Mark Gilbert to Ella Baker (January 27, 1944), NAACP Papers, 26, A, 9: 549, 551; 10:658-9. As in Georgia, the movement in Louisiana declined in the late forties and early fifties. Louisiana’s State Conference membership peaked at 14,118 in 1948 but fell to 12,764 over the next seven years. Faiclough, Race and Democracy, p 190.

⁶⁹ Letter from Lucille Black to Ralph Mark Gilbert (n.d., c. Autumn 1947), NAACP Papers, 26, A, 10:839-40.

but too busy or apathetic to volunteer their time.⁷⁰ Georgia may also have been hurt by the doubling of membership fees.⁷¹ The branch was also competing with grassroots groups for the loyalties of city blacks. In 1947, a group of professionals and businesspeople called “The Hub” campaigned for the School Board to spend an increased portion of a half million bond issue on black schools and considered taking the board to court; however, the NAACP was unable to participate in the campaign because of the national policy of refusing to support segregated schools.⁷²

Gilbert believed that the answer to the problem was to elect a new President who might breathe life into the branch. In early February 1948, he resigned and the youth council President Wesley Wallace Law was elected as Branch President in his place.⁷³ The following year, William Boyd of Atlanta succeeded him as State Conference President. As Gilbert had done, Boyd attempted to establish new branches and to revive existing ones.⁷⁴ However, the handover did not revitalize the statewide movement and Boyd was frequently “disillusioned” about Georgian African Americans’ indifference to civil rights and refusal to provide financial support, although Current did reassure him that his state was not alone in suffering from “the disease of apathy.”⁷⁵ The Savannah branch, similarly, continued to face problems recruiting volunteers in the 1950s and Law was particularly frustrated by the attitude of professional and business people who seemed to have “a million excuses” for not volunteering. The branch still “desperately needed” more local leaders to help obtain new members and organize the people. Nevertheless,

⁷⁰ See below for a description of the 1948 gubernatorial election and its controversies.

⁷¹ Letter from Ralph Mark Gilbert to Gloster Current (June 16, 1948), NAACP Papers, 26, A, 10:22.

⁷² Memo from Gloster Current to Walter White (December 15, 1947), letter from Gloster Current to Ralph Mark Gilbert (December 16, 1947), NAACP Papers, 26, A, 10:876-8, 884-5.

⁷³ Letter from Ralph Mark Gilbert to Gloster Current (January 11, 1950), letter from Gloster Current to Lynwood Diamond (February 1, 1951), NAACP Papers, 26, A, 9:553, 559.

⁷⁴ Letters from William Boyd to Gloster Current (January 4, 1948; February 5th, 1948), NAACP Papers, 26, A, 11: 82, 90.

⁷⁵ Letters from William Boyd to Gloster Current (11 and 20 October, 1949), letter from Gloster Current to William Boyd (October 26, 1949), NAACP Papers, 26, A, 118, 120, 119.

the branch campaigned on some local issues, including pressing a housing suit, which reached the Supreme Court in 1958.⁷⁶ The State Conference meanwhile planned an “all out voter registration program to be effected in every county” in the early 1950s.⁷⁷

In 1954, the local civil rights movement in Savannah, as across the state, was struggling. Neither recruiting new local leaders nor dispatching national Field Secretaries stemmed the crisis of declining numbers of members and committed volunteers. In 1955, many branches in the state were being run “by one, two or three people.”⁷⁸ However, as in the 1940s, political processes at the national and local level combined with local leadership and initiative served to revitalize the branches. Tuck explains that the Georgia State Conference reacted slowly to the 1954 Brown vs. Board decision, but after Brown II, Law demonstrated leadership skills by initiating a statewide meeting to discuss strategy.⁷⁹ With Boyd in hospital, as First Vice President, Law called an emergency meeting of the State Conference in Macon in August 1955. He argued that the meeting was imperative because of the continued action avoiding the Supreme Court decision, reports of black teachers being terrorized and several acts of police brutality. “Our branches must not be allowed,” Law urged, “to remain inactive while State Officials do everything they can to destroy the effectiveness of the NAACP and slow down our program for integration.”⁸⁰ The State Conference asked branches to become involved in desegregation cases and designed a list of legal procedures for them; it appointed a special

⁷⁶ Letter from W.W. Law to Lucile Black (April 2, 1953), “Annual Report of the Georgia State Conference, 1958,” NAACP Papers, 26, A, 9:588; 25, C, 11:213-227.

⁷⁷ “Report of the Policy of the Georgia State Conference,” NAACP Papers, 26, A, 11:276-7.

⁷⁸ Letter from Ruby Hurley to W.W. Law (October 28, 1955), 26, A, 11:373-4.

⁷⁹ Beyond Atlanta, p 100.

⁸⁰ Letters from W.W. Law to Roy Wilkins (August 4, 1955) and to members of the Executive Committee (n.d.), NAACP Papers, 26, A, 11:339, 352.

committee to raise \$10,000 to protect black teachers and it planned workshops on desegregation for branch officers and delegates at the forthcoming annual State Conference.⁸¹

The 1955 meetings had consequences across the state, including in Savannah. Later that year, the State Conference met in Savannah and delegates elected Law as the new President.

Thus, the city once more held a pre-eminent position within Georgia's civil rights movement.⁸²

The emphasis on waging local desegregation cases gave local branches a sense of responsibility and purpose and thirty parents from Savannah initiated a desegregation case in 1959.

Additionally, in the years between the 1955 State Conference meeting and the establishment of citizenship schools, the city branch campaigned for the Civil Rights Act, by holding mass protest meetings and sending telegrams to President Dwight D. Eisenhower and Attorney General Rogers; petitioned the public library for use of its facilities and attempted to use a public golf course. A black candidate, Reverend G. P. Walker stood as a candidate for the Alderman's electoral race in 1959 and Chatham County's African American registration rate was, at 35.7%, the highest of any of the state's eight largest counties.⁸³ In 1959, a concerted membership drive in Savannah meant that the Branch had 798 new members by April. Field Secretary Amos Holmes believed that this placed "our State Conference president in the proper place of leadership."⁸⁴

Although the movement did not follow a steady line of progress and growth in numbers and organizational strength during the "early civil rights movement," by the time that Highlander extended the citizenship school program to Savannah, there was a well-established local

⁸¹ "Legal Procedures Adopted by the Executive Committee of the Georgia State Conference of NAACP Branches, August 31, 1955," letters from W.W. Law to Gloster Current (August 4 and September 1, 1955) NAACP Papers, 26, A, 11:352, 342-3, 366.

⁸² "Press release: Georgia NAACP Votes to Step Up School Desegregation Work" (December 8th, 1955), NAACP Papers, 26, A, 11:377.

⁸³ Amos Owen Holmes (Georgia Field Secretary), Monthly reports (July 21, 1958 and June 24, 1959); 1959 Annual Report, NAACP Papers, 25, D, 17:674-7, 810-2, 911-23.

⁸⁴ Amos Holmes, Monthly report (April 27, 1959), NAACP Papers, 25, D, 17:792-5.

NAACP branch under a popular President, W.W. Law. The branch was beginning a concerted campaign in African American voter registration. In 1957, the Eisenhower administration passed the first Civil Rights Bill since Reconstruction, which included a provision by which the Department of Justice could seek an injunction if they believed that states were interfering with African Americans' right to vote. The NAACP responded by establishing a Voter Registration Committee at its annual conference in Atlanta. Under the Virginian John Brooks, the Committee encouraged local branches to conduct joint voter registration drives with churches, labor unions and civic groups, focusing on Southern cities and towns.⁸⁵ Because the NAACP was vilified in the white press, Savannah officials believed that the voter registration committee should be given an alternative name in order to avoid alienating people.⁸⁶ In 1960, therefore, the branch established the Chatham County Crusade for Voters (CCCV) which divided the city into areas, appointed two block workers to each and founded several committees to work with various sections of the community, including churches, organized labor and schools.⁸⁷ When Myles Horton planned to introduce citizenship schools to Savannah, he contacted Law, who referred him to Hosea Williams and the CCCV.

Political Opportunities for Citizenship Schools

Doug McAdam proposed that the civil rights movement emerged because of a series of opportune political conditions that, between 1930 and 1954, “rendered the political establishment more vulnerable to black protest activity while also allowing blacks the institutional strength to

⁸⁵ Berg, *Ticket to Freedom*, pp 157-9.

⁸⁶ “Savannah, Chatham County,” inspection by Melvin Marsden (September 5, 1966) General Report, Head Start No. 204 Savannah and Chatham County, *NARA*, RG 381, box 95.

⁸⁷ Carolyn Roberts, “Savannah’s Plan for Voter Registration,” talk delivered at a Highlander workshop. *Highlander Tapes*, Tape 180, Side 1, Part 1.

launch a challenge.” He argued that African Americans’ northward migration, allegiance to the Democratic Party, World War II and America’s reputation overseas combined to prompt the government to support changes in the racial status quo. In turn, shifts in government policy and economic upturns “triggered a growing sense of political efficacy” and optimism among some African Americans. He attributed the sustenance of protest between 1961 and 1965, and its decline thereafter to rising and declining internal organization and external support, political confidence among African Americans and the changing responses of other groups to the movement.⁸⁸ Charles Brockett meanwhile has classified four major factors that constitute the “political opportunity structure” in which social movements organize: elite fragmentation and conflict, the role of political allies, the availability of points to access elites, and the existence of repression.⁸⁹

The “political opportunities” model was highly influential, although it has been refined in subsequent works. Sociologists have since argued that different forms of political opportunities have different consequences for the incidences of protest, formation of social movement organizations and favorable policy outcomes.⁹⁰ Meanwhile, in his study of the Mississippi freedom movement, Kenneth Andrews explained that “external” factors, namely “political opportunities” need to be considered alongside “internal” ones (such as the nature of local leadership and levels of local organization) in order to account for the emergence of social movements at certain times.”⁹¹ Finally, to understand the development of local movements, it is

⁸⁸ Political Process and the Development of Black Insurgency, 1930-70 (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1999), pp 3, 77-87, 110, 144, 231.

⁸⁹ Charles Brockett, “The Structure of Political Opportunity and Peasant Mobilization in Central America,” Social Science History, (23, 1991), pp 253-74, citation on p 254.

⁹⁰ David Meyer and Debra Minkoff, “Conceptualizing Political Opportunity,” Social Forces, 82, 4 (June 2004), pp 1457-1492.

⁹¹ Freedom is a Constant Struggle: The Mississippi Civil Rights Movement and its Legacy (Chicago, IL and London: University of Chicago Press, 2004), pp 30, 5.

also necessary to consider opportunities created at the local and state level and how these affected the ways in which citizenship schools operated.⁹²

On the one hand, historians of African American freedom movements in Charleston and Savannah point to the similarities between the two cities. There are convincing surveys which consider “the South” as a distinctive region in this period, still marked by the large black population, legacy of slavery, and its rural, agricultural society (although this was marked by rapid social and economic changes).⁹³ In many ways, moreover, the political and economic context of Charleston and Savannah is comparable; as both cities share a coastal location and, by the 1950s, economies bolstered by tourism and defense industries. Furthermore, historians have argued that civil rights activism was possible because Charleston and Savannah were both relatively free of the virulent racism seen in Mississippi and in Birmingham, Alabama. Moreover, although Mary Lee Davis did open a citizenship school in North Charleston in 1958, the earliest Charleston schools were established not in the city, but in rural peripheries.

Voting Rights

In the post-reconstruction period, white politicians devised a number of mechanisms to prevent African Americans from practicing the right to vote guaranteed by the Fifteenth Amendment, including questionable procedures, like filling ballot boxes; introducing “grandfather” clauses, poll taxes and literacy tests. At one level, the citizenship schools can be

⁹² Andrews, Freedom Is a Constant Struggle, p 38. A classic example of local influences on social movement insurgency is Peter Eisenger’s study of riots in forty-three American cities and concluded that incidence of protest varied upon the degree to which protest groups could access the power or “the city’s political opportunity structure.” “The Conditions of Protest Behavior in American Cities,” American Political Science Review, (1973) 67: 11-28.

⁹³ See Carl Degler, Place Over Time: The Continuity of Southern Distinctiveness (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 1977), especially p 27.

viewed as a logical stage in the campaign for voting rights beginning with the Fifteenth Amendment and culminating with the Voting Rights Act. From the 1940s, South Carolina, Georgia and other Deep South states saw a gradual liberalization in voting rights. Local activists, white allies and “moderate” politicians revised state voting ages, poll taxes and most significantly, campaigned for African Americans’ inclusion in the Democratic primaries, the only election of any consequence in the South’s one party system.⁹⁴ No reform created more “opportunities” for the development of citizenship schools, however, than the abolition of white primaries.

In South Carolina, challenges to the white primary came from both local activists and an unlikely ally, Judge J. Waties Waring. Waring had been born into a privileged Charleston family and was the descendent of slaveholders and Confederate soldiers. He attended the College of Charleston, trained with a local law firm and married Annie Gammell, a “belle” from a family of equal stature to the Warings and settled into a home on Charleston’s elite Meeting Street. In 1942, US Senators “Cotton” Ed Smith and Burnett Maybank recommended that he be appointed as Judge for the South Carolina’s Eastern District. Three years later, he ordered the equalization of teachers’ salaries and ended segregation within the courtroom, insisted that African Americans jurors be addressed by their courtesy titles and that they no longer had to eat in the kitchen when the jury dined out. In 1947, when George Elmore petitioned the court to permit African Americans’ participation in the white primaries, Waring struck them down as unconstitutional.⁹⁵ In response, Democratic Party executives introduced an oath, in which

⁹⁴ Prior to the introduction of state primaries, party nominees were chosen by conventions, mass meetings, local primaries and other methods. The primary was introduced in Georgia and South Carolina in 1898 and 1896 respectively. J. Morgan Kousser, The Shaping of Southern Politics: Suffrage Restriction and the Establishment of a One-Party South, 1880-1910 (New Haven, CN: Yale University Press, 1974), pp 75-91, 148-150, 209-219.

⁹⁵ David Southern, “Beyond Jim Crow: Judge Waring’s Fight Against Segregation in South Carolina, 1941-1952,” The Journal of Negro History, 66, 3, pp 209-227, especially p 223; Yarborough, A Passion for Justice pp 157-170. Historians differ over the reasons for Waring’s striking turn towards racial liberalism. David Southern

potential party members were required to swear allegiance to the Democratic Party, oppose the Federal Employment Practices Commission (FEPC) law and uphold states rights. The following year, PDP representatives tried and failed to replace the all-white South Carolina delegation at the Democratic Convention in Philadelphia; however, in 1949, David Brown of Beaufort County and the NAACP successfully proved the new electoral laws to be unconstitutional. While Waring praised compliant judges in Pickens, Laurens, Greenville and Jasper counties, he declared it a “disgrace and a shame you’ve got to come into court and ask one judge to tell you that you are American citizens and going to obey the law.” It was time, he declared, for South Carolina to “rejoin the union.”⁹⁶

NAACP activists throughout South Carolina seized upon the opportunities that Elmore vs. Rice had opened for them. In the 1947 annual state conference made political action (registration) a priority and included a workshop panel on the topic.⁹⁷ Local branches conducted registration drives throughout the late 1940s. A.J. Brown, president of the Frogmore, Beaufort County, branch coordinated registration work throughout the 1st Congressional (or Lowcountry) region.⁹⁸ Furthermore, there were nascent signs that the black vote could be an important political tool. The 1950 South Carolina senatorial race was fought by two white supremacists: Strom Thurmond and Olin Johnston. Because of Thurmond’s 1948 States Rights party candidature, John McCray, editor of the Lighthouse and Informer urged his readers to support

credits Waring’s divorce and marriage to a Northern divorcee, Elizabeth Avery. Not only may he have retaliated against his ensuing social ostracism from Charleston society, but he may have seen racial matters from his northern wife’s view. For example, she encouraged him to read a number of works, such as Gunnar Myrdal’s An American Dilemma. Yarborough, on the other hand, argues that Waring was particularly shocked when he presided over a 1946 case in which Isaac Woodward, a World War II veteran was blinded by a local police chief. Waring was disgusted when the all-white jury found the chief not guilty.

⁹⁶ Key, Southern Politics, pp 632-5, Brown vs. Baskin in NAACP Papers, II, A, 18: 575- 634.

⁹⁷ Memo from Modjeska Simkins to local branches titled “Tentative Program of the Seventh Annual Meeting” (n.d.), Press Release on the Annual Meeting at Georgetown (n.d.), NAACP Papers, 26, A: 18 641, 642-3.

⁹⁸ Memo from Eugene Montgomery to Gloster Current (Report for January, 1949); Minutes of the Officers of Branches in the First Congressional District, NAACP Papers, 19: 38-9, 40.

Johnston instead, while Modjeska Simkins explained, “Strom vilified Negroes in 1948... and we swore vengeance.” The News and Courier even suggested that African Americans supplied Johnston’s narrow margin of victory.⁹⁹

In Georgia, meanwhile, voting rights reform began as part of Governor Ellis Arnall’s program of economic and political modernization. In 1942, Arnall challenged Eugene Talmadge for the governorship on a platform of academic freedom and integrity.¹⁰⁰ Having graduated from law school in 1931, he was elected to the Georgia House of Representatives the following year when he was only twenty-five years old. He served as Speaker pro tempore (the second highest position in the house) and as state attorney general before he was elected to the governorship.¹⁰¹ Arnall pioneered economic reforms, including leading a campaign against discriminatory freight rates that favored Northern businesses’ investment in the state and he tried in vain to win legislative approval for a Georgian Reconstruction Finance Committee to provide capital for indigenous public and private projects.¹⁰² More relevant to the development of voter registration movements in Savannah, he introduced constitutional amendments for electoral reform. Apparently inspired by a young man from Georgia Tech University who had worked hard for his campaign, he successfully proposed that the voting age be reduced from twenty-one to eighteen, which was supported by a two-thirds majority vote in the Georgia Assembly. Constitutional measures reducing the voting age also prompted debates over the utility of retaining a poll tax,

⁹⁹ Both cited in Jack Bass and Marilyn Thompson, Ol’ Strom (Marietta, GA: Longstreet, 1998), pp 130-1.

¹⁰⁰ Talmadge had moved to remove all professors who were not native Georgian from State Universities, provoking protests by students, academics and progressive businesspeople. Patrick Novotny, This Georgia Rising: Education, Civil Rights and the Politics of Change in Georgia in the 1940s (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2007), pp 60-125.

¹⁰¹ Ellis Arnall, The Shore Dimly Seen (New York, NY: Lippincott, 1946)

¹⁰² Numan Bartley, The Creation of Modern Georgia (Athens, Georgia: The University of Georgia Press, 1983), pp 193-4, 196; Egerton, Speak Now Against the Day, p 9.

which was levied on male voters between 21 and 60. After being rejected once, the amendment was passed and “created about 500,000 new voters overnight.”¹⁰³

Inspired both by Arnall’s relative liberalism concerning electoral reform and by the decision in the 1944 Smith vs. Allwright case (which ruled that Texas’ all-white Democratic primaries were unconstitutional), Georgia’s State Conference President Ralph Mark Gilbert called a State Executive Board meeting to devise a statewide strategy to try to capitalize on the changing system.¹⁰⁴ In July, however, members of an Atlanta voting rights league were turned away from the polls, including C.A. Scott, editor of the Daily World, the local black newspaper; attorney Austin Walden, and the director of the Southern Regional Council, Ira DeReid. African Americans in other cities, including Savannah, made similar unsuccessful attempts to vote.¹⁰⁵ Scott and Walden sought the assistance of the national NAACP, who pursued their favored strategy of registering affidavits with the Attorney General. When he made it clear that he would not prosecute the voting restrictions as a criminal case in April 1945, Walden filed a civil case in the Georgia district court in June.¹⁰⁶ Meanwhile, Primus King, a minister from Columbus, who had also been denied registration, filed a separate complaint. King received financial assistance from a local citizens’ committee and the sanction of local NAACP branch president, William

¹⁰³ Arnall, Shore Dimly Seen, pp 52-3.

¹⁰⁴ Letter from Parvell Mines to Ruby Hurley (April 11th, 1944), letter from Ralph Mark Gilbert to Ella Baker (May 4th, 1944), telegram from NAACP Papers, 26, A, 9: 486-7, 484.

¹⁰⁵ Letter from C.A. Scott to Thurgood Marshall (Nov 27, 1944), Press Release: “Biddle Sent Affidavits of Georgia Primary Ban” (June 7th, 1944), Telegram from C.A. Scott to Roy Wilkins (June 7th, 1944), NAACP Papers, Part II, box B211, folder 4.

¹⁰⁶ Letter from Thurgood Marshall to C.A. Scott (December 14, 1944), letter from Thurgood Marshall to C.A. Scott (May 8, 1945), telegram from A.P. Walden to Thurgood Marshall (June 13, 1945), NAACP Papers, Part II, box B211, folder 4.

Thomas.¹⁰⁷ On October 12th, district Judge Thomas Hoyt Davis argued that the Smith vs. Allwright decision applied to Georgia and awarded King \$100 in damages.¹⁰⁸

Arnall personally disapproved of moves to enfranchise African Americans, stating that Southerners “don’t believe in social equality.”¹⁰⁹ Yet, when the King decision was read, he conceded that it was necessary for the legislature to accept the court’s rulings.¹¹⁰ These electoral reforms created opportunities for Savannah’s freedom movement in general, and for voter registration campaigns specifically. The liberalisation of the electoral system may have made African Americans optimistic about prospects for reform and their prospects of eliciting favorable governmental reforms. With the 1944 reduction in the voting age, Ruby Hurley recommended that Savannah’s Youth Council focus on registering young people to vote.¹¹¹ One committed Youth Council member was the World War II veteran and postal worker Westley Wallace Law, who replaced the President of the youth council, Norman Gadson, in September 1946.¹¹² Like Gilbert, Law worked assiduously to developing youth councils throughout the state by 1948, and worked with Ruby Hurley on coordinating statewide meetings to ensure better dialogue between youth branches.¹¹³ The reduction of the voting age also inspired Savannah’s Youth Council to conduct its own registration drives and helped to initiate a well-organized and active branch at Savannah State University.¹¹⁴ Meanwhile, the opening of the white primaries created new opportunities for civil rights agitation. In the spring following the King decision,

¹⁰⁷ Letters from Ernest Britton to Thurgood Marshall (June 6 1944), Thurgood Marshall to Ernest Britton (June 9 1944), W M Thomas to Thurgood Marshall (Aug 28 1944), Thurgood Marshall to WM Thomas (September 5 1944), NAACP Papers, Part II, box B211, folder 9.

¹⁰⁸ Patrick Novotny, This Georgia Rising: Education, Civil Rights and the Politics of Change in Georgia in the 1940s (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2007)pp 160-1.

¹⁰⁹ Cited in Tuck, Beyond Atlanta, p 43.

¹¹⁰ Egerton, Speak Now Against the Day, pp 380-1.

¹¹¹ Letter from Ruby Hurley to W.W. Law (Jan 26 1946), NAACP Papers II, E50, 2

¹¹² Letter from W.W. Law to Ruby Hurley (September 10th, 1946), NAACP Papers, II, E50, 2.

¹¹³ Letter from Gloster Current to Ralph Mark Gilbert (October 15, 1948), NAACP Papers, 26, A, 11:28-9, letter from Ruby Hurley to W.W. Law (September 23 1946), NAACP Papers II, E50, 2

¹¹⁴ “Annual Report of the Savannah Youth Council, 1943-4,” letter from Parvell Mines to Ruby Hurley (February 6th, 1945), NAACP Papers, 26, A, 9:320-9, 433-4.

the Savannah branch conducted a highly successful membership drive in which they acquired 869 new members, 148 of which were youth members and it considered initiating a school desegregation suit the following year.¹¹⁵ In 1946, solid African American support throughout the state, but particularly from Atlanta, was instrumental in electing Helen Douglas Mankin, white lawyer and an Arnall supporter to the United States Congress during a special election.¹¹⁶

NAACP lawyers had been campaigning since 1924 to have the primaries declared unconstitutional and their “demolition” after 1944 “opened the iron clad doors to the most important election in southern politics.”¹¹⁷ NAACP activists’ success in opening the white primaries laid the foundation for movements against another voting restriction: literacy tests. According to Sidney Tarrow’s model of a “protest cycle,” “early risers” sometimes create new opportunities and set examples for other movements.¹¹⁸ It would have been difficult to motivate African Americans to pass literacy tests and register to vote as long as they remained excluded from the Democratic party primary because it was the only election of consequence in the South. By initiating the liberalization of voting rights in the South, “early riser” activists created opportunities for citizenship school organizers and voting rights campaigners in the subsequent generation.

However, citizenship school organizers may have tacitly accepted this last remaining obstacle to universal African American suffrage. Septima Clark believed that voting was a privilege that citizens achieved through becoming well-educated and politically conscious. In

¹¹⁵ Letter from J.S. Delaware to Ella Baker (May 11, 1946), letter from Gloster Current to J.S. Jameson (December 15, 1947), *NAACP Papers*, 26, A. 9: 505, 532.

¹¹⁶ Bartley, *Creation of Modern Georgia*, p 201. Douglas stood again for election in the Democratic primary of the same year, however, despite winning the popular vote, she was defeated in the county unit system.

¹¹⁷ Steven Lawson, *Black Ballots: Voting Rights in the South* (Lanham, MD, Oxford: Lexington Books, 1999, 1st edition, 1976), p 53.

¹¹⁸ Tarrow, *Power in Movement*. For example, the unwitting inclusion of Title VII in the Civil Rights Act, which theoretically extended equal opportunities to women, became a political opportunity around which women’s groups organized and the sit-ins introduced by civil rights protestors were a model for campus protests.

her autobiography, Clark argued that she was “just as anxious to prevent an unqualified Negro from voting as (preventing an) unqualified white voter (from doing so). The Negro must be willing to qualify himself to function as a citizen before he demands the full privileges of citizenship.”¹¹⁹ The 1965 Voting Rights Act, which enforced the Fifteenth Amendment of the US Constitution by outlawing voting restrictions like literacy tests, in many respects represented the culmination of over two decades of voting reform. Yet, ironically, it meant that the original rationale behind citizenship schools was no longer relevant and it became more difficult for SCLC to find funding for the program. This point will be returned to in Chapter 5, but here it is worth noting that the citizenship schools arose in an opportune period when literacy tests were the final major obstacle to African Americans’ voting and when local leaders saw the merit in educating “qualified” electors rather than challenging the validity of the literacy test itself.

Political reforms were undoubtedly a motivation for civil rights activists to initiate a campaign like the citizenship schools which tackled another restriction to African American voting. At the same time, social and economic changes *facilitated* the emergence of schools indirectly - by setting a new tone to state politics - and directly, by enabling the emergence of prosperous local leaders like Esau Jenkins.

Economic Development

Postwar economic development in Charleston and Savannah created opportunities for the rise of civil rights organizations and citizenship schools in several ways. In the first place, Charleston and Savannah’s positions as attractive, historic tourist destinations affected the racial

¹¹⁹ Echo in My Soul, p 216.

culture of both cities. In the post World War II era, politicians and businessmen alike sought to promote both cities as tourist sites. A 1949 publication by the Carolina Art Association described Charleston as both a prime tourist destination and a modern industrial city. Because historic Charleston and the new industrial plants were separate, the book explained, the city had advanced economically without sacrificing its ubiquitous charm.¹²⁰ Similarly, in 1960, Savannah's authorities created a tourist division of the Chamber of Commerce to entice tourists and business conventions to Savannah.¹²¹ Obviously, violent racial protests or virulent white racism would not help to promote the city's image as a genteel, attractive holiday destination. Historians have suggested that local freedom movements in Charleston and Savannah capitalized on the fact that the white population saw itself as "too dignified" for overt, violent racism.¹²² There are, clearly, problems with arguing that the two cities were distinguished from the rest of the Deep South because they shared a similarly "genteel" racial culture. Historians can and do refer to many Southern cities and regions as "civil" or "dignified" in contrast to Mississippi. Yet, historians and cultural critics including V.O. Key described Mississippi as far from a benchmark of Southern society; but rather as being in an unenviable category of its own.¹²³ It is more likely that politicians, businessmen and promoters in Savannah and Charleston projected, and sought to preserve, this image because they felt that it would help to boost both cities' reputation as prime tourist destinations. Moreover, civil rights protestors were very much aware

¹²⁰ Carolina Art Association, Charleston Grows (Charleston: Walker, Evans and Cogswell Co., 1949), cited in White, "Managed Compliance," p 67.

¹²¹ Savannah Morning News (December 25, 1960).

¹²² Stephen Tuck, "A City Too Dignified to Hate: Civic Pride, Civil Rights, and Savannah in Comparative Perspective," Georgia Historical Quarterly 79 (October 1995), 539, Steven O'Neill, "From the Shadow of Slavery: The Civil Rights Years in Charleston," (PhD Dissertation: University of Virginia, 1994), pp 18-20. Both cities' reputation for "civil" race relations, similar to Chafe's description of Greensboro, North Carolina, meant that they did not have to fear the violent reprisals experienced in Mississippi. For Chafe, "civility" was "a way of dealing with people and problems that made good manners more important than substantial action." Civilities and Civil Rights, p 9. See also, Colburn, Racial Change, p 23

¹²³ V.O.Key, Southern Politics in State and Nation (New York, NY: Knopf, 1949) especially page 229.

of this. In the 1960s, NAACP branches in both cities held disruptive direct action desegregation protests during tourist seasons to bargain for integrated facilities.

Emerging prosperous classes of financiers, businessmen and journalists demanded new, efficient and modern political and social reform. The World War II economy brought vast socio-economic changes to the South in general and to Charleston particularly. Under Mendel Rivers, congressional representative for the First Congressional District from 1941 to 1970 and second ranking member and then chair of the House Armed Services Committee, Charleston acquired an air force base, naval hospital, mine warfare center and a Naval District Headquarters. By the end of his term, one third of the area's income was defense related.¹²⁴ Economic changes required different kinds of government which, in turn, created opportunities for civil rights activists. Historians of the so-called 'New South' argue that politicians who once attracted Northern capital and defense contracts with low wages and stringent anti-union legislation, began to focus instead on educational reform to develop skilled labor and efficiently managed government. Particularly after the 1957 school integration crisis in Little Rock, they also wanted to avoid gaining a reputation for racial conflict.¹²⁵ Additionally, Charleston's blossoming defense economy depended upon the federal government's investment in projects like the Santee-Cooper hydroelectric plant, the Charleston Air Force Base and the Savannah River nuclear weapons plant. For some of South Carolina's voters, Thurmond's reputation as a States' Rights candidate

¹²⁴ Bruce Schulman, From Cotton Belt to Sunbelt: Federal Policy, Economic Development and the Transformation of the South, 1938-1980 (Durham, NC and London: Duke University Press, 1994), p 146.

¹²⁵ The New South (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 1996), pp 176, 259-61; James Cobb, The Selling of the South: The Southern Crusade for Industrial Development, 1936-1990 (Urbana and Chicago, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1993), passim, Elizabeth Jacoway and David Colburn (eds.), Southern Businessmen and Desegregation (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 1982), passim. Gavin Wright, however, argues that Southern industrialists retained a dual wage system that prevented a revolution in racial relations, while in Alabama, not one business chose to desegregate its workplace. He does acknowledge that Southern economic reform contributed to the civil rights movement by encouraging economic migration and the development of black voting blocs. Old South, New South: Revolutions in the Southern Economy Since the Civil War (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 1986), especially pp 284, 287.

posed a threat to future federal financing of projects, so in 1952 they selected Olin Johnston as senator instead.¹²⁶ The increasing inconsistency between the desire to attract federal funding and hostility towards federal intervention in segregation shaped racial policy in the pre-Brown period. By 1954, Secretary of Defense Robert B. Anderson had directly ordered desegregation of water fountains, cafeterias and facilities at Charleston's Navy Yard, while all of South Carolina's defense installations had undergone token desegregation.¹²⁷

In Georgia, industrialization and urbanization led to the development of an urban-based, white professional class that tended to be relatively "moderate" on political and some racial issues. Mechanization and diversification of agriculture and the booming wartime economy, including growth in Savannah's ports, combined to create jobs in both blue and white-collar industries and precipitated migration into urban centers, particularly Atlanta. By 1960, 46% of Georgia's population lived in cities, and 25% of Georgians lived in the Atlanta area.¹²⁸ The proportion of Georgians employed in retail, real estate, finance, insurance and white-collar services rose from approximately one in five in 1940 to over one in three by 1960.¹²⁹ In 1952, journalist Samuel Lubell argued that the "new middle-class, the branch plant managers and their college-trained supervisors, merchants, doctors and lawyers, newspaper publishers, and realtors, all seemingly so conservative... are the real political rebels in the South today."¹³⁰ This is an exaggeration, but urban middle-class voters did support candidates who advocated political modernization, efficient economic management and educational reform, such as Governors Ellis Arnall and Carl Sanders.¹³¹ As previous sections have explained, Arnall oversaw reforms in

¹²⁶ John White, "Managed Compliance: White Resistance and Desegregation in South Carolina, 1950-1970" (Unpublished PhD Dissertation, The University of Florida, 2006), pp 62-3, 92-4,

¹²⁷ White, "Managed Compliance," pp 133-5.

¹²⁸ Bartley, Creation of Modern Georgia pp 179-182.

¹²⁹ Bartley, Creation of Modern Georgia, p 181.

¹³⁰ The Future of American Politics (Garden City: Doubleday, 1953), p 119.

¹³¹ Key, Southern Politics, pp 112-4.

voting rights that created opportunities for the nascent civil rights movement, including the reduction of the voting age, abolition of the poll tax and opening of the previously all-white primary.

Economic development had direct effects on the men and women who went on to develop citizenship schools. Doug McAdam has argued that African Americans underwent increased prosperity and “rising expectations” because of wartime prosperity. While African American employees in Charleston’s defense industry usually worked in unskilled jobs, they had better prospects than they would have done in civilian industries. Between 1940 and 1950, nearly 10,000 nonwhites migrated to Charleston County, overwhelmingly to work in defense activities.¹³² NAACP Legal Counsel Thurgood Marshall observed that the growing military industry during World War II had resulted in a “large number of Negroes there (in Charleston) making plenty of money.”¹³³ This was an exaggeration and did not consider the wage discrimination faced by black defense workers, persistent poverty in spite of Charleston’s economic prosperity or the fact that economically prosperous blacks were not necessarily predisposed to social activism. However, Peter Ling has argued that “low country African Americans subsequently involved directly in the establishment of the CEP” also benefited from the booms in the defense industry, as well as other industries, such as agriculture and chemicals. Esau Jenkins is a prime example of the ways in which a black man took advantage of postwar economic conditions and went on to lead his community. Jenkins switched from cotton to truck farming and opened a successful fruit store and motel in Charleston, while the local people he took to work on a bus had often found skilled work in tobacco or fertiliser plants or as

¹³² White, “Managed Compliance,” p 132.

¹³³ Memo from Thurgood Marshall to Walter White and Roy Wilkins (June 17, 1942), NAACP Papers, Part 26, Series A, 18: 450-1.

longshoremen.¹³⁴ However, in Jenkins' case, economic prosperity gave him the means to promote skills he believed to be necessary for a future generation of business leaders, such as thrift and industry. His bus, moreover, represented a "free space" in which he identified people's desire to learn to read so that they could register to vote.

For Esau Jenkins, making money and providing for the community was not merely a case of a local man capitalizing on economic opportunities to do well as an individual and, subsequently, helping other people. For Jenkins, economic prosperity, combined with other virtues such as thrift, self-sufficiency and responsibility for one's family and community defined his identity as a middle-class, black, rural man. He would also seek to introduce these virtues to his civic work, including the citizenship schools. This leads to questions about the nature of gender in the "early civil rights movement" and the ways in which these shaped the character of the early citizenship schools.

Theorizing Gender

Historians have discussed gender in relation to the citizenship schools only inasmuch as they argue that they were an outlet for African American women to become involved in a movement usually dominated by men. Yet, gender also affected the classes taught and the forms of social action in which citizenship school students took part. In the first place, Esau Jenkins' specific form of masculinity informed his civic activities. For the past two decades, gender scholars have concurred that it is more appropriate to discuss "masculinities, or "the ways in which different men construct different versions of masculinity."¹³⁵ For example, Robert Connell applied Antonio Gramsci's model of "hegemony," the practice by which one social

¹³⁴ "Local Leadership," p 401, Clark, *Echo in My Soul*, p 135.

¹³⁵ Michael Kimmel and Michael Messner, *Men's Lives* (Boston, MA: Allyn and Bacon, fourth edition, 1989), p xix.

group occupies a leading position in social life, to the study of gender relations. He argued that “hegemonic masculinity” was the “configuration of practice” that legitimated patriarchy or “the dominant position of men and the subordination of women.” Within this framework, he argued there were “specific gender relations of dominance and subordination between groups of men.” Men subordinate other men, as well as women, through legal and extralegal violence; cultural exclusion and abuse; and economic discrimination. Connell argued that gender interacts with other structures like race, class and sexuality to create new relationships between masculinities. He cited examples of black sporting stars becoming models of masculine toughness and the “fantasy figure of the black rapist,” which shaped sexual politics among white Americans.¹³⁶

Connell’s line of reasoning is apparent, if not always acknowledged, in histories of black men in the United States. Slave historians debate whether or not hegemonic white masculinities subordinated male slaves by denying them opportunities to form stable families and to provide for women and children, the measures by which men were deemed successful in antebellum society.¹³⁷ Studies of black men in the post civil rights era discuss the interaction between racial subordination and class, as unemployment and urban poverty shaped black masculinity. Sociologists depicted young black men “in crisis:” underrepresented among high school graduates and college students, and overrepresented among the incarcerated population, substance abusers and unemployment rolls.¹³⁸ Robert Majors argued that black men developed a new model of masculinity in response to their subordination. Because they did not meet hegemonic white middle-class standards of masculine success such as educational attainment

¹³⁶ RW Connell, *Masculinities* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2005; 1st edition, 1995), pp 77-80.

¹³⁷ For example, Frazier, *Negro Family*. Herbert Gutman, on the other hand, argued that black slaves found inventive ways of providing for their families; for example, by trapping game and growing vegetables. *The Black Family in Slavery and Freedom, 1750-1925* (New York, NY: Vintage Books, 1977).

¹³⁸ For example, Robert Staples, *Black Masculinity: The Black Man’s Roles in American Society* (San Francisco: Black Scholar Press, 1982); Jewelle Taylor Gibbs, *To be Young, Black and Male in America: An Endangered Species* (Dover, MA: Auburn House, 1988).

and economic success, young black men set “coolness” as a standard to which they could aspire. Young black men became “cool” by emulating “gangsta rappers” in dress, speech patterns and attitudes.¹³⁹

Esau Jenkins and Rural Middle-class Masculinity

Historians of African American men have applied gender theory to understand different forms of masculinities. For example, Martin Summers argued that a generational shift transformed the dominant model of black middle-class masculinity between the first and third generation of the twentieth-century. He argued that in the early twentieth-century men joined associations like Masonic lodges and the United Negro Improvement Association (UNIA), which encouraged men to participate in the marketplace and to practice “thrift, regularity and sobriety.” These organizations promoted “racial solidarity, self help and self reliance.” This masculinity was created in relation to a perceived working-class “non-respectable” masculinity in which men were profligate and failed to protect and provide for women and children. However, by the end of the period, younger middle-class African American men challenged the earlier “canon of manliness” through “the career choices that they made (often in the face of parental and societal pressure to pursue a respectable profession), their enjoyment of new ‘unrespectable’ modes of leisure and the intimate relationships that they formed with women and other men.” Summers cites the lives and works and of poets and artists during the Harlem Renaissance as emblematic of this “generational shift.”¹⁴⁰ Age has not been used as a category

¹³⁹ Cool Pose: The Dilemmas of Black Manhood in America (Clearwater, FL: Touchstone Books, 1992).

¹⁴⁰ Martin Summers, Manliness and Its Discontents: The Black Middle-class and the Transformation of Masculinity, 1900-1930 (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2005), citations on pp 8, 32, 35, 152.

of analysis nearly as commonly as race, class or gender.¹⁴¹ However, it is just as useful for explaining different forms of black masculinity, including in Charleston and Savannah.

Summers' model of black masculinity is apparent in Esau Jenkins' philosophies and ethos. Through the Progressive Club, Jenkins sought not only to serve the community but to instill virtues and qualities in its people. For Jenkins, to be "progressive" meant to "look upward and do better."¹⁴² Reflecting on the club he had established, he concluded that to "make any kind of progress in life," people should "first, get organize (sic); second, do away with folly; third, work together and fourth, set your goals." Through Progressive Club meetings, Jenkins hoped to "obliterate ignorance, to promote health and social, educational and civic welfare, and to combat juvenile delinquency," in order to "secure a more rich and abundant life for ourselves and for our posterity."¹⁴³ This rationale was apparent in the Progressive Club and Citizens' Committee work. Credit unions encouraged "self starters" to make improvements to their homes and businesses, becoming "better" men who provided money and more comfortable accommodation for their families. Civic efforts to improve schools and local amenities, like street paving, extended this ethos of personal "uplift" to the entire community. Finally, the citizenship schools encouraged students to learn skills that would help them advance in the workplace and, indirectly, by voting for progressive politicians. There are undeniable undercurrents of the men's organizations Martin Summers described in the ethos and practice of the Progressive Club. However, Jenkins' ideas of manhood and masculinity were also informed by local conditions, not least its rural location.

¹⁴¹ Susan Eckelman, "Freedom's Little Lights: Children and Youth in the Civil Rights and Black Power Movement," (Paper presented at the Heidelberg Spring Academy, March 30- April 3, 2009).

¹⁴² Interview with Guy Carawan, Carawan Collection, FT3617.

¹⁴³ Handwritten notes, "My job is Enjoyable to Me;" Proposal to the Charleston Anti Poverty Program (January 12, 1965), Esau Jenkins box, folder 13.

Riché Richardson's analysis of rural and Southern black men in literature and popular culture underlines the importance of considering geography alongside class, race and age, in the construction of masculinities. She argues that black southern masculinity has been either romanticized as "ancestral, historical (and) spiritual" or lambasted as "cowardly, counterrevolutionary, infantile and emasculated" and epitomized by the "Uncle Tom" figure. For example, during the 1920s, many northern-based civil rights activists believed southern rural migrants to be undereducated, unsophisticated and immoral, was antithetical to the "racial uplift" project. The Urban League created pamphlets for new migrants to Detroit, instructing them not to wear house slippers in public, swear or talk loudly. Moreover, depictions of Malcolm X in popular culture portray him as an urban revolutionary and downplay his early life in rural Michigan "because rurality would not mesh with images of him as masculine and militant." When Malcolm X pilloried Martin Luther King as an "Uncle Tom" and hinted that he was emasculated or even homosexual, he juxtaposed northern urban activists (revolutionary, black nationalist and masculine) from Southern ones, who accommodated white society, practiced nonviolence and were unmanly.

Richardson justifies conflating "rural " and Southern and juxtaposing a rural South with an urban north, because "though rural areas are located throughout the nation and though many urban areas are located in the South, it is nevertheless true that when some people think 'South,' they think rural."¹⁴⁴ Yet, within the South and within individual states, rural or urban geography played a role in gender construction. For example, white professional men in Atlanta identified themselves as educated, astute and progressive in relation to landowning classes in Georgia's rural counties and they felt that they were under-represented by the county unit system. The

¹⁴⁴ Riché Richardson, From Uncle Tom to Gangsta: Black Masculinity in the US South (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2007), citations on pp 127, 6, 77, 163, 168-70, 134-5.

same was true of civil rights activists in Savannah and the rural Sea Islands. The Sea Islands' rural location shaped its early civic institutions and the development of citizenship schools in a number of ways. Many of the problems early organizers faced, and many of the issues they campaigned for, were endemic to rural areas: namely, lack of transportation and communication facilities. Esau Jenkins' vision of self-sufficient, respectable men who provided for their families was also shaped by the specific rural environment. Although men were increasingly working for wages in the city, island dwellers had traditionally owned small plots of land and raised their own food with which to provide for their families. By emphasizing "respectable" qualities like sobriety and regular churchgoing, Jenkins was reacting against both the "vices" associated with city-dwelling and the "folk" traditions of the island. He was concerned by the numbers of young island people who migrated to New York and, in the case of men, became dependent on drugs and alcohol or in the case of women, had children outside marriage. He also cautioned people against "evil" folk practices, such as relying on "roots" as good luck charms rather than advancing through hard work and thrift.¹⁴⁵

Black Clubwomen and Black Masculinity

An analysis of masculinity in the "early civil rights movement" should not negate women's participation. In the city of Charleston, middle-class black women joined sororities and clubs like the YWCA where they met likeminded women and participated in welfare activities, like providing health and nutrition education for women and children. They also experienced early stirrings of racial justice movements. For example, in 1948, Elizabeth Waring addressed the Charleston Coming Street's YWCA, where she described white people as "a

¹⁴⁵ Recording of Christmas Watch, Johns Island, 1961, [Carawan Collection](#), FT 3586.

sick... and decadent people (who were)... full of pride and complacency... (and) morally weak” and urged African Americans to attack their “selfish and savage... way of life.” Some participants were more shocked than inspired by her speech: Septima Clark’s mother, for example, was so taken aback that she fainted and had to be carried outside.¹⁴⁶ While it was rare for women to form clubs in rural communities, they participated in similar activities through their churches. Meanwhile, teachers were historically active in rural communities in general and on the Sea Islands specifically. In 1949, Septima Clark’s sorority arranged for children to be transported from Johns Island to the city in order to be immunized against diphtheria. She also arranged for Highlander staff to deliver workshops on health and social welfare.¹⁴⁷ Mamie Garvin Fields also organized social welfare activities when she worked as a teacher on Johns and James Islands. For example, noting that many of her students did not eat a nutritious diet, she bought a stove to cook hot meals for her students and taught their parents how to prepare vegetables.¹⁴⁸

Clubwomen’s activism did not necessarily challenge or transgress dominant gender roles. Deborah Gray White explains that sometimes African American men did challenge women’s activism. Although clubwomen saw themselves at once “uplifting” the African American race through club activities, W.E.B. DuBois warned that African Americans would “not keep progress with the virile races of the world” unless black women were “prepared to assume the responsibility of healthy families, of two or three children.” Other men argued that “club activity undermin(ed) women’s place” and “natural” gender roles. Yet, White also suggests that black clubwomen reinforced a model of black men protecting and providing for their families,

¹⁴⁶ Septima Clark, interview with Jacquelyn Dowd Hall (July 25, 1976), p 28.

¹⁴⁷ Echo in My Soul, pp 110-1, Richard Couto, Ain’t Gonna Let Nobody Turn Me Around (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 1991), pp 120-2.

¹⁴⁸ Mamie Garvin Fields, Lemon Swamp and Other Places: A Carolina Memoir, (London: Macmillan, 1983), p 218.

when they levied charges that black men had previously neglected to protect black women against white violence. Furthermore, middle-class clubwomen were concerned with black women's morality, and promoted chastity, virtue, hygiene and better housekeeping, all values that reinforced women's roles within the home. These gender roles were constructed in relation to supposedly "deviant" black working class traits, such as promiscuity and indolence.¹⁴⁹

Law, Gadsden and Black Masculinity in Savannah's NAACP

As the archival and oral history materials outlining W.W. Law, and the Savannah NAACP's, ideology and tactics are relatively scarce, it is more difficult to analyze masculinities among Savannah's early civil rights activists and the ways in which these differed from Esau Jenkins and the Progressive Club. The branch did attract a number of professional middle-class men, such as the lawyer Eugene Gadsden who may have emulated similar "bourgeois" male values to Esau Jenkins, including industry, thrift and "respectable" manhood, although they represented a well-educated, professional elite rather than "self made" men. Gadsden's educational background may have influenced his behavior in the 1960s. When young people staged sit-ins and boycotts at Savannah's stores and schools, he frowned upon their actions because he felt that they would not help the city's desegregation campaigns. As in the national organization, professional men in Savannah's NAACP branch valued reasoned argument in the courts rather than emotionally-charged direct action.¹⁵⁰ Meanwhile businesspeople in the black community chose to negotiate better conditions through interracial committees established by the city's mayor. W.W. Law's class position in the city's class structure is more ambiguous. The son of a domestic worker, he had taken advantage of the GI bill to attend college, but

¹⁴⁹ Deborah Gray White, *Too Heavy a Load: Black Women in Defense of Themselves, 1894-1994* (New York: NY W W Norton Co., 1999), pp 60-1, 68-71.

¹⁵⁰ Savannah Morning News March 24 1960.

because of the city's discriminatory hiring practice, he had not been able to find a well-paid career and instead worked as a post officer. Meanwhile, as a bachelor, Law may not have identified as closely with Jenkins' emphasis on providing for women and children.¹⁵¹ In the early months of the city's sit-ins and boycotts in 1960, Law was relatively sympathetic to, and sympathetic of, young protestors. Yet, as his relationship with Hosea Williams of the CCCV became increasingly strained, he condemned the protestors and distanced himself from both direct action protest and the work.

The Sea Islands' and Savannah's citizenship schools were rooted in different traditions. The former grew out of a civic association that promoted respectability, thrift, educational attainment and industry amongst its members. While there was a relatively strong NAACP branch in Charleston by the late 1950s; in previous decades it had fluctuated in size and influence within the state. Moreover, the schools developed not in the city but on the nearby rural Sea Islands. In Savannah, on the other hand, there had been a historically strong NAACP branch, although it too experienced problems after the election of reactionary politicians like Herman Talmadge and after the national branch raised membership fees. The citizenship schools were a component of the NAACP's voter registration work. Yet, the schools were administered not by Law, Gadsden or experienced branch members, but by the new Vice President and registration coordinator, Hosea Williams. Williams not only quarreled with and challenged his colleagues, but he associated himself with different sections of society and different forms of masculinity:

¹⁵¹ Westley Wallace Law, interview with T Crimmins and C. Kuhn (November 15, 1990, Savannah, Georgia), Georgia Government Documentation Project, Georgia State University, Atlanta, GA, p 78.

ostensibly young, urban and working class. The next chapter will address the development of citizenship schools in both Lowcountry South Carolina and Savannah, and the ways in which they were similar to, and changed from, the “early civil rights movements” in both regions and from one another.

Chapter Two

From Johns Island to Savannah: Building the Citizenship Schools, 1954-1960

Septima Clark invited Esau Jenkins to a workshop on the United Nations at Highlander at an opportune moment in the school's history. Highlander had recently acquired a grant from the Emil Schwartzhaupt Foundation to develop local leadership in the South and Myles Horton was looking for projects and individuals with whom they could collaborate. When, at the close of the 1954 workshop, Horton asked workshop participants what they intended to do to promote the United Nations in their communities, Jenkins announced that he had his own ideas about what he wanted to promote. He had bought a bus on which he took islanders to work in Charleston. One of his passengers, Alice Wine, had asked him to help her memorize the South Carolina constitution so that she could register to vote. Although Jenkins was impressed with Wine's ability to recite the constitution by rote, he recognized that this would not work for everyone and hoped to begin a class for adults so that they could learn to read and write well enough to pass South Carolina's literacy test.¹⁵²

¹⁵² Clark, Ready from Within, pp 42-7. The literacy test required potential voters to read a portion of the South Carolina constitution. In the early years of the citizenship schools, students were given the same passage to read when they went to register. Registrants were exempted from the literacy test if they could bring a receipt that demonstrated that they paid tax on \$300 worth of property. These election laws were outlined for students in Highlander Folk School, "My Reading Booklet," SCLC Papers, Part 4, 12:487-503.

Developing Local Leadership on Johns Island

Seeing potential in Jenkins and his ideas, Myles Horton and Septima Clark spent years between 1954 and 1957 taking frequent trips to Charleston and the Sea Islands. Horton wrote of this time,

I went down to Johns Island and was in and out for almost a year trying to figure out how to help Esau. I'd get acquainted by going fishing with the people. I'd spend the night with them, work with them on their farms and play with their children.¹⁵³

Meanwhile, Horton asked Clark to develop a course and to write a manual for training local leaders. It was to be “written in simple language” and “placed in the hands of individuals with little formal training” to “help them to develop leaders.” Although she was apprehensive about Highlander’s reputation as a training school for communists, she was employed as a temporary Highlander summer staff member.¹⁵⁴ Clark visited community and civic meetings and recorded the proceedings, and met with potential grassroots leader on Johns and neighboring islands.¹⁵⁵

During these years, Highlander staff considered, and worked on, several projects that would benefit Johns Island’s African American inhabitants rather than exclusively developing citizenship schools. For example, immediately after the United Nations workshop, an interracial youth meeting was held at the Johns Island church center.¹⁵⁶ Esau Jenkins attempted to arouse

¹⁵³ Long Haul, p 100.

¹⁵⁴ From its inception, the school was attacked by local people and the state of Tennessee for its supposed communism, although it faced its most serious legal challenges after 1957. These are discussed in depth later in this chapter.

¹⁵⁵ Letters from Septima Clark to Judge Waties and Elizabeth Waring (March 22, May 16, June 1, June 30 and August 30, 1955), Waring Papers, box 9, folder 227.

¹⁵⁶ Letter from Esau Jenkins to Myles Horton (September 20 1954), Highlander Files, 33:571.

interest in politics and assuage any fears local people may have had when he ran for the Charleston school board in 1956.¹⁵⁷ A civic club of interested citizens met regularly and Clark argued that although this was not a formal instructional program, the meetings gave islanders a “general education” in political participation.¹⁵⁸ Highlander also organized some community welfare projects. Septima Clark found that decent, affordable housing was a priority for many islanders, particularly young people, and Horton attempted to recruit architects to assist but with mixed successes.¹⁵⁹ In 1956, Highlander staff arranged a workshop which included sessions on housing and cooperatives. The former informed participants of federal housing regulations and included advice on how to secure loans to build or improve housing. The latter invited an unidentified African American man, formerly from Charleston, to share his experiences of opening a cooperative business in Ohio.¹⁶⁰ It was only after three years of meetings, leadership development workshops and experimental projects that Highlander opened the first adult literacy school.¹⁶¹ Yet, these range of other projects were consistent with Esau Jenkins’ and the Progressive Club’s previous campaigns, and with his vision of respectable middle-class black masculinity.¹⁶²

Peter Ling has argued that Highlander’s ability to develop grassroots leadership on Johns Island was due to the groundwork carried out between 1954 and 1957 as well as to the citizenship school classes themselves. Believing that communities benefited when a wide range

¹⁵⁷ Glen, Highlander, p 190

¹⁵⁸ Highlander Files, 33:582-9; Septima Clark, “Report on trip to Johns Island,” October 17-20, 1955, Highlander Files, 33:691-4.

¹⁵⁹ Septima Clark, “Notes on a trip to Charleston and Johns Island, May 24 1955,” Highlander Files, 33:643-6; letter from Jacob Crane to Myles Horton (October 7 1955), Highlander Files, 34:36; by Myles Horton, October 21, 1955, Highlander Files, 34:37.

¹⁶⁰ Letter from Septima Clark to Judge Waties and Elizabeth Waring (February 12, 1956), Waring Papers, box 9, folder 227.

¹⁶¹ Peter Ling has argued that all other issues discussed between 1954 and 1957 “seemed, in the end, to return to illiteracy.” “Local Leadership,” p 415.

¹⁶² See the analysis in Chapter 1.

of people took on responsibilities and contributed their ideas, Highlander staff endeavored to both identify potential leaders and encourage Jenkins to share leadership roles with others.¹⁶³ Esau Jenkins juggled several businesses with civic and political action and was not accustomed to sharing responsibilities with others. This was partly tied to the traditional models of middle-class masculinity to which he subscribed and, hence, his position within his family.¹⁶⁴ He tended to rely on the women in his family for support. For example, when he ran a workshop on Wadmalaw Island in 1955, Septima Clark observed that “women were busy working in the kitchen under the supervision of Esau’s wife.”¹⁶⁵ If Esau Jenkins or even Myles Horton had been writing the report, this fact might have gone unrecorded. On another occasion, Myles Horton was looking across Johns Island for Jenkins in his various businesses. Instead, he found Jenkins’ son, wife and daughters running the family gas station and restaurant respectively. This turned out to be an opportunity to speak to Marie about her desire for a decent home she and her husband could afford.¹⁶⁶ Other than hiring an extensive staff, it would have been difficult for Jenkins to sustain his various business and community activities without the support of his family members, so it was not surprising that his wife and daughters played these supportive roles.

¹⁶³ “Local Leadership,” p 413.

¹⁶⁴ Elizabeth Fox Genovese, in her study of antebellum slave households, distinguished between “patriarchy” seen in ancient Rome, where males dominated their households and could legitimately kill their wives, children and slaves, and “paternalism” or “the protective domination of the father over his family.” Within the Plantation Household: Black and White Women of the Old South (Chapel Hill, NC, London: University of North Carolina Press, 1988), pp 63-4. Genovese’s case study was specific to antebellum slave society and she demonstrates the ways in which Southern paternalism governed male householders’ relationships with both women and slaves. Of course, these structures are not directly applicable to mid twentieth-century African American communities. Nevertheless, as the head of the Jenkins family, its businesses and related community projects, Jenkins took on both a dominant and protective role in his family. His wife and children were expected to contribute towards business and community projects, while he took on responsibilities for his children’s education and careers, as in the case of Ethel’s employment as a citizenship schoolteachers and Head Start administrator.

¹⁶⁵ Septima Clark, “Saturday night meeting on Wadmalaw Island,” Highlander Files, 33:647-52.

¹⁶⁶ Myles Horton, “Notes on a trip to Charleston and Johns Island,” May 2 1955, Highlander Files, 33:643-646.

Yet, this was hardly consistent with Highlander's model of participatory grassroots leadership and Horton and Clark endeavored to encourage him to share responsibilities more widely. For example, when Clark asked Jenkins to ask someone to carry out a survey on voter registration and educational attainment on the island, Jenkins volunteered his daughter Ethel. Clark needed to persuade him to look outside his family circle and consider Elijah (Buddy) Freeman instead.¹⁶⁷ Merely recruiting a community leader to attend a Highlander workshop was not sufficient to develop grassroots leadership or democratic organization to implement community change. Highlander's model of community leadership development, rather, depended on wide participation from across the community and establishment of democratic organization, as well as tailoring projects and programs to people's needs. On Johns Island, this had taken time, effort and extensive preparations. Once the program started to grow, Highlander did not have the time and resources for similar preparations. Established wisdom about the citizenship school program suggests that Highlander cultivated grassroots leadership by selecting undiscovered, talented leadership and training them in Highlander's ethos and methods before sending them back to their communities. This assumption requires closer examination of the nature and character of these "trained leaders" or citizenship schoolteachers.

Bernice Robinson: a teacher without formal training

Historians have, for the most part, based their assumption that citizenship schools trained individuals from a wide variety of backgrounds on prevailing myths surrounding the first teacher, Bernice Robinson. A beautician and a single mother from Charleston, Robinson had some experience working on voter registration projects with the YWCA, but was not a formal

¹⁶⁷ Septima Clark, "Conference on Leadership Training, Charleston," March 19, 1955, Highlander Files, 33:627-8.

“leader” in a community or civil rights organization. By selecting her as a teacher, Highlander staff successfully gave another local person a leadership role as part of its project of encouraging democratic participation and leadership roles. Myles Horton, moreover, wanted to avoid using people with formal teaching qualifications, as he believed that they would impose their methodology and “be judgmental.” He juxtaposed Robinson, who became a good teacher not through training, but by “loving and caring for (people) and above all, from respecting and dealing with them as they are” favorably with Clark (who had been trained in the South Carolina school system).¹⁶⁸ For example, in a memo to Ralph Tyler of the U.S. Justice Department, Horton accused Clark of being incapable of “grasp(ing) principles or conceptual(izing) a systematic methodology.” It was apparently only with Horton’s “constant and informal guidance” that she was able to administer the program.¹⁶⁹ As Chapter 3 explains, Horton and Clark had a fraught relationship by 1960. Clark was dissatisfied with Horton’s administration of the program and hurt when he chose to retain Robinson and not herself as a staff member. This exchange is further evidence of this; however, it also indicates Horton’s prejudice against experienced, trained schoolteachers who he believed would have problems understanding Highlander’s teaching methods and techniques.

Figure 1 Bernice Robinson teaching a class on Johns Island

¹⁶⁸ Long Haul, p 105.

¹⁶⁹ “Notes for a Ralph Taylor Memo,” (n.d.), Highlander Papers box 38, folder 2, cited in Charron, “Teaching Citizenship,” pp 522-3. The memo was probably written in 1960, as it was part of Highlander’s proposals that the school would continue to support the citizenship school program by researching its effects and benefits. See Chapter 3 for a fuller description of these proposals.



Not only was Horton's depiction of the two women unfair to Clark, who was often more sympathetic and understanding of local people than Horton himself, but it is emblematic of the misleading way in which Bernice Robinson has been represented in the historiography of the citizenship schools.¹⁷⁰ Historians have reiterated the line that Robinson, although having a limited education herself, nevertheless managed to be an effective citizenship schoolteacher. Yet, given the emphasis placed on Robinson as a model for citizenship schoolteachers, she has been understudied and misunderstood both in histories of the citizenship schools and of women in the civil rights movement. In both sets of scholarship, Clark tends to overshadow her cousin.¹⁷¹ When scholars discuss Robinson in any detail, it is usually to contrast her with Clark

¹⁷⁰ On one occasion, Jenkins, Horton and Clark held a meeting with Mary Lee Davis to plan a voter registration workshop. The taped discussion indicated that Horton was increasingly frustrated with, and hostile to, Davis while Clark did her best to mediate the situation. Transcript of a "Planning Meeting for Workshop in Charleston," (September 22, 1958) *Highlander Files*, 33: 744-68. Clark had also spent her early teaching career living and working on Johns Island, during which time she participated in social welfare programs and built a rapport with the people. Conversely, Robinson had been born and grew up in Charleston and had lived in cities for most of her life. She earned islanders' trust, at least initially, because they saw her working with Jenkins and he introduced her to them. Robnett, *How Long, How Long*, p 89.

¹⁷¹ An entire chapter is devoted to Clark in Crawford et al.'s *Women in the Civil Rights Movement* and in Lynn Olson's *Freedom's Daughters*. Belinda Robnett gives a detailed account of Clark as a "bridge leader" and recently three doctoral dissertations have been completed on Clark's life work and contribution to the civil rights movement. Most of these accounts refer to Robinson only as someone that Clark brought into the movement. Grace Jordan McFadden, "Septima P; Clark and the Struggle for Civil Rights," in Crawford et al, *Women in the Civil*

or to argue that citizenship schoolteachers were a counterweight to traditional leaders. Historians repeatedly refer to Robinson's proximity to and affinity with her students and describe her as a beautician without teacher training who was sensitive to her students and their needs.¹⁷² Only one recent dissertation alludes to Robinson's outstanding administration and organizational capabilities.¹⁷³ Further, although Robinson was indeed an empathetic person who tailored an educational program that met Johns Islanders' needs, existing literature underestimates her educational level, skills and experience. She is seen as being "one of the people" when in fact her life history was far from typical of most Johns Island residents, or of South Carolinian women of either race. Although Robinson clearly lacked her cousin's educational attainment, she had graduated from high school which meant that she was unusually well educated compared to her students and by South Carolina standards.¹⁷⁴

Even more impressive are the lengths that Robinson went to in order to complete her education. She left school at fifteen to join a sister in New York with a view to training as a classical musician. Several years later, after she had married and separated, she again lived in New York and attended evening classes. When she met a girl who explained that going to evening classes three nights a week would take too much time, Robinson responded,

Rights Movement; Olson, Freedom's Daughters, pp 213-224; Robnett, How Long, How Long, p 92; Charron, "Teaching Citizenship, Jenkins, "Septima Clark," Greene, "Working Towards Literacy."

¹⁷² Sandra Oldendorf, "Highlander Folk School and the South Carolina Sea Island Citizenship School: Implications for the Social Studies," (Unpublished PhD Dissertation, The University of Kentucky, 1987), pp 63-4; David Levine, "Citizenship Schools," (Unpublished PhD Dissertation, The University of Wisconsin, 1999), pp 132-4, 111; Charron, "Teaching Citizenship," pp 478-80; Jenkins, "Septima Clark," pp 88-9; Curtis, "Working Towards Literacy," p 96-8. Levine and Charron both outline Robinson's life history, but are not explicit about what these experiences brought to the CEP or how they challenge conventional wisdom.

¹⁷³ Lathan, "Writing a Wrong," pp 87-96

¹⁷⁴ Unfortunately, there is scarce statistical information on educational attainment in South Carolina in this period. Yet, in 1950, when Bernice Robinson had her high school diploma, just over a quarter of people of either gender and all races had completed four years of high school. Only 12.5% of African Americans *nationwide* had done so. Bureau of the Census, 17th Census of the United States, 1950: Special Report on Education, (Washington, D.C.: Bureau of the Census, 1950), pp 12-13, available at <http://W.W.w2.census.gov/prod2/decennial/documents/41601759v4p5ch2.pdf> (Accessed on 22/5/2008). On Johns Island, literacy levels were lower. When she began teaching on the island in 1919, Clark believed that virtually all adults were illiterate. Echo in My Soul, p 39.

I went to school five nights a week and had a child and didn't have nobody to leave her with... and she had to get on the subway in New York and meet me downtown after work and go on and sit down in the reception room while I go on upstairs to school, five nights a week.

This statement gives some indication of the time and effort Robinson put into finishing school, the value she placed on education, and it also suggests that she had limited sympathy with people who were not as driven and ambitious as she had been. In addition to completing high school, Robinson passed civil service exams in Philadelphia, New York and in Charleston, although South Carolina's discriminatory hiring practices meant that she always found herself on waiting lists rather than in Charleston's government service.¹⁷⁵ Her clerical job provided a weekly salary of seventy dollars a week, which was a mark of her above average intelligence and education. Robinson may have avoided traditional teaching methods of a trained teacher, however, her articulate speaking voice and intelligence distinguished her in her students' eyes. At least one of her students, Anna Vastine, was surprised to hear that Robinson was not a trained schoolteacher.¹⁷⁶

Identifying Robinson, as accounts of the citizenships all do, as merely a beautician is itself somewhat misleading. As a young woman, Robinson had co-owned a beauty shop in New York, but she also worked in the garment industry to make ends meet before she found well-paid work in the civil service. She returned to Charleston in 1947 because her parents were ill and she worked at a range of jobs, including working for an upholstery man for a fraction of her former salary (\$15 a week). She was a driven and independent woman who wanted to earn a living for herself and her daughter. "I had to have money," she explained, "I had to know I was

¹⁷⁵ All quotes and details on Robinson's life are taken from Bernice Robinson, interview with Sue Thrasher and Elliot Wigginton (November 9, 1990, Charleston, S.C.), hereafter "Thrasher and Wigginton interview," Robinson Papers, box 1, folder 5.

¹⁷⁶ Transcribed discussion between Myles Horton, Septima Clark, Esau Jenkins and students. Records of Highlander Research and Education Center (microfilm), hereafter, Highlander Records, 33:606-617.

having money coming in every week.” It was only when her attempts to find a well-paid job in Charleston were frustrated that her brothers tore down the family garage and built a beauty shop for her. Nevertheless, working as a beautician gave her useful skills for her later civil rights work. She was independent of white employers, socialized with local people and her shop gave her a base to run voter registration campaigns.¹⁷⁷ Extensive historical work, including a recent study by Lee Sartain, argues that being a beautician was a “position of strength” for African American women, marking them as independent businesswomen.¹⁷⁸ Robinson’s broader employment history, however, illustrates that she was also a skilled administrator and record keeper, and a driven, ambitious individual.

A reinterpretation of Robinson and her experience raises several questions about both the first school and those that followed. Myles Horton believed Robinson to be a suitable teacher not only because of her personal qualities, but because her selection meant sharing leadership roles with another local person and because her lack of formal teacher training meant that she would be more receptive to Highlander’s participatory teaching methods than he perceived Septima Clark to be. When Robinson stood in front of her first class in January 1957, she told them that she would not really be their teacher, but rather that they would all learn together and teach one another. She encouraged students to design their own curriculum and discuss issues that faced their daily lives, thus cohering Horton’s educational ideologies.¹⁷⁹ However, as Highlander extended the program, it increasingly relied on both established community leaders and trained teachers.

¹⁷⁷ Thrasher and Wigginton interview, pp 34, 28-30, 37-8, 115.

¹⁷⁸ Sartain, *Invisible Activists*, pp 72-3.

¹⁷⁹ See Chapter Four.

Every Teacher is Different

Between 1957 and 1961, the citizenship schools were extended along the South Carolina coast from Charleston to Savannah, Georgia (see map below). Formed during early North American geological history, when the Atlantic Ocean retreated over a submerged region of the continental shelf, the roughly 1000 variable sized Sea Islands are divided by winding rivers and marshland and extend southwards to Florida.¹⁸⁰ In her autobiography, Clark explained that

There are many such islands, more than most Americans realize, on the Southeastern coast downward from North Carolina to Florida; literally hundreds of islands, some of them large, some hardly more than specks of land. Numbers of them, in fact, are too small to have people settled on them. The islands in the vicinity of Charleston are cut off from the mainland on the North and East by the waters of the ocean and on the West and South by wide and deep rivers that form a great intercoastal waterway.¹⁸¹

Myles Horton referred to the program as “island hopping” and this reflects the way that the program appeared to proliferate over a geographical region.¹⁸² Just under two years after the Johns Island School was established, in December 1958, Alleen Brewer was teaching a class at the Larimer Presbyterian Church, Edisto Island, while Ethel Grimball taught another on Wadamalaw Island.¹⁸³ Between 1958 and 1959, Highlander citizenship schools trained 106 students; a further 150 enrolled in time to vote for the 1960 Presidential Election, and in 1960-1, 105 out of 111 black students qualified to vote.¹⁸⁴

¹⁸⁰ Jackson, When Roots Die, p 5.

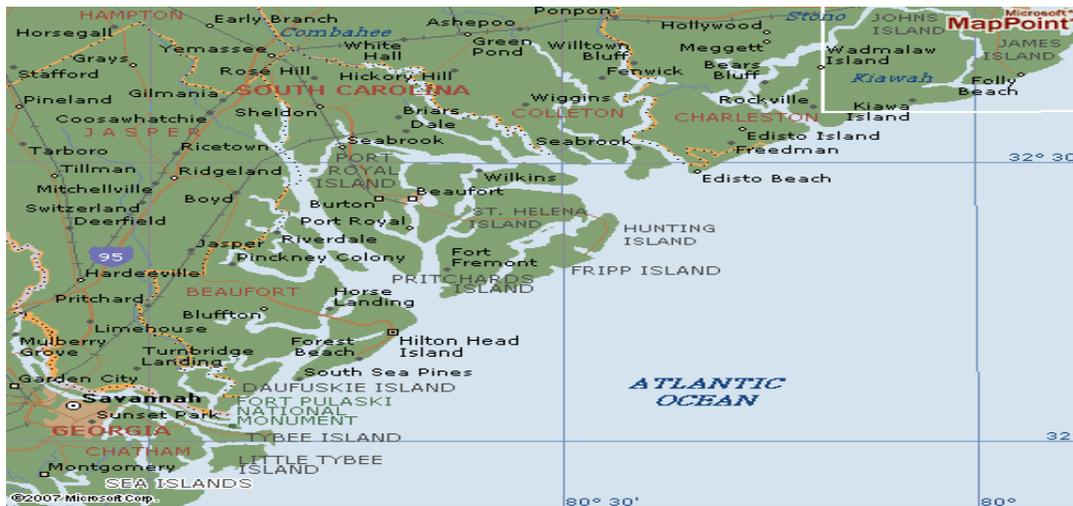
¹⁸¹ Clark, Echo in My Soul, p 33.

¹⁸² Horton, Long Haul, p 105

¹⁸³ “Septima Clark’s Report from the Sea Islands,” Highlander Folk School Audio Collection (Nashville, Tennessee, 1964), 807a, part 1, side 1, Tape 12.

¹⁸⁴ Glen, Highlander, p 198.

Figure 2 Map of the South Carolina Coast and Sea Islands



Horton suggested that the Sea Islands were an ideal location for the first citizenship schools. In a 1958 report on the Carolina and Georgia islands, he identified them as a potential site for future leadership development programs. He argued that this was due to “many of the same reasons why Johns Island was chosen for the Schwartzhaupt project.” Each island had a black majority population; each “encourage(d) its population to think of itself as a community” and the islands were located near cities (namely, Charleston and Savannah) which would make citizenship school graduates better able to relate to topical issues such as school desegregation campaigns. Residents were frequently self-employed and homeowners so therefore less vulnerable to participating in civil rights activity than African American public employees or workers at white-owned private businesses would be able to do. He also identified Penn Center on St Helena Island as a possible site for leadership training and interracial workshops.¹⁸⁵ He

¹⁸⁵ “Report of Myles Horton’s Trip to the Sea Islands” (January 1958), *Records of the SCLC*, 12:751. Established in 1962, Penn Center was a former school for African Americans. Along the lines of Booker T. Washington’s Tuskegee Institute taught vocational skills such as crop rotation and carpentry to boys and homemaking skills to girls. Under the direction of, Rosa Cooley, the school became a central social welfare

believed that citizenship schools had proliferated because the idea had wide appeal and it was an easy project for local communities to implement. “Soon,” he explained, “the Citizenship School program started island-hopping. We never brought anybody into that system from the outside... It was very spontaneous because it was so simple.”¹⁸⁶ Levine has also pointed to the islands’ communal institutions, such as prayer meetings and storytelling sessions and to the “cultural resources embedded in black Sea Island life” which were a “powerful combination” when combined with Highlander’s pedagogy and spirit.¹⁸⁷ Both Horton and historians have exaggerated the ease with which schools spread over the South Carolina Lowcountry. Setting up a citizenship school was not a spontaneous act; rather, as had been the case on Johns Island, it took time and sometimes extensive preparations for Highlander staff to implement an effective citizenship school in other communities.

The Wadmalaw Island School

Clark began working with local people on Wadmalaw Island in 1955. Her work followed a similar pattern to that on Johns Island: identifying leaders, encouraging other people to take on positions of responsibility and helping people to form new civic associations. She began by

institution in St Helena island residents’ lives. Students carried out repairs, sold second-hand clothes and organized cooperatives and farmers’ conference. Cooley brought a registered nurse to provide the island’s health care and established a Community Council, which met monthly to discuss community life and organized committees on individual issues, such as health and welfare, home life and recreation. Howard Kester, a former colleague of Myles Horton and organizer of the Southern Tenant Farmers Union, succeeded Miss Cooley for a brief period. In the 1940s, however, the board decided to abandon educational programs and focus on community services. In May 1948, the school was renamed Penn Community Services Inc. and Courtney Sicheloff replaced Kester as director. Elizabeth Jacoway, *Yankee Missionaries in the South: The Penn School Experiment* (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 1980). As a community center, it was thus an appropriate space for workshops and SCLC staff eventually used it for retreats. <http://W.W.w.sciway.net/afam/penn.html> (Accessed on May 26, 2008).

¹⁸⁶ Horton, *Long Haul*, p 105-6.

¹⁸⁷ “Birth of the Citizenship Schools,” p 413. On the other hand, in a 1958 community meeting, both Jenkins and J. Arthur Brown argued that students should devote less time to societies and to “singing and clapping” and instead join organizations that worked for registration and citizenship. This suggests that cultural organizations were not necessarily seen by contemporaries as a precedent to social movement activities. Recording of a meeting in North Charleston, *Highlander Audio Collection*, Tape 807a, 10, Side 1, Part 1.

visiting a local minister and “potential leader,” where she found that he was investigating a traffic accident involving a local black woman and a marine “speeding on the highway.” When he invited Septima Clark to give a speech about the NAACP at his church, she was impressed to find that the minister was using a piece about Waring and civil rights as a text for his sermon. Although the minister admitted to her that he had not been as active as he might have liked, the accident had inspired him to do more for the community. Meanwhile, Clark met another local man on the island, Sonny Jenkins (no relation to Esau), whom she believed could be an effective community leader.¹⁸⁸ Recognizing that Johns and Wadmalaw islands shared a voting place, Jenkins and Clark reasoned that it made sense for the two islands to coordinate their efforts. They held a workshop, consisting of several discussion panels, including one querying why less than 30% of South Carolina’s African Americans were voters. Another panel on consumer education posited that African Americans could change their condition through their individual purchasing power.¹⁸⁹ Here, it is possible not only to see the influence of Highlander Folk School and grassroots leadership training; but of Esau Jenkins’ ethos of respectability, thrift and personal responsibility. Despite this auspicious beginning, however, Esau Jenkins thought that Sonny Jenkins made slow progress in organizing local civic and political associations and he recommended holding a workshop to involve the island’s leader in local affairs.¹⁹⁰

It took another three years for a dedicated resident, Juanita Grimball, to request help to initiate a citizenship class on Wadmalaw Island. The class came about largely because Grimball worked assiduously to ensure that it would do so. She visited the Johns Island Progressive Club,

¹⁸⁸ Letter from Septima Clark to Judge and Elizabeth Waring (June 30 1955), Waring Papers, box 9, folder 227.

¹⁸⁹ “A Saturday Night Meeting at Wadmalaw Island,” Highlander Files, 33:649-52; Letter from Esau Jenkins to Septima Clark (August 18, 1959), Highlander Files, 33:888-9.

¹⁹⁰ Septima Clark, “Report on trip to Johns Island, October 17- 20, 1955,” “Report on a Trip to Johns Island,” October 17-20, 1955, Highlander Files, 33:691-4.

where Jenkins showed a film detailing Highlander's work training leaders for integration. She asked Clark and Jenkins to hold a meeting on her island, where they also showed the film and answered practical questions about holding workshops on the island. The film captured participants' interest and imagination. They appreciated seeing Esau Jenkins, a man they knew well, on the screen and were amused to see his children chasing chickens.¹⁹¹ Grimbball spent the following year looking for a space for the class; but in 1959 she established a school where she taught sewing and Jenkins' daughter Ethel (possibly her daughter in law) taught literacy skills.¹⁹²

Ethel Grimbball's selection for the Wadmalaw Island School was a departure from Highlander's educational ethos because she was a college educated, trained elementary school teacher. She had lost her job because of her father's activism and was working as a tailor for the Citadel military training school.¹⁹³ This may have meant that Jenkins felt responsible for finding his daughter alternative work, and Horton may have sympathized, although Grimbball was the kind of trained teacher he wished to avoid using. Nevertheless, unlike Bernice Robinson, who quickly discarded teaching materials for schoolchildren, Grimbball relied on such workbooks, as discussed in Chapter 4.¹⁹⁴ Her selection was, however, fully consistent with the ways in which Esau Jenkins both relied on, and took responsibility for, his children. This was most apparent in his endeavors to find Ethel a teaching job following her graduation from college. When he found out that a school in St George was looking to hire a science teacher, he arranged for them to hire her. However, he recalled, after she had bought clothes and prepared to start work; the

¹⁹¹ Septima Clark, "Trip to Charleston, Wadmalaw, St Helena's and Hilton Head Island," Highlander Files, 33: 737-743.

¹⁹² In a letter to Septima Clark dated August 18, 1959, Esau Jenkins refers to Grimbball and Brewer's finding a space in which to hold their classes, Highlander Files, 33:888-9. Tjandersen, Education for Citizenship, p 167; "Teachers Activity Report, February 4, 1960," Highlander Files, 33:814. In 1960, another Grimbball, Rosa taught the sewing class.

¹⁹³ "Report on a trip to Johns Island," Highlander Files, 33:691-4; Septima Clark, "Notes on Johns Island," October 15, 1955, Highlander Files, 33:658-61; Septima Clark, "Report on the Sea Islands," January 7, 1960, Highlander Files, 33:980-93.

¹⁹⁴ "Report on the Wadmalaw Island school," (n.d.), Robinson Papers, box 3, folder 18.

principal came to his home and said that he would not hire her.¹⁹⁵ As Septima Clark explained, the superintendent looked at Ethel's qualifications in Mathematics and decided to "let her father support her. He is so militant on the island."¹⁹⁶ This event inspired Jenkins to campaign against his daughter's dismissal and in turn, to support Septima Clark's case. Clark was impressed that he stood up for her own case while NAACP officials equivocated.¹⁹⁷ As the previous chapter explained, this was one of the reasons why Septima Clark chose to invite rural Johns Islanders to Highlander workshops. While on earlier occasions Horton and Highlander staff had endeavoured to persuade Jenkins to consider sharing leadership with people outside his family, they may have felt uncomfortable about refusing Grimball's offer to teach a class given that she had been dismissed because of her father's activism, even though her training made her a controversial choice.

The Brewers and the Edisto Island School

On Edisto Island, citizenship classes were made possible by the tireless efforts of the ministers' wife Alleen Brewer who also taught her first class in 1959.¹⁹⁸ In a meeting with Clark and Horton, Jenkins explained that Mrs Brewer was a person who initiated and worked hard on projects, perhaps with little assistance at times. "She's been trying to set up this adult school for a long time," he explained to Jenkins and Clark. He had worked with her on a previous project, getting a high school on Johns Island. Brewer had been the "only one interested" in helping him. "She took the initiative; she even lent me her car. She's a very good woman," he professed.¹⁹⁹

¹⁹⁵ Interview with Jim Leeson (Charleston, South Carolina, May 1968), Ralph Bunche Oral Histories

¹⁹⁶ Letter from Septima Clark to Elizabeth Waring, (October 6, 1955) Waring Papers, box 4, folder 52.

¹⁹⁷ Letters from Septima Clark to J. Waties and Elizabeth Waring (September 16, 27, 1956), Waring Papers, box 9, folder 228.

¹⁹⁸ Glen, Highlander, p 105.

¹⁹⁹ "Planning Meeting for a Workshop in Charleston," (September 22, 1958), Highlander Files. 33:754-8

His son remembered Mrs Brewer as one of the “grandmoms of the island.” “She would help with anything that needed doing” and was “instrumental in so many little things you don’t hear that much about.” At a time where there was little formal health care on the island, women with an interest in social welfare and who were knowledgeable about folk medicine and midwifery contributed a great deal to the community’s health and well-being.²⁰⁰ Brewer continued to be very active in her community, teaching bible schools, arranging camps for young people and being active in the Parents Teachers’ Associations while teaching at the school. Her extensive activities did however prevent her from attending a Highlander Refreshers’ Workshop.²⁰¹

While the Brewers were undoubtedly indispensable for the establishment of citizenship schools on Wadmalaw Island, their selection did not fit with Highlander’s efforts to share leadership roles with a wide cross section of the community. Looking back on the program on the 1970s, Myles Horton described the kind of social background of the most successful community projects. “If you get the little fixture type,” he explained,

You know, get the person who’s a little better prepared to cope with life in a rural community, but not too much better- then they’re the best people to lead, to work with the people next to them. But if you skip that gap and get somebody who’s already made it... into the courthouse crowd, or a schoolteacher or is... one of the welfare people that push people around – if you get people in that level, you’ve cut the thread... you miss, you get too high.²⁰²

It is possible that Reverend Brewer was “too high” in the island’s social structure to be the grassroots community leader that Myles Horton had had in mind. He was certainly an undisputed community leader. When Jenkins held a meeting to select a chairperson for the new

²⁰⁰ Mr Abraham Jenkins. “I’ll Give You an Example of People Who Really Made a Difference in These Islands,” in Carawan and Carawan, Ain’t You Got a Right, pp 186-7. Because she was a churchwoman and a minister’s wife, and had come to the islands from Orangeburg, Brewer would have avoided some more esoteric healing practices that Mamie Garvin Fields describes in her biography. Lemon Swamp and Other Places: A Carolina Memoir (New York: Free Press, 1983), pp 116-122.

²⁰¹ Letter from Alleen Brewer to Septima Clark, Highlander Files, 33: 947 -8.

²⁰² Jerome D Fransom, “Citizenship Education in the South Carolina (MA Dissertation: Peabody College, 1977), p 53, cited in Ling, “Local Leadership, p 402.

Citizen's Committee, one resident proposed Brewer because he "was already the leader of the world." Jenkins had to persuade residents to consider alternative leaders like the eventual chairman Solomon Brown.²⁰³ He reflected on the meeting that Reverend Brewer had been unwell, that he already had "quite a bit to do" and, crucially, that Jenkins thought it "would be better to get someone else, especially one of the laymen, on."²⁰⁴ His wife was also a recognized and highly regarded figure in the community. By selecting Mrs Brewer to be the Edisto teacher, Highlander staff reinforced the Brewers' position of authority rather than cultivating a new leader.²⁰⁵

As they had done with Esau Jenkins, Highlander staff endeavored to persuade the Brewers to share their workload and, thus, share leadership roles. Yet, when Clark asked Mrs Brewer to do so, instead of finding a new leader, she asked Reverend Brewer instead. She argued, "My husband is about the best qualified person now who would not be afraid of getting hurt."²⁰⁶ Given that Mrs Brewer made the Wadmalaw school possible, it would have been churlish for Clark or any other Highlander staff to suggest that she share or relinquish her responsibilities. Given the negative experiences of would-be teachers elsewhere, Mrs Brewer may have been right not to include other men and women who could lose their jobs or property by participating in the civil rights movement. While Horton may have wanted to recruit "little fixture types," this may not have been realistic in Southern communities, where people lived in fear of white economic (as well as physical) reprisals.

²⁰³ Esau Jenkins, handwritten report on organizing on Edisto Island. SCLC Records, 13:924-9.

²⁰⁴ "Planning Meeting for a Workshop in Charleston," September 22, 1958, Highlander Files, 33:744-768.

²⁰⁵ Again, in 1966, when Jenkins helped Highlander to organize the Southwide Voter Education Project, an ambitious program with workshops and citizenship school classes throughout the region, four of the citizenship schoolteachers were ministers. Highlander Files, 34: 425-434, 724-7, 731-2, 734-5, 972-9, 1133-8.

²⁰⁶ Letter from Alleen Brewer to Septima Clark (December 2, 1959), Highlander Files, 33:933-4.

Ministers continued to be recruited to teach citizenship schools in South Carolinian and other Southern communities, after 1960. Reverend Lonnie Hamilton, a Dorchester trainee, taught a class in his AME church in Charleston Heights, while the Southwide Voter Education Internship Project (SVEP) held classes in churches on Younges, Edisto and Johns Island and in downtown Charleston.²⁰⁷ As with the Brewers on Wadmalaw Island, these may have been the only people with the means to organize classes. Yet, ministers were not always a reliable source of support in the local civil rights struggle. When Jenkins attended the local Democratic Club in March 1958 to campaign for African Americans' inclusion on the all-white party list, Washington was either intimidated or changed his mind as he did not second Jenkins' motion.²⁰⁸ It is also debatable how far either teachers or students could radically rethink their place in the local hierarchy during their citizenship classes, and hence engage in the kind of participatory learning that Highlander had pioneered.

"High-Falutin": Citizenship Schools in Mainland Charleston

Interest in the citizenship schools soon came from the mainland. At a public meeting, Jenkins told Johns Islanders and Highlander staff that

We have had quite a few times people from Charleston to come into that school and small as it might seem, it was doing something that Charleston don't have, Charleston not doing. We not only teach them about reading and writing, but we talk about civic things.²⁰⁹

²⁰⁷ Completed questionnaire by Reverend Lonnie Hamilton, SCLC Records, 13:390. Highlander Files, 34: 425-434, 724-7, 731-2, 734-5, 972-9, 1133-8. See Chapters 3 and 6 for analyses of the Southwide Voter Education Project.

²⁰⁸ SCLC Papers, box 154, file 9, cited in Ling, "Local Leadership," p 419.

²⁰⁹ Transcribed discussion of a conversation between Jenkins, Clark, Horton and several students, Highlander Files, 33:606-614

For Charlestonians to notice a program on the islands as something they would like to emulate went some way to challenge the traditional hierarchy between city dwelling and island blacks. Septima Clark explained that “people living on the island didn’t want to trust black people coming from the city. They just thought you were so highfalutin that you were going to make fun of them.”²¹⁰ Black Charlestonians were also, for the most part, unfamiliar with Sea Islanders and their ways of life. Septima Clark recollected,

Growing up in Charleston, we knew little about these islands or the people on them. From time to time, we would see stories in the papers about them and often we would hear snatches of weird tales told about them by fishermen and other seamen who had visited them.²¹¹

For Clark, and men and women like her, the islands had always appeared mystical, romantic and distant. It was remarkable that they should now seem to be a beacon of progress for pioneering voter registration classes.

However, by the late 1950s, Esau Jenkins reported only mixed successes establishing schools in central Charleston. In 1958, he argued that “Charleston wasn’t doing a thing.”²¹² Jenkins and Highlander staff began to promote citizenship schools among local NAACP members. In 1958, the State Conference held workshops on planned voter registration work, at which Jenkins told them about his evening adult schools and suggested that this be done more extensively in the state.²¹³ The following year, State Conference members attended a workshop at Highlander on voter registration and “developing community leadership.”²¹⁴ Jenkins also established the Citizens Committee of Charleston County, a political campaigning and voter

²¹⁰ Ready from Within, p 49

²¹¹ Echo in My Soul, p 33.

²¹² “Planning Meeting for Workshop in Charleston,” (September 22, 1958) Highlander Files, 33: 744-68.

²¹³ “Seventeenth Annual Meeting of the South Carolina Conference of the Branches of the NAACP,” NAACP Papers, 27, A, 13:851-9.

²¹⁴ “Annual Report of Activities, South Carolina Conference of Branches NAACP to the Southeast Regional Advisory Council held in Atlanta, Georgia, December 15, 1959, NAACP Papers, 27, A, 13:1003-10.

registration organization with an office on Spring Street. Having a base in central Charleston meant that Jenkins was better placed to organize citizenship schools in the city.²¹⁵ Yet, although the Committee held practical classes advising people about governmental structures, this did not amount to organizing literacy schools.²¹⁶

Some interest, however, came from residents in the “North area” of Charleston. North Charleston is now a town in its own right, but in the 1950s this was an undefined area near the airport and several industrial plants with a large African American population.²¹⁷ In the mid 1950s, one resident had asked Clark to help him to learn to read sections of the constitution.²¹⁸ Yet, it took the efforts of a local beautician, Mary Lee Davis, to begin a formal class. She wanted to get streets in her neighborhood paved and was impressed by the way in which Jenkins and Highlander had helped African Americans to register to vote and influence local affairs through the polls. She offered her shop for use as a citizenship school and Robinson taught the class, while Davis taught sewing.²¹⁹ Davis, like the Brewers, was a relatively experienced political activist. She was a member of the local NAACP branch who had won the South Carolina “Mother of the Year” competition in 1959 when she raised \$515 for the organization.²²⁰ Unlike the Brewers, however, she did not have a formal leadership role in a church or civil rights organization, but became a citizenship school teacher and leader because she was interested in improving her community. By 1960, the North Charleston school was taken over by Gertrude

²¹⁵ Esau Jenkins, handwritten notes, “A Short Background of the Citizens Committee of Charleston County,” (n.d.), Esau Jenkins box, folder 15.

²¹⁶ Letter from Esau Jenkins to Myles Horton, February 1962), Highlander Files, 33:977.

²¹⁷ Warren Wise, “Bourne Identity: North Charleston assessed by its former mayor,” The Post and Courier (March 22, 2008)

²¹⁸ Letter from Septima Clark to Myles Horton (January 8, 1959), Highlander Files, 34:85.

²¹⁹ “Septima Clark’s Report from the Sea Islands,” Highlander Folk School Audio Collection (Nashville, Tennessee, 1964), 807a, part 1, side 1, Tape 12.

²²⁰ “48th Annual Meeting of the South Carolina Conference of NAACP Branches” (October 22, 1959), NAACP Papers, 27, A, 13:971-990.

Simmons, who taught literacy, and Roberta Leonard who initially ran a sewing class, but became a citizenship schoolteacher during the Southwide Voter Education Project.²²¹

On Edisto and Wadmalaw Islands and in mainland Charleston, Highlander relied on local leaders who had the time and resources to implement a citizenship school. Rather than being “little fixture” people, the earliest teachers included a minister and his wife, a formally trained teacher and an NAACP activist. This suggests that the citizenship school model was not a powerful force that proliferated throughout the region. Instead, it relied on the commitment of key individuals, with time and resources to commit to the program. Other resources were also necessary to ensure that local schools and programs would run smoothly. These included funding to pay expenses and training; interest among potential students and a suitable space in which to hold a class. The spaces in which classrooms were held played a highly significant role in shaping the culture and character of schools and the wider movement.

Classroom Spaces

A recent PhD dissertation has given a romanticized account of the spaces used in citizenship school classes. It describes “a lone black woman walk(ing) through a cornfield in South Carolina” at night towards an “unpainted on-room building” where she will have “to rely on oil lamps.” Moreover, hundreds of other teachers in the southern states conducted classes in “city churches, other in country homes, still others in beauty parlors and tents.”²²² This statement suggests that impromptu classes could be set up in any convenient space. Although in Deep South states like Mississippi, classes may have been more impromptu, Septima Clark

²²¹ “Septima Clark’s Report from the Sea Islands, ” “Teachers Activity Report,” (February 4, 1960), [Highlander Files](#), 33:814.

²²² “Teaching Citizenship,” p 506.

envisaged that they would take place in formal settings with adequate facilities. She told participants in a 1961 workshop on training leadership for citizenship schools:

“You need a place that can be well heated and lighted. There must be a blackboard, chalk and an eraser. There must be a seating capacity for at least 30 and tables to write on or chairs equipped with desk arms and book shelves. There must be a coat rack and a wastebasket for umbrellas. A janitor is needed to have the fire made and room warm before students arrive. The janitor can be made responsible for arranging the chairs and table and having them dusted. The janitor could be one of the adult students who lives nearby.”²²³

The time and consideration involved in finding the earliest citizenship school spaces supports the contention that citizenship schools required extensive pre-existing community resources before they could open. Jenkins and Clark struggled to find a venue for the first school. They faced antipathy from the local elementary school and other organizations that they approached for help, most often because of the risks of economic reprisal from participating in civil rights activity. In a letter to Myles Horton, Clark explained her frustration:

Esau and I have had many setbacks. We are still trying to get the school. They sent us some blanks asking the purpose and name of the sponsoring organization but up to now we have no definite word from the trustees... We have not been able to get a voting machine as of yet. We are still trying. No one says no. But there is always a waiting period for some kind of investigation.²²⁴

This initial frustration was fortuitous in the long term. The Progressive Club secured the former Mount Zion School, in which they organized a cooperative food store in the front room and held classes in the back. This later became a space for community activities, including a shop, a gym, table tennis and basketball facilities, and for future work with Highlander Folk School, including

²²³ Untitled, handwritten notes, Highlander Papers, box 80, folder 5.

²²⁴ Letter from Septima Clark to Myles Horton (January 8, 1956), Highlander Files, 33:83-4.

residential workshops.²²⁵ A former citizenship school student put her newfound skills to use when she was employed to work in the shop.²²⁶ Thus, acquiring the Progressive Club building not only provided a space for citizenship classes; the shop provided opportunities for people to work and acquire skills; for the community to experiment in running a cooperative business; and was a welcome community meeting place. Yet, securing the site took some financial commitment from Highlander Folk School (although the Progressive Club eventually paid this back in full from proceeds from the shop) which, for reasons outlined below, it was not able to offer other communities.

The choice of classroom spaces also shaped the character of the schools held there. Shirley Ardener explains that any “restricted area like a club, a theatre or a nation state has a set of rules to determine how its boundary shall be crossed and who shall occupy that space.”²²⁷ Defined areas also have rules, codes and social norms that determine people’s behavior within these spaces. On Johns Island, when citizenship school organizers took advantage of Highlander funds to purchase the Progressive Club building, this in many ways served as a *tabula rasa* in which teachers and organizers could shape the kind of school and community project they had in mind. Jenkins, in particular used the space to develop several of his aspirations for community development, thrift, self-sufficiency and respectable manhood. These included a cooperative store, activities which combated juvenile delinquency and a venue for workshops and civic meetings. However, Highlander did not have funds available to do this elsewhere and this meant that would-be teachers and organizers had to find an appropriate space in which to hold their

²²⁵ Unfortunately, after being hit by Hurricane Hugo in 1989, the club building is now in disrepair, although it has now been declared a historical site and efforts are being made to restore it. Bill Saunders, interview with author (March 21, 2008, North Charleston); Abraham Jenkins, correspondence with author (May 18, 2008).

²²⁶ Sandra Oldendorf, “South Sea Island Citizenship Schools,” in Crawford et al, Women in the Civil Rights Movement p 174.

²²⁷ “Ground Rules and Social Maps for Women: An Introduction,” in Shirley Ardener, Women and Space: Ground Rules and Social Maps (London: Croom Helm, 1981), p 1.

classes. These spaces usually had a pre-existing role in the community and, consequently, social and behavioral norms attached to them. For example, African American churches were a convenient space for public meetings and citizenship school classes, and had connections with potential citizenship school participants in the community.²²⁸ Sea Island churches especially were a cornerstone of civic life. They encouraged the residents to participate in services and encouraged islanders to extend their religious values into their daily lives. From the late nineteenth century, islanders built “praise houses,” small wooden structures that housed interdenominational, participatory services and served as mutual aid and burial societies. One such house was Moving Star Hall on Johns Island.²²⁹ On the other hand, these spaces usually had pre-existing codes of behavior and hierarchies. For example, if students were accustomed to listening to a preacher speak from a pulpit every Sunday, they may well have found it challenging to become accustomed to participatory learning methods in the same space with the same minister during their twice-weekly citizenship class.

Social theorists have also described the ways in which gender norms are inscribed on, and developed within, various spaces. In the first place, women are often excluded from spaces either because of formal rules or because of cultures and behaviors associated with that space. For example, Silvia Rodgers compared Men’s Houses in New Guinea, from which women are forbidden, to the British House of Commons, where a particular culture prevents women MPs from feeling comfortable and participating on an equal status as their male counterparts.²³⁰

Other scholars have demonstrated how women create and construct their own social space. For

²²⁸ Morris has explained that black churches provided an organizational, cultural and financial base for the civil rights movement. They recruited mass bases for protest, possessing “numerous standing committees and organized groups” which coordinated voluntary labor. Black churches were a “relatively autonomous force,” as African Americans owned and controlled them. They were an alternative institution for African Americans who were subordinated within mainstream institutions. Origins of the Civil Rights Movement, pp 4-7.

²²⁹ Levine, “Citizenship Schools,” pp 62-73.

²³⁰ “Women’s Space in a Man’s House: the British House of Commons,” in Ardener, Women and Space.

example, bell hooks reminisced that as a child, she understood that “houses belonged to women, were their special domain not as property, but as places where all that truly mattered in life took place.” Because “sexism delegates to females the task of creating and sustaining a home environment,” black women assumed the responsibility of “construct(ing) domestic households as spaces of care and nurturance in the face of the brutal harsh reality of racial oppression.”²³¹ Moreover, in her study of women-led tenants’ associations in Chicago, Roberta Feldman illustrated how women’s interest in maintaining pleasant surroundings for their children led to their engaging in civic and political activism. In so doing, they drew both on their knowledge and experience of their homes and surroundings, and the networks they had developed with other women living in housing developments.²³²

When women held citizenship classes in their homes, they drew on this tradition. For example, in the 1960s, Mrs Roberta Leonard hosted a class at her North Charleston house.²³³ Classes may have been a natural extension of women’s social lives and been a more intimate, relaxed gathering than meetings in institutional buildings such as churches. Yet, only certain women were able and/or willing to hold classes in their homes. In many parts of the South, this would be an act of courage on homeowners’ parts, as it potentially meant risking attacks on their property and their families. Hosts were also likely to be slightly more affluent than average to have a home large enough to host a class of twenty people or more; therefore, these classes were likely to be shaped by the class as much as the gender identity of their hosts. It is worth noting that besides Mrs. Leonard, the only other Charlestonian to hold classes in their homes was the

²³¹ Yearning: Race, Gender and Cultural Politics (Boston, MA: South End Press, 1991), pp 47-8.

²³² The Dignity of Resistance: Women’s Residents’ Activism in Chicago Public Housing (New York, NY Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), passim. Rosemary Ridd found evidence of similar community activism in women’s residential networks in District 6, Cape Town, South Africa. “Where Women Must Dominate: Response to Oppression in a South African Urban Community,” in Ardener, Women and Space, pp 182-199.

²³³ “Final Report of the Sea Islands Voter Education classes,” (1963), Highlander Files, 33:35

NAACP President J Arthur Brown, who offered his James Island summer residence for Highlander-led workshops.²³⁴

Sometimes teachers organized classes in businesses rather than private homes, particularly those that had traditionally been independent of white patrons and were prominent community institutions. For example, a Savannah funeral director offered Williams his business as a site.²³⁵ Again, this depended on the support of middle-class individuals who were relatively independent of white support, although working people were also familiar and comfortable with these spaces. Beauty shops were one of the more significant business-based sites. While Mary Lee Davis taught a class in her North Charleston shop, Bernice Robinson also used hers as a base for her voter registration work.²³⁶ Beauty shops were key social spaces for African American *women* of most social classes which gave them an opportunity to associate with and socialize with other women outside the home.²³⁷ Churches were also gendered spaces to some extent. Although they did not hold positions of authority, black women tended to be active within their local church (for example as Sunday schoolteachers) or made contributions *through* churches to their community (for example, by doing charity work).²³⁸ By drawing on these particular spaces, then, citizenship schoolteachers and organizers ensured that women would attend classes and feel comfortable in them. This goes some way to explain why, as historians have reiterated, women predominated in the student rolls in South Carolina's schools. By way of contrast, the Savannah schools were taught in entirely different spaces; ones that tended to attract black men of certain social classes and positions. This point will be returned to below.

²³⁴ Invitation to residential seminars on James Island, Highlander Files, 34:256.

²³⁵ Bernice Robinson, memorandum on Teachers Travel Expenses and Building Rental for Schools," February 1961, Highlander Files, 33:962.

²³⁶ Thrasher and Wigginton interview.

²³⁷ Julie Willett, Permanent Waves: The Making of the American Beauty Shop (New York, NY: New York University Press, 2000).

²³⁸ For example, Evelyn Brooks Higgenbotham, Righteous Discontent: The Women's Movement in the Black Baptist Church, 1880-1920 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006), *passim*.

This chapter has thus far outlined the planning and resources that were necessary in order for a citizenship school to be opened in a community and explained why this led to changes in the schools organized in Lowcountry South Carolina. At times, either the resources or the motivation to organize citizenship schools was lacking and, in these cases, schools did not take root at all. These cases have been ignored in existing accounts of the schools because they challenge the seductive myth that citizenship schools were such an attractive model that they were welcomed wherever they were introduced. In fact, failed efforts are as much a part of the story of the early citizenship school program as successful ones. By focusing on failed attempts to set up schools in St Helena and Daufuskie Islands in Beaufort County, this study reiterates the fact that schools required extensive preparations and pre-existing resources if they were to take root.

Non starters: Highlander and Failed Efforts in Beaufort County

St Helena Island had been identified as a potential stronghold for citizenship schools because Penn Center might be a useful sponsor and a space for training. Horton visited Beaufort County for the first time in 1955.²³⁹ Highlander's experiences with Penn Center on St Helena Island suggest that while literacy education might prove acceptable in the community, local people determined the forms with which it would take and sometimes deliberately downplayed the Highlander influence. Far from bequeathing its ethos to the post 1960 schools, Highlander's involvement was a disincentive to some local organizations who might otherwise have been interested in adult education. In March, Jenkins and Clark met with the Center's director Courtney Siceloff and several interested citizens. Jenkins' reputation preceded him from his role

²³⁹ Myles Horton, "Report of visit to Buford (sic), S.C.," March 6, 1955, Highlander Files, 33:618-9

in the Highlander film. They planned a meeting at the Center for the twenty-third of the month and local NAACP President, Mr A J Brown, promised to visit local churches to recruit people to attend.²⁴⁰ However, the meeting was cancelled. Clark blamed Brown for the cancellation, and when she tried to meet him to discuss an alternative date and time, he equivocated and she spent a day looking for him until they had a meeting that she deemed to be unsatisfactory. She also learned from her NAACP colleague Ruby Cornwell that the Penn Community Services Board had decided against letting Highlander use their facilities for a planned community development workshop in July.²⁴¹ Siceloff explained to Horton that board members were concerned with the Communist charges being levelled at the school. The previous year, a local white citizens' council had indicted the school in the local press because members, mistakenly, believed that a proposed YWCA conference at the Center would be interracial.²⁴²

Clark did make some good contacts on the island, however, whom Highlander attempted to include in social events in 1959 and 1960.²⁴³ Penn Community Center staff-members were more sympathetic to working with Jenkins and the Citizens Committee than with Highlander. In 1960, after participating in a music session with the folk singer Guy Carawan, Siceloff agreed to bring a "busload" of people to a civic meeting, while in 1960, Penn hosted a consumer education workshop which Jenkins organized and some citizenship school students attended.²⁴⁴ Penn staff members were sympathetic to citizenship education, but not to working with Highlander Folk

²⁴⁰ Septima Clark, "Sea Island Luncheon," March 14 1958, Highlander Files, 33:725-736.

²⁴¹ Septima Clark, "Trip to Charleston, Wadamalaw, St Helena and Hilton Head," April 20-7, 1958, letter from Septima Clark to Annie Mae Higgins, March 5 1958, Highlander Files, 33: 737-743, 858. .

²⁴² Letters from Courtney Siceloff to Myles Horton (March 25, 1958) Penn School Papers, box 88, folder 758, letter from Myles Horton to Carl Tjanderson (May 7 1958), Highlander Research and Education Papers, (The Wisconsin Historical Society, Madison, WI), hereafter Highlander Papers, box 51, folder 2.

²⁴³ For example, they attended an oyster roast in January 1959 at NAACP President Joe Arthur Brown's home. Untitled report, 20 January 1959, Highlander Files, 33:772.

²⁴⁴ Letter from Septima Clark to Mikki, Highlander Papers, box 9, folder 12; Flyer, "Citizens Committee of Charleston County to present a workshop on Consumer Education," report on first workshop on Consumers' Problems- held at Penn Community Center (March 25-7), Highlander Papers, box 41, folder 3

School. In May, July and August 1960, the center hosted three conferences organized by Alice Spearman of the South Carolina Commission on Human Relations (SCCHR) and attended by representatives of civic and civil rights groups, including the NAACP. The conference consisted of series of panels and consultations with experts, including a session on adult education, in which Bernice Robinson served as a consultant. Conference attendees resolved that “major priority should be given to increasing Negro voting and political consciousness” and that the “key need in this area is not just registration, but effective organization and use of the ballot,” including education through discussions and ballots. They also argued that “widespread” illiteracy necessitated greater attention and proposed programs of “adult education in basic education, in citizenship and in consumer education” in rural areas.²⁴⁵ In 1961, Penn staff organized a class that it referred to as a “citizenship school” on its campus, which met from January 13 to 17 with fifty students. By 1961, the school had begun a series of workshops and classes in consumer education.²⁴⁶ Far from demonstrating the ways in which Highlander introduced a model, based on its democratic leadership and participatory education ethos, this example indicates that local organizations sometimes preferred to introduce literacy classes on their own terms and downplay Highlander’s influence.

On Daufuskie Island, practical problems prevented Highlander staff from carrying out the field work and training necessary to introduce a class. In a remote rural community, the first concern was with transportation. Jenkins and Clark learned that if they wanted to visit the

²⁴⁵ “News from Penn Community Services” (Spring 1960), Highlander Papers, box 65, folder 14, “Preliminary Report: Consultation of Human Relations Programming in the Rural South Condition,” “Human Relations Programming in South Carolina: A report of three consultations on human relations common in South Carolina held at the Penn Community Center, May-August, 1960,” Penn School Papers (microfilm) 16:114-56, 1161-1184; “Highlander: Sea Island Project” report recorded on May 17, 1959, Highlander Audio recording, Tape 515a, 46, Side 1.

²⁴⁶ “Beaufort County News,” clipping, Southern Regional Council Files (Clark Atlanta University, Atlanta, Georgia, microfilm), 172:1961-2, Director’s Report to the Annual Meeting of the Board of Trustees (April 8th, 1961), Penn School Papers (Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, N.C.), 16:122-4.

island, the only way was on an oyster boat that took the mail over three times a week. When they arrived on the island, their primary form of transport would be on a pick-up truck driven by the local postmistress.²⁴⁷ Clark's trips to the island depended on the weather; one trip in April 1958 had to be cancelled because "it was stormy and the weather was choppy."²⁴⁸ Instead, she invited two women, whom she had learned of through contacts on Hilton Head island, to come to Highlander. One refused her offer and there is no record of the other's response.²⁴⁹ Clark recognized that organizing schools on the island would involve some extra planning. In a recorded discussion, she explained that Highlander staff would need to purchase a car and train a driver to transport interested students from across the island to classes.²⁵⁰

Yet when she did visit the island, she was pleasantly surprised to find that the isolated community had relatively modern facilities, such as lighting and plumbing.²⁵¹ Daufuskie residents also had a proven commitment to civic affairs. A former resident, Mr. Seabrook had established a cooperative store, which was taken over by two women, Miss Chapman and Miss Chisholm when Seabrook began working in business in Beaufort city.²⁵² However, Clark also noticed the island's many problems. She argued that it was a "dying community" because poor transportation and limited opportunities for work or social life on the island meant that the island's young people kept leaving.²⁵³ In January 1959, Clark finally held a meeting at an island school, which was attended by 25 people. She successfully persuaded participants to write to their elected officials to request better transportation, reminding them that their request would be

²⁴⁷ Septima Clark, "Sea Island Luncheon," March 14 1958, Highlander Files, 33:725-736.

²⁴⁸ Septima Clark, "Charleston, Wadmalaw, St Helena's and Hilton Head Trip," Highlander Files, 33:737-743.

²⁴⁹ Letter from Septima Clark to Annie Mae Higgins (March 5, 1959); letter from Septima Clark to Viola Bryant (March 5, 1958), letter from Annie Mae Higgins to Septima Clark (March 13, 1958), Highlander Files, 33:885-7.

²⁵⁰ Septima Clark's Report from the Sea Islands," side 2.

²⁵¹ Letter from Septima Clark to Myles Horton, January 27, 1959, Highlander Files, 33:914.

²⁵² Septima Clark, "Sea Island Luncheon," March 14 1958, Highlander Files, 33:725-736.

²⁵³ "Miscellaneous Notes on Daufuskie," Highlander Files, 33:733-5.

taken more seriously if they were registered voters.²⁵⁴ The effort paid off to some extent, when Governor Hollings promised to take their complaint seriously, but there are no records of any action following suit.²⁵⁵ Clark planned to start a citizenship school program on Daufuskie in the fall of 1959, but there are no reports of any schools beginning at this time.²⁵⁶ In 1960, she also tried unsuccessfully to recruit citizenship schoolteachers for a Highlander workshop. For one recruit, fear of economic reprisal prevented her from attending. The superintendent of her school had threatened to fire her from her position should she continue with her endeavors.²⁵⁷ Two other potential trainees had already pulled out. One said that she could not find anybody to stay with her husband; the other had been unwell.²⁵⁸

In 1958, Jenkins had been interested in extending the program to Moncks Corner, Dorchester County. Nobody from the community had met Horton or attended a Highlander workshop. Mary Lee Davis agreed, arguing that there was a local civic organizer in Moncks Corner who they might contact. She argued that he was a “great leader” and that people would “walk on water” for him. Yet, there is little evidence either of Highlander approaching local community members or of successful citizenship schools being established in the region.²⁵⁹ The lack of success in Beaufort and Dorchester Counties indicates some of the reasons why the citizenship school program worked elsewhere. On Johns, Edisto and Wadmalaw islands and in North Charleston, Highlander staff secured sufficient participation from interested parties in order to start the schools; on St Helena and Daufuskie islands, this was not the case. Esau Jenkins, Bernice Robinson, Alleen Brewer and Mary Lee Davis were able to participate because

²⁵⁴ “Miscellaneous Notes on Daufuskie,” Highlander Files, 33:733-5.

²⁵⁵ Untitled account of the Sea Islands, Highlander Files: 33:980-1911,

²⁵⁶ “Trip to Daufuskie,” 1 July 1959, Highlander Files, 7:778-784.

²⁵⁷ Letter from Frances Jones to Septima Clark (July 21, 1959), Highlander Files, 33:931.

²⁵⁸ Letter from Viola Bryan to Septima Clark (May 1 1960), Highlander Files, 33:936-7; letter from Sylvia Graves to Septima Clark (May 9, 1960), Highlander Files, 33:938.

²⁵⁹ Planning Meeting for a Voter Registration Workshop (c. September 1959), Highlander Audio Collection, Tape 515a, Tape 45, Part 1.

were independent of white employers. They did not fear participation in the same ways that other potentially interested parties might. The St Helena example also indicates that a high level of individual commitment among community leaders was vital for Highlander staff to make inroads. Finally, while all of the Sea Islands were relatively isolated, Daufuskie was an extreme case of how poor infrastructure made organization extremely frustrating.

Inroads in Savannah: Hosea Williams and the Chatham County Crusade for Voters

Following these setbacks, Highlander Folk School was interested in extending the literacy program to the city of Savannah. Whereas on Edisto and Wadamalaw islands, local community members impressed with the Johns Island model or with their previous dealings with Jenkins, requested help; in Beaufort County and in Savannah, Highlander sought out potential leaders. Horton and Clark “contact(ed) organizations” and invited them to send people in toto Highlander for teacher training.²⁶⁰ In 1960, Horton contacted the NAACP office in Atlanta to identify who an appropriate local representative might be. He was told, “the guy you want to talk to is Hosea Williams because he is on the Voter Registration Committee for the NAACP.”²⁶¹ While an Atlanta official may have referred them to Williams, local NAACP President Wesley Wallace Law made the formal introductions.²⁶²

Williams was the illegitimate son of a blind woman who had died when he was still a boy. Brought up by his grandfather in Attapulgus, Georgia, he had left when he was twelve years old after a lynch mob attacked him for dating a white girl. After working as a hustler, he

²⁶⁰ “A Proposed Citizenship School Training Program,” (Highlander Folk School, Monteagle, Tennessee, December 1960), Records of the SCLC, 12: 575-86.

²⁶¹ Bernice Robinson, manuscript of a talk given about citizenship schools, November 17-18, 1979), Robinson Papers, box 3, folder 8.

²⁶² Bernice Robinson, “Report on Fields Trips for May, June, July, 1960,” Highlander Files, 7:538.

eventually joined the United States army and fought in Germany, where he was the sole survivor when a shell exploded near his platoon. Williams had taken advantage of the GI Bill and gained bachelors and masters degrees in chemistry from Morris Brown College in Atlanta and was employed by the United States Department of Agriculture. Unpredictable and irrepressible, when he joined the SCLC board in 1964, King began to refer to him “my wild man, my Castro,” while Stanley Levison, less charitably, described him as “psychotic.”²⁶³ He was reputed to be a heavy drinker and was, by the late 1960s, also using recreational drugs. When he was arrested in Charleston during the hospital strike in 1969, he was allegedly “completely loaded (and) stoned” and was consuming a quart of liquor a day.²⁶⁴ Savannah’s civil rights movement also had a significant drinking and bar culture and this study will demonstrate the ways in which this shaped recruitment to the citizenship schools and teaching styles and methods. Heavy drinking and drug abuse may have reflected badly on SCLC’s image and affected Williams’ behavior and conduct in the late 1960s, but it does not negate his assiduous work establishing citizenship schools in Georgia earlier in the decade.

In one oral history, W.W. Law gave a cryptic account of when and how Williams entered the movement.

Hosea Williams was working for the Department of Agriculture here as a chemist... and he had taken no interest in civic or civil rights up until that time. But he came to us about problems. Well, no, I ran into him on the corner of Gaston and West Broad in the heart of the black community. I was coming from an NAACP meeting at the First African Church. I was walking home. And, in some kind of way we got to know each other.

²⁶³ Hosea Williams, interview with Taylor Branch (October 29, 1991), Taped FBI recording (June 21, 1969), Taylor Branch Papers (Southern Historical Collection, The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill), box 132, folder 954; box 64, folder 509.

²⁶⁴ Taped FBI recording of a conversation between Bill Rutherford and Stanley Levine (June 22nd, 1969), Taylor Branch Papers, box 64, folder 509.

Law recalled that when Williams found out that he was the NAACP president, he offered to help. Perennially short of officers and workers, Law quickly found a place for his eager new recruit and appointed him as an officer in charge of voter registration and he was soon elected as Vice President.²⁶⁵ As Chapter Three explains, Law and Williams had a personal feud that might have prompted Law to minimize his rival's role in the movement during later interviews.

Williams has suggested that his commitment to civil rights was more deep seated than this memory suggests. In interviews, he has traced his civil rights involvement to several incidents. He apparently believed that God had saved him from a near-death experience in Germany for a higher purpose, giving him a deep rooted commitment to social justice. On another occasion, he argued that he had become disillusioned when he realized that he was just "token" employee at Savannah State and he also argued that he had felt responsible when his children could not have a soft drink at one of the city's segregated lunch counters.²⁶⁶

Williams' often erratic behavior may explain the differences in his testimonies. It was unlikely that he was outraged by "token" employment at the college. Later, he demonstrated that he was unwilling to forego earning a comfortable salary for the civil rights cause. When he joined SCLC, he argued that the organization should match his previous salary and consequently became one of the best-paid members of staff.²⁶⁷ This makes it unlikely that he would resign from his job out of disgust with his employers' practices. NAACP records give a better

²⁶⁵ Law, Crimmins and Kuhn interview

²⁶⁶ . Michael Kirkland, "Hosea Williams, 1926-2000," New Georgia Encyclopaedia, available at <http://W.W.w.georgiaencyclopedia.org/nge/Article.jsp?path=/HistoryArchaeology/SunbeltGeorgia/People-7&id=h-2721> (accessed on May 27 2008); "Hosea: in his own words" (GPTV special presentation: 2000), available online at The Civil Rights Digital Library, Hosea : in his own words, GPTV special presentation, <http://crdl.usg.edu/voci/go/crdl/publicSearch/viewVBO/7985/0/io> (Accessed on 8/6/2008), Howell Raines, My Soul is Rested: Movement Days in the Deep South Remembered (New York, NY: G.P. Putnam, 1977), p 437.

²⁶⁷ Taylor Branch, Parting the Waters: America in the King Years, 1954-1963 (New York, NY: Simon and Schuster, 1989), p 589. Given that he had grown up in poverty and lacked the privileges of his minister colleagues on the SCLC board, it is perhaps not surprising that he was aware of the value of money and of securing a steady income for himself.

indication of Williams' early activities within the branch. He was first recorded as an officer in 1955, when he was the branch membership chairperson.²⁶⁸ He began to participate in the State Conference in the late 1950s: in 1958, he chaired a "Mother of the Year" contest and he ran a workshop on securing Government loans at that year's State Conference.²⁶⁹ As vice president, he participated in a wide range of activities. He was one of the plaintiffs in a case that successfully desegregated the public library, while, along with his wife and several other parents, he sued for school desegregation.²⁷⁰

However deep seated Williams' commitment to the NAACP branch was, in 1960, he was committed to implementing a voter registration program along the lines of the John Brooks model.²⁷¹ Because the NAACP had a controversial reputation locally, officials felt that a voter registration committee would have a wider appeal if it was ostensibly a separate organization.²⁷² Williams subsequently founded the Chatham County Crusade for Voters (CCCV), in April 1960. 2,500 people attended a mass meeting which launched the new organization. Although it was a voters' league, it spent its first meeting applauding the young students who participated in sit-ins and promoting a consumer boycott of downtown restaurants and shops. Although the local newspaper reported that Law "did not take an active role" as he had done in previous sessions, at this point the CCCV was part of the NAACP.²⁷³ In October, Robinson, Clark and Macanic drove to Savannah and attended two of the precinct meetings. They agreed with Williams to start three citizenship classes, based on the Highlander model.²⁷⁴ In November, he stated that the

²⁶⁸ Letter from Lucille Black to W.W. Law (January 20, 1955), NAACP Papers, 26, A, 9:615.

²⁶⁹ "Annual Report of the Georgia State Conference, 1958," "Tentative Program of the Seventeenth Annual Conference," NAACP Papers, 25, C, 9:213-227, 25, D 17:725-9.

²⁷⁰ Savannah Morning News, June 1 1960; January 19, 1962.

²⁷¹ See Chapter One for a description of the John Brooks plan.

²⁷² United States Civil Rights Commission, "Community Study of Savannah, Georgia" (1964), Records of the Commission on Civil Rights: Police Community Relations in Areas (1954-66), NARA Record Group 453.

²⁷³ Savannah Morning News, April 4 1960

²⁷⁴ Septima Clark, "Trip to Savannah, October 7-9, 1960," Highlander Files, 8:282.

CCCV had selected its first three teachers: his wife, Juanita, along with his CCCV secretary Emogene Stroman and Benita Spaulding Matthews.²⁷⁵ The classes ran between December 1960 and February 1961.²⁷⁶ By January 1961, Horton reported that Highlander had trained seventeen individuals from Savannah, and that there were plans for fifty-four schools.²⁷⁷

In January 1961, Williams extended the Crusade across the region. He invited “well known citizens” or community leaders, from each of the eighteen counties surrounding Savannah to a dinner meeting in the Savannah YMCA conference room. The meeting encouraged participants to attend leadership training workshops, set up citizenship schools and work on voter registration. Fifty-four people attended and subsequently formed the Southeastern Georgia Crusade for Voters.²⁷⁸ They arranged to train at least ten teachers and one supervisor per county and when the project was underway, to merge with representatives from other organizations.²⁷⁹ By May, six hundred black students had attended twenty-one citizenship schools and by August, 110 of these had registered to vote.²⁸⁰

Williams’ “Lieutenants”

From the outset, there were marked differences between the Savannah program and the South Carolina one. The most fundamental differences were in the gender, class and generational composition of their participants. Gillespie argued that, while young student

²⁷⁵ Memorandum from Hosea Williams to Septima Clark, re. Savannah, Georgia’s Basic and Fundamental Literacy Project (November 5, 1960), Highlander Files 8:823

²⁷⁶ Highlander Files, 8:287-291.

²⁷⁷ Memorandum from Myles Horton to Mrs. Jane Lee Eddy of the Schwarzhaupt Foundation (January 1961), Highlander Files, 8:301

²⁷⁸ Hosea Williams, “History and Philosophy of the Southeastern Crusade for Voters,” Records of the SCLC, 4:416; Standard letter from Hosea Williams (December 8, 1970), Highlander Files, 8:293.

²⁷⁹ Myles Horton, “Trip to Savannah, Georgia” (January 7, 1961), Highlander Files, 8:297.

²⁸⁰ Glen, Highlander, p 202-3.

demonstrators led protests in Savannah, older African American women taught citizenship schools along the lines of Bernice Robinson's Johns Island class.²⁸¹ In fact, quite the contrary was true. Williams' most loyal supporters and trusted allies, including citizenship schoolteachers, came from one of two social groups. The first were young student demonstrators. In 1960, members of the NAACP youth branch staged a series of sit-ins in downtown Savannah. Williams, then an eager NAACP activist, was assigned the task of training them in nonviolent methods.²⁸² This work gave Williams a pool of young people from which to recruit participants for his new citizenship school project. For example, nineteen-year-old Benjamin Van Clarke taught more classes than any other teacher in Savannah: two per week in January-March 1963, the winter of 1963-4 and the spring in 1964. Carolyn Roberts not only taught classes in the summer and autumn of 1963, took over a class from another teacher and served as Crusade for Voters secretary, she was also considered as a replacement trainer when Robinson and Clark considered joining the Peace Corps in 1961.²⁸³ James Alexander, the president of the NAACP Youth Council attended a Dorchester training session, although he did not teach a class.²⁸⁴

Younger participants brought fresh ideas and new perspectives to voter registration programs, including conducting registration drives in bars and pool rooms. When SCLC staff learned of this innovation in an August 1961 workshop, they welcomed it and did not question the morality of these venues.²⁸⁵ However, it is doubtful whether citizenship schoolteachers in their late teens and early twenties could earn the confidence of a class of illiterate middle-aged men and women, and they certainly lacked Robinson's life experiences. Horton was concerned

²⁸¹ "They Walk, Talk and Act," passim.

²⁸² Law, Crimmins and Kuhn interview.

²⁸³ Letter from Myles Horton to Septima Clark, June 21, 1961, Clark Collection, box 7, folder 3.

²⁸⁴ List of participants at a Dorchester workshop, June 16-18, Highlander Files, 7:875.

²⁸⁵ Reports of workshops held in Dorchester, SCLC Papers, Part 4, 12:536-48

that Roberts' lack of first hand experience in civic organization could prove a hindrance to her teaching others, although he believed that she would grow in skills and confidence because she was "willing."²⁸⁶ They might also, as Clark believed Andrew Young and Hosea Williams did, have prioritized activism over teaching. Van Clarke rose to prominence in 1960 when he organized a boycott of classes in protest at the school board's failure to rehire his high school principal. He was arrested five times in 1963 and when Williams negotiated a truce with police officials, he was the only activist who had to remain in jail.²⁸⁷ Roberts was not averse to breaking the law for her cause either and in 1963, she was prosecuted for impersonating another activist who was due to stand trial.²⁸⁸

Williams' second group of supporters was black men who embodied a different kind of masculinity than Esau Jenkins or W.W. Law had promoted. Williams' inner coterie of allies and confidants included former street gang members, such as Willie Bolden, "Big" Lester Hankerson and Henry "Trash" Brownlee. According to citizenship schoolteacher Ida Proctor, Hankerson had come from a "cutthroat situation" and many African Americans in the community were afraid of him, although she explained that he had "a heart of gold."²⁸⁹ Similarly, Hosea Williams recalled that citizenship school student and local volunteer Willie Bolden was "meaner than a rattlesnake (and) could hit as hard as Mike Tyson." He explained that many volunteers and students had "been in jail... for felonies, for robbery and killing people and all kinds of stuff" and he referred to these men as "his thugs."²⁹⁰

There is little written archival evidence detailing the contributions and decisions that they made, or with information about their backgrounds and lives following the demise of the

²⁸⁶ Letter from Myles Horton to Septima Clark (July 3, 1961), Septima Clark Collection, box 7, folder 3

²⁸⁷ Savannah Morning News, July 9, 1963; September 4 1963

²⁸⁸ Savannah Morning News, July 27, 1963.

²⁸⁹ Ida Proctor, interview with David Levine (February 14th, 1998, Savannah, GA)

²⁹⁰ Interview with Taylor Branch (October 29, 1991), p 27.

citizenship school program. However, audio-visual materials provide some evidence of their activities and their predominance in the local movement. In 1964, for example, Robert Newman, a documentary film maker, recorded Hankerson during a voter registration drive. The film included an interview, during which Hankerson explained that he had joined the movement after hearing Williams speak in Johnson Park and was so moved by his words that he resolved to turn his life around. It showed Hankerson stopping to speak with men sitting smoking or playing board games on street corners and among chain gangs. He drove people who wanted to register to the court house and he publicized the citizenship school classes. The film draws attention to the contribution Hankerson made to the local movement, as an assiduous worker and charismatic man who recruited low-income men to become registered voters. At one point, a young man he spoke to became hysterical, but Hankerson managed to calm him down, laughed and joked that it was a “man thing.” His appeal, and success as a registration worker, came at least in part from his affinity with potential voters, due to their shared gender, class and racial identity. The film also illustrates the Crusade for Voters’ interest in working with low-income black men: most of Hankerson’s recruits were dressed in old, casual clothes; lived in communities without paved streets and while some men explained that they were unemployed, none were seen to be working in this film.²⁹¹

A series of photographs by Frederick Baldwin portrays similar images of the CCCV and its members. Baldwin’s previous work demonstrated his interest in social justice and in individuals on the margins of society. For example, in 1962, he photographed gangs and drug addicts on the Lower East Side of New York City and, following his project in Savannah, he

²⁹¹ Right Now! (Film by Robert Newman), Jack Rubin Collection on Alabama Civil Rights and Southern Activists, available online at <http://128.118.88.226/cdm4/document.php?CISOROOT=/rabin&CISOPTR=742&CISOSHOW=23> (Accessed on August 6, 2009).

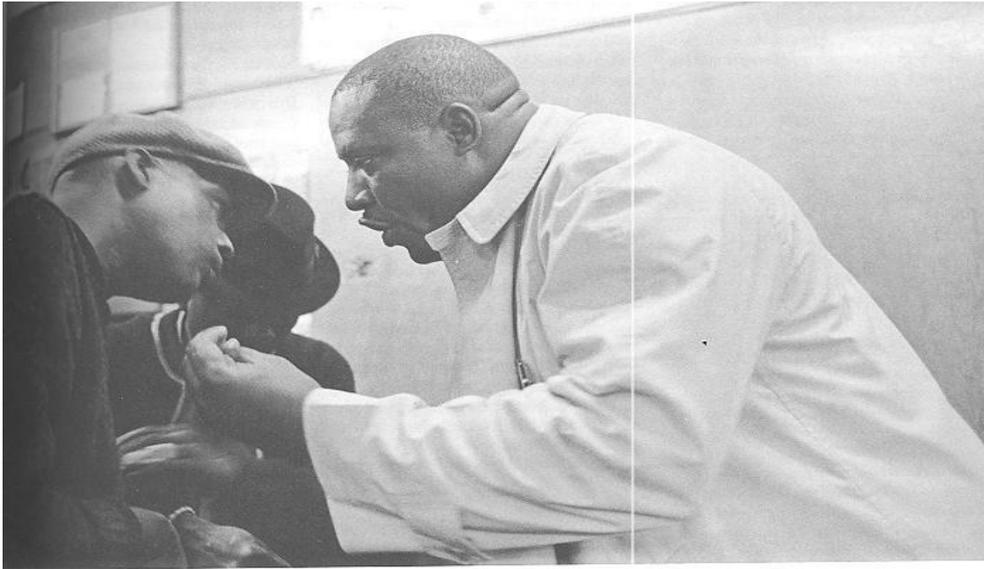
worked as part of a multiracial group to combat juvenile delinquency.²⁹² It is perhaps not surprising that Baldwin's photographs, which were exhibited in Savannah's Telfair Academy in 1983 and again in 2008, should feature former gang members like Hankerson and Brownlee so prominently. The series is striking because it illustrates the large numbers of black men – almost certainly from low-income backgrounds because of their casual, old clothes and the photographs' setting – who participated in voter registration work and literacy classes.

Figure 2 “Success,” West Broad Street



²⁹² Telfair Academy of Arts and Sciences, “...We Ain’t What We Used to Be: Photographs by Frederick C. Baldwin,” (Savannah, GA: Telfair Academy of Arts and Sciences, 1983), p 85.

Figure 3 “Big Lester” captivates

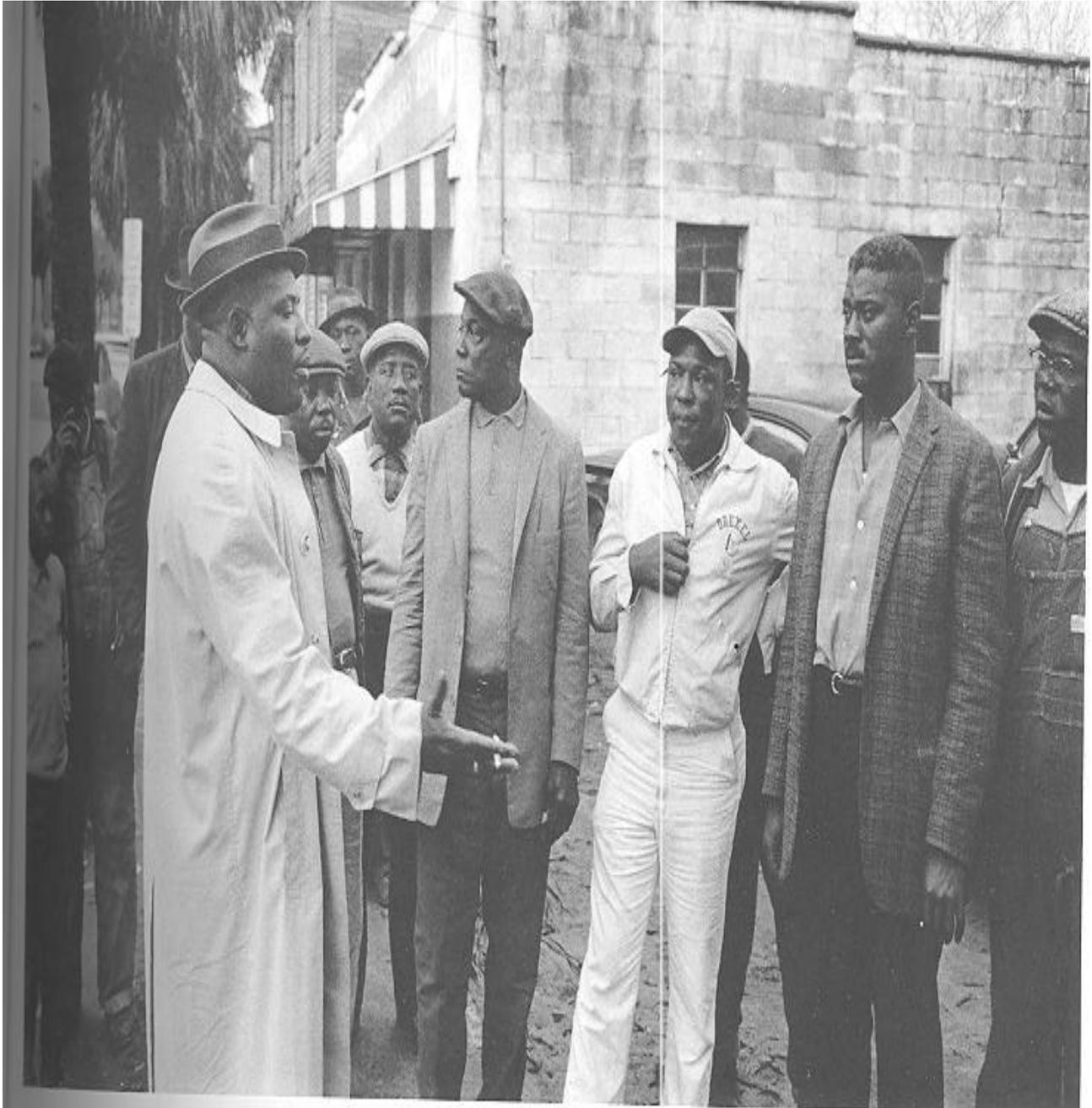


There are two principal reasons why men like Hankerson and Brownlee predominated among the CCCV’s members. In the first place, whereas citizenship school classes and recruitment on the Sea Islands tended to take place in spaces occupied by African American women, such as churches and beauty parlors, the Savannah movement used very different locations. The Baldwin series includes images documenting a class run for longshoremen in a union hall. Working with longshoremen unions not only guaranteed the inclusion of greater numbers of men, but also the infusion of a specific kind of black working class masculine culture, including strong language and alcohol and drug abuse, into the citizenship school and voter registration movement.²⁹³ Williams also drew on unions’ resources to support his projects and programs, in a way that was sometimes controversial. For example, the local white press

²⁹³ The best history of black longshoremen and unionism is Eric Arneson, Waterfront Workers of New Orleans: Race, Class and Politics (Champaign, Urbana., IL University of Illinois Press, 1994). Arneson explained that longshoremen had a relatively strong level of unionism and high bargaining power because their profession was regarded as prestigious relative to other workers in the industry.

attacked him in 1963 by using a property on West Park Avenue owned by the supposedly “communist-affiliated” Mine, Mill and Smelter union for the Crusade offices.²⁹⁴

Figure 4 “Big Lester” and “Trash” Recruiting Longshoremen, Longshoremen’s Hall



²⁹⁴ Newspaper clippings, one unnamed, n.d., Savannah Morning News (July 27, 1963), Atlanta Constitution, n.d., SRC Papers, 179: 324, 325-6, 336, 327-8.

Figure 5 Hosea Williams preaching voter registration, Longshoremen's Hall



The pictures also show Hankerson persuading bar patrons to become registered voters. Bars and social clubs became increasingly important spaces for the CCCV over the course of 1962 and 1963. When Williams alienated black ministers by quarrelling with the local NAACP and staging controversial direct action protests, they refused to let him use churches for public meetings. Instead, Williams organized events in the Flamingo nightclub.²⁹⁵ The Baldwin photographs do show one woman sitting at the bar. However, these were predominantly spaces occupied by “working class” black men; because of the “macho” culture including alcohol consumption and (in the picture below) an image of a glamor model taped to the wall. In order

²⁹⁵ Savannah Morning News (July 3, 1963)

to recruit men in bars, on street corners or from gangs, Savannah's campaign required volunteers who were not only charismatic and persuasive, but who were also known to the men who frequented similar spaces. This meant that Hankerson had a hugely important and positive role to play in the movement.

Figure 6 Big Lester persuades the patrons, West Broad Street

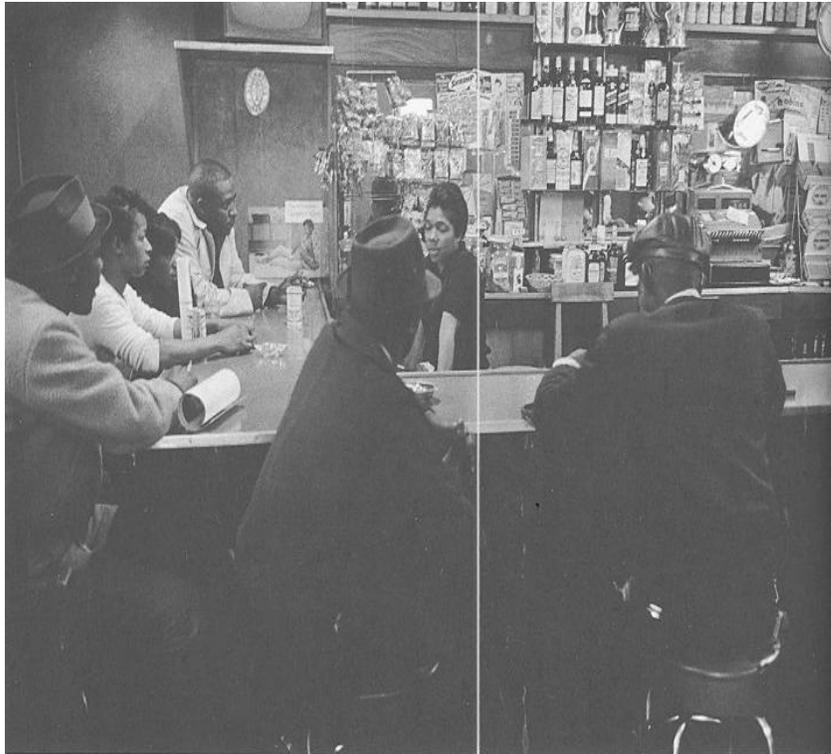
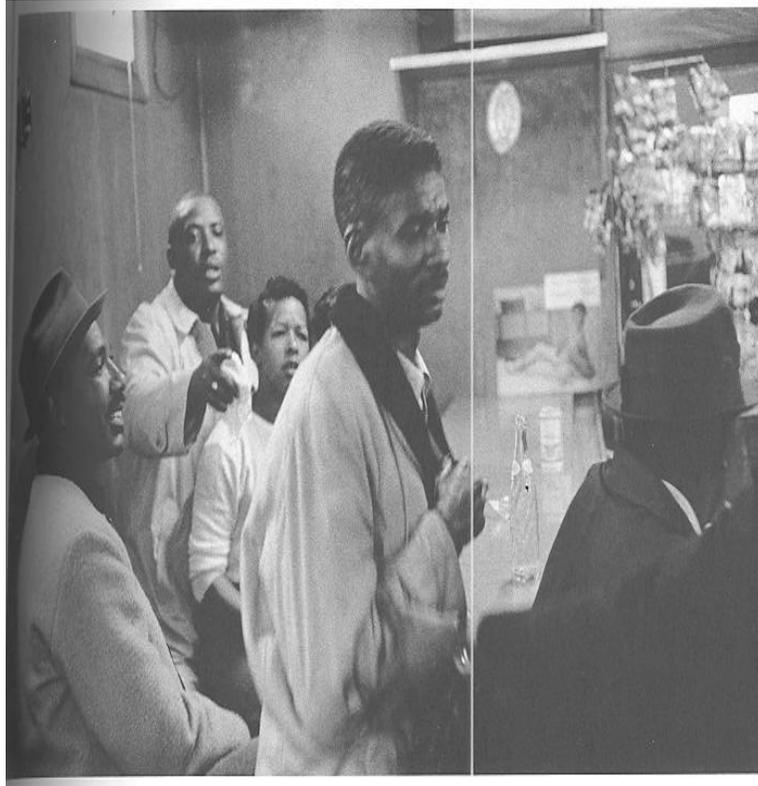


Figure 7 No one Escapes Big Lester



In the second place, Williams' idiosyncratic leadership style contributed to the gendered distinctions between the Savannah and the South Carolina programs. Williams did not lead a formal organization with elected or appointed titled officials carrying out set duties. Rather, he shared Jenkins' intransigence when it came to sharing leadership roles and did not participate in the same leadership development activities as Jenkins had done on Johns Island. A Civil Rights Commission Report observed in 1964 that the CCCV was not a "formally structured organization" but rather that Hosea Williams had "several lieutenants around him" and used his supporters on an ad-hoc basis.²⁹⁶ This meant that he was more likely to give responsibilities to friends and allies and, given the fact that he enjoyed drinking, people with whom he regularly socialized. There was some overlap between spatial and organizational determinants of the

²⁹⁶ United States Civil Rights Commission, "Community Study of Savannah, Georgia" (1964), Records of the Commission on Civil Rights: Police Community Relations in Areas (1954-66), [NARA](#) Record Group 453, p 13

class, generational and gendered character of the local movement. Daphne Spain, in a study of gendered spaces such as workplaces and universities, argues that when women are excluded from a certain space, they are also denied valued knowledge contained within these spaces. Even “seemingly trivial talk” about sport, that male employees might enjoy in sports clubs or bars, can play a role in advancing men’s careers.²⁹⁷ Similarly, Hosea Williams discussed movement tactics and strategy while socializing with men outside formal CCCV meetings. If this socializing took place in spaces formally closed or less attractive to women, they would not be able to make influential decisions, even if they held formal positions within the CCCV. For example, citizenship schoolteachers Carolyn Roberts and Emogene Stroman both served as the organization’s secretary at one point, while Catherine Branch was the treasurer.²⁹⁸ Carolyn Roberts remembered that she was an influential CCCV leader, equal to Williams and Clarke.²⁹⁹ Yet, other leaders hinted that Roberts’ responsibilities were limited to administration, rather than decision-making. Andrew Young explained that despite being unpaid, Roberts “just decided that she was going to keep the store. And so, every day she would open up an office and she’d sit there all day long. She’d answer the phone and she’d tell people what they could do and what they couldn’t do and she was... there every day all day.”³⁰⁰

²⁹⁷ Gendered Spaces (Chapel Hill, NC, London: University of North Carolina Press), especially pp 242-3.

²⁹⁸ Stroman, interview with author (February 12, 2008), Roberts, Levine interview, Hosea Williams, “Monthly Report to the VEP (April 1964),” SRC Papers, 182:773.

²⁹⁹ Carolyn Roberts Bartow, contribution to “... We ain’t what we used to be,” notes by Taylor Branch, Branch Papers, box 120, folder 865.

³⁰⁰ Young, interview with Feay Shellman in “... We ain’t what we used to be,” p 10.

Defining Race, Class, Generations and Gender

I discuss class, gender and generational distinctions in this study because they are significant categories of analysis, which explain many variations between citizenship schools and programs. However, there are problems involved with drawing neat dichotomies between classes and generations. For example, citizenship schoolteacher Catherine Branch identified the CCCV as a movement of young people, who provoked criticism from their elders.³⁰¹ Yet, it is a simplification to argue that Hosea Williams and the CCCV represented a younger generation of activists than W.W. Law and Eugene Gadsden. Williams was only a year younger than Law, while citizenship school attendees were often middle aged. Hankerson was thirty-nine when he joined the movement, older than Williams himself.³⁰² However, Williams' rash personality, combined with his rapport with young student protestors meant that he appeared to be of a different generation to men like Law and Gadsden. South Carolina's citizenship schoolteachers – Bernice Robinson, Alleen Brewer, Mary Lee Davis and Ethel Grimball- did not represent a single generation, of course. Robinson was in her forties when she taught the Johns Island class, while Grimball was a recent college graduate. Yet, because they were or had been married and had established themselves as professionals, they appeared to come from a separate generation from the students who combined teaching with direct action protest.

Similarly, the study avoids using the term “working class” to differentiate the gang members, longshoremen and bar patrons in Savannah from members of the Progressive Club on Johns Island. Jenkins may have used the Progressive Club to promote middle-class masculine values, but its members were usually very poor. The Crusade for Voters became associated with men from a specific group of the urban poor, which scholars have, problematically, described as

³⁰¹ Levine interview

³⁰² Right Now

an “underclass.” Paul Jargowsky defines the “underclass” as a “popular way to refer to the urban poor, particularly those who reside in the high-poverty neighborhoods.” Important characteristics included “dropping out of school, having children out of wedlock, drug and alcohol abuse, welfare receipt and low attachment to the labor force.”³⁰³ These social traits were also prevalent in poor rural communities, like Johns Island.³⁰⁴ However, there were qualitative differences between “delinquency” in rural communities and the urban “underclass.” Low population densities may have contributed to relatively low levels of gang membership in rural communities. Young men would find it difficult to join a gang with other young men merely because they lived several miles from their peers and were not able to “hang out” together in public and private spaces easily. Furthermore, in the late 1960s, a wealth of burgeoning sociological, psychological and historical literature argued that black men were deprived of the opportunity to provide for their family and did not practice values like thrift and industry. Instead, they argued that young black men demonstrated their manhood through “machismo” behavior, such as joining gangs, drinking heavily and abusing drugs, having premarital unprotected sex and participating in criminal behavior. The breakdown of the family and subsequent social ills were exacerbated when African Americans migrated from the rural South to Northern cities in the twentieth-century.³⁰⁵

Delinquency, crime and gang membership were prevalent in Southern cities as well as in the North. Although they are not usually associated with the citizenship school narrative in South Carolina and Mississippi, historians have recognized the contributions that men from the

³⁰³ Poverty and Place: Ghettos, Barrios and the American City (New York, NY: Russell Sage, 1997), p 17.

³⁰⁴ Recorded conversations between Guy Carawan and Johns Island residents indicate that there were incidences of alcohol and drug abuse, gambling and teenage pregnancy on the island and islanders were concerned about these social ills to a greater or lesser degree. Bill and Henrietta Saunders, interview with Guy and Candie Carawan, Carawan Collection, FT 3612.

³⁰⁵ For example, Clark, Dark Ghetto, passim, Richard Cloward and Lloyd Ohlin, Delinquency and Opportunity: A Theory of Delinquent Gangs (Glencoe, IL: Free Press, 1960), passim.

“underclass” made to various local urban freedom struggles. For example, Robin Kelley argued that during the 1963 Birmingham campaign, local slum dwellers, motivated more by everyday indignities of police brutality, poverty and unemployment rather than by Fred Shuttlesworth’s desegregation movement, participated in demonstrations “on their own terms.” He argued that the term “onlookers” was a misnomer for the local slum dwellers who “taunted police, retaliated with fists, profanity, rocks, and bottles,” because these people were “clearly demonstrating their utter contempt for the police, in particular, and racist oppression in general.”³⁰⁶ Organized gangs could also offer resources to burgeoning civic and civil rights movements. For example, Ron Chepesiuk found that in Chicago, gang members sought ways to participate in SCLC’s Poor People’s Campaign in 1967 and up until the early 1970s, organized activities like mentoring programs for young black men.³⁰⁷

Savannah was different because men from the so-called “underclass” shaped the character of the local movement. Savannah’s citizenship school registers indicate that the masculine character of the local movement was reflected in the gender composition of citizenship classes. Contradicting the bulk of historical studies that assume that women formed the majority of citizenship school students, Savannah’s classes actually attracted significant numbers of men.³⁰⁸ Chapter 4 will explain how these men shaped the curriculum content of the

³⁰⁶ Race Rebels: Culture, Politics and the Black Working Class (New York, NY, Oxford: Free Press, 1994), p 88.

³⁰⁷ Black Gangsters of Chicago (Fort Lee, NJ: Barricade Books, 2007). In a more contemporary example, Mary Patillo-McCoy argued that drug dealers and mobsters played ambiguous roles in Groveland, a “middle-class” Chicago neighborhood. Sometimes working with block clubs and churches to “spurn disorder, actively combat graffiti and show disdain for... loitering or public fighting;” sometimes making altruistic contributions to community events and parties, street gangs both cooperated with church leaders, block club members and politicians to create a more pleasant environment and maintained a criminal element in the community. Black Picket Fences: Privilege and Peril among the Black Middle-class, (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1999), pp 70-3.

³⁰⁸ Savannah’s surviving citizenship school registers are incomplete, and mostly date from 1962-4, when the Voter Education Project was funding Williams and the CCCV, and pressing him to keep more complete records. People dropped in and out of classes, so it cannot be presumed that all documented students went to classes regularly. However, records for these years indicate that 52% of students were female and 48% male, suggesting that rather being overwhelmingly attended by women, the classes had a nearly even gender divide. See Citizenship

classes that they attended. There was also a difference because such men became leaders within the movement. This was not common in SCLC-sponsored protest events. As Adam Fairclough explained, SCLC chairman Joseph Lowery made little effort to engage with participants in riots in New York State in 1964. Apparently it “went against SCLC’s grain to organize among the people who shunned the churches and frequented bars, pool halls and street corners.” Similarly, SCLC staff faced obstacles when they attempted to organize ghetto and slum dwellers during the 1967 Chicago Campaign. Young gang members, Fairclough explained, were both suspicious of authority and were “contemptuous of the word ‘nonviolence.’” SCLC had more success after James Orange “learned to speak the language of the group.”³⁰⁹ Ironically, although former gang members and drug addicts are not usually associated with the citizenship school narrative, the CCCV was ironically more successful at cultivating undiscovered, inexperienced leaders in Savannah than had been the case in Lowcountry South Carolina. Whereas on Edisto Island and Wadmalaw Island, Highlander relied on established leaders like ministers, gang members proved to be previously undiscovered future leaders who had affinities with low-income blacks in their communities and who turned their lives around. In this case, it fit the Highlander model *more* closely than the South Carolina program.

Local circumstances, including Williams’ personality, the racial and gender composition of teachers and students and the spaces in which the classes took place shaped the development of the Savannah program and made it an individual program. Hosea Williams also had a different relationship with Highlander and Myles Horton than Esau Jenkins had done and the

School reports, SCLC Records, 4, 16:230-270. These aggregate figures mask differences between various classes. For example, Daisy Jones, Mrs. C.M. Hagin, Ida Mack and Ardell Lunnon taught classes where the ratio of men to women was at times 3:20, 2:11, 0:7 and 2:11 respectively. Meanwhile, Dorothy Boles taught a class with nine men and one woman; Adline Bradshaw had seven men and three women in her West Savannah class; and one of Benjamin Van Clark’s classes had fourteen men and four women. SCLC Records, 4, 16:504, 428, 535, 511, 365, 375, 415.

³⁰⁹ Adam Fairclough, To Redeem the Soul of America: The Southern Christian Leadership Conference & Martin Luther King, Jr. (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1987), pp 197, 288.

schools operated in a highly different context. By the time the first school had opened in Savannah, Highlander was in the midst of a legal challenge that affected the formation of the local program, and its development after 1961.

New Circumstances: Highlander, the courts and financial constraints

Suspicion over Highlander's so-called "communistic" tendencies had been leveled since its formative years in the 1930s. However, the school faced its most devastating attacks after 1957. First, the Internal Revenue Service informed Highlander staff that it no longer qualified for tax exempt status, although this was restored several months later. Later that year, the pro-segregationist Georgia Commission on Public Education attacked Highlander's interracial children's camp and published a four-page magazine entitled "Highlander Folk School: Communist Training School," which included pictures of the school's Labor Day celebrations. In early 1959, Tennessee state representatives Shelby Rhinehart and Harry Lee Senter pressed the governor to investigate Highlander and its supposedly subversive activities. In February and March, a committee investigated charges of Communism and interracial gatherings at the school, and believed that it had found evidence that Horton had profited from the transfer of school property in 1957. In July, state law officers raided the school. The raid was an ordeal for Septima Clark who was arrested and tried for possessing alcohol, although the charges against her personally were dropped in 1960. Nevertheless, State District Attorney Albert Sloan prosecuted the school on the grounds that it sold alcohol and goods without a license and held interracial gatherings. The trial began in September 1959 and in February 1960 District Judge

Chester Chatten ruled that the school should be closed. Highlander lost appeals to the state and federal Supreme Court in June 1960 and April 1961 respectively.³¹⁰

Thus, while Highlander staff had a philosophical commitment to developing independent local leadership in the South, they were also concerned about developing responsibilities to local communities when the school's own future was in doubt. In December 1960, just as the Savannah schools were starting, Highlander staff decided that the school would not "continue financing field programs" including the Georgia project.³¹¹ By January 1961, Highlander reported that it had

made arrangements with organizations in a position to set up classes, recruit teachers and students, underwrite the cost of sending teachers for training, as well as to cover the costs of carrying out the program in the field.³¹²

The following June, Horton issued a memo to Highlander staff members, which provides a stark indication of the state of Highlander finances at the time: "Until such a time when general funds are available, or special grants or earmarked contributions secured for given staff members," he explained, "further financial obligations cannot be assumed. No additional expenses are to be incurred, or commitments made, without my written authorization."³¹³

Septima Clark was concerned about the impact of Highlander's legal position and financial predicament on the fledgling citizenship schools, including the Savannah program. In April 1959, she wrote to Horton in order to tell him that she was "deeply concerned" at falling numbers of white participants at supposedly interracial workshops. Her letter indicates that

³¹⁰ Glen, Highlander, pp 207-245

³¹¹ Letter from Myles Horton to Hosea Williams (March 1, 1961), Highlander Files, 8:322.

³¹² "Progress Report on the Citizenship School Program," January 27, 1961, Highlander Files, 33:795-6.

³¹³ Memo from Myles Horton to Septima Clark, Bernice Robinson, Anne Lockwood, Chuck Boyles and John Thompson (June 21, 1961), Records of the SCLC, 12:640.

African American staff members had assumed most of the responsibilities for recruiting participants and, while she, Robinson and Jenkins could enlist African Americans for citizenship school training and related workshops, they were “powerless” to recruit white people to attend other sessions.³¹⁴ This suggests that, with the increasing pressures on the school, Clark felt that she and her Sea Island colleagues were taking on more and more of the school’s daily business. In 1961, she told Horton that she felt that Highlander was not handling the extension of the citizenship school program very well. By this time, Highlander had trained teachers to run classes in Charleston, southeast Georgia and in Huntsville and Montgomery, Alabama. The program was, she reasoned, entirely different from the class they had first set up with first “one teacher and fourteen pupils for two months” and then, “thirty seven pupils for three months.” Teachers and supervisors were driving thirty or forty miles a night to supervise the project.³¹⁵

On the other hand, Myles Horton argued that Highlander gradually disengaged itself from the citizenship schools because it believed that local people, once given basic training and support, should be free to direct local programs without external supervision. This marked a “shift in role from experimentation, sponsorship and supervision” to supporting programs on an informal, ad hoc basis.³¹⁶ In South Carolina, local leaders recognized that this shift had take place and responded accordingly. Esau Jenkins reported to Juanita Grimball and Alleen Brewer that they could not rely on Highlander funds to support their schools and “made them feel that the responsibility for taking care of the expense of the building will be up to the people.”³¹⁷ Horton argued in 1959 that Highlander receive a large grant to expand the citizenship school program, it should turn down the money as it lacked the “organizational capacity” to manage it.

³¹⁴ Letter from Septima Clark to Myles Horton, Dr Hayden May Justus and trustees of Highlander Folk School, April 12, 1959, Septima Clark Collection, box 7, folder 2

³¹⁵ Letter from Septima Clark to Myles Horton, May 4, 1961, Septima Clark Collection, box 7, folder 3.

³¹⁶ Education for Citizenship, p 178.

³¹⁷ Letter from Esau Jenkins to Septima Clark (August 8, 1959), Highlander Files, 33:888-9.

He preferred that Highlander staff members act as “consultants” to organizations that wanted to run classes themselves.³¹⁸ He explained that after some initial investment and organization on Highlander’s part, successful schools tended to be self-sustaining because former students and community members themselves had decided that they “would continue to further (their) education in citizenship beyond the elementary stages of meeting requirements for registration.” He expected that the same would happen with the Southeastern Georgia Crusade for Voters.³¹⁹ Given that this was a memorandum to a charitable foundation from which Horton wished to secure funding, he may have been keen to persuade the trustees that a preliminary grant would help to create a self-sustaining project. However, Clark reported that she encouraged participants to continue organizing schools when they told her that they wished to continue the “fellowship” which they cultivated.³²⁰

While the South Carolina programs were already established by this time, the Savannah program had only recently been initiated. What impact did Highlander’s funding situation have on the CCCV’s early years? Clearly, Hosea Williams felt that his schools were unfairly penalized. There were also some misunderstandings about funding. Williams had been promised a \$50 expense account, \$3 towards each night’s rental fee and resources such as workbooks and pencils and was disappointed when these offers were not guaranteed.³²¹ On the other hand, Taylor Branch has implied that Williams asked for, and expected, more money than was reasonable. He also controversially incurred significant expenses when he stayed in a Birmingham motel with some colleagues during the 1963 campaign.³²² It is also possible that

³¹⁸ “Septima Clark’s Report from the Sea Islands”

³¹⁹ Memorandum from Myles Horton to Mrs. Jane Lee Eddy of the Schwartzhaupt Foundation (January 1961), Highlander Files, 8:301.

³²⁰ “Septima Clark’s Report from the Sea Islands”

³²¹ Letter from Septima Clark to Hosea Williams, December 6, 1960, Highlander Files, 8:285.

³²² Branch, Parting the Waters, p 742.

he wanted more funds for Savannah or Southeast Georgia schools than the other early schools had needed or asked for. In one letter, Williams requested money to buy a wood stove for Burroughs County, where cold weather made teaching classes uncomfortable. However, Highlander could not afford it.³²³ On another occasion, he explained that, lacking access to a car, he experienced problems in transporting recruits to a training workshop.³²⁴ Clark suggested that Williams economize by sending them on a bus.³²⁵ Shortly afterwards, she reminded him that changing circumstances meant that the programs had to change. She emphasised that Williams would need to find local support for running the schools and his teachers should only submit their travel expenses. “Remember,” she wrote, “these schools are not exactly set up like the ones we had in the winter.”³²⁶ Conversely, the Huntsville program was sustaining itself with personal contributions and by holding schools in private homes.³²⁷

Nevertheless, the legal context did contribute to the varied directions that schools in South Carolina and Savannah would take. Given Highlander’s legal and financial difficulties in 1959 and 1960, staff did not have the time or resources to devote to new programs as it had done in 1957. Although Williams’ complaints of posterity may not have been entirely justified, he could not take advantage of, for example, loans for a purpose-built community center like the Progressive Club and instead relied on community resources. Highlander also did not conduct the same range of workshops and leadership building activities in Savannah as it had done on the Sea Islands, and Williams tended to dominate and shape the program himself, relying on key “lieutenants.” This led to class, gender and generational distinctions between the two programs.

³²³ Letter from Hosea Williams to Septima Clark (February 9, 1961), Highlander Files, 8:312-3; letter from Septima Clark to Hosea Williams (February 15, 1961), Highlander Files, 8:314.

³²⁴ Letter from Hosea Williams to Myles Horton (February 8, 1961), Highlander Files, 8:311.

³²⁵ Letter from Septima Clark to Hosea Williams (April 6, 1961), Highlander Files, 8:329

³²⁶ Letter from Septima Clark to Hosea Williams (April 30, 1961), Highlander Files, 8:336.

³²⁷ Memorandum on Citizenship Schools, June 26 1961, SCLC Papers, Part 4, 12:549-553.

Williams relied on the support of both black men recruited from unions and street gangs and on young student protestors. Finally, in 1960, the Crusade for Voters was still the voter registration wing of the local NAACP branch. The relationship between Hosea Williams and the local NAACP would shape the direction of the program after 1961.

As the future of the school became uncertain, Horton became unwilling to commit resources to new programs and expected more cooperation from local leaders. This meant that resources available in each community would be even more significant for the establishment and sustenance of citizenship schools, but these resources would continue to create differences and distinctions between schools and programs. By June 1961, Myles Horton had decided that the future of citizenship schools was “too important” to be “tied to the fate of Highlander.”³²⁸ For several months, negotiations had been taking place with SCLC staff over a possible transfer or sharing of responsibilities for the program. This would have different repercussions for the schools that were already in place.

³²⁸ Letter from Myles Horton to Dr. Wesley Hotchkiss (American Missionary Association or AMA), June 26, 1961, Records of the SCLC, 2: 0592.

Chapter 3

“A Vital Movement for Mass Action”: SCLC, Highlander Folk School and the Politics of transferring citizenship schools in Savannah and Lowcountry South Carolina, 1960-4

The previous chapter demonstrated that from the outset of the citizenship schools' history, there were striking variations between citizenship school programs in South Carolina and in Savannah. These were due to local resources (such as the spaces in which citizenship schools were held); the interests and experience of citizenship school organizers and teachers and local organizers' relationships with Highlander Folk School. In 1960, Highlander staff resolved to transfer the program to the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC). This move only reinforced and widened the existing differences between the two regional programs. During the course of the transfer, and in its aftermath, relationships with sponsoring organizations combined with local events to ensure that the South Carolina and Savannah moved in different directions.

Highlander, marginalized from the program it had initiated, continued to support the schools that it had pioneered on the Sea Islands. Meanwhile, Andrew Young, appointed to coordinate the CEP in 1961, identified Williams' Crusade for Voters as the best program of its

kind in the South and urged his new colleagues to work with it.³²⁹ SCLC staff envisaged using citizenship schools to develop strong local affiliates who would provide the personnel for its direct action and voter registration work. Presuming that they were successful in doing so, they would become, in the words of Andrew Young, the foundation on which the civil rights movement was based.³³⁰ However, SCLC's ability to build local affiliates also depended on local circumstances. By 1961, the Citizens Committee of Charleston County and, to a lesser extent, the Crusade for Voters were established organizations with their own agendas that were not necessarily compatible with the SCLC's. Moreover, both organizations worked in cities with pre-existing NAACP branches that did not entirely welcome SCLC's attempts to build a grassroots following.³³¹ In Charleston, Esau Jenkins and citizenship schoolteachers focused on local concerns, cooperated with the local NAACP branch, and few attempts were made to develop SCLC's presence in the city. In Savannah, however, Hosea Williams' conflict with the NAACP and Voter Education Project drove him to identify with SCLC.

Not so straightforward: Current assumptions about the transfer

Works that study the early Sea Island schools pay little attention to the program's transfer from Highlander Folk School to SCLC. Their focus is on why and how the early schools were founded, teaching methods used and their legacy in Charleston County. By describing the

³²⁹ Fairclough, To Redeem the Soul, p 95, Andrew Young, report to the President of SCLC and the Administrative Committee, SCLC Records, 4:817-8.

³³⁰ An Easy Burden, p 144.

³³¹ Nationally, NAACP and SCLC were often competitors for funds and support for their voter registration work. Gilbert Jonas, Freedom's Sword: The NAACP and the Struggle against Racism in America, 1909-1969 (New York, NY: Taylor and Francis, 2007), pp 212-3. John Dittmer, furthermore, portrays frequently explosive disputes between Council of Federated Organizations (COFO) partners in Mississippi that eventually undermined the coalition. Local People, pp 341-2, 353-62, 403

transfer only very briefly, such accounts imply that it was relatively straightforward.³³² John Glen's account of Highlander depicts the transfer of the citizenship schools as coinciding with the school's relocation to alternative grounds and a new beginning for the organization as Highlander Research and Education Center.³³³ More recently, Mellon Charron has discussed the transfer in terms of the ambiguities over Clark's employment and salary.³³⁴ At the local level, Gillespie examines the transition from Highlander to SCLC in Savannah; however, her account gives Williams a greater deal of agency in shaping the Savannah program's direction after 1961.³³⁵ In fact, Williams and the Crusade for Voters were gradually thrust into SCLC after he complained about Highlander's declining support and alienated local NAACP members, churches and civic groups. He also prompted the VEP to remove its support by failing to keep adequate accounts and neglected voter registration work in favor of direct action in 1963.

David Garrow provides a thorough account of the arrangements and negotiations that resulted in the program's transfer. He details the planning that took place before SCLC took over the training and responsibility for citizenship schools. Yet, because he was writing a history of SCLC, he describes the transfer from that perspective. He explains why SCLC wanted the program and what benefits it stood to gain from it.³³⁶ However, this description of Highlander cultivating a program that provided the impetus for SCLC activity fails to take into account local variations in the details of the transfer and relationships to both SCLC and Highlander.

³³² For example, Langston, "Women of Highlander" writes only that "arrangements were made to give the program, staff and funds to SCLC", p 162; Sandra Oldendorf explains that "the citizenship schools plus the teacher-training workshops were transferred to SCLC," p 174, while Carolyn Jenkins states that "SCLC... was given the Citizenship School program and Septima Clark was transferred with (it)," "Septima Clark," p 27. Frank Adams summarizes, "arrangements were made to give the program- funds, funding sources, staff, and idea- to the Southern Christian Leadership Conference early in 1961," Unearthing Seeds of Fire, p 118.

³³³ Highlander, p 204-6.

³³⁴ "Teaching Citizenship," pp 528-545.

³³⁵ "They Walk, Talk and Act Like New People," pp 142-191.

³³⁶ Bearing the Cross: Martin Luther King and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, 1955- 1968 (New York, NY: W Morrow, 1996), p 120.

Furthermore, none of the work on Highlander, citizenship schools or SCLC fully recognizes the fact that Myles Horton continued to be interested in the program he had helped cultivate after 1961 and that he felt unfairly marginalized from it. He may not have hoped to organize a southwide program, but still wished to be involved in the Citizenship Education experiment. Myles Horton envisaged Highlander Folk School's role as continuing to supply advice, guidance and resources even after his relinquishing of the program. Only David P. Levine has recognized that Highlander continued to be involved in citizenship schools after 1960. He suggested that Highlander collaborated with SCLC on the citizenship schools but fails to recognize the attempts made to undermine Highlander's influence during the transfer.³³⁷

Sociologists have conceptualized Highlander's role in cultivating and transferring the citizenship school program in several ways. Bob Edwards and John McCarthy classify Highlander as a "movement mentor organization" which "encouraged, supported and facilitated collective action," but which was not an "organizational vehicle." Francesca Polletta calls Highlander and organizations like it "transmovement structures" which provide advice, contacts and training but do not "supply leaders, engage in recruitment drives or develop resonant mobilizing frames." Aldon Morris calls them "halfway houses," that is, organizations which are "relatively isolated from the larger society" but provide insurgent organizations with knowledge, experience, contacts and workshops.³³⁸ While these theoretical models reinforce the orthodox history of Highlander as cultivating a program to train civil rights leaders before willingly relinquishing it to a burgeoning civil rights organization, they are problematic for a number of reasons. On the one hand, Highlander's role as a willing "mentor" is somewhat compromised by

³³⁷ "Citizenship Schools," p 175.

³³⁸ "Review: Social Movement Schools," *Sociological Forum* 7, 3 (September 1992), pp 541-550, citation on pp 548-9; "Free Spaces in Collective Action," *Theory and Society*, 28, 1 (February 1999), pp 1-38, citation on pp 9-10; *Origins of the Civil Rights Movement*, pp 139-140.

the fact that Horton continued to seek a role for his organization in the project after most accounts assume it had been willingly transferred to SCLC. On the other, SCLC also performed some functions associated with “movement mentors” and “halfway houses.” Unlike the NAACP, in which a national office presided over regional offices, State Conferences and local branches, SCLC retained a more loosely knit structure with a central committee and local affiliates.³³⁹ As the subsequent section will explain, SCLC staff believed that the citizenship school program would “mentor” local affiliates on SCLC ideology and non-violent direct action tactics. On the other hand, a closer understanding of the politics of the transfer, and the ways in which SCLC and Highlander interacted with Williams’ Crusade for Voters and Jenkins’ Citizens Committee indicates that movement “mentors” have their own interests in cultivating certain grassroots movements more than others. Furthermore, the Savannah example demonstrates that conflict on the local level shapes the ways in which local groups interact with “movement mentors.”

Transferring the Program

Although the details of the transfer have largely gone understudied, they are valuable for a greater understanding of the citizenship schools history; illustrating first, the different objectives that Highlander and SCLC staff had for the program and second, the ways in which Myles Horton found himself gradually forced out by 1961. In 1960, SCLC was a fledgling organization. Ella Baker, during two frustrating years working as SCLC’s executive director in Atlanta, had argued that SCLC had little grassroots backing from its affiliates and had made few inroads into voter education. Baker’s voter registration project “The Crusade for Citizenship” had been unremarkable because it lacked local support, either financial or organizational. In

³³⁹ Fairclough, *To Redeem the Soul*, pp 48-50.

September 1959, she gave an address to the SCLC board in which she recommended that they “facilitate coordinated action by local groups.” SCLC, she argued had “been so busy doing the things that had to be done to keep in existence,” it had become stagnant. The time had come to develop a “vital mass action against racial discrimination.” Although she did not stress citizenship schools, she had been impressed with Highlander and Septima Clark’s work on the Sea Islands.³⁴⁰ Baker’s views on leadership and participation were notoriously different from her colleagues at SCLC.³⁴¹ Charles Payne, in particular, argues that her vision of grassroots action formed part of an “organizing tradition” which cultivated a democratic movement in Mississippi.³⁴² However, James Wood of SCLC, if he did not necessarily see the need of helping communities to organize locally saw merit in the idea of using citizenship schools to train cadets of SCLC supporters.³⁴³ In the autumn of 1960, Wood visited Highlander Folk School and reported Myles Horton’s suggestion that they take over the program to Wyatt Walker, SCLC’s new executive director.³⁴⁴

Over the fall, both organizations negotiated plans for a cooperative program where Highlander would supply its strengths in leadership training and mentor SCLC in organizing a democratic educational program. It was envisaged that SCLC would take responsibility for

³⁴⁰ “Report of the Executive Director,” (9/29/59), cited in Garrow, Bearing the Cross, p 118; letter from Ella Baker to Septima Clark, April 14 1959, Records of the SCLC, 12:617.

³⁴¹ Robnett, How Long, pp 98-102, 166. Baker’s most recent biographer explained that she had seen the cult of personality surrounding King as inhibiting the development of grassroots participation. Baker believed that grassroots action was most effective when it came from concentrated efforts of poor people rather than from a charismatic leader. The biography does suggest that Baker was excessively confrontational and failed to appreciate King’s ability to inspire the very communities she wanted to organize. She credits the conflict between them to fundamental philosophical differences about the role of ministers in the churches and the significance of non-violence. Ransby, Ella Baker and the Black Freedom Movement, especially pp 187-195.

³⁴² Payne, I’ve Got the Light of Freedom, pp 78-102.

³⁴³ Wyatt Walker introduced Wood to the SCLC staff in May 1960 and he stayed until September, 1961. After Walker’s secretary reported that Wood had made unflattering remarks about both Walker and Martin Luther King, King forced him to resign. During his time at SCLC, however, Wood played a key role in securing the citizenship school program’s transfer and shaping it to suit SCLC needs. Garrow, Bearing the Cross, pp 137, 165.

³⁴⁴ Letters from James Wood to Myles Horton, November 18 1960; Anne Lockwood to James Wood, December 8th 1960; Report by James Wood, November 23rd 1960, all cited in Garrow, Bearing the Cross, p 149.

recruiting local leaders and running citizenship schools and would pay for the room and board of people they sent to Highlander for workshops, while Highlander would use its facilities and tried and tested methods to train teachers. In January, arrangements were made for a workshop to be held the following month on “Training Leaders for Citizenship Schools” and SCLC arranged to send delegates. Highlander would refer applications to SCLC, so the latter organization had the wherewithal to select who would receive training. At the February workshop, Highlander and SCLC issued a press release that they were working together on a new citizenship program and seeking funds for it to move forward.³⁴⁵ Over the course of 1961, however arrangements were made so that Highlander’s role in the program was increasingly marginalized. This was partly due to Highlander’s increasingly precarious legal position. Two days after announcing the merger with SCLC, Highlander lost its charter and the District Judge announced that the school’s property should be liquidated.³⁴⁶ Highlander, aware of the impending closure of its Tennessee facilities arranged to turn teacher training over to SCLC.³⁴⁷ Horton also looked for an alternative facility for training workshops and in May, the United Church of Christ offered its building, Dorchester Center, near Savannah.³⁴⁸

Legal arrangements over the administration of funding brought another organization, and a new staff-member, into the program. In the spring, the Field Foundation awarded SCLC \$26,000 to operate a new citizenship school program. The foundation required, however, that the money be administered through a tax-exempt organization, which SCLC was not. The United Council of Churches (UCC) agreed to be this intermediary body.³⁴⁹ In May, Horton

³⁴⁵ SCLC, press release, February 14, 1961, cited in Garrow, Bearing the Cross, p 150.

³⁴⁶ Glen, Highlander, p 244.

³⁴⁷ Press release by Highlander Folk School (May 4, 1961), Highlander Files, 7:610.

³⁴⁸ Letter from Max Hahn to Myles Horton (April 28, 1961); letter from Charles Boyles to Myles Horton (May 2, 1961); letter from Myles Horton to Martin Luther King (May 2, 1961); letter from Herman Long to Myles Horton (May 15, 1961), Highlander Files, 7:729, 731, 732, 739.

³⁴⁹ Garrow, Bearing the Cross, p 161.

turned the administration of the program over to a Citizenship School Committee, initially consisting of Horton, Highlander's Anne Lockwood, James Wood and the UCC's Herman Long, to coordinate the citizenship school program.³⁵⁰ In June, Highlander hired a new staff member, Andrew Young, to work on the program.

Correspondence between Horton, Andrew Young and Wesley Hotchkiss over the next six months suggests that the United Church of Christ consciously minimized Highlander's role in the program. In August, Horton proposed that the Citizenship School Committee use the remainder of an unspecified grant made two years previously in order to research teacher training and teaching materials for use in citizenship schools. He argued that the present program was based on six years experience of close individual training and supervision; but, as it was expanded across the South, it would require the development of a greater number of teacher trainers, improved instructional materials and a guide book explaining the program's purpose to potential sponsors. He argued that not only did Highlander have the records and experienced staff to draw examples from the early citizenship schools, but it had secured the assistance of Aimee Isgrig Horton of the Illinois Human Relations Committee and Ralph Tyler for expert guidance and consultancy.³⁵¹ His letters and proposals were enthusiastic and optimistic about the role Highlander staff could play in the program after the transfer was complete.

By October, his letters hinted at Highlander's reduced circumstances and he regretted not being more involved in the previous two months. "I feel in a way that we have let you down," he told Young, although "the situation was not of our making." The letter also suggests that Hotchkiss and the AMA had felt that Highlander's participation in "putting the final touches" on

³⁵⁰ Letter from Myles Horton to Wesley Hotchkiss (June 26, 1961); "Citizenship School Committee Meeting," June 6 1961, Highlander Files, 7: 752, 612-5.

³⁵¹ Letters from Myles Horton to Wesley Hotchkiss (August 4 and September 7, 1961); memo from Myles Horton to Wesley Hotchkiss (August 4, 1961), Highlander Papers, box 30, folder 5.

the citizenship school program was “not essential.”³⁵² By the end of 1961, however, Horton had acquired a new charter for “Highlander Research and Education Center” and temporary offices in Knoxville and was attempting to find more permanent facilities.³⁵³ Horton again suggested that Highlander staff undertake the research project that he had devised in the summer. However, neither Wesley Hotchkiss, director of the UCC nor Maxwell Hahn of the Field Foundation were enthusiastic about his proposal.³⁵⁴ In October, Highlander staff shared these ideas with Young, who presented them to the UCC Board meeting. Although Hotchkiss had seemed enthusiastic about the proposal, he blocked a vote on it.³⁵⁵

SCLC takes precedence

Although Young suggested that it had been Hotchkiss and Hahn who had stymied Horton’s proposals, from the outset, he and his new colleagues hoped to minimize Highlander’s influence in order that SCLC could benefit from the grassroots leadership training that the program offered. Although he recognized that Horton saw SCLC as “one of many organizations” who could lead the citizenship school program, Young felt that its southwide extension depended on SCLC’s leadership.³⁵⁶ This is because Young had seen the potential in citizenship schools as a training program for SCLC’s grassroots leaders and felt that schools should thus be associated with SCLC alone. In a memorandum sent by SCLC to its affiliates, he indicated what SCLC thought should be the purpose of the citizenship school program. It argued

³⁵² Letter from Myles Horton to Andrew Young (October 12, 1961), SCLC Records, 2:603.

³⁵³ Glen, Highlander, p 247.

³⁵⁴ Letters from Myles Horton to Maxwell Hahn (August 4, 1961), Maxwell Hahn to Myles Horton (August 9, 1961), Wesley Hotchkiss to Andrew Young (August 11, 1961), Myles Horton to Wesley Hotchkiss (September 7, 1961), Highlander Files, 7: 762, 764, 766, 771-2.

³⁵⁵ Letter from Anne Lockwood to Andrew Young (October 19, 1961), SCLC Records, 2:604, letter from Andrew Young to Myles and Aimee Horton (November 29, 1961), SCLC Records, 2:605.

³⁵⁶ Letter from Andrew Young to Myles Horton (October 3, 1961 and April 24, 1962), Highlander Papers, box 30, folder 5.

that trained teachers or local leaders would implement SCLC's program. They were called upon to encourage voter registration, work for jobs and training, desegregate facilities and apply mass direct action. It pressed local affiliates to send representatives who would "implement the program of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference."³⁵⁷

SCLC also reasoned that it could expect financial contributions from its affiliates, including those who were already operating citizenship schools. In this respect, it would be disappointed.³⁵⁸ On the one hand, SCLC's idea of strengthening ties to local groups and movements neatly fits a model of cultivating a mass movement from the grassroots up. Oral histories and memoirs of SCLC employees focus on this aspect of the program. Dorothy Cotton recalled that the CEP reinforced this by offering people support after they left Dorchester and enabling them to be a part of the SCLC through its affiliate groups.³⁵⁹ Similarly, Andrew Young argued that a major contribution of the CEP was making people feel that their isolated struggles for better facilities or desegregation was part of a wider movement.³⁶⁰ Such testimonies stress that although SCLC's reputation was built around charismatic leaders, the citizenship school program gave it a more democratic and local edge.

Yet, there are reasons why organizers would choose to stress that they had democratic goals for the program. On the one hand, by arguing that SCLC included local people through its citizenship school program, Young and Cotton imply that SCLC was based on a democratic movement, more usually associated with Baker and SNCC than with Martin Luther King's organization. Young, in particular, by stressing the significance of the CEP to SCLC's

³⁵⁷ Memo from the SCLC on "Leadership Training Program and Citizenship Schools," SCLC Records, 2:177-80.

³⁵⁸ SCLC, "Citizenship School Training Program;" "Citizenship Education Program: Request for Supplementary Budget," (Memo from the SCLC and UCC to the Field Foundation c. February 1962), SCLC Records, 2:703-14; 690-5.

³⁵⁹ Dorothy Cotton, interview with Harry Boyte (1991, Minneapolis, Minnesota), available at <http://W.W.w.publicwork.org/pdf/interviews/Citizenship%20Education.%201991.pdf> (Accessed on 31/5/2008)

³⁶⁰ An Easy Burden, p 156.

organizational strength is drawing attention to his own contribution to building SCLC after joining its staff. Moreover, there is evidence that the focus on recruiting SCLC affiliates meant introducing further changes to the program Clark, Robinson and Jenkins had devised on Johns Island. Most notably, SCLC may have been more likely to train teachers without rudimentary literacy skills if they had the potential to become community leaders. Many of the “right people,” Young argued

Might have value far beyond the training of the non literate persons of the area. As we know, the distinction between literate and non-literate in these organizations is not always very great... A trained local leadership would be on hand to coordinate a wide variety of programs in future.³⁶¹

For Septima Clark and Bernice Robinson, this was a troubling development. Clark saw the citizenship schools as part of a long term project to tackle illiteracy in the South and disapproved of Horton’s proposal that they should prepare students explicitly for literacy tests. Hosea Williams’ strategy was closer to what Horton’s would have been, largely because he incorporated citizenship schools into his wider voter registration plan. With Clark’s guidance, he recognized that teachers required a minimum level of education in order to prepare students for the test.³⁶² However, Clark and Robinson felt that the early SCLC recruits lacked even the most basic literacy skills. Clark reflected that at the first joint workshop in February, it had been difficult to train teachers of variable educational levels. Extensive work needed to be done to

³⁶¹ Memo from Andrew Young to the Citizenship School Committee, American Missionary Association and the Field Foundation (n.d.), Highlander Files, 7:607

³⁶² Williams became increasingly selective about the teachers he recruited. In December 1962, he reported to Andrew Young that he intended to give teaching certificates to only thirteen of eighteen newly trained teachers, whereas the other five would have to undergo “additional training” in order to “correct their defaults (sic).” On another occasion, Dorothy Cotton wrote to Williams expressing doubt about the capability of a Mrs. Jones who had attended a recent workshop, explaining that she had had difficulties “grasping anything.” Williams agreed not to assign her to a class and urged SCLC not to grant teaching certificates to anyone that they had doubts over. Letter from Dorothy Cotton to Hosea Williams (January 3, 1963), Records of the SCLC, 16:671; letter from Hosea Williams to Annell Ponder (n.d.), Records of the SCLC, 4:429. Because it refers to a workshop to be held on March 16, 1963, this was probably written in early March, 1963.

“do any program effectively.” This prompted her to ask both Cotton and Hosea Williams to send participants who could write on the board and read legibly.³⁶³ From the beginning of the transfer, there were tensions between Clark’s emphasis on education and SCLC’s interest in building strong affiliates to support its various projects, including direct action. As the final chapter will reveal, this difference in priorities would lead to disputes and conflict within SCLC’s Citizenship Education Program.

Moreover, Young clearly preferred the idea of being an SCLC employee to working with a citizenship school committee. When he was recruited, Young himself was uncertain of what his role should be or where his responsibilities lay. He introduced himself to the board as a proposed “something or other” for the citizenship school program. Although he was anxious to begin work, he was not sure what his “exact role” was to be, although he planned to move South in September.³⁶⁴ Similarly, when he introduced himself to Clark, he explained that all he knew was that “the American Missionary Association needed someone to be responsible for the Field Foundation grant and they knew I was interested in Highlander and the program.”³⁶⁵ Myles Horton had initially envisaged that Young would administer the Field Foundation funds through the Citizenship School Committee.³⁶⁶ Young, on the other hand, had reservations about being closely associated with Highlander. Not only was he concerned about the “court situation;” he also did not want to work out of Tennessee.³⁶⁷ When Young attended his first committee meeting, he suggested that he live and work out of Dorchester. Wood discouraged this, as it would not allow him flexibility for field work, while Horton pointed out that Young’s salary was

³⁶³ Letters from Septima Clark to Dorothy Cotton (March 12, 1961, March 23, 1961) and Hosea Williams (February 23, 1961), Highlander Files, 7:713, 712; 8:314.

³⁶⁴ Letter from Andrew Young to James Wood, Herman Long, Charles Jones and Myles Horton (June 27), Records of the SCLC, 2:593.

³⁶⁵ Letter from Andrew Young to Septima Clark (n.d.), Records of the SCLC, 2:597.

³⁶⁶ Letter from Myles Horton to Charles Jones (June 26, 1961), Myles Horton, report to the Citizenship School Committee (June 30, 1961) Highlander Files, 7:755.

³⁶⁷ Letter from Andrew Young to Myles Horton (June 20, 1961), Highlander Files, 7:751.

not a part of the SCLC grant and he should divide his time between groups other than SCLC.³⁶⁸

Young resolved to move to Atlanta instead to work out of SCLC offices. Young's autobiography suggests that he moved to Atlanta only after Highlander facilities closed and he had no school to which he could go.³⁶⁹

This seems to be a discrepancy in Young's account, because it had been decided that teacher training would be transferred in May, whereas the debate over where Young would be based took place in July. Young chose to identify himself as an SCLC employee and this arrangement, quite rightly, seemed to Horton to signify that Young's loyalties were to SCLC and not to the Committee. In September, Horton wrote that it was "natural" for SCLC to want to run its own program. Yet, he argued that the administrative arrangements over the grant meant that his connection would "have to be handled with extreme care." He also gave some indication that he was not altogether pleased with the separation of Highlander from the SCLC program when he regretted that he was not in a position to "do more than give advice."³⁷⁰ In December, Young effectively stymied any further efforts of Highlander or the Committee to work on the citizenship school program. He told Horton that not only would a meeting not be possible, but also that he did not know what the purpose of such a meeting would be. He insisted that any Committee should be composed of people who were directly responsible for the program, and that Hotchkiss did not see any need for Highlander's additional contributions.³⁷¹ Horton was irritated by his exclusion from the program. He argued that he found it "disconcerting" to have wasted time and money on the program "only to find there is apparently no carry-over."³⁷²

³⁶⁸ "Citizenship School Committee Meeting," (July 12, 1961), Highlander Files, 7:629-30. Young's salary was paid by the United Church of Christ, Young An Easy Burden, p 134.

³⁶⁹ An Easy Burden, p 133

³⁷⁰ Letter from Myles Horton to Andrew Young (September 14, 1961), Highlander Files, 7:773.

³⁷¹ Letter from Andrew Young to Myles Horton (December 13, 1961), SCLC Records, 2:609.

³⁷² Letter from Myles Horton to Andrew Young (December 19, 1961), SCLC Records, 2:610.

In the spring of 1962, when Horton had secured new premises for Highlander Research Education Center, he attempted to engage with Young and Hotchkiss once more. The exchanges contained echoes of those of the previous fall. Young ignored Horton's request for a citizenship school committee meeting in January 1962, but he responded to a letter that April in which the Highlander director asked for details of SCLC classes so the two organizations could at least avoid overlap. Responding that letters to Horton were always "overdue and difficult," he described Septima Clark's work in South Carolina but made no references to meetings or further cooperation.³⁷³ Meanwhile, although Hotchkiss commended Horton on his plans to train SNCC leaders in Mississippi, he regretted that the UCC would not be able to provide any funds or support.³⁷⁴

In his biography, Myles Horton explained that he had told Martin Luther King that Highlander had a "ready-made program that you can have. Take the Citizenship School program, it's too big for us."³⁷⁵ He gave the impression that Highlander had willingly relinquished the program to a more appropriate body. Social movement theorists draw on this assumption when they describe Highlander as a mentoring organization or a "halfway house." It was no doubt appealing for Horton to have his organization identified as a predecessor and mentor for Martin Luther King's celebrated Southern Christian Leadership Conference. However, the events of 1961 illustrate that, with the transfer, Highlander's influence over the program declined rapidly. SCLC had different priorities and interests and these would shape the form which the program took after 1961. The evidence also reveals that Horton had wanted to continue organizing citizenship schools through a committee and was disappointed when Young

³⁷³ Letter from Myles Horton to Andrew Young (January 13 and April 10, 1962), letter from Andrew Young to Myles Horton (April 24, 1962), Highlander Papers, box 9, folder 30.

³⁷⁴ Letter from Myles Horton to Wesley Hotchkiss (May 26, 1962), letter from Wesley Hotchkiss to Myles Horton (June 11, 1962), Highlander Papers, box 15, folder 15.

³⁷⁵ Long Haul, p 107

refused to continue working with him. Feeling slighted and alienated, he looked for new ways to support citizenship education after 1962.

Gender and the transfer

Myles Horton was not the only person who was unhappy with arrangements made during the transfer. Septima Clark and Bernice Robinson's reactions during 1960 and 1961 are illustrative of the contested gender relations seen both in Highlander Folk School and the wider civil rights movement. Studies of women in the civil rights movement have usually taken one of two forms. One has been a "compensatory" approach in which historians demonstrated that women too played key leadership roles.³⁷⁶ The other has been to analyze structures and processes which excluded women from key leadership roles in the movement.³⁷⁷ Myles Horton has been lauded for his commitment to gender equality and recognizing women's contributions to Highlander and to the civil rights movement.³⁷⁸ However as a result of his negotiations with SCLC during the transfer, both women felt undervalued and underappreciated. Horton, James Wood and Wyatt Walker agreed that Clark would take a leave of absence for a year to work with SCLC, while Robinson would remain with Highlander. Clark saw this as a personal slight. In a

³⁷⁶ For a discussion of "compensatory" studies, see Myra Max Ferree and Silke Roth, "Gender, Class and the Interaction between Social Movements: A Strike West Berlin Care Workers," *Gender and Society*, 12, 6, pp 626-648, especially p 627.

³⁷⁷ Bernice McNair Barnett found that civil rights activists seldom recognized women's leadership roles and, due to "triple" constraints of race, class and gender, women were excluded from formal leadership roles. However, they did perform a multitude of leadership roles, including mobilizing resources and planning tactics. "Invisible Southern Black Women Leaders in the Civil Rights Movement: The Triple Constraints of Gender, Race and Class," *Gender and Society*, 7, 2 (June 1993), pp 162-182. Similarly, Belinda Robnett also explained that activists were excluded from formal leadership roles because of their class, gender, sexual orientation or educational levels, but that they held varying levels of "bridge" leadership positions. *How Long, How Long*, passim.

³⁷⁸ For example, organizers of the "Women in the Civil Rights Movement: Trailblazers and Torchbearers" conference, held at Georgia State University in 1987, honored Myles Horton during the conference banquet. He was the only man they chose to honor, and they explained that they did so because his "work at Highlander Folk School gave great support and assistance to women activists." Acknowledgements, Crawford et al, *Women in the Civil Rights Movement*, p xiv. The editors also dedicated the book to Horton, as well as to Modjeska Simkins and Septima Clark.

letter to Horton, she indicated how hurt she had been by the arrangement. “I think you did not want to tell me that you did not want me anymore, but I’d rather hear you say it than have others treat me so inhuman.”³⁷⁹ Similarly, shortly after she moved to Atlanta to work for SCLC, Clark wrote to her friends Judge Waties and Elizabeth Waring. She complained that for the previous year, she had “been tossed around like a poor relative while a decision was being made.”³⁸⁰

Clark’s transfer from Highlander to SCLC also meant that she suffered considerable financial insecurity. From October 1960, Horton had promised her that SCLC would pay her salary, but by June 1961, she had received no communication from SCLC in this matter. In October, an SCLC bookkeeper told Horton that the question of Clark’s salary and expenses still needed to be taken up with the administrative board and that they would let him know their decision in due course. The financial insecurity of going for a year without pay would be a problem for most widowed women in their sixties who, as Clark put it, had been accustomed to supporting themselves.³⁸¹ Yet Clark had further emotional and financial problems in 1961. Her sister had died earlier in the year and she had committed herself to paying for the funeral arrangements. She was also in poor health, having had a mild heart attack in January and she required dental treatment in August.³⁸² She had been dismissed once before by the Charleston County School Board for her NAACP activities, so she knew first-hand how serious unemployment could be. Horton trivialized Clark’s financial concerns in a letter to Maxwell Hahn. Although both he and Wood had explained that she would be given a salary, “she finds it

³⁷⁹ Letter from Septima Clark to Myles Horton (June 29, 1961), Clark Collection, box 7, folder 3.

³⁸⁰ Letter from Septima Clark to Judge J. Waties and Elizabeth Waring, (August 15, 1961), Waring Papers, box 9, folder 232.

³⁸¹ Letter from Septima Clark to Myles Horton (June 29, 1961), Clark Collection, box 7, folder 3, letter from Lillie Hunter to Myles Horton (Oct 10 1961), Highlander Papers, box 26, Folder 27

³⁸² Letter from Septima Clark to Myles Horton (August 6, 1961), Robinson Papers, box 3, folder 1; Clark, Ready From Within, pp 60-1. Eventually, Clark’s financial predicament was solved when Robinson signed over a portion of her own salary. Letter from Bernice Robinson to Septima Clark (August 15, 1961), Robinson Papers, box 3, folder 1.

difficult to believe that the situation will ever be cleared up... Septima sometimes supposes that she is a victim of white prejudice even though everything possible is being done.”³⁸³ Bernice Robinson was similarly concerned about these arrangements. Used to being self-sufficient and supporting herself and her daughter, she initially worried about giving up her beauty shop in order to work on a short-term contract.³⁸⁴ The financial concerns might have been less problematic had it not been for the way in which the news was delivered. Robinson and Clark had been told not to attend the board meeting where their fate was decided, so they may have seen this as an underhand way of making decisions about their future without consulting them.³⁸⁵ Clark telephoned James Wood and told him that they “refused to be swapped around like horses.”³⁸⁶ Above all else, however, the women were concerned about the implications of these decisions for the local programs that they were organizing. Robinson explained that she and Clark were concerned not with the separation of salary but of services. They were not as concerned about their payment for work in Georgia as they were about ensuring that the work was done efficiently. Both women were needed to carry out training sessions effectively.³⁸⁷

To Horton’s credit, he responded to the women’s complaints by looking for ways for them to be able to work together and arranged for both of their salaries to be covered by Hosea Williams’ Schwartzaupt Foundation grant.³⁸⁸ However, he let Robinson know that he regretted that she would not stay with Highlander Folk School, as he had wished to “build the non-SCLC

³⁸³ Letter from Myles Horton to Septima Clark (June 19, 1961), Highlander Files, 7:616.

³⁸⁴ Letter from Bernice Robinson to Anne Lockwood (March 8, 1961), Robinson Papers, box 3, folder 1. Hitherto, Horton had employed her on a part-time basis because he reasoned that this would enable her to maintain her business. Recorded conversation, “Highlander: Sea Island Project, May 17th 1959,” Highlander Audio Collection, Tape 515a, 46, Side 1, Part 2.

³⁸⁵ Telegram from Myles Horton to Septima Clark (June 5 1961), Clark Collection, box 7, folder 3.

³⁸⁶ Letter from Septima Clark and Bernice Robinson to Myles Horton (June 19, 1961), Clark Collection, box 7, folder 3.

³⁸⁷ Letter from Bernice Robinson to Myles Horton (June 25, 1961), Robinson Papers, box 3, folder 1.

³⁸⁸ Telegram from Myles Horton to Bernice Robinson, June 26, 1961, SCLC Records, 12:641.

part of the Citizenship Training Program” around her.³⁸⁹ His slightly insensitive handling of the situation may have been due to his preconceptions about formally trained teachers, which were discussed in the previous chapter. He may have also had preconceptions about the women’s claims to be “authentic” radical leaders based on their class and age. He was inclined to employ Robinson rather than Clark because, without formal teacher training or an extensive education, she represented a “pure” grassroots teacher and leader who was apparently closer to low-income people and who embodied the Highlander spirit. He may also not have fully understood that Clark, despite her educational advantages, was living on a low and precarious income. Moreover, in one letter to Robinson, he argued that should he resign or retire during the legal battles, “young folk” like her would have to carry Highlander’s torch.³⁹⁰ In other words, he saw people of his and Clark’s generation as removed from the freedom movements emerging across the South in the early 1960s, and considered younger people to be more capable of leading them. His assumptions may not have been quite accurate. Although Robinson was an attractive woman and, as a beautician, she took care of her appearance and appeared younger than her years, she was forty-two when she began teaching citizenship schools and hence, was also generation removed from the young student demonstrators in Savannah.

While Septima Clark was demonstrably hurt by Horton’s preference for Robinson and his disregard for her financial predicament, both women were sufficiently upset to consider resigning from the citizenship school project altogether and joining the newly founded Peace Corps in order to develop adult literacy programs in Ghana. This prompted Horton to consider hiring Carolyn Roberts or Alleen Brewer to conduct training sessions instead.³⁹¹ Eventually,

³⁸⁹ Letter from Myles Horton to Bernice Robinson, (June 21, 1961), SCLC Records, 12:636.

³⁹⁰ Letter from Myles Horton to Bernice Robinson (January 11, 1960), Highlander Papers, box 24, folder 13.

³⁹¹ Letter from Myles Horton to Septima Clark, June 21, 1961, Clark Collection, box 7, folder 3, letter from Septima Clark to Judge J. Waties and Elizabeth Waring, (August 15, 1961), Waring Papers, box 9, folder 232.

however, Robinson decided to stay with Highlander, where she worked on voter literacy programs with SNCC in Mississippi and Louisiana and held beauticians' workshops near the new Highlander Research and Education Center in Tennessee.³⁹² She remained until January 1964, when she finally became frustrated by staff members' frequent references to the need to find her salary and because she did not get on with Highlander's new associate director, Conrad Browne, who joined the staff in 1963.³⁹³ Septima Clark resolved to stay with SCLC and settle in Atlanta. In August 1961, she wrote to the Waring and explained that although she felt as if she had been "tossed around like a poor relative" for the past few months, she decided to remain with SCLC rather than join the Peace Corps because "the South needed (her) most."³⁹⁴

However, in late 1961, she attempted to reconcile with Horton. In October, she wrote to Horton's second wife Aimee, probably because the relationship with her former employer had become so fraught. Expressing sympathy with Mr. and Mrs. Horton during Highlander's legal difficulties, Clark wrote that she wished Mrs. Horton would "get Myles to drive you down on the islands immediately. When you look into those people's eyes and see how much they love Myles, you and Myles would forget the Tennessee Courts."³⁹⁵ Alongside the concern over the Hortons' wellbeing, Clark also apparently worried that he had lost sight of the constructive work being done on the Sea Islands during these months.³⁹⁶ Whether or not it was Clark's letter that

³⁹² "Beauticians Workshops on Leadership" (1961-3), Tape 515a, 216.

³⁹³ Letter from Bernice Robinson to Myles Horton, January 10 1964, Clark Collection, box 8, folder 3. In January 1964, Robinson, Thrasher and Wigginton interview, Robinson Papers, box 1, folder 5, letter from Myles Horton to Septima Clark (April 17, 1963), Highlander Papers, box 9, folder 12. From 1949 until he joined Highlander, Browne had lived on Koinonia Farm, a radical religious community established in Americus, Georgia, in 1942. Koinonia, meaning "common", was an experiment in sustainable and communal living. Residents took part in regular worship and bible study, practiced sustainable diversified farming and held regular community meetings to address issues like civil rights. Conrad Browne, interview with Anne Karp (February 2006), available online at http://W.W.w.koinoniapartners.org/History/oralhistory/Con_Browne.html (Accessed on July 1, 2009).

³⁹⁴ Letter from Septima Clark to Judge J. Waties and Elizabeth Waring (August 15, 1951), Waring Papers, box 9, folder 232.

³⁹⁵ Letter from Septima Clark to Aimee Horton, October 17, 1961, Septima Clark Collection, box 7, folder 3.

³⁹⁶ Of course, by December 1961, Horton had decided to spend Christmas on Johns Island and, forced out of the Citizenship School Program, had decided to work directly with Esau Jenkins and his Citizens' Committee.

convinced him, Horton did turn to Esau Jenkins in late 1961 after he found that his partners on the citizenship school committee did not welcome Highlander's support. This was the beginning of a working relationship that shaped the development of the South Carolina program for many years.

Continued cooperation: Highlander and the Sea Islands, 1961-2

Removed from the administrative side of the program, Horton turned instead to the local movement it had developed on the Sea Islands. In the August of 1961, Horton had written to Esau Jenkins and Hosea Williams to tell them about the handover. He explained that because SCLC was organizing the program, citizenship school organizers would have to look to them for support, even though he offered Highlander's continued non-financial assistance.³⁹⁷ Over the winter of 1961 and 1962, however, he resolved to work with and support Esau Jenkins and the Sea Island program. He spent the Christmas of 1961 with Jenkins on Johns Island and spoke at a praise meeting at Moving Star Hall.³⁹⁸ Prior to his coming, he had told Jenkins that he had "much to talk to him about."³⁹⁹ In January Horton wrote to Jenkins and explained that Highlander wished to continue supporting the Citizens Club and promised him \$50 a month.⁴⁰⁰ Although the offer was made in light of Highlander's more secure status, Horton also chose to continue supporting Jenkins shortly after Young and Hotchkiss rejected the possibility of Highlander working on the CEP. By cooperating with Jenkins, Horton could ensure Highlander's continued participation in the project, as other doors closed. However, he did not

³⁹⁷ Letter from Myles Horton to Esau Jenkins (August 1, 1962), Highlander Files, 33:973.

³⁹⁸ "Christmas Watch, Johns Island, 1961-2," Carawan Collection, FT 3586

³⁹⁹ Letter from Myles Horton to Esau Jenkins (December 16, 1961), Highlander Papers, box 16, folder 10.

⁴⁰⁰ Letter from Myles Horton to Esau Jenkins (January 22, 1962) Highlander Files, 33:974.

show a similar enthusiasm for working with Williams and the Savannah movement. This is an early indication of the different directions that the South Carolina and Georgia programs would move in during and after the transfer.

In late 1961, SCLC was more concerned with expanding the program in South Carolina and training new recruits than it was with supervising established classes. While Septima Clark was allocated the task of fieldwork in South Carolina she spent just five days in Charleston in October 1962 and divided the rest of her time in the state in Columbia and surrounding counties.⁴⁰¹ In December, Dorothy Cotton reported to Young that citizenship schoolteachers in Charleston were “accumulating expenses for the operation of their schools.” She told Young that the teachers understood that SCLC would pay for their schools; however, Young replied that this would only be possible if reports were submitted to him in writing.⁴⁰² On the one hand, this indicates that by this time the Citizens Committee believed that SCLC was responsible for their schools; on the other, there was also some ambiguity over SCLC funding. By 1963, these ambiguities seemed to be cleared when Jenkins reported to VEP staff that he had transferred adult citizenship schools to SCLC and new recruits were trained at Dorchester. By this time, however, the Citizens Committee was an independent and self-sufficient organization. It had been operating for two years, had an office in the city of Charleston and focused largely on local concerns.⁴⁰³ After 1961, there were also opportunities for grassroots organizations like the Citizens Committee to secure funding to run their own voter registration programs. In 1961, philanthropic contributions, encouraged by the Kennedy administration, established the Voter

⁴⁰¹ Meanwhile, Dorothy Cotton conducted field work in her home state of Virginia, while Young worked in Georgia and Alabama. Itinerary for Dorothy Cotton, November-December 1961; Itineraries for Septima Clark, October and November 1961; December 1961- January 1962; SCLC Papers, Part 4, 2: 870; 869; 872.

⁴⁰² Memo from Dorothy Cotton to Andrew Young (December 13, 1961), SCLC Records, 2:880.

⁴⁰³ Letter from Esau Jenkins to Myles Horton (n.d., estimated February 1962), Highlander Files, 33:977.

Education Project, which was administered under the Southern Regional Council in Atlanta.⁴⁰⁴

On the one hand, it makes little sense that Jenkins continued to want outside groups to collaborate on running the schools, rather than operating independently. However, by 1963, Jenkins seemed determined to separate the adult citizenship schools for a new project that he had in mind. In funding applications to the VEP, he explained that he had turned pre-existing citizenship schools over to SCLC, so that he could organize an independent project of voter education and registration in Berkeley and Charleston counties. Hitherto, his schools had been financed by Highlander and money raised locally; he acquired his first VEP grant in 1963.⁴⁰⁵

Jenkins proposed that, to avoid confusion with the SCLC project, his schools be renamed “Voter Education,” rather than citizenship schools.⁴⁰⁶ However, he eventually decided to run separate “voter education” and “citizenship” classes simulatenously. The former were for people who needed help passing the literacy tests; the latter resembled “second step” education classes, where people learned about civic improvement and voting behaviur. Roberta Leonard, who had donated her North Charleston home for Highlander citizenship classes, and who had taught sewing, again offered her home and taught classes herself. Mary Lee Davis ran a voter education class in Charleston Heights and other classes were held on Johns and Younges Island and in Huger.⁴⁰⁷ In September, the VEP extended Jenkins’ funding so that he could run classes for an additional three months.⁴⁰⁸ Because of the classes, at least 416 and 1139 people were registered in Berkeley and Charleston counties respectively.⁴⁰⁹

⁴⁰⁴ Fairclough, To Redeem the Soul, pp 76-7; Jonas, Freedom’s Sword, pp 212-3.

⁴⁰⁵ Letter from Esau Jenkins to Wiley Branton (August 16th 1963), Letter from Wiley Branton to Esau Jenkins (August 26, 1963), SRC Papers, 181:745-6, 751

⁴⁰⁶ Letter from Esau Jenkins to Wiley Branton (August 23, 1962), SRC Papers, 181:753.

⁴⁰⁷ “Final Report on Southwide Internship Voter Education Classes,” Highlander Files, 34:351.

⁴⁰⁸ Letter from Wiley Branton to Esau Jenkins (September 9, 1963), SRC Papers, 181:757.

⁴⁰⁹ Field reports by Esau Jenkins for Berkeley County (July-August; September-October; October-November; November-December, 1963) and Charleston County (July-August; August-September; September October, October-November, 1963), SRC Papers, 181:821, 829, 836, 822, 823, 830, 837, and 838. Reports are not available for

The Southwide Voter Education Internship Project (SVEP)

Jenkins also collaborated closely with Highlander Research and Education Center on the schools set up after 1963. Classes became part of an internship program organized by Highlander. The program was explicitly intended to organize and revitalize civic activities across Southern communities. It recruited thirty people who were already active in their communities and aimed to demonstrate what poor people in Lowcountry South Carolina had already been able to achieve. Interns learned “firsthand how significant gains are being made by people” and it was hoped that they would put their knowledge into practice when they returned home.⁴¹⁰ The program began with a weeklong series of workshops at the Johns Island Progressive Club on topics such as “changing the Southern landscape,” “requirements of a First Class Citizen,” the “value of knowledge in voting,” the “role of the Social worker in the community,” the “power of the ballot” and a proposed Civil Rights legislation.” Participants spent the next three weeks observing the citizenship and voter education classes, before spending a weekend discussing what they had learned and how they would practice these things in their communities. The program culminated in a folk festival run by Guy Carawan.⁴¹¹ Interns stayed with local African American families.⁴¹²

In some respects, SCLC did assist with the program. “Veterans” of the Highlander schools taught most classes, but some new recruits were trained at Dorchester. Additionally,

August-September (Berkeley) or November-December (Charleston), so it is possible that additional voters were registered at this time.

⁴¹⁰ Highlander Files, 34:384.

⁴¹¹ “Announcement: South-wide Voter Education Workshop at Progressive Club Center, Johns Island, S.C. July 29-Aug 25, 1963,” Highlander Files, 34:388.

⁴¹² “Staff Conference July 9 1963,” Highlander Files, 34:312.

citizenship schoolteachers used SCLC booklets.⁴¹³ Septima Clark and South Carolina field supervisor Benjamin Mack were also seconded from SCLC to work with Jenkins as Highlander representatives.⁴¹⁴ Although she left Highlander in 1964, Robinson agreed to help organize the program. Septima Clark and SCLC were unable to spare her in 1964, but she did participate in 1965 and 1966.⁴¹⁵ Yet, despite the crossover in staff, there is little evidence that Clark, Mack or Robinson attempted to use Jenkins' project as a vehicle for training SCLC programs. Highlander staff also had considerable confidence in Jenkins' leadership and organizational skills and gave him full responsibility for the program.⁴¹⁶ Local people exclusively gave talks, classes and led workshops.⁴¹⁷ To Highlander, it was important to "demonstrate that no outsiders are needed to carry on an extensive program of workshops and internships."⁴¹⁸ Although SCLC staff offered advice and brought expertise, Jenkins ran the project according to the models he had been developing on the Sea Islands for the previous decade.

For Clark, working with Highlander again must have involved some mixed feelings. Her relationship with Horton had been strained for several years, and she was hurt when he did not retain her as Highlander staff after the transfer. Yet, as Chapter 5 will demonstrate, by 1964 she had also been frustrated with SCLC staff, including her colleague Andrew Young's, prioritization

⁴¹³ "Southwide Voter Education Internship Project;" "Highlander Staff Conference July 9 1963," Highlander Files, 34:312, 663-5.

⁴¹⁴ "Announcement: South-wide Voter Education Workshop at Progressive Club Center, Johns Island, S.C. July 29-Aug 25, 1963," Benjamin Mack, "Citizenship Workshop Report and Community Leadership Training Report," "Southwide Voter Education Project, Progressive Club Center, Johns Island, S.C., July 11-23 1966," Highlander Files, 34:338, 838-40, 1031

⁴¹⁵ Letter from Septima Clark to Conrad Brown (April 24, 1964), memo from Conrad Brown to Highlander staff (April 24, 1964), Bernice Robinson, "Report on the Southwide Voter Education Workshop, July 12-24, 1965;" Bernice Robinson, "Report of the 1966 Southwide Voter Education Workshop Project," Highlander Files, 34:497, 498, 827-8, 1032-7.

⁴¹⁶ Memo from Myles Horton to Esau Jenkins, Septima Clark, Bernice Robinson, Guy Carawan and Conrad Brown (n.d.), Highlander Files, 34:319.

⁴¹⁷ "Southwide Voter Education Internship Workshop, September 30-October 26 1963," Highlander Files, 34:357.

⁴¹⁸ Memo from Myles Horton to Esau Jenkins, Septima Clark, Bernice Robinson, Guy Carawan and Conrad Brown (n.d.), Highlander Files, 34:319.

of direct action over educational work. It may have been a relief to return to working in her native Charleston county, as well as to cooperate with Jenkins on a program which more closely resembled the one cultivated on the Sea Islands in the late 1950s. Although Clark assured Conrad Browne that SCLC required Robinson's services as a citizenship school supervisor to expand the SCLC program over the summer of 1964, it is possible that she did not want to return to work with Browne. Yet, in 1965 and 1966, she was employed to supervise teaching and workshops, and was more likely to be sought after because of her experience as the first citizenship schoolteacher in the region than because of the organizational skills she was developing as an SCLC employee. Ben Mack's reports suggest that he was impressed with Jenkins' work and the SCLC program compared unfavorably. He "wished that this could be done in many other counties of South Carolina and in other places as well."⁴¹⁹ As the next chapter will demonstrate, he too was disillusioned with SCLC by 1964. His statement suggests that he felt that Jenkins and Highlander's work was achieving community and leadership development in South Carolina that he had not seen during his supervisory work for SCLC.

The organization of the Internship program is significant in the history of citizenship schools in several respects. First, it illustrates that although in 1961, Highlander was not able to continue financing the Sea Island schools or train new teachers, Horton was still interested in citizenship education. As soon as he had found the means to do so, he offered funds and support to the Citizens Committee and the Progressive club for workshops and programs. He would do so again in 1964, 1965 and 1966. Yet, he was only interested in the Sea Island project. Apart from suggesting that Williams and/or Benjamin Clarke might be interested in contributing to the program in 1964, he made no equivalent attempts to remain involved with the Savannah

⁴¹⁹ "Citizenship Workshop and Community Leadership Training Report (July 26, 1965-August 7, 1965), Highlander Files, 34: 838-40.

program.⁴²⁰ While the 1963 schools were funded with a VEP grant, after 1964, Highlander supported Jenkins' political education and citizenship summer schools.⁴²¹ It also funded "second step" classes in 1964 and 1965, including one taught by former citizenship school teacher Alleen Brewer on Edisto Island and one on Johns Island, at which former student Solomon Brown organized a session on "why we should register."⁴²²

The internship program also indicates the high regard in which Highlander held Jenkins' activities on the Sea Islands. It held the citizenship classes in the South Carolina Low Country up as a model for other Southern leaders to follow. As it had done with the citizenship school program, the Sea Island program once again led the way in methods and directions of voter education. It introduced voter education classes that were seen as a logical new stage after citizenship schools. Students were not only given the skills that they needed to vote, but also given classes that told them why it was important to vote and participate in civic affairs. A subsequent chapter will explain that this approach became important to SCLC after the passage of the 1965 Voting Rights Act. Participants and observers praised and were inspired by the program and its achievements. The program also successfully recruited citizenship schoolteachers who continued to teach classes after the program had finished. Reverend Lewis Simmons was another of Jenkins' recruits trained at Dorchester in 1964. He continued to teach in the winter and spring of 1965 and worked to open five Head Start centers in Dorchester

⁴²⁰ Memo to Esau Jenkins, Guy Carawan, Septima Clark, Bernice Robinson, Myles Horton and Conrad Brown (March 23, 1964), Highlander Files, 34:475.

⁴²¹ Letter from Esau Jenkins to Myles Horton and Conrad Brown (June 10, 1965), letter from Conrad Brown to Esau Jenkins (June 19, 1965). Highlander Files, 34:813, 815. In this correspondence, Jenkins and Brown make arrangements for the 1965 classes, while Jenkins refers to Highlander's funding his schools in South Carolina "before," which suggests that it did so the previous year. In 1966, furthermore, Esau Jenkins referred to the classes "supported by Highlander." Letter from Esau Jenkins to Conrad Brown (August 20, 1965), Highlander Files, 34:1041.

⁴²² Reports on second step political education classes in Charleston, Wadamalaw and Edisto Islands (1964); Parkers Ferry, Younges Island, Johns Island, Edisto Island and Pinesville (1965), Highlander Files, 34: 739-741, 965-971.

County.⁴²³ Reverend Lonnie Hamilton of Charleston Heights reported that his experience convinced him of the need for citizenship schools in his area. He continued to teach classes in August and September and he established a community league and a car pool to take voters to the polls.⁴²⁴

SCLC on the Sea Islands

By way of contrast, SCLC was far less successful in organizing in Lowcountry South Carolina. In 1962, the South Carolina NAACP field secretary was concerned that by organizing citizenship schools in the region, SCLC threatened the continued influence of the Charleston NAACP branch and requested money from the national office to finance an NAACP led voter registration campaign.⁴²⁵ Yet, these fears were not realized until the late 1960s. SCLC recruited very few teachers from the region. Completed SCLC teacher surveys from 1965 and 1966 suggest that of the eight trained teachers from Charleston and Dorchester counties only four had been successful in initiating citizenship school classes when they returned home.⁴²⁶ Three of these, Lonnie Hamilton, J.W. Milligan and Lewis Simmons, were men who Jenkins recruited to

⁴²³ Completed questionnaire by Lewis Simmons (August 8, 1964), SCLC Records, 13:344.

⁴²⁴ "Southwide Voter Education Internship Project," letter from Lonnie Hamilton to Conrad Brown (September 2, 1964), completed survey by Lonnie Hamilton (received September 4, 1964), Highlander Files, 34: 663-5, 667, 679-80; completed teacher survey by Lonnie Hamilton (received May 2, 1965), SCLC Records 13:390.

⁴²⁵ Letter from I.D. Newman to Roy Wilkins (January 16, 1962), NAACP Papers, 27, A 14:310-1. Similarly, in 1962, former Progressive Democratic Party president wrote to Roy Wilkins, asserting that he would oppose voter registration work by any organization other than the NAACP and South Carolina Council on Human Relations (SCCHR) in South Carolina. While arguing that local people would not benefit from competition over voter registration funds, he was also concerned that the emergence of new organizations threatened the survival of NAACP branches. He wrote that he was "ashamed" by recent membership figures and that "one of the explanations for this drop is the ambitious campaigns of CORE and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference... CORE has reduced NAACP membership at Sumter, S.C. to exactly 11 persons (July, 1961). SCLC has just about killed NAACP in the Greenville area and, having fleeced the Columbia NAACP branch of certain funds last year, is now quietly sneaking a foothold about this State through paid workers." Letter from John McCray to Roy Wilkins (April 12 1962), NAACP Papers, Part 3, box 271, folder 4.

⁴²⁶ Completed SCLC questionnaires by Rosa Tucker (August 16 1965), Ida Ross, Lewis Simmons (August 8, 1965), E.J. Siyer (August 4, 1965), Justine Deas (July 29, 1965); Erline D Green (July 29, 1965); Reverend J.W. Milligan (July 27, 1965), Roberta Leonard (July 20, 1965) 328-9, 340, 344, 365, 366, 367, 392, 416.

work on his internship program. On one occasion, SCLC failed to provide training for a would-be citizenship schoolteacher. An internship program participant, impressed by what he had seen, planned to run classes in his church. However, because there were no workshops planned at Dorchester that year, he asked Highlander for training.⁴²⁷

SCLC did not develop grassroots support for its aims and tactics in Charleston County. Eventually, the Citizens Committee did affiliate with SCLC. In 1964, a minister who attended a summer workshop on Johns Island was elected to the Citizens Committee. He arranged for it to become an official SCLC affiliate, which it would remain for the rest of the decade.⁴²⁸ However, the local NAACP branch remained the pre-eminent civil rights organization in the city and surrounding region. When high school students initiated sit-ins in 1963, the NAACP established a steering committee to coordinate the protests, which included Esau Jenkins and Herbert Fielding of the Citizens Club and North Charleston citizenship schoolteacher Mary Lee Davis. The branch organized a boycott and picketing of stores and established steering and communication committees to raise funds, offer legal defense and negotiate with the business community. South Carolina field secretary Reverend Newman hoped that other cities would emulate what he deemed to be “the most significant social upheaval to take place in South Carolina since the passage of the Reconstruction Act by the United States.”⁴²⁹ SCLC, on the other hand, did not attempt to identify with, or send staff to, Charleston during the protests. Furthermore, although there is evidence that national NAACP staff and field secretaries saw other civil rights groups, both national and grassroots, in the region as competitors, Jenkins saw the Citizens Committee as a cooperative group and he participated in NAACP voter registration

⁴²⁷ J. Oliver Williams, completed Internship Program questionnaire, Highlander Files, 34:704-5.

⁴²⁸ J. Oliver Williams, completed questionnaire on the Southwide Voter Education Internship Project, Highlander Files, 34:704-5, certificate of affiliation with SCLC (expiry date, 1969) Esau Jenkins box, folder 15.

⁴²⁹ I.D. Newman, Report for period June 10-August 17, 1963, NAACP Papers, part 25, series D, 30:531-7.

drives.⁴³⁰ Citizenship schoolteachers Mary Lee Davis and Etta Clark, continued to be active in local NAACP branches.⁴³¹ Thus, although Wood had promoted citizenship schools as a means of developing loyal SCLC affiliates, they did not succeed (or seriously attempt) to do this in the region where citizenship schools had been pioneered. The history of SCLC in Savannah, however, was entirely different.

Hosea Williams and Highlander Folk School

When Hosea Williams organized citizenship schools in Savannah, Highlander was not in a position to offer extensive support or assistance. While Williams may have had unrealistic expectations about the levels of financial assistance that he needed, he also lacked the support that Jenkins and Sea Island participants received when establishing their schools. In turn, this meant that he looked to SCLC for assistance relatively early during the transfer. In February 1961, Myles Horton implied that SCLC would help with the costs of transporting Chatham County Crusade for Voters recruits to a Highlander workshop.⁴³² When Williams asked Dorothy Cotton for assistance, she replied that this would only be possible if the Crusade for Voters affiliated with SCLC.⁴³³ Although Williams was not in a position to do this in time for the

⁴³⁰ Letter from Esau Jenkins to Myles Horton (n.d., estimated February 1962), Highlander Files, 33:977. In 1963 and 1964, Wiley Branton of the VEP corresponded with NAACP staff. The NAACP had financed NAACP voter registration projects throughout South Carolina; however, the VEP decided in 1964 to finance local projects throughout the state, often involving people with NAACP membership. He asked Wilkins' assistant John Morsell to "forego separate programs in South Carolina and urge its members to work with these VEP supported programs." Voter registration director John Brooks believed that the NAACP Voter Registration Committee should "continue to take credit for new voters in all areas where voter registration programs are being sponsored by NAACP branches" as failing to do so would mean "submerg(ing)" the NAACP's "identity." Letters from W.C. Patton to Wiley Branton (September 20, 1963), NAACP Papers, Part 6, I3, folder 4; Wiley Branton to John Morsell (April 22, 1964), John Brooks to John Morsell (April 29, 1964), NAACP Papers, Part 6, I3, folder 5.

⁴³¹ Charleston, South Carolina Membership List (c. 1961), North Charleston branch charter (1961), NAACP Papers, box C209, folder 2.

⁴³² Letter from Anne Lockwood to Dorothy Cotton (January 30, 1961) Highlander Files, 7:709.

⁴³³ Letter from Dorothy Cotton to Hosea Williams (February 6, 1961), Records of the SCLC, 16:635

workshop, the option of affiliation with SCLC seemed attractive.⁴³⁴ Myles Horton, on the other hand, believed that the Crusade for Voters could become self-sufficient in the way that the Citizens Committee had.⁴³⁵ He discouraged Williams from affiliating with SCLC and believed that the current situation, whereby Highlander trained members of an independent Savannah organization was best.⁴³⁶ In May, Horton transferred the \$2,000 Schwartzhaupt Foundation money to Williams and cautioned that Highlander could not continue to support the program. He also asked Bernice Robinson and Esau Jenkins to visit Savannah to help Williams think about ways to support his citizenship school program independently.⁴³⁷

Over the summer, Williams continued operating Savannah's citizenship schools.⁴³⁸ His correspondence frequently signalled mounting frustration with the uncertainties over the program's future. In early June, he explained to Horton that he was continuing to "work as if we are fully aware of what you, Bernice and Septima would finally decide." He implored that "it certainly would help if we knew the destiny of our program" as "without additional funds it will be necessary to close down some of our schools until a future date."⁴³⁹ He continued to negotiate with both Highlander and SCLC over sites and funding for teacher training workshops. Also in June, he told Horton that he had decided to hold a session at SCLC's training center in Dorchester, which made sense given the site's proximity to Savannah. Once again, however, his tone was pleading as he requested Horton's guidance and confirmation of the arrangements. "Please consider," he asked, "all the facts and let me know where you think the workshop should

⁴³⁴ Letter from Hosea Williams to Septima Clark (February 9, 1961), Highlander Files, 8:312-3.

⁴³⁵ Memo from Myles Horton to Mrs. Jane Lee Eddy re: Southeastern Georgia Crusade for Voters, Highlander Files, 8:301-9.

⁴³⁶ Letter from Myles Horton to Hosea Williams (March 1, 1963), Highlander Files, 8:323.

⁴³⁷ Staff meeting minutes (May 4, 1961), Highlander Files, 8:336

⁴³⁸ Letter from Myles Horton to Hosea Williams (May 26, 1961), Highlander Files, 8:341

⁴³⁹ Letter from Hosea Williams to Myles Horton (June 4, 1961), Highlander Files, 8:354

be held.”⁴⁴⁰ In July, SCLC began to offer increased support and assistance to the Georgia program. It agreed to take over teacher training costs, which meant that Williams could use the money allocated for teacher training in the \$2,000 grant for school expenses.⁴⁴¹ SCLC also began assisting the Savannah Movement in the summer, when NAACP President W.W. Law was dismissed from his post office job. Cotton agreed to help with appeals to the Justice Department, while Clark wrote a letter in defense of Law which she asked Williams to publish.⁴⁴²

In August, Horton attempted to resolve financial arrangements with the Savannah program. His correspondence reinforced and reiterated the fact that, to all extents and purposes, Hosea Williams’ Citizenship Education Program was now SCLC’s responsibility. Williams was evidently still confused and expecting Horton to make some financial commitments. Horton explained that while he could understand Williams’ “confusion” during the transfer, Highlander simply was not in a position to offer further assistance to local programs, much to his own regret. By this time, Highlander was \$15,000 in debt and had not paid several staff members’ salaries for four months. Horton implied that either Williams or Dorothy Cotton had misunderstood a resolution made in an earlier conversation whereby SCLC would deal with the SGCV’s financial difficulties. He sent Williams a check to cover remaining expenses and in order to “meet (Highlander’s) commitment in full.” He hoped that “these misunderstandings had not been too embarrassing” for Williams and told him that he was “perfectly free” to make his

⁴⁴⁰ Letter from Hosea Williams to Myles Horton (June 5, 1961), Highlander Files, 8:349-50

⁴⁴¹ Letter from Anne Lockwood to Hosea Williams (July 12, 1961), Highlander Files, 8:356. Over the summer, SCLC paid training expenses for CCCV trainees. Letter from Dorothy Cotton to Hosea Williams (September 12, 1961), Highlander Files, 8:641.

⁴⁴² Letter from Dorothy Cotton to Hosea and Juanita Williams (July 28, 1961), letter from Septima Clark to Hosea Williams (September 12, 1961) Records of the SCLC, 16:637, 640. Savannah Morning News (July 29, 30; August 16, September 9, 1961).

own arrangements with the Schwartzhaupt Foundation should he wish to do so.⁴⁴³ Three weeks later, Horton wrote to Wyatt Walker to reiterate that any financial assistance he had offered Williams were for expenses for the July schools and to pay for a projector. He argued that Williams was apparently not so much dissatisfied with his new relationship with SCLC but with the fact that it had not worked out thus far. Not wanting Williams “to suffer,” Horton urged that SCLC staff let him know whether they would give Williams the assistance he asked for.⁴⁴⁴ Still, for the rest of the month, Williams continued to equivocate over his likely future relationship with SCLC. While he suggested that affiliation with SCLC was likely, he asked Highlander for extra commitments, such as personnel and supervision.⁴⁴⁵ However, in September, the Southeastern Georgia Crusade for Voters decided to become an SCLC affiliate and Williams had paid the affiliate fee by the end of the year.⁴⁴⁶ This marked the final severing of Highlander’s ties to the Georgia program.

NAACP “through and through”: Local conflict

As Baker and Wood had pointed out in 1959 and 1960, being an SCLC affiliate did not necessarily mean close cooperation with the Atlanta offices and, indeed, citizenship schools were intended to encourage greater cohesion among the ranks. In early 1962, however, it was far from inevitable that Williams’ organization would become closely linked to SCLC. In fact, Williams attempted to secure funds from the national office to run his citizenship classes. In February, he wrote to Roy Wilkins, introducing himself as an NAACP activist “through and through,” and

⁴⁴³ Letter from Myles Horton to Hosea Williams (August 3, 1961), Highlander Papers, box 15, folder 8.

⁴⁴⁴ Letter from Myles Horton to Wyatt Walker (August 23, 1961), Highlander Papers, box 15, folder 8.

⁴⁴⁵ Letter from Hosea Williams to Dorothy Cotton (August 24, 1961), SCLC Records, 16:638.

⁴⁴⁶ “Annual Report of the Southeastern Georgia Crusade for Voters, 1963-4,” Highlander Files, 8:373-6; letter from Hosea Williams to Dorothy Cotton (December 14, 1951), SCLC Records, 16:642.

listing his activities within the Savannah branch and Georgia State Conference. A former Savannah Vice President, he was now the State Conference secretary and chair of the negotiations, political action and labor and industry committees. He also detailed his work in developing citizenship schools in the area, explaining that this was the “only way that we could get the grass-roots people to come out and take part in a voter registration effort.” He had recently attended a meeting with SCLC staff, where he was informed that they wanted to work with Williams in conducting extensive voter registration in the city and would cover all the costs. Williams argued that he would rather have the national NAACP fund the program than SCLC because of his “faith, confidence and respect for the Association.”⁴⁴⁷ The letter was written at Law’s request and the following day, Law wrote to Wilkins himself to explain that Williams’ organization was “the political action committee of the Savannah Branch NAACP. The CCCV grew out of the Savannah NAACP protest movement following the guidance of John Brooks” (the NAACP Registration Director). He informed Wilkins that he was watching Williams’ connection to SCLC’s with extreme caution because the city did not need “the additional problem of having the Southern Christian Leadership Conference in this community.”⁴⁴⁸ While Wilkins was initially somewhat receptive to funding Williams’ endeavors, and gave him some verbal encouragement, the NAACP board failed to see the link between literacy schools and voter registration work and decided that it “would not be interested and could not afford to proceed with a continuing type of school for what amounts to adult education.”⁴⁴⁹ Despite this disappointment, Williams still retained some distance from SCLC and, instead of accepting their

⁴⁴⁷ Letter from Hosea Williams to Roy Wilkins (Feb 7 1962), NAACP Papers, Part 3, Box A270, folder 4.

⁴⁴⁸ Letter from W.W. Law to Roy Wilkins (February 8th, 1962), NAACP Papers, 27, A, 6:280-1.

⁴⁴⁹ Letter from Roy Wilkins to Hosea Williams (March 7th, 1962), letter from Hosea Williams to Roy Wilkins (March 30, 1962), NAACP Papers, Part 3, Box A270, folder 4.

offer, borrowed \$300 from the local branch to finance Crusade for Voters activities and Law worked as a deputy Crusade registration worker.⁴⁵⁰

While Williams may, as he assured Wilkins, have been more impressed with NAACP's approaches than with SCLC's, his reluctance was probably due more to his ambitions to go further within the Association. Wilkins' refusal to finance the Crusade was softened partially by his proposition that Williams might be employed as an NAACP staff-member "on a regular salary basis" with travel and other expenses provided.⁴⁵¹ This did not materialize, however Williams had plans to stand for election to the national executive. He was even prepared to limit his work on the citizenship school project in order to pursue this goal.⁴⁵² Williams was stunned when, at the NAACP's 1962 annual meeting, Law refused to second Williams' nomination.⁴⁵³ He reflected, "It was kind of like telling a man, 'You don't have your own *family*. Your family won't vote for you.'" Prior to the convention, Roy Wilkins had sought Williams out and told him that he was not board material, which Williams believed was because he was too militant.⁴⁵⁴

Clouded by several decades of hindsight, his erratic nature and his long harboured grudge against Law and the NAACP, Williams' recollections of events following the convention are

⁴⁵⁰ Minnis, "Savannah Field Trip," SRC Papers, 179:232-42

⁴⁵¹ Letter from Roy Wilkins to Hosea Williams (March 7 1962), NAACP Papers, part 3, Box A270, folder 4.

⁴⁵² The previous summer he had written to Dorothy Cotton, informing her that he may need to compromise the amount of time spent on citizenship schools because he was "contemplating seeking or accepting an additional position." Letter from Hosea Williams to Dorothy Cotton (August 24, 1961), SCLC Records, 16:635

⁴⁵³ Tuck, Beyond Atlanta, p 135. This is not the only reason historians have given for the disputes between Williams and Law in 1962 and 1963. The Civil Rights Commission's interviewees had explained that the split had arisen when Malcolm Maclean replaced Lee Mingledorff as the city's mayor in 1962. The Crusade had refused to endorse Mingledorff and African American groups believed that they should bargain with MacClean. "This was the point at which there was a falling out," the report explained, because "Law wanted the negotiations to be conducted by the NAACP, while Williams felt the Crusade should do so." "US Civil Rights Commission Community Survey, Savannah, Georgia." Law and Williams also disagreed on tactics during the summer of 1963. In June, Law and other members of the Savannah NAACP branch signed a petition that claimed that marches and rallies did "not serve the best interests of the African American cause" and were counterproductive to the school integration movement. Savannah Morning News, June 24, 1963.

⁴⁵⁴ Taylor Branch, Pillar of Fire: America in the King Years, 1963-5 (New York, NY: Simon and Schuster, 1988), p 124, Williams cited in Gaines, My Soul is Rested, p 445. Wilkins' elitism probably meant that he objected to Williams' family background.

contradictory. He told Taylor Branch that he left the conference, disillusioned with both the local and national NAACP, and subsequently warmed to Martin Luther King. King had told him not to be concerned and that Baptist ministers had once told him that he was an unfit leader. Branch suggests that Williams “vowed to redouble his efforts” to recruit for the CEP, and it was also at this time that he became an SCLC board member. In a 2000 television interview, Williams recollected that after becoming a board member, he established an SCLC “branch” in the city, by which he meant that he organized the CCCV as an SCLC affiliate.⁴⁵⁵ In fact, Williams had affiliated his organization in late 1961. Moreover, Fairclough argues that the dispute with Law prompted Williams to turn the CCCV into “his own, autonomous, power base.”⁴⁵⁶ Following the NAACP meeting, Williams did not turn immediately to SCLC for greater support for his voter registration and citizenship education work. Instead, he attempted to run the project autonomously by seeking money from the Voter Education Project.

An autonomous organization?: Williams and the Voter Education Project

In 1963, Williams received a VEP grant to support his registration work in the southeast Georgia.⁴⁵⁷ SCLC were training and paying expenses for Savannah’s citizenship schoolteachers, but the grant enabled Hosea Williams to sustain the Crusade for Voters as an organization and to enthruse citizenship school participants about political activities in the city.

⁴⁵⁵ “Hosea: in his own words” (GPTV special presentation: 2000), available online at The Civil Rights Digital Library, Hosea : in his own words, GPTV special presentation, <http://crdl.usg.edu/voci/go/crdl/publicSearch/viewVBO/7985/0/io> (Accessed on 8/6/2008)

⁴⁵⁶ Branch, *Pillar of Fire*, p 124, Fairclough, *To Redeem the Soul*, p 95. Similarly Williams told Howell Gaines that when he walked out of the conference he found Martin Luther King on “another street down here then, ‘bout two blocks over where his office was. And I had never really met him to know him, and I walked out of the convention hall cryin’, and I went round to his office and asked ‘em could I see him.” Upon meeting King, he told him that he wanted to work in his organization. *My Soul is Rested*, p 445.

⁴⁵⁷ Letters from Hosea Williams to Wiley Branton (November 15, 1962), letter from Wiley Branton to Hosea Williams (November 29, 1962), *SRC Papers*, 179: 187-8, 196-8.

At the same time, the NAACP ceased giving the CCCV a \$100 per month donation for its administrative fees.⁴⁵⁸ This marked the CCCV's move from a wing of the local NAACP branch to an independent organization with external funding, and a working relationship with SCLC to coordinate citizenship schools. Over the course of 1963, the CCCV's reputation with the VEP deteriorated, which eventually led Williams to seek a closer working relationship with SCLC. VEP staff repeatedly censured Williams for his inefficient record keeping. In February, secretary Jean Levine complained that Williams had not accounted for five of his payments and in March, she told Williams that she could not accept the monthly report from Liberty County.⁴⁵⁹ Wiley Branton reminded Williams several times over in June to send vouchers in. The requests came at the height of Savannah's integration campaigns of night marches and pickets, and Branton suspected that Williams spent so much time on demonstrations "that our enemies might wonder if VEP funds are being used in any way to support your direct action."⁴⁶⁰ Williams' credibility was called into question again when he was arrested in June, when it was revealed that an allegedly "communist controlled" labor union owned CCCV headquarters and two union members served on CCCV staff and when Carolyn Roberts was found guilty of contempt of court for impersonating a student due to stand trial for participating in the sit ins. The organization's link to Highlander Folk School was also publicized as an issue discrediting the program.⁴⁶¹ In late July, Branton explained that although he did not suspect the CCCV of using money unwisely, he was unable to continue funding the Savannah project.⁴⁶² For five months after the cessation of the program, VEP staff continued to find discrepancies in Williams'

⁴⁵⁸ Letter from Hosea Williams to Vernon Jordan (December 27, 1962), SCLC Records, 4:459-60.

⁴⁵⁹ Letters from Jean Levine to Hosea Williams (February 25, March 15, 1963), SRC Papers, 179:274-5, 289.

⁴⁶⁰ Letters from Wiley Branton to Hosea Williams (June 13, 20 28, 1963), SRC Papers, 179:321, 323-4, 320.

⁴⁶¹ Memo from Jack Minnis to Wiley Branton (July 9, 1963), newspaper clippings, one unnamed, n.d., Savannah Morning News (July 27, 1963), Atlanta Constitution, n.d., SRC Papers, 179: 324, 325-6, 336, 327-8.

⁴⁶² Letter from Wiley Branton to Juanita Williams (July 20, 1963), SRC Papers, 179:334-40.

accounting.⁴⁶³ Yet again, Williams felt that his working relationship with the VEP might win him a position, preferably salaried, in a civil rights organization. He believed that Wiley Branton had made a proposal of this kind. In late 1963, as the VEP grant was suspended, Williams accused Branton of renegeing on a promise to employ him and leaving him destitute as he had already resigned his position at the Department of Agriculture.⁴⁶⁴ Whether Williams had sound reasoning to believe that Branton would employ him is unclear. Given Williams' poor handling of the VEP grant, he was unlikely to appear to be an attractive employee in 1963, but Branton may have made vague conjectures that Williams misunderstood.

The move to SCLC

Williams decided both to run his voter registration work in partnership with SCLC, and to become an increasingly committed SCLC volunteer. In the autumn of 1963, Williams was eager to continue working as an SCLC affiliate. In September, he wrote to Andrew Young, "I must get my teeth into something" and asked permission to open citizenship schools across southeastern Georgia. By this point, he anticipated that SCLC would take responsibilities for many details of the program. He asked Young who would take responsibility for providing materials and facilities, and crucially, arranged for citizenship school reports to be sent to the Atlanta office as he lacked office support. This marks a shift whereby the program was monitored centrally, rather than by the local affiliate and represents a more complete "transfer."⁴⁶⁵ At the same time, the VEP allocated Williams another grant on condition that the money be administered through SCLC and that the latter organization supervise Williams'

⁴⁶³ Letters from Wiley Branton to Hosea Williams (September 9, 1963), Jean Levine to Hosea Williams (September 24, 1963), Jean Levine to Wiley Branton (December 1, 1963), SRC Papers, 179:344, 347, 356.

⁴⁶⁴ Letters from Hosea Williams to Wiley Branton (September 19 and 21, 1963), SRC Papers, 179:345-6, 347.

⁴⁶⁵ Letter from Hosea Williams to Andrew Young (September 20, 1963), SCLC Records, 2:391-2.

work.⁴⁶⁶ At the end of November, the Crusade relaunched the program with a mass meeting at the Hi-Hat bowling lanes during which they showed an informational film. A flyer for the meeting announced the opening of six new citizenship schools and was intended to reinvigorate interest and recruit new students for the school.⁴⁶⁷

Williams also identified his voter registration work with the SCLC-affiliated citizenship schools. Several citizenship schoolteachers were recruited as voter registration workers, including stalwart Benjamin Clarke, who worked with schools and PTAs; Lillian Robinson, who worked with neighborhood organizations; Ida Mack, who set up social action committees, and Rebecca Jenkins and Adline Bradshaw, who were area chairpersons. Emogene Middleton (nee Stroman) and Carolyn Roberts were elected as treasurer and secretary and Josh Crofton worked on transport. Benjamin Clarke's mother Rosa Lee was a dedicated area worker. Citizenship schoolteachers also recruited their students who could not read or write to work as canvassers. Williams also advertised the citizenship education program in mass meetings, telling participants "repeatedly that many of the problems of the various counties could be solved by instituting the adult citizenship school program which is being sponsored by SCLC."⁴⁶⁸

In many ways, the Savannah program achieved precisely what SCLC had envisaged by developing grassroots leaders and supportive affiliates. Not only were the citizenship schools in Savannah effectively transferred to SCLC, but Hosea Williams, after having problems with both the VEP and the local NAACP branch, ran a successful registration project through SCLC which

⁴⁶⁶ Letter from Wiley Branton to Hosea Williams (September 24, 1963), SRC Papers, 179:351-2. By 1965, however, the SRC would be dissatisfied with SCLC record keeping and management. See Jonas, Freedom's Sword, p 213.

⁴⁶⁷ Flyer announcing the beginning of Savannah's citizenship schools, SCLC Records, 4:413.

⁴⁶⁸ April 1964 report to the Voter Education Project, SRC Papers, 186:177. "Chatham Counter Crusade for Voters: Voter Registration Campaign, January 15- May 2, 1964," SRC Papers, 186:795-6.

by May 1964, Williams estimated had registered 8,000 people and which received another grant in July.⁴⁶⁹ Finally, by organizing direct action demonstrations in the summer of 1963, shortly after Birmingham, the CCCV was behaving as if part of a “movement” rather than organizing an isolated local campaign. The situation was markedly different in Charleston, where the Citizens Committee, although nominally an SCLC affiliate, worked independently or through Highlander Folk School and did not identify with SCLC.

SCLC had also found a loyal recruit in Hosea Williams. In addition to his campaigns in Savannah, Williams was asked to help establish citizenship schools in Albany and was an SCLC representative during the St Augustine campaign.⁴⁷⁰ Not all of his support was welcome, for example, the SCLC board voted to evict him from a Birmingham motel when he and several Savannah recruits were accumulating unreasonable expenses, while he clashed with Andrew Young over the escalation of marches in St Augustine.⁴⁷¹ Septima Clark, moreover, complained that Williams’ preference for work on the “firing line” (probably referring to St Augustine) meant that his teachers could not get permission to start work and citizenship schools were compromised by Williams’ other commitments.⁴⁷² Yet, by October 1964, Williams had “volunteered his way” onto SCLC staff and moved to Atlanta to work for the organization. With him, he took loyal CCCV activist Lester Harkesen and citizenship school participants Benjamin Clark and Willie Bolden.⁴⁷³

Yet, the high point of Williams’ working relationship with SCLC also marked the decline of the CCCV and Savannah’s local citizenship school movement. By the time he left the

⁴⁶⁹ “Chatham County Crusade for Voters: Voter Registration Campaign” (January 15-May 2, 1964), SRC Papers, 186:795-803, letter from Wiley Branton to Andrew Young (July 21, 1964), SCLC Records, 4:553.

⁴⁷⁰ Fairclough, To Redeem the Soul, p 181.

⁴⁷¹ Branch, Parting the Waters, p 743; Pillar of Fire, p 322.

⁴⁷² Letter from Septima Clark to Andrew Young (July 12, 1964), SCLC Records, 12:725-8.

⁴⁷³ W.W. Law, Crimmins and Kuhn interview, p 92.

city, Williams had a mixed relationship with local activists. Prior to launching the November 1963 campaign, he had attempted a truce with Law and the NAACP. He invited community members to attend a meeting at Savannah's Butler Presbyterian Church in November 1963, which established a Citizens Committee on Unity to coordinate voter registration and civil rights activity in the city.⁴⁷⁴ Law did not attend the meeting and instead organized NAACP registration drives to run in competition with the CCCV. He received a \$500 grant for this from the national NAACP organization.⁴⁷⁵ The feud between Williams and Law and the founding of a separate NAACP registration committee did not preclude some cooperation between Williams and individual NAACP members. For example, Mercedes Wright, a NAACP stalwart who coordinated the 1960-3 boycott and became field secretary for the national office, also participated in Crusade drives.⁴⁷⁶ Yet, it did mean that there was an alternative organization, which carried out similar voter registration work, but were unconnected to SCLC or the citizenship schools. As the final Chapter will explain in greater detail, when Williams and his most loyal and influential supporters left the city, the NAACP branch quickly resumed local influence and responsibility for Savannah's voter registration drives.

Historians have placed considerable weight on the fact that although SCLC might be criticized for hierarchical leadership surrounding Martin Luther King, at the grassroots level, affiliates ran citizenship schools that inspired people to participate in local campaigns and direct action protests that came to be identified with SCLC. For example, Aldon Morris argues that the schools successfully made students feel like they were a part of SCLC, encouraged them to take

⁴⁷⁴ Standard letter from Hosea Williams (November 22, 1963), Unnamed, undated newspaper clipping, SRC Records, 182:695, 694.

⁴⁷⁵ Letter from John Morsell to W.W. Law (n.d.), NAACP Papers Part III Box C28. folder 2, Williams noted, clearly satisfied, that the NAACP drive had registered only three hundred people. "Voter Registration Drive, November 10-December 10, 1963," SCLC Records, 16:642.

⁴⁷⁶ List of Crusade for Voters committee members, SCLC Records, 16:487, "US Civil Rights Commission Community Survey, Savannah, Georgia," NARA, RG 453, Police-Community Relations, box 5.

part in demonstrations and prepared communities to listen to Martin Luther King and civil rights leaders. He argued that the schools served as “quiet structures” which were nonetheless “mobilizing factor(s)” behind supposedly “spontaneous uprisings.”⁴⁷⁷ Charles Payne proposed that citizenship schools developed civil rights leaders, by enabling local people to “provide much of the leadership for their own struggle.” He suggested that they cultivated local, sustained leaders who worked on problems facing their community.⁴⁷⁸ The history of the schools in Savannah belies these claims. By 1964, SCLC had cultivated a working relationship with a local affiliate that registered voters, ran citizenship schools and recruited people to join direct action protests that came to be identified with the Atlanta-based organization. Williams’ deteriorating relationships with Highlander, the NAACP and the VEP contributed to closer links with SCLC. Yet, in the long term, although Williams recruited several loyal staff members for SCLC, he did not leave behind a self-sustaining organization to organize citizenship schools and local action following his departure.

The statement that citizenship schools were transferred from Highlander Folk School to SCLC in 1961 is a simplification of the processes and events that affected the destiny of the two programs thereafter. The transfer meant that differences between the programs became increasingly pronounced. This is partly because of the action and interests of sponsoring organizations. Myles Horton did not relinquish control of the program entirely wholeheartedly and wanted to remain involved after 1961. He did this through offering support to Jenkins’ program and coordinating the Internship Program. Andrew Young, on the other hand, believed that Williams’ registration campaign was the best of its kind in the South and thought it would

⁴⁷⁷ Origins of the Civil Rights Movement, pp 238-9.

⁴⁷⁸ I’ve Got the Light of Freedom, p 77.

serve SCLC's interests in developing strong and loyal affiliates to forge closer ties to the CCCV and SEGCV. The programs were at different stages of development during the transfer, so while the Citizens Committee was self sufficient and able to sustain citizenship schools and registration work with some external funding, Williams was frustrated by the uncertainty of continued support from Highlander and forged closer links to SCLC to cover the program's expenses. Finally, the relationship of both organizations to their local NAACP branches was instrumental in the development of both programs. In Charleston, Jenkins was independent from but cooperated with the local NAACP, while in Savannah, animosity between Williams and Law resulted in a split between civil rights organizations that led the CCCV to become independent from the NAACP and move closer to SCLC. Yet, the question of whether SCLC developed a local affiliate through citizenship schools in Savannah is debatable, because the SEGCV was so short-lived.

It is ironic that although historians presume that the citizenship school program was neatly transferred from SCLC to Highlander in 1961 and that Highlander was no longer involved, they still suggest that Bernice Robinson's initial class on Johns Island was a model for the SCLC led program. Thus, Highlander bequeathed its participatory teaching and learning methods to the fledgling SCLC, despite the latter's reputation for hierarchical leadership. The next chapter will cast aspersion on this assumption, arguing that the SCLC-led program continued to move away from the Highlander one and that this was due to the interplay between local and external influences. It will focus on a long-neglected question in the citizenship schools' historiography: what precisely was taught in classes other than Bernice Robinson's first Johns Island citizenship schools, and how did these curricula change over the course of the program.

Chapter 4

“We’re all going to learn together:” Highlander Folk School, the Southern Christian Leadership Conference and the curricula of the Citizenship Education Program

In 1961, as Highlander staff prepared to transfer the citizenship school program to SCLC, Myles Horton addressed a meeting of citizenship schoolteachers. He was concerned about the future of the program on the Sea Islands as it moved into a new stage. He told citizenship schoolteachers that the program was more than a literacy training exercise; it was a project to secure “human brotherhood, dignity, democracy.” He advised teachers “not to let it become watered down, to teaching people to do little things for no purpose. Keep the purpose in mind, keep the ideal that staggers the imagination- that you can’t fully realize yourself, that you can’t fully understand or understand is true.”⁴⁷⁹ Yet, Horton’s statement was both misplaced and overdue. While he saw education as a means for people to come together, challenge the status quo and foment social revolution, with that of local African American people recruited to teach citizenship schools, whose educational mission had more in common with black educators from the early twentieth-century, such as Booker T. Washington. Teaching materials changed over the course of the citizenship school program, especially following the transfer and the 1965 Voting Rights Act. They also varied enormously between locales, and were shaped by the race,

⁴⁷⁹ Untitled transcribed discussion from a Training Leaders for Citizenship Schools April 10-15, 1961, Highlander Papers, box 80, folder 5.

gender and generational composition of teachers and students. Gender, class and generational considerations shaped both the development of SCLC materials and some of the differences between school curricula in South Carolina and in Savannah. However, there were also tensions between Myles Horton, and local people's, educational ethos dating from Bernice Robinson's first Johns Island class.

This study will combine surviving citizenship school materials with oral history testimony to analyze what precisely was being taught in schools across Lowcountry South Carolina and in Savannah. It will build on recent work that emphasized the role of African American women like Clark and Robinson in developing citizenship school curricula. It will point out, however, that these women had different interests and educational philosophies from Myles Horton and Highlander and that these shaped the kinds of classes they taught. Finally, it will point to the way that local circumstances, including the gender and class composition of students, led to variations between citizenship school classes, and notably, between the South Carolina and the Savannah program.

Myles Horton and Student Led Learning

The majority of existing literature on the citizenship schools has explained their development as an outgrowth of the educational philosophy of Highlander and its founder Myles Horton. This has led to a widespread, yet somewhat misleading, assumption that citizenship classes always had a radicalizing influence on students. Before demonstrating that the citizenship schools had more in common with African American educational history than with Highlander's ethos, it is valuable to outline what the key tenets of Horton's philosophy were. In the first place, his upbringing in the Appalachian Mountains meant that, culturally, he had an

independent spirit which affected his attitude towards learning. He considered his education at Cumberland University in Lebanon, Tennessee, to be a blessing. Because there were very few “good teachers” at the university, he directed his own education through extensive reading. “If I had teachers who I thought knew things, I would have to listen to them and learn their opinions instead of developing my own.”⁴⁸⁰ Horton’s background and culture, then, was at the heart of both his conviction that students should direct their own learning and his suspicion that trained teachers would “impose” certain opinions on their students.

With an independent mind, Horton ensured that his ideas and philosophies were his own; nevertheless, he was also influenced by theological and educational works and by people that he met. He drew on John Dewey’s models of a “philosophy of education based on a philosophy of experience.” Dewey rejected the “banking concept” whereby teachers merely instilled facts and children were passive learners. Instead, he argued educators should provide stimuli and encourage pupils to interact with them and understand the impact that they made on the world.⁴⁸¹ Similarly, Horton designed Highlander’s curriculum to include both classes based on group discussion and workshops and first-hand “experiences” of local social action.⁴⁸² Horton also drew on influences from outside the United States. In 1930, during the Great Depression, he enrolled at Union Theological Seminary in New York, where he met the theologian Reinhold Niebuhr. In addition to introducing Horton to the work of the American Socialist Party (discussed below), Niebuhr encouraged Horton to visit Danish folk schools in the winter of 1931-2. The folk schools had been set up to preserve Danish peasants’ culture and traditions and help them to rebel against “landlords, the church and the nobility.” Although Horton approved

⁴⁸⁰ Long Haul, p 14.

⁴⁸¹ See John Dewey, Experience and Education (New York: MacMillan, 1938).

⁴⁸² Myles Horton and Don West, “New Years Greetings from the Highlander Folk School”, Highlander Papers, box 2, folder 1, cited in Adams, Unearthing Seeds, p 30.

of the schools' rejection of "grades, ranks, tests and diplomas," he felt that they had not kept pace with new challenges facing Danish society.⁴⁸³

Horton wanted Highlander to do more than provide an environment where students learned through experience and discussion; he also saw the potential of education for radical social change. He was influenced in this respect by first-hand experiences of working with poor people in both rural Tennessee and in New York City. In "around 1927," he spent a college vacation in Ozone, a town in the Tennessee Mountains where he organized regular community meetings for local residents. Before the first "meeting was over," he made what he considered to be "a very valuable discovery." "You don't have to know the answers," he explained. "The answers come from the people, and when they don't have any answers, then you have another role, and you find resources." For example, Horton knew a man who could help residents to establish a co-op and another man who could help them with sanitation. He thus developed "a list of items... that (he) hadn't thought of when (he) went in there, but... just knew them from working with these people."⁴⁸⁴ As a student in New York, Horton read Marxist and socialist literature and, through Niebuhr, met members of the American Socialist Party. He decided that he could not be a Marxist because his "strong mountain background" prevented him from "pledging to do in advance what someone else decides." Witnessing trades union struggles at first hand had a greater influence on Horton, because he believed they offered a way for working people to obtain "control over their lives."⁴⁸⁵

Horton was adamant that people articulated their own problems and possible solutions in both community meetings and during Highlander classes. Yet, he had preconceptions about the best means to solve workers' problems. A fund-raising letter that Niebuhr wrote in 1932 on the

⁴⁸³ Adams, Unearthing Seeds, pp 20-21.

⁴⁸⁴ Long Haul, pp 22-3.

⁴⁸⁵ Long Haul, pp 35-6.

school's behalf reflected both men's ideas on education for social change. "Our hope," Niebuhr explained, was "to train *radical* labor leaders who will understand the need of both political and union strategy."⁴⁸⁶ Historians have argued that Highlander continued to train leaders to challenge the status quo when the school began working with civil rights workers in the 1950s, including Esau Jenkins on Johns Island. For example, Sandra Oldendorf argued that citizenship school teachers fit Myles Horton's idea of teachers as "enablers," who "promote understanding of the learner's lives, sensitivity to injustices and future thinking about a better world."⁴⁸⁷ Similarly, Levine argued that Robinson's class built on "years of painstaking pedagogical experimentation and political networking" that had taken place at Highlander. "Through trial and error," he argues, Highlander had "evolved an innovative residential workshop through which grassroots activists discussed shared dilemmas and gained confidence in their leadership abilities."⁴⁸⁸ Joe Street is more explicit in his argument that citizenship school exercises "complemented the Highlander ethos of questioning everything." When students learned words such as "constitution," they would be encouraged to think about and debate the meaning of the word and this would help them to think challengingly about politics and social issues.⁴⁸⁹

However, there were tensions and contradictions in Highlander's educational philosophy because, although students were expected to devise their own solutions to social problems, Horton had his own ideas about what these solutions should be. The very nature of an

⁴⁸⁶ Standard letter by Reinhold Niebuhr (May 27, 1932), Highlander Research and Education Center Papers, (Wisconsin Historical Society, Madison, hereafter Highlander Papers), box 22, folder 1, emphasis in original. For a discussion of Highlander's views on education as a political and labor strategy, see Anthony Dunbar, "Against the Grain: Southern Radicals and Prophets, 1929-1959", Charlottesville, VA: University Press of Virginia, 1981) pp 42-3.

⁴⁸⁷ Oldendorf, "Literacy and Voting," in Harvey G. Neufeldt and Leo McGee, Education of the African American Adult: A Historical Overview, (New York, London: Greenwood Press, 1990), p 204. Her citation is from Myles Horton, "Decision-Making Processes," in N Shimahara, Educational Reconstruction, Promise and Challenge (Columbus, Ohio, 1973), p 334.

⁴⁸⁸ "Birth of the Citizenship Schools," p 392.

⁴⁸⁹ Culture War in the Civil Rights Movement, p 90.

educational program organized to meet local people's needs means that it is imperative to understand local people's own participation in developing teaching styles and content. Local people often had different ideas about the purpose of citizenship education and what schools should teach than Myles Horton had done. This was apparent from the topics taught in Bernice Robinson's first class and the materials developed from them.

Septima Clark and African American Education

Some recent works on the citizenship schools have begun to downplay the influence of Myles Horton on the development of citizenship school curricula and instead see the schools an outgrowth of Clark's "life work as an educator and civic activist."⁴⁹⁰ This approach is problematic for several reasons. Because Clark had such a long and varied career, her biographies devote considerable space to her work prior to joining SCLC, and contain only limited discussions of her work at the helm of the citizenship school program during the 1960s. Nevertheless, her early teaching experience might give some indication as to the range of educational influences to which she had been exposed during her teaching career. For example, she had experience of working with both African American vocational schools and white "progressive" reformers, which shaped her teaching ethos and, in turn, the teaching materials used in citizenship schools. Despite their emphasis on Clark's long teaching career, her recent biographers have not challenged the assumption that citizenship schools taught students to challenge the status quo according to Highlander's ethos. This study, on the other hand, identifies the ways in which influences such as vocational education shaped the teaching materials of the citizenship schools. In so doing, it challenges the long-held assumption that the

⁴⁹⁰ Charron, "Teaching Citizenship," p 126; Jenkins, "Septima Clark," Greene, "Working Towards Literacy," pp 4-5.

schools were an outgrowth of Highlander’s work teaching individuals to challenge the status quo and to move for social change.

Clark began teaching on Johns Island in 1916 and taught in the South Carolina school system until Charleston’s School Board refused to renew her contract in 1956. Myles Horton was unfair to dismiss her formal training as making her “judgemental,” but it did expose her to discussion about the role of education in “uplifting” the African American race and debates on the relevance of vocational education.⁴⁹¹ Clark received her Masters’ degree from Hampton Institute in Virginia, which had been established by Northern philanthropists following the Civil War. Hampton taught practical skills (such as crop rotation and carpentry for boys and homemaking for girls) and trained teachers, instilling them with the schools’ ethos.⁴⁹² Hampton’s most illustrious graduate was Booker T. Washington, who opened a teacher training and vocational school in Tuskegee, Alabama in 1881 and vocally advocated practical skills-based learning as a root to racial uplift.⁴⁹³ He argued that African Americans should learn a curriculum that was relevant to their daily lives. He contended that because “at least eighty per cent” of African Americans lived in the rural South and were “dependent on agriculture of some form for their support,” Washington argued that black Americans “should know” about farming and agricultural techniques. Tuskegee taught a practical curriculum, which demonstrated farming methods, and ensured that traditionally “academic” classes like Mathematics used language and problems that would be relevant to future farm workers.⁴⁹⁴ This also meant that vocational training was highly gendered. He believed that black women’s education should focus on

⁴⁹¹ For general histories of African American education and its pioneers, see James D Anderson, The Education of Blacks in the South, 1860-1935 (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1935) and Adam Fairclough, A Class of Their Own: Black Teachers in the Segregated South (London: Harvard University Press, 2007).

⁴⁹² Fairclough, Class of Their Own, p 120.

⁴⁹³ Up From Slavery: An Autobiography (London: Grant Richards, 1902), pp 36, 62

⁴⁹⁴ Washington, Future of the American Negro, p 49.

homemaking skills. For example, rather than “six or eight years of book education,” young women would benefit from “the most thorough training in the latest and best methods of laundrying and other kindred occupations.”⁴⁹⁵ Finally, Washington saw vocational education as having a moral, as well as a practical, imperative. Racial equality would be secured, he argued, when African Americans demonstrated that they were living economically sufficient and moral lives. Over time, he believed, the race would economically prosper and African Americans would demonstrate that they were worthy of full American citizenship.⁴⁹⁶ Washington’s ideology would lose currency over time and over the course of Septima Clark’s career. Nevertheless, some of his ideas resonated with African American teachers and civic leaders in the 1950s. As Chapter One explained, Septima Clark herself believed that citizenship should be earned through education and engagement with current affairs and the political system. Similarly, Esau Jenkins may never have read any of Washington’s works, but shared his view that community uplift and racial progress would come about through people living frugal, industrious lives and supporting their families and their community, as discussed in Chapter 1. Similarly, this chapter demonstrates that citizenship school materials reiterated Washington’s ideology by teaching students concrete means by which they could “uplift” themselves and their families.

While Washington’s ideology and ethos undoubtedly resonated with citizenship school organizers, there were more direct influences on Septima Clark’s ethos and teaching strategies. During World War II, Clark worked for an educational program that taught soldiers stationed at

⁴⁹⁵ Up From Slavery, p 53. Of course, this did not reflect the real experiences of black women who worked outside the home under slavery and freedom. Ironically, domestic education also required black women to work outside the home as instructors. Similarly, the CEP recruited teachers to work outside the home and to train students to participate in politics: a traditionally “male” sphere. However, they also taught women homemaking skills such as managing household budgets. This apparent contradiction is discussed in greater detail later in the chapter.

⁴⁹⁶ Future of the American Negro, pp 101-5.

Fort Jackson how to sign their name in order to claim salaries. Here she met South Carolina State Supervisor of Education, Wil Lou Grey, who had organized the project. Grey introduced Clark to the kinesthetic method of teaching handwriting; that is having students trace words repeatedly. As Clark explained in her autobiography, “Night after night, night after night, they (the soldiers) traced over their names. In two weeks they could write their names without tracing.”⁴⁹⁷ Grey certainly did not share Myles Horton’s visions of using education to challenge the status quo. Critics argue that Grey was less concerned with advancing opportunities for African Americans than with “socializing” students in order to ensure social order and a skilled workforce.⁴⁹⁸ Alice Spearman of the South Carolina Council on Human Relations (SCCHR) complained that Gray “really sickens me” by acting as “such a martyr and such a sob sister to these pitiful people... but would never ruff anybody’s feathers for anything under the sun.”⁴⁹⁹ Kinesthetic methods of teaching handwriting also hardly encouraged student-led learning or participatory education. Myles Horton explained that he had met Grey, who had praised him for doing work that she had deemed to be impossible on the Sea Islands. He joked that Grey was an “old style” educator. However, Clark considered Grey’s methods to be effective and useful for teaching adults. She told Horton that Grey had given Clark a valuable introduction to adult education.⁵⁰⁰ She took Grey’s methods on board when designing teaching materials for citizenship schools, as discussed below.

⁴⁹⁷ Echo in My Soul, p 148.

⁴⁹⁸ Leon Fink, Progressive Intellectuals and the Dilemmas of Democratic Commitment (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1997), p 251.

⁴⁹⁹ Interview with Jacquelyn Dowd Hall (August 8, 1976), cited in Marcia Synnott, “Crusaders and Clubwomen: Alice Norwood Spearman Wright and Her Women’s Network” in Gail Murray, Throwing Off the Cloak of Privilege: White Southern Women in the Civil Rights Era (Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 2004) pp 49-76.

⁵⁰⁰ “Highlander: Sea Island Project,” Highlander Audio Recording (Wisconsin Historical Society, Madison), tape 515a, 48, Part 1, Side 1.

Biographies and studies of Septima Clark and her influences have done important work to broaden historians' understanding of the citizenship schools, the influences on them and the topics which they taught. However, they have not gone far enough to challenge assumptions that the schools were an outgrowth of Highlander's philosophy or to appreciate the range of influences on the schools. They continue to assume that the schools taught students to challenge the status quo and foment social revolution. Aligning Clark, Jenkins and the citizenship schools with influences such as Washington and Grey leaves them open to charges of being conservative rather than "radical." This is undoubtedly a simplification. Historically, African American educators did not draw such strict dichotomies. For example, the NAACP's founder W.E.B DuBois was one of Washington's most voracious critics. He argued that vocational education was limiting and that reformers should work to establish higher educational institutes which would enable the intellectual development of future African American leaders. Yet he also argued that moral behavior, respectability and a stable family life would help to advance African Americans as a race and bring about equality.⁵⁰¹ More fundamentally, the topics taught in early citizenship schools were not prescribed by Clark or Jenkins, although they surely influenced them, but were designed by the first teacher in response to her students' needs. This suggests that when poor African Americans were given the opportunity to design their curriculum, they identified concrete ways of improving their lives rather than ways to overthrow the status quo. Thus, to understand the formation of citizenship school curricula, it is necessary to examine the lessons learned from Bernice Robinson's first Johns Island class.

⁵⁰¹ Fairclough, Class of their Own, p 245-7, "Education in the Black Monthly Periodical Press," in Neufelt and McGee, Education of the African American Adult pp 75-112, p 101.

Bernice Robinson and Participatory Learning

When Bernice Robinson stood in front of her first class, neither John Dewey's educational philosophy nor Booker T Washington's experiences of training skilled agricultural workers were likely to have been at the forefront of her mind. She had attended Highlander workshops, and thus been au fait with the school's informal and participatory workshops. She was also likely to have also discussed teaching methods with her cousin, Septima Clark, and to have learned from her experience. However, her first class was improvised and based on what students wanted to learn. They asked Robinson to teach them how to read the bible, to be able to correspond with their children who had left home; to fill in money orders and to fill in mail order catalogues.⁵⁰² In other words, when a group of underprivileged African Americans were asked to direct their own social educational program, they expressed little interest in challenging the status quo but, rather, wanted to learn practical skills that would help them to improve their daily lives in concrete ways. This section will use mainly oral history testimony to analyze three of Robinson's most popular topics: consumer education, handwriting and political instruction.

"Consumer education" was a popular topic throughout the citizenship schools' history; included both because of Jenkins' interest in encouraging thrift, savings and careful use of available credit and because of requests from students themselves. Robinson recalled that her first students wanted to "know how to economize on groceries," so she brought in newspapers and they discussed special offers on groceries and consumer goods. Robinson saw this as an

⁵⁰² See Levine, "Birth of the Citizenship Schools," p 392, Ling, "Local Leadership," pp 417-8. Secondary accounts of the first school draw largely upon Bernice Robinson's own account of her first class in Bernice Robinson, interview with Sue Thrasher and Elliot Wigginton (November 9, 1990, Charleston, S.C.), Robinson Papers, box 1, folder 5.

opportunity to teach students arithmetic. She asked them how much they would pay if they wanted one pound of meat when two pounds cost 40 cents. They also discussed how many miles they could “get on a gallon of gas.”⁵⁰³ Similarly, she introduced sewing and crochet classes. These were primarily intended to occupy teenage girls who attended citizenship classes with their parents, but they also taught students to save money on clothing. A report from the second Johns Island School stated that sewing classes taught students how to refashion their existing clothes and use inexpensive materials.⁵⁰⁴

Figure 8 Bernice Robinson teaching teenage girls to sew



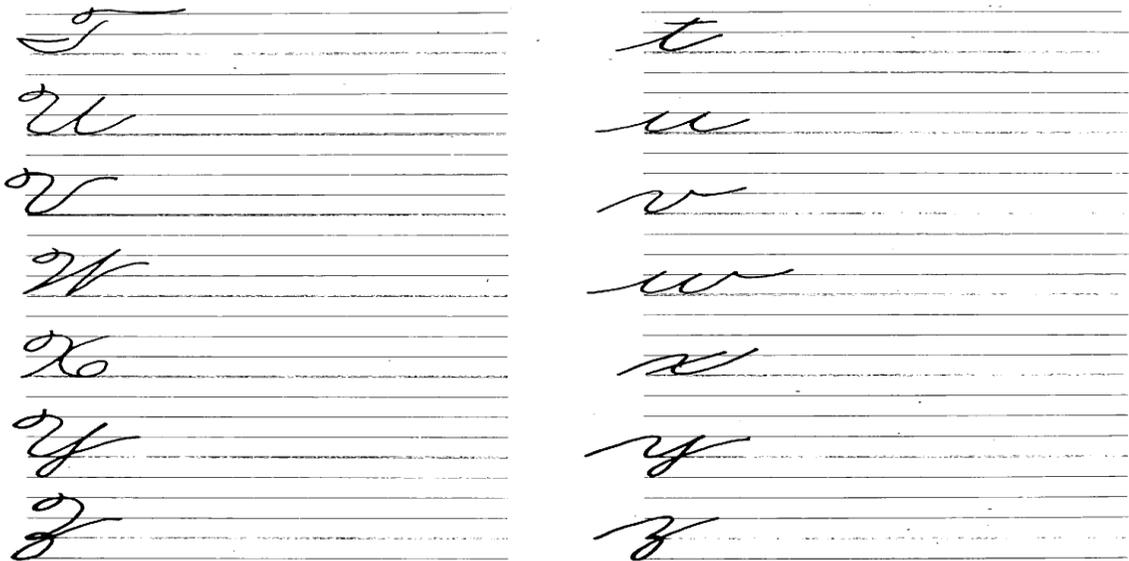
Although historians have rightly pointed out that Bernice Robinson incorporated a wide range of topics into her citizenship school classes, it is worth reiterating that the first citizenship school was billed as a class to teach basic reading and writing skills and students would have attended classes expecting to learn these. For example, Robinson included handwriting sessions which drew on Gray’s kinesthetic methods. She traced letter stencils on onion skin paper and

⁵⁰³ Bernice Robinson, Manuscript of a talk given on Citizenship Training Schools (November 17-18 1979), Bernice Robinson Papers, box 3, folder 8.

⁵⁰⁴ School reports, Robinson Papers, box 3, folder 18.

asked students to use them until they could construct letters on their own. Similar methods were used on other early Sea Island schools. Anderson Mack, a student of the Wadamalaw Island explained how Ethel Grimball would teach him handwriting skills. She would spell his “name on something first” and then he would “start to print it.” He explained, “You know, A-n-d-e-r-s-o-n. Then she come to my last name. M-a-c-k. Then she type it up for me. Then after I print it she take my hand and tried to join it (sic).”⁵⁰⁵ Meanwhile, at Highlander workshops, Clark recommended having students trace circles repeatedly before starting to form words and joining them together.⁵⁰⁶ Emogene Stroman of Savannah taught one of her students, a Mr. Link, to write his name by tracing it in the sand at one of the city beaches.⁵⁰⁷ SCLC staff included a similar template in the workbooks it gave to trained teachers to use in their classrooms.⁵⁰⁸

Figure 9 Excerpt from a sample handwriting template



⁵⁰⁵ Interview with Rhea Estelle Lathan (17 November 2000), cited in “Writing a Wrong,” p 114.
⁵⁰⁶ Continuation of a Training Workshop (August 9, 1961), Highlander Audio Recordings, Tape 53, Side 1, Part 2.
⁵⁰⁷ Interview with David Levine, (Savannah Georgia, January 29th, 1998)
⁵⁰⁸ Citizens Workbook, SCLC Records, 12: 487-503.

Handwriting classes were laborious and do not cohere with Highlander's discussion and workshop based teaching methods. It is highly questionable whether students discussed ideas of citizenship, democracy and participation while they were concentrating on this assigned task. Some studies of the citizenship schools have made links between simple reading tasks and students becoming conscious of social problems and possible solutions to them. For example, Carolyn Jenkins argues that the way in which citizenship school student Anderson Mack "made connections with the letters *h a t* before he was able to read the word 'hat' was an act of becoming conscious of his reading problem and finally making a connection to solving the problem."⁵⁰⁹ As Ethel Grimball explained, a "young man" came to her class, she said "This is a hat" and showed him a picture. He replied, "'So this is how you spell hat!' And he kept repeating the same thing over. We spelt the word. From that he gained confidence in himself and he felt as if he could learn."⁵¹⁰ Given that elementary school students are taught to put words together in this way, this was hardly an example of unconventional teaching practice creating politically conscious students.

On the other hand, teachers like Clark and Ethel Grimball had been trained in these methods and would not necessarily have considered the "kinesthetic method" to be laborious or repetitive. Citizenship school students themselves may have been less concerned with the mechanical nature of the task at hand than with the benefits they might gain from learning to write. When Lathan questioned Anderson Mack about his writing instruction, which she felt sounded "very rote and mechanical," he was emphatic that Ethel Grimball was a "good teacher" and he found the classes useful.⁵¹¹ His initial reason for attending citizenship schools was to learn to write his name so he could keep his property. In the late 1960s, the

⁵⁰⁹ "Septima Clark," p 122.

⁵¹⁰ Untitled transcribed discussion from a citizens workshop, Highlander Papers, box 80, folder 5.

⁵¹¹ Ibid, quoted in Lathan, "Writing a Wrong," p 148.

customary “X” on tax receipts was not sufficient to prove that he had paid taxes and as a result his property was at risk. He found other advantages in being able to read, such as being able to identify “colored” and “white” signs in the South’s segregated businesses and avoid potentially dangerous situations. His education also helped him to gain promotion and become a supervisor in his workplace.⁵¹² Other citizenship school students shared Mack’s interest in attending citizenship classes in order to improve their employment prospects. For example, Cassie Pierce, a Savannah citizenship schoolteacher, explained that students were interested in reading and writing “as a way of making a living” and wanted to learn “what the employers are asking for and requiring.”⁵¹³

Kinesthetic methods were also a good means of enabling students to learn how to hold a small pencil correctly. Horton even recollected that several pencils were broken in the first class.⁵¹⁴ Treating cursive handwriting was also a means of promoting students’ dignity. As Robinson explained, “We taught cursive writing from the beginning” because adults had no reason to print letters like children.⁵¹⁵ Similarly, Clark explained that being able to sign one’s name made people feel different: perhaps more confident or more dignified.⁵¹⁶ Not only did these advantages outweigh the repetitive nature of kinesthetic writing practice, but for Mack, acquiring these benefits was more important than being able to discuss democracy and the constitution. Citizenship school students were more interested in learning skills that would secure them better paid employment than they were in campaigning for wealth redistribution or developing working-class consciousness.

⁵¹² Interview with Lathan, cited in Lathan, “Writing a Wrong,” pp 114-117.

⁵¹³ Cassie Pierce, “Narrative Report,” SCLC Records, 16: 571-3.

⁵¹⁴ Long Haul, p 103. It is possible that some individuals showed symptoms of dyspraxia, which made fine motor movements like writing very difficult, or alternatively, they were simply unaccustomed to holding pencils in their predominantly agricultural careers.

⁵¹⁵ Bernice Robinson, manuscript of a talk given about citizenship training schools (November 17-18, 1979), Robinson Papers, box three, folder eight.

⁵¹⁶ Echo in my Soul, pp 148-9.

Of course, Esau Jenkins expected participants to develop reading and writing skills not merely for their personal development but in order to register and vote. Citizenship school organizers did not merely wish to ensure that students *could* vote; they also taught them the value of voting and political participation. Even prior to the establishment of citizenship schools, organizers endeavoured to teach local people the value of voting. In 1955, Progressive Club members and Highlander staff performed a sketch called “How Buddy Votes” based on communications between Progressive club member Buddy Freeman and Esau Jenkins. In the sketch, Jenkins played a voter registration worker while Freeman and Septima Clark played a married couple whom Jenkins persuaded to register. Jenkins persuaded Freeman that by voting, he could ensure that officials such as judges, magistrates and police officers worked in his interest. Although Freeman initially resisted the idea, when Jenkins offered to transport him to the court house, Freeman declared that “Tomorrow afternoon when you see me, I’ll be a registered citizen” and, in turn, over several meetings, convinced his father to register as well.⁵¹⁷ The sketch demonstrated to workshop participants how they could persuade friends and relatives to vote and the support that they might want to offer them.

In citizenship school classes themselves, Bernice Robinson incorporated political education with her literacy lessons. She used sections of the South Carolina constitution as a primer and, as Street has explained, they discussed the meaning of unfamiliar words such as “constitution” as a group. After citizenship schools were wound down, residents on both Johns and Edisto Islands founded “second step” political education classes, which included lessons on civic skills such as the purpose of government and how to hold a precinct

⁵¹⁷ “How Buddy Votes,” transcript, Highlander Papers, 8: 383-393.

meeting.⁵¹⁸ However, explicitly “political” classes did not necessarily encourage debate or discussion on the topics at hand. For example, one evening class taught by Mrs Alleen Brewer on Edisto Island demonstrated the correct way to fill in a registration form. At no point did students ask questions about the terminology or discuss current election laws and Mrs Brewer did not solicit their input.⁵¹⁹ If this class was typical of those taught on Edisto Island, it challenges the established belief that all citizenship schools encouraged political debate and discussion among participants.

From Bernice Robinson’s first class on Johns Island, there were already tensions between Highlander’s educational ethos and the lessons being taught in citizenship school classes. In Robinson’s consumer education classes, she promoted Esau Jenkins’ emphasis on thrift and frugality rather than challenging socio-economic structures. In her handwriting classes, she replicated the “kinesthetic” methods that Wil Lou Grey had pioneered. Political and “second step” taught students to participate within mainstream institutions, rather than to lead protests or revolutions. Existing scholarship not only fails to consider the ways in which Robinson’s class departed from Horton and Highlander’s ethos, it also overlooks changes to and variations within citizenship school curricula. In order to redress this imbalance, a closer examination of materials used in citizenship school classrooms is required.

Teaching Materials

What lessons were taught in classes beyond Johns Island? How did these differ from Bernice Robinson’s first class? And how did these change over time? There is a

⁵¹⁸ Glen, *Highlander*, p 199; Letter from Septima Clark to Aimee Horton (October 17 1961), *Highlander Files*, 33:808.

⁵¹⁹ “Sea Island Citizenship Class” (n.d.), *Highlander Audio Recordings*, Tape 515a, 47, Side 1, Part 1.

methodological problem involved in answering these questions, because teachers were encouraged to “improvise” classes. For example, a report on a training workshop in Dorchester in July 1961, under the heading “What the Schools Should Teach” explained, “Subjects for any specific school will come out of the issues at the time.”⁵²⁰ When one teacher trainee asked Septima Clark which topics she could cover in a workshop, Clark replied, “You can teach anything: banking, consumer education, history, the Constitution.”⁵²¹ The lack of an overarching curriculum means that it is difficult to make generalizations about teaching curricula. However, there are some surviving sources. As the program was expanded across the Sea Islands, into Charleston and beyond, Highlander staff members found that they were not able to provide trained citizenship schoolteachers with extensive support and supervision. Instead, they decided to develop a workbook that each student could use in class. After the transfer, Highlander gave these materials to SCLC staff to use.⁵²² The ensuing workbook, entitled “My Citizenship Booklet” documents some of the topics that citizenship classes across the South were likely to have covered.

“My Citizenship Booklet”

The Citizens workbook was a typewritten document which used straightforward, clear language which students could understand. The original Highlander document was eighteen pages long, with a background to Highlander Folk School; information about the South Carolina political system; a copy of the registration form; sections on social security and health services and exercises on how to fill in money orders and mail order forms, with practice forms for

⁵²⁰ “Report of Training Workshop, Dorchester Community Center, MacIntosh, Georgia, July 17-21, 1961,” *Records of the SCLC*, 13: 578-9.

⁵²¹ “Sea Island Workshop,” *Highlander Audio Collection*, Tape 515a, 57, side 2, part 1.

⁵²² Oldendorf, “South Sea Island Citizenship Schools,” p 172.

students to complete.⁵²³ SCLC staff made some changes to the booklet after the program had been transferred, and over the course of the program. One version from 1961 was clearly modeled on the Highlander version, but was six pages longer. It also included new exercises, including some practical sections on arithmetic and lists of words that students were asked to incorporate into sentences. The most substantial new sections dealt with issues surrounding manners and behavior, including sections on writing letters, “good manners” and how to “be polite,” which are discussed in detail below.⁵²⁴ Another, undated (but presumably revised and updated) version had a more “polished” presentation, with varied fonts and images. It was also, at thirty-five pages, substantially longer than earlier versions and included new sections including “The Bible and the Ballot” (which discussed the religious imperatives for voting); nonviolence; handwriting sections and passages on African American history.⁵²⁵

The citizens’ booklet represented an innovation in education for African American adults in myriad ways. The very act of allocating students with their own booklet was an impressive and forward-thinking move. African American schools in the Jim Crow South faced a perennial shortage of schoolbooks. Not only were books second-hand and tatty, but, as a recent history of African American education points out, the struggle to obtain books “took place in the broader context of contestation over what stories textbooks would tell and who would tell them.” Too often, textbooks produced by Southern states’ educational boards presented a benign account of slavery and assumed that African Americans were intellectually inferior. Textbooks, therefore,

⁵²³ Citizens Workbook, SCLC Records, 12: 487-503.

⁵²⁴ “SCLC Citizens Workbook,” Records of the SCLC, 12: 506-530.

⁵²⁵ Although the section on black history suggests that the longer booklet was designed after 1965, when SCLC broadened school curricula, it still discusses literacy tests in its introductory passages. It was, therefore, probably a redrafted version produced between 1961 and 1964. Because it is the longest booklet, covering the widest range of topics, it is the most useful source for understanding the remit of classes taught in SCLC’s classes and the following examples are taken from this final version. “SCLC Citizens Workbook,” Records of the SCLC, 12: 357-91.

can be “political tools aimed at transmitting particular ways of looking at the world.”⁵²⁶ Furthermore, the booklet rethought the vocabulary and style that was traditionally used in schoolbooks designed for schoolchildren. Septima Clark explained that there was “not one mention of dogs, cats, bunnies, chickens, not one reference to ‘Come Muff, See Puff.’”⁵²⁷ In other words, she saw the booklet as an alternative to the “Dick and Jane” books and elementary school materials that Robinson had quickly rejected as teaching materials for instructing adults. Highlander and SCLC staff were then careful to treat their students as adults and to give them some dignity. Finally, some of the booklet’s exercises were clearly intended to encourage discussion about politics and current affairs. For example, students were given lists of “political” words used in the constitution for students to learn. One page of the SCLC booklet contained an alphabet chart linking letters of the alphabet to relevant words (“a is for attorney”, “c is for constitution” and so on), before asking students to use these words in sentences and short passages.⁵²⁸

Figure 10 Writing Exercise from "My Citizenship Booklet"

It is debatable whether other exercises in the booklet constituted explicitly “political” education or whether they encouraged debate or dissent. It continued to teach students kinesthetic methods for practicing handwriting, including several pages, which list letters of the alphabet in cursive script, and leaving space for students to copy the letters repeatedly until they were ready to make words. The workbook also continued Bernice Robinson’s practice of

⁵²⁶ Heather Williams, *Self Taught: African American Education in Slavery and Freedom* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2005), p 130.

⁵²⁷ Clark, *Echo in My Soul*, p 198.

⁵²⁸ All exercises are taken from “SCLC Citizens Workbook,” *Records of the SCLC*, 12: 357-91.

teaching students a curriculum that would be relevant to their daily lives by including a sound chart that used images that would be familiar to any student used to rural and farm life (for example, a picture of a wheel to demonstrate the sound “wh”). Both Highlander and SCLC staff used similar exercises in training exercises. For example, Clark explained that when trained teachers attempted to explain the word “program” to their students, they should explain how it was relevant to each of their daily lives. For example, a housewife could be told that her housework routines constituted a “program,” while an agricultural worker would learn that his work in the field was his daily program.⁵²⁹ Another reading passage, which Septima Clark asked Savannah trainee Benjamin Clark to read in a training session, described a mechanic’s workshop, the tools he owned and stressed that a working environment should be kept orderly and clean, with tools in their proper places.⁵³⁰ On the one hand, devising a curriculum and materials which used terminology that would be familiar to rural and working class people was an innovative student-led learning method, and no doubt was more appealing to African American students than elementary school materials might have been. On the other, it was condescending to assume that African American adults would learn to read using agricultural and worker related topics exclusively. Robinson balanced these kinds of topics with discussion of the United Nations and human rights; however, there is little evidence of international topics in the Citizenship booklet.

Figure 11 Sound Chart from "My Citizenship Booklet"

Sections concerning courtesy and etiquette were introduced to the booklet after the transfer and retained in the later version. Under heading of “good manners” and “being polite,”

⁵²⁹ Undated citizens workshop, [Highlander Audio Collection](#), Tape 515a, 58, Side 1, Part 1.

⁵³⁰ “Training Workshop Aug 7 1961,” [Highlander Audio Recording](#), Tape 515a, Tape 50, side 1, part 2.

students were given a short excerpt with some new words to remember at the bottom. The excerpts instructed them not to interrupt other people and to take care when introducing people to one another that they use people's names, pronounce them clearly and "to tell something about the friend you are introducing." Students were encouraged to be chivalrous ("call the woman's name first") and deferential ("call the older person first.")⁵³¹ Such sections drew upon middle-class norms of morality and respectability and had far more in common with Booker T. Washington's ethos of education for moral uplift than with Myles Horton's principles of education as a means of revolutionary change. This section may have been introduced at the recommendation of SCLC staff who believed that appropriate conduct would attract popular support for direct action campaigns. As one account puts it, "There are few more striking images from the southern freedom struggle than those which... juxtaposed perfectly coiffure, immaculately dressed, quietly dignified and stoically nonviolent black demonstrators with violent, foul-mouthed, unkempt and hysterical white mobs." Ironically, civil rights activists used "ideas of middle-class respectability, which had from their inception been coded in racially exclusive ways in order to break down that very pattern of racial exclusivity." This image was constructed consciously and carefully by SCLC leaders. The authors explain, for example, how both Rosa Parks and Martin Luther King became suitable figureheads for the Montgomery Bus Boycott because they demonstrated virtues such as sobriety; a stable family life; articulate speaking skills; appropriate dress; a strong religious affiliation and regular church attendance.⁵³²

⁵³¹ "Citizenship booklet," pp 17,18, Records of the SCLC, 12: 525-6.

⁵³² Marissa Chappell, Jenny Hutchinson and Brian Ward, "Dress modestly, neatly... as if you were going to church: Respectability, Class and Gender in the Montgomery Bus Boycott and the Early Civil Rights Movement," in Ling and Monteith, Gender and the Civil Rights Movement, pp 69-100.

Figure 12 Etiquette Sections from "My Citizenship Workbook"

Good Manners

When other people are talking, I listen. Harry likes me to listen when he talks. Sue likes me to listen when she talks. One has good manners if he listens when others talk. When I talk I want other people to hear me.

I talk about things my friends are interested in. I speak so that everyone can understand me. It is not polite to do all the talking. Everyone likes to talk some.

My friends like to tell me about their jobs. They like to discuss their community problems with me. I like to tell them about my job and my children. Sue likes to talk about local politics. She discusses with her friends the ways they can share in the running of their city.

When your friend is talking, do not interrupt. It is not polite to interrupt. Everyone likes people to listen when he talks.

The sections may also have been introduced at the request of grassroots teachers at training workshops. Sometimes, teachers may have taught courtesy because they believed it would help students when they went to register or vote. Savannah teacher Ida Proctor recalled that she taught students to dress well and speak articulately so they would be treated with more respect by registrars, and likely to find it easier to be able to register.⁵³³ Yet, for other citizenship school organizers and teachers, behaving decently and respectability was not so much a media-savvy tactic, but based on the reasonable belief that if people behaved decently,

⁵³³ Ida Proctor, interview with David Levine (February 14th, 1998, Savannah, Georgia).

communities would be more pleasant places in which to live. Clark noted that one teacher had taught her male students to pull chairs out for the women in the class, while a trainee told her that she wanted to use the classes to combat what she perceived as the growing use of profane language.⁵³⁴ Similarly, photographs of the early citizenship schools indicate that women without extensive means made an effort to dress respectably, including wearing hats, for their citizenship schools (see below). Similar to attendance at church, citizenship schools were a social occasion that women made an effort for which they should dress well.⁵³⁵ Courtesy classes were also highly gendered. They sought to instill chivalry in men and encourage mutually respectful, yet traditional roles between men and women. Similarly, they were entirely consistent with both Esau Jenkins' philosophy of respectable middle-class masculinity and the moral instruction undertaken by middle-class clubwomen (both outlined in Chapter 1). This took on added class dimensions in Savannah, where citizenship schoolteachers addressed men with so-called "deviant" or "anti-social" traits.

⁵³⁴ "Sea Island Workshop," [Highlander Audio Collection](#), Tape 515a, 57, Part 1, Side 2.

⁵³⁵ It is possible that women wore hats because the classroom was cold.

Figure 13 Bernice Robinson teaching adults in the Progressive Club



Why Vote?

The topics in the Citizenship Booklet were wide-ranging and the curriculum became even broader after 1965. Yet, the classes were of course first and foremost a vehicle to increase African American registration and voting across the South. This required some degree of political education. SCLC focused explicitly on educating students about the reasons for voting and the benefits they could acquire from using their ballot. Robinson explained, “If we are talking about why vote, ours was a voter thing, we were training people to fit in the mainstream, then to conduct their own personal business and that sort of thing.” The main objective was the need to “know something about the political structure of your area in order to function as an individual.”⁵³⁶ In a draft of a lesson plan, she noted that a “first class citizen” not only votes in elections but researches candidates’ backgrounds, finds

⁵³⁶ Bernice Robinson, Manuscript of a talk given on Citizenship Training Schools (November 17-18 1979), Bernice Robinson Papers, box 3, folder 8.

out about organizations that work for job opportunities, race relations and community improvement and finds out about health facilities, among other civic roles.⁵³⁷ The Highlander workbook and both the SCLC versions included a section on “Our America,” which praised the United States’ democratic institutions and urged students to take part in them.

Figure 14 Excerpt from "My Citizenship Booklet"



Alongside the citizenship workbook, a booklet called “Why Vote?” was recommended to newly trained teachers as a resource.⁵³⁸ Robinson recalled that a labor union (she did not specify which one) had developed the pamphlet.⁵³⁹ Robinson used the booklet after she was employed by SCLC in 1964, although Clark suggested that it might not be as useful as other course

⁵³⁷ Manuscript, “Responsibilities of a First Class Citizen,” Robinson Papers, box 3, folder 17.

⁵³⁸ List of instructors for trained CEP teachers, Robinson Papers, box 3, folder 17.

⁵³⁹ Thrasher and Wigginton interview, CIO affiliates had historically run classes which taught local people to pass literacy tests and register to vote, including during the 1946 tobacco workers’ strike in Charleston. Lillie Doster, quoted in a transcript of “South Carolina Voices of the Civil Rights Movement,” (November 1982, Avery Research Center), p 67.

materials because it failed to mention the educational aspects of a voter registration campaign.⁵⁴⁰ The booklet was not a literacy primer but a pamphlet written in straightforward language with cartoons that informed students how to be a well-rounded citizen. It encouraged people to attend precinct meetings, to vote for local officers, the school board and in national elections and, reminded them of the Southern primary system where in 1960 choosing “candidates” was still “more important than the elections themselves.” It encouraged wider involvement, such as researching political parties, driving people to the polls, working at headquarters, distributing literature and attending party meetings. It also encouraged people to join clubs, such as PTAs, civic and veterans clubs and lodges.⁵⁴¹ Similarly, training workshops advised teachers to use newspapers to find out what issues were being voted on and how candidates may have voted in the past and to find out which individuals in a community were responsible for individual areas, such as street lighting, so that students could target their letter writing campaigns. Trainers suggested that people who could not read should be asked during the first session to find out where registration offices were located.⁵⁴² All of these materials and techniques were meant to persuade program participants of the value of registering and voting. Despite the pamphlet being written in basic language with large print, it would of course only be suitable for reasonably literate adults.

SCLC staff member James Wood had promoted the citizenship school model as a vehicle for extending the fledgling organization’s influence across the South, while Andrew Young believed that individuals’ potential to lead SCLC affiliates should take priority over their

⁵⁴⁰ Bernice Robinson, manuscript of a talk given about citizenship training schools (November 17-18, 1979), Robinson Papers, box three, folder eight, “Citizenship Workshop” (August 7, 1961), Highlander Audio Collection, Tape 50, Side 2, Part 1

⁵⁴¹ “Why Vote: The ABC’s of Citizenship,” Bernice Robinson Papers, box 3, folder 16.

⁵⁴² “Training workshop (August 10-12, 1961),” Highlander Audio Recordings, Tape 515a, Tape 64, Part 1, Side 2.

teaching ability. It follows that after the transfer, SCLC included details about direct action protest and desegregation movements in “political” classes. However, with the exception of a small excerpt detailing SCLC’s work and ethos in the citizens’ workbook, extant citizenship school materials contain few details of this kind. Workshop sessions meanwhile gave optimistic accounts of what African Americans could achieve if they used their franchise and did *not* stress alternative means. For example, one session discussed the meaning of the “political machine” or groups of politicians with a stranglehold on government, and suggested that, by voting, African Americans could challenge or break such machines. Another session discussed the meaning of pressure groups and asked workshop participants to give examples. Bernice Robinson, leading the workshop, pointed out that in addition to these groups that citizenship school students were likely to view positively, like SCLC and SNCC, examples of pressure groups included the Ku Klux Klan and White Citizens Council. Again, the workshop concluded that by voting, African Americans could restrict the influence of such groups.⁵⁴³

How can one account for the apparent lack of information about nonviolent protest and direct action in citizenship school materials? It may have been due to public relations concerns. Stressing voter registration, participation in government and pro-American sentiments meant that citizenship school programs could secure money from the Voter Education Project and, ideally, avoid the anti-Communist slurs that had beset Highlander Folk School. Additionally, SCLC staff could not, and did not always feel it was necessary, to support and encourage widespread direct action and may have preferred to focus on key protest events such as Birmingham and Selma. It might have been preferable to develop a well-informed citizenry that would support and publicize SCLC’s work, but not necessarily stage expensive, labor intensive and controversial campaigns. SCLC staff may also have genuinely felt that a large registered

⁵⁴³ Undated Citizen’s Workshop, Tape 515a, Tape 58, Side1, Part 2.

population was an important resource for political change. On the other hand, Septima Clark felt that her SCLC colleagues did prioritize direct action over the possibly more mundane aspects of voter education. For organizers like Septima Clark and Esau Jenkins, however, the emphasis on working within the mainstream reflected their pre-existing ethos and interest, related to Jenkins' model of middle-class masculinity, and Clark's teacher training. There may have been a disparity between the ethos apparent in citizenship school materials and individual teachers' approaches. Local variations in citizenship school classes, including the background of citizenship schoolteachers and the class and gender dynamics of classes, meant that individual teachers adapted and changed materials to suit their students' needs.

Local Variations

Esau Jenkins and Hosea Williams both believed in the potential of registration and voting for personal and community uplift. The former argued that becoming a registered citizen turned community members into better people while the latter argued that most community problems were best solved through the ballot.⁵⁴⁴ Yet, because Savannah's teachers were recruited from the young students who were staging direct action campaigns and sit-ins in the early 1960s, they may have taken a different approach. This leads to a broader question: what differences were there in the curriculum content between local programs and individual schools? The fact that teachers were encouraged to devise their own curricula means, of course, that it is difficult to ascertain precisely what was being taught in South Carolina and Savannah schools. However, some information can be gleaned from Highlander recordings, teachers' reports and oral histories.

⁵⁴⁴ "The New Highlander," interview with Myles Horton and Esau Jenkins, Highlander Audio Recording, Tape 127, Part 1, Side 1, Hosea Williams, "History and Philosophy of the Southeastern Crusade for Voters," Records of the SCLC, 4:416.

One of the most striking distinctions between the Edisto Island and the Johns Island class was the former's reliance on formal materials, including books for schoolchildren. This was probably because Ethel Grimball's experience as a public schoolteacher gave her access to such materials. Yet, like Robinson, Grimball also "developed her own teaching materials." Although she "used materials designed for elementary school students, she used them in such a way that learners responded well to them."⁵⁴⁵ Thus, while Highlander and SCLC's materials may have been innovative, some teachers in fact used the very materials that Bernice Robinson and Highlander staff had eschewed. Other teachers drew on published materials designed for adults. In a training workshop, Septima Clark recommended Step Vaughan, a publisher in Austin, Texas, that specialized in adult literacy teaching materials. Emogene Stroman of Savannah recalled using these booklets; however, many teachers found these costly and their expenses would not cover them, so it is not clear how widespread their use was.⁵⁴⁶ If teachers could afford them, they would be more convenient than the improvised materials which Robinson had taken to her Johns Island class, and it is understandable why busy people who were volunteering their time to hold classes might find them attractive resources. They were also likely to be more suitable for adults than elementary school materials. However, if they were used widely, this suggests that citizenship schools taught from more "formal" and conventional teaching materials than historians have recognized, and suggests that classes moved away from improvisation and innovation after they were extended beyond Johns Island. Such changes were even more apparent in Savannah's schools.

⁵⁴⁵ Lathan, "Writing a Wrong," p 140.

⁵⁴⁶ "Workshop (August 7 1961), [Highlander Audio Recordings](#), Tape 515a, 50, Side 1, Part 1, Emogene Stroman-Middleton, interview with author (November 21, 2008).

Savannah: the role of gender, class and age

Regional differences also become apparent when the curricula used in Savannah are compared and contrasted with those used in South Carolina. In certain respects, Hosea Williams was keen to use methods and materials that he had seen used at Highlander and in other schools. After the citizens' booklet had been completed, Williams requested that 540 copies be transported by train to Savannah for use across southeastern Georgia.⁵⁴⁷ Yet, he and his teachers adapted citizenship school curricula to suit their students' needs and the mission and ethos of the Crusade for Voters. As Chapter 2 explained, in southeast Georgia, the classes were one component of a voter registration campaign and Williams did not necessarily see the value of the long term education that Septima Clark pioneered. This was apparent from the organization of Savannah's citizenship classes. Williams envisaged that teachers would spend a large portion of the sessions encouraging students to register and vote.⁵⁴⁸ He explained to potential teachers that one of the two hours in each class should be "used for citizenship training." This would cover the details of who local officials were, what responsibilities they had and how they were selected and was designed to develop community leaders and followers to address community problems.⁵⁴⁹

Gender, class and generational issues also account for many of the distinctions between the Savannah and the South Carolina class curricula. Savannah's teachers tended to be young

⁵⁴⁷ Bernice Robinson, Manuscript of a talk given on Citizenship Training Schools (November 17-18 1979), Bernice Robinson Papers, box 3, folder 8.

⁵⁴⁸ Jenkins, on the other hand, organized "second step" political education classes for adults who were already able to read and write. The classes, run at the offices of Jenkins' Citizens Committee of Charleston County, worked on some of the technical issues involved in voter registration when they borrowed a voting machine on which people could practice voting. They also taught people the importance of voting, what the ballot meant and facts about government, such as the number of members in the House of Representatives. "Highlander Board Meeting," 1961, Highlander Audio Recordings, Tape 515a, Side 1 Part 1

⁵⁴⁹ Standard memorandum from Hosea Williams to community leaders (December 28, 1960), Highlander Files, 8: 293.

students who had been recruited through the local sit-in and boycott movements. Many, therefore, were keen to include some instruction about the protest movement in their classes. One teacher, for example, explained in a monthly report that she had organized a Crusade for Voters youth meeting and another reported that she had taken her students to a mass demonstration.⁵⁵⁰ Yet, these endeavors were tempered by the generational cleavages between teachers, usually in their late teens and early twenties, and students, who tended to be middle-aged men and women. Carolyn Roberts even taught her own father in one class.⁵⁵¹ Interviews with former Savannah teachers suggest that they attempted to bridge the divide between middle aged citizenship school pupils and a movement led by young people, often their own friends and colleagues.⁵⁵² Stroman explained that many of her students were parents of the college students and young people who were participating in sit-ins and marches, and she spent some time in classes addressing their concerns and anxieties about their children's activism.⁵⁵³

Some students were enthused to join marches and mass demonstrations. For example, Henry Brownlee described Rosa Clarke, Benjamin's mother, as a "brave lady" who regularly marched with the Crusade and on one occasion, even collapsed from a heart ailment during her registration work.⁵⁵⁴ More often, however, when middle-aged students were recruited to participate in the movement, they found places for themselves outside direct action protest.⁵⁵⁵

⁵⁵⁰ Helen Brown, "Monthly Attendance Report" (January 1963), Ardell Brown, "Monthly Attendance Report" (January-March, 1963) SCLC Records, 13:282, 510.

⁵⁵¹ Carolyn Roberts Bartow, contribution to "... We ain't what we were," Taylor Branch Papers, box 120, folder 865.

⁵⁵² By doing so, female citizenship schoolteachers were acting according to Belinda Robnett's model of "bridge leadership." Yet, although Robnett discusses in some detail the ways in which activists' experience were constructed by race, gender and class, she overlooks the significance of age and generational distinctions. See Robnett, How Long, How Long, especially p 21.

⁵⁵³ Levine interview

⁵⁵⁴ Brownlee, comments in "We ain't what we used to be," Taylor Branch Papers, box 120, folder 865, The Crusader (March 1964), SRC Papers, 182:763.

⁵⁵⁵ The Savannah Morning News published lists of individuals arrested daily during the height of the 1960-3 protests. Only two citizenship school students appeared in these: nineteen year old Jackie Banks and Willie Bolden.

This was usually shaped by their gender and class. Stroman recollected that her students helped with practical office work, attended mass meetings and provided transportation, while Proctor recounted that her students cooked for demonstrators and night marchers.⁵⁵⁶ Henry Brownlee recalled that that older people, “too old to march,” made financial contributions and housed freedom riders from northern states.⁵⁵⁷ They did not specify the gender of the students or community members who carried out these tasks, but it is more likely that female students participated in these kinds of tasks.

Cooking for and housing demonstrators is akin to what Nancy Naples has defined as “activist mothering.” Black women often took on “mothering” responsibilities for members (especially children) in the community and Naples argued that “activist mothering” included both “nurturing work for those outside their kinship group” and a “broad definition of actual mothering practices.”⁵⁵⁸ This type of work had long traditions in black women’s movements, including women’s clubs of the early twentieth-century. For example, prior to World War I, the Charleston City Federation of Women’s Clubs (which included Mamie Garvin Fields amongst its members) raised funds to support the Wilkinson House.⁵⁵⁹ Other scholars have suggested that the gendered division of labor in social movements might result in women carrying out “activist

Savannah Morning News, (August 28, October 31, 1963). This is not a perfect indication because citizenship school registers are incomplete, particularly for the years prior to 1963.

⁵⁵⁶ Stroman, Levine interview, Proctor, Levine interview.

⁵⁵⁷ Shellman, cited in “... We ain’t what we used to be,” p 50.

⁵⁵⁸ Grassroots Warriors: Activist Mothering, Community Work and the War on Poverty (New York, NY, London: Routledge, 1998), p 136; “Activist Motherhood: Cross-Generational Continuity in the Community Work of Women from Low-Income Urban Neighborhoods,” Gender and Society, 6, 3, 1992, pp 441-463, especially pp 448-9. There is a wealth of scholarship discussing African American women’s “mothering” work in their communities. For example, Katrina Bell McDonald argues that black women’s activism is motivated by both empathy for other African American women and by feelings of “solidarity” to their racial class, which is analogized to a “family,” while Patricia Hill Collins argues that black women serve as “othermothers,” caring for and supporting people in their community networks. “Black Activist Mothering: A Historical Intersection of Race, Gender and Class,” Gender and Society, 11, 6 (December 1996), pp 773-795, especially 776-7, Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness and the Politics of Empowerment (New York, NY, London: Routledge, 1991), p 121. Carol Stack All Our Kin (New York, NY: Perseus, 1974) is an excellent general analysis of family and “fictive kin” networks.

⁵⁵⁹ Deborah Gray White, Too Heavy a Load: Black Women in Defense of Themselves, 1884-1994 (New York, NY, London: W.W. Norton, 1999), p 23.

mothering” or supportive nurturing roles.⁵⁶⁰ For African American women, this would be particularly pertinent and extending their “other mother” and “community mother” roles to political activism. For example, Jenny Irons argues that Aurelia Young, an African American woman in Mississippi, performed “activist mothering” roles when she took orange juice and vitamins to jailed demonstrators and housed and fed freedom workers.⁵⁶¹ Teaching citizenship schools might itself be described as a kind of “activist mothering.” Patricia Hill Collins argued that black female teachers were often “mentors” to their pupils, while oral histories indicate that citizenship school participants saw Septima Clark as a “mother” figure.⁵⁶² Yet, in Savannah, this was complicated by generational divisions between teachers and students. When young women like Proctor, Stroman and Roberts taught sessions on nonviolent protest, their female students could assume “mothering” roles by caring for students on the frontline.

Savannah’s teachers faced different challenges when it came to teaching men. They attempted to bolster self-esteem and self-worth among their male students. While Robinson and Clark wanted to ensure that citizenship school students were treated with dignity and not embarrassed by their lack of formal education, this took on additional meaning in the Savannah

⁵⁶⁰ For example, Ronald Lawson and Steven Barton found that in New York City tenant movements, women tend to lead grassroots Building Organizations (BOs), while men take over when larger National Organizations (NOs) are formed. They point out that women tend to lead local movements because they tend to hold responsibilities within the home and over housekeeping budgets and draw on social ties to women in their building and surroundings. However Neighborhood Organizations are formed in a political environment, often sponsored by left wing parties or unions, which has gendered structures that discriminate against women holding positions of power. “Sex Roles in Social Movements: A Case Study of the Tenant Movement in New York City,” *Signs*, 6,2 (Winter 1980), pp 230-47 passim. Karen Beckwith, in her study of Women Against Pit Closures (WPAC) in Lancashire explained that women gained status within the movement because of their social or familial ties to miners (as wives, mothers and sisters for example. Furthermore, their role in the movement was reiterated by their position maintaining “pit camps,” in which they “provided all that a welcoming home would offer: food, company, costs, cooking fuel and other necessities.” “Lancashire Women Against Pit Closures: Women’s Standing in a Male Movement,” *Signs*, 21, 4 (Spring 1996), pp 1034-1068, especially 1051-2.

⁵⁶¹ Jenny Irons, “The Shaping of Activist Recruitment and Participation: A Study of Women in the Mississippi Civil Rights Movement,” *Gender and Society*, 12, 6 (December 1998), pp 692-709, p 699.

⁵⁶² *Black Feminist Thought*, p 131. Emogene Stroman reminisced that Clark was “like a mother” to her, while Williams called her “a “God-sent woman” and a “jewel” and referred to her ability to nurture other people’s best qualities. Stroman, Levine interview, Williams, Branch interview, *Taylor Branch Papers*, box 132, folder 954. Martin Luther King summarized this sentiment when he referred to her as the “mother of the civil rights movement.” Cited in McFadden, “Septima Clark,” p 85;

classes, where college educated women in their early twenties taught classes of mostly middle-aged men. Emogene Stroman argued that it was important that she made her students feel good about themselves; that they felt like “good people.”⁵⁶³ This reflects a wider movement among African American activists to promote black men’s self-worth and dignity. For example, when Memphis sanitation workers chose the slogan “I am a Man” during the 1968 strike, they were asserting their right to meet American standards of manhood: to make a decent wage, support a family and end the humiliation that the unsanitary aspects of their job brought them in both public and their own homes.⁵⁶⁴

Savannah’s citizenship schools attracted men from a specific section of the black working class. Ida Proctor argued that she “had some rowdy people coming out of the lanes and out of the alleys” in her classes, and she recalled that many of her students were recovering alcoholics or drug addicts. This affected the kinds of classes she conducted because her students found citizenship classes and Crusade offices a comfortable place to talk about their addiction.⁵⁶⁵ Citizenship schoolteachers and voter registration workers also encouraged men to dress respectably and to conduct themselves in a dignified manner. Nathaniel Boles recalled that “Lester would dress you. He goed (sic) in the house. ‘All right, come on.... very good, okay,

⁵⁶³ Levine interview. She remembered that she attempted to build on her students’ prior knowledge so that they did not feel inadequate. For example, one student came to her, complaining that a college educated friend had mocked him for using the term “thirteen states” instead of colonies. She pointed out that because colonies became states after the Revolution, this was a minor error to have made. For Stroman, this was a means of building her students’ confidence and expanding their knowledge simultaneously.

⁵⁶⁴ Steve Estes, *I am a Man: Race, Manhood and the Civil Rights Movement* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2005), pp 132-6. Estes argues that during the strike, men from different classes, generations and political persuasions differed on definitions of manhood, particularly with regard to tactics and nonviolent philosophy. Laurie Green furthermore argues that both black men and women identified with the “I am a Man” slogan because it meant a departure from the “plantation mentality” of subservience and servility. African American women, as well as men, used the slogan to assert their own freedom and equality with white women, as well as calling men to action. “Race, Gender and Labor in 1960’s Memphis: ‘I am a Man’ and the Meaning of Freedom,” *Journal of Urban History*, 2004, 30, pp 465-89, especially p 484.

⁵⁶⁵ Levine interview

you don't need a hat on, everything good. Put your feet.'"⁵⁶⁶ This was largely an extension of the etiquette classes taught throughout the SCLC-led program, but in Savannah, it was tailored to the needs of male students. Participants remembered that one "success" of the local movement was its ability to make different men out of its participants. Proctor argued that Williams and the Crusade were successful in making "leaders" out of young men, who may not have had many opportunities to feel confident in themselves and their abilities.⁵⁶⁷ For example, Reverend Boles of Savannah's First Missionary Church argued that it was a "miracle" that Williams and King converted Lester Hankerson to nonviolence. When King visited Savannah in 1964, Hankerson was asked to drive him to and from the airport.⁵⁶⁸

Citizenship schools also had a part to play in ensuring that when citizenship school students *were* recruited to participate in direct action protests, they would do so non-violently. As Kelley argued of slum dwellers in Birmingham, gang members in Savannah sought to participate in protests and demonstrations on their own terms. Natural responses may have been to break windows, start fights and hurl verbal abuse at police or white antagonists. Yet, citizenship schoolteachers argued that a strength of the Savannah program was its ability to bring people into the organized movement and educate them in SCLC's nonviolent philosophy. For example, Ida Proctor argued that citizenship schools taught these men how to "turn the other cheek." She asked, hypothetically,

Could you see someone spitting on Big Lester, and him not pulling out a knife this long and cut(ing) his neck? So this was a man who benefited from that school because it wasn't all about reading and writing... Can you imagine if we were not taught how to smile when we were abused, can you imagine what kind of turmoil we could have had

⁵⁶⁶ Interview with Feay Shellman, in, "...We ain't what we used to be", p 6.

⁵⁶⁷ Levine interview. Benjamin Van Clarke's mother, Rosalee, was proud of his accomplishments. She explained that watching her son address a crowd made her feel as if she was "just as rich as the next person there" and like she was "ten feet tall," cited in "... We ain't what we used to be," p 17.

⁵⁶⁸ Reverend Boles, interview by Feay Shellman, excerpt from "We ain't what we used to be," exhibition (Telfair Academy, 1983), Taylor Branch Papers, box 120, folder 85.

in Savannah...?Could you imagine the bloodbath they could have had in Savannah if those people were not taught that you don't get it by cutting, cursing, screaming, slapping (and) hitting back?⁵⁶⁹

Teaching middle age women to understand the youth-led direct action campaign and encouraging them to contribute as “activist mothers”; helping drug addicts and alcoholics to wash and dress respectably; and training people in SCLC’s philosophy of “turning the other cheek” were all forms of political education devised to encourage people to participate in Savannah’s local movement. By encouraging students to discuss personal and addiction issues in classes, teachers were also responding to their students’ needs. In these respects, Savannah’s teaching curricula followed principles set down by Robinson on Johns Island in 1957. Yet, these classes demonstrate the potential variety in what was being taught across the South and the influence that interlocking race, gender, class and generational factors played in developing school curricula. They also illustrate the extent to which citizenship schools changed and adapted between the first class in 1957 and the cessation of the Savannah program in the mid 1960s. Further changes would need to be made to citizenship school classes after 1965.

The Voting Rights Act and Changes to the Curriculum

On August 6, 1965, President Lyndon Johnson signed the Voting Rights Act into law. The act suspended the use of literacy tests and other mechanisms designed to prevent African Americans from voting. It provided federal “examiners” to register blacks and supervise elections and made it a crime punishable by a \$5,000 fine and/or prison sentence to intimidate or threaten anyone who attempted to vote.⁵⁷⁰ The Act represented the culmination of three decades of concerted agitation by civil rights organizations to secure the constitutional provisions that

⁵⁶⁹ Levine interview

⁵⁷⁰ Editors introduction to Chandler Davidson and Bernard Grofman, Quiet Revolution in the South: The Impact of the Voting Rights Act, 1965-1990 (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994), p 3.

had been made in the Fifteenth Amendment. In many places, NAACP activists had joined struggles against the poll tax and then opened the previously all-white primaries. Citizenship schools had worked around one of the last obstacles to voting – literacy tests – yet, after, 1965, the federal government no longer recognized these as constitutional.

Ironically, the Act thus removed the original impetus for citizenship schools - to teach literacy. Indeed, CEP staff members were concerned about the implications the Voting Rights Act would have for the future of their program.⁵⁷¹ However, there was still an unmet need for adult literacy classes and, for students like Anderson Mack, voting had not necessarily been the primary reason for attending a citizenship school. As Septima Clark explained in a 1965 workshop, “We want to read and write for many reasons... (but) we don’t need to write to register and vote.”⁵⁷² Yet, the schools were intended to be (and received their funding because they were) part of a political program, an organ for African American voter registration. The passage of the Voting Rights Act meant that “citizenship education” needed to be redefined. Rather than giving individuals the skills to become registered voters, then, the program shifted to convincing people that political participation was worthwhile. It also introduced new topics, such as birth control and black history that would interest students and address their needs.⁵⁷³

This meant that the schools introduced a far broader curriculum after 1965. A proposal outlining plans for the CEP between 1965 and 1970 explained,

Our curriculum has changed from the basic reading and writing program to one including Simple Banking, Consumer Economics, The Importance of the Precinct Meeting, Implementation of the Civil Rights Bill, Negro History and Planned

⁵⁷¹ “A Workshop for Volunteer Teachers in the Citizenship Education Program of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference,” (n.d.), Robinson Papers, box 5, folder 8, p 109.

⁵⁷² Ibid, p 109.

⁵⁷³ For example, when Esau Jenkins applied for funds in 1965 for a rural center that would offer daycare and evening classes for children, he also planned to offer “citizenship classes” for adults. He described these as “lessons in moral and civic responsibility,” including learning to use voting machines. Proposal submitted to Charleston Antipoverty program (Jan 12 1965), Esau Jenkins box, folder 13.

Parenthood. The change is in keeping with new problems as they appear in various areas of the South.⁵⁷⁴

Similarly, a 1966 workshop included sessions on “Planning Your Family”; Negro History and The Negro in Politics; Consumer Education and Banking.⁵⁷⁵ New teaching materials and workshop content were requested topics. Yet, just like the political activity, consumer education and etiquette classes taught in the early classes, new classes continued to promote participation in “mainstream” politics and society and did not use education as a means of social insurgency. Curricula also remained highly gendered, reflecting the roles that African American men and women continued to play in the South.

Consumer Education after 1965

Consumer education, taught in the first Sea Island classes, remained a popular topic and featured heavily in classes and workshops in the post Voting Rights Act program. In 1965, South Carolina school supervisor Ben Mack ran a session on property, taxation and money.⁵⁷⁶ He told participants that they should seek to interest students in the topic by explaining simply that by controlling their property, they would control their own lives. He urged them to take care of their property, to pay taxes and make wills, because African

⁵⁷⁴ “Citizenship Education Proposal for 1965-1970,” (n.d.), Records of the SCLC, 11:250-2.

⁵⁷⁵ “Citizenship Education Workshop, Penn Community Center, Frogmore, South Carolina”, Records of the SCLC, 13: 0571-2.

⁵⁷⁶ Ben Mack was born in Richland County, South Carolina and attended a vocational high school in Columbia and summer school at Benedict and Allen universities. Under the GI bill, he took a business education course in Columbia University, New York and returned to South Carolina to run a job training course for African Americans in rural areas. Septima Clark recruited him to teach a citizenship school and, impressed with his work, arranged for him to work as a salaried citizenship school supervisor. Ben Mack, interview with Blake McNulty (Columbia, South Carolina, December, 1966), Part I, pp 1, 3-4, 8-9, Blake McNulty Papers, box 1, folder 4

Americans were losing their homes at a rate of 33% a year.⁵⁷⁷ One 1966 training workshop reported a successful workshop on consumer education. The topics it covered were

Shopping habits, how to determine bargains, sales, cooperative buying, courtesy in service, advertising and sales gimmicks, values related to possessions and the consumer's use of authority and control in determining how and why his money goes.⁵⁷⁸

A worksheet on "consumer education" gives clearer and more specific indication of how individuals could "spend their money more wisely in order to get the most pleasure and service from it." They were encouraged to ensure that "food, clothing and other household needs" were of a high quality so that they would last longer. It recommended "keep(ing) a clean house which prevents the growth of disease bearing insects and other pests which can cause doctor's bills and spoil good food." It provided nutritional advice: recommending that students avoid eating too many carbohydrates and instead choose fruits, vegetables, meat and milk.⁵⁷⁹ Another lesson plan explained that consumer education should teach students factors that determine a family's income (education and economic conditions, family planning and allowances); sales and advertising techniques; the differences between loan sharks and bank loans and the necessity of thrift and not spending more than a month's income.⁵⁸⁰

Undoubtedly, consumer education was a popular class and this is reflected in its legacy in 1970s Charleston and the Lowcountry. For example, participants in a "Volunteers in Service to America" (VISTA) program taught consumer education classes in their respective

⁵⁷⁷ "Mr Mack speaks to a Sea Island Class," April 26 1965, Highlander Audio Collection, 515a, 57, Side 1, Part1.

⁵⁷⁸ Report of a Citizenship Education Training Workshop (October 24-17 1966), by Dorothy Cotton to Wesley Hotchkiss, Leslie Dunbar, CEP Staff and the Advisory Committee, Robinson Papers, box 5, folder 11.

⁵⁷⁹ "Information sheet on Consumer Education," Esau Jenkins box.

⁵⁸⁰ Consumer education lesson plan, Myles Horton Papers, box 80, folder 32.

communities. Programs to introduce credit unions and consumer cooperatives were born out of a similar concern to encourage people to save and use their money wisely.⁵⁸¹ However, the intention behind it was to show people how to take responsibility for their personal welfare by saving and being economical, and *not* to challenge the economic structures that gave them a meager income in the first place. Some of the recommendations made on the consumer education sheet, moreover, may have been inappropriate for the poorest people in the South. People on low incomes often did not have a choice but to buy low quality goods as they could not afford better ones, even if this would be more economical in the long run.⁵⁸² Similarly, while the starch-based diets common among poor people in the South were not the most nutritious, they *were* cheap and filling.

Consumer education was highly gendered. Although thrift and careful use of loans constituted one of the key tenets of the model of middle-class masculinity to which Esau Jenkins subscribed, it was women who usually kept the housekeeping budget and would have been responsible for keeping homes clean. In one respect, then, the topic stressed women's domestic responsibilities rather than encouraging them to become politically active. Alleen Brewer made this point most explicitly when she explained that, to be a useful citizen, women "must know how to do things in the home."⁵⁸³ This principle was largely consistent with classes organized by middle-class clubwomen, such as the National Association of Colored Women (NACW), and by Mothers' Clubs associated with the AME and Baptist churches in the early twentieth-century. Believing that women and the roles that they

⁵⁸¹ All three are referred to in a VISTA project proposal: "Comprehensive Overview of the South Carolina Commission for Farm Workers (SCCFW)" Robinson Papers, box 8, folder 9.

⁵⁸² A similar argument was made in a 1966 workshop about credit unions. A workshop participant pointed out the African Americans who credit unions would benefit most "are financially limited and cannot see or afford to work for the long range benefits." Robinson, "Report of the 1966 SVEP Project), Robinson Papers, box 5, folder 21.

⁵⁸³ Untitled, transcribed discussion from a 1961 training workshop, Highlander Papers, box 80, folder 5.

performed in the home were a source for social change, it was assumed that teaching women to keep a clean home and to bring up children with “respectable” values would “uplift” African American families.⁵⁸⁴ Mary Church Terrell of the NACW summarized the organization’s work and mission as being a “ray of light” to women with “ignorance of everything that makes life sweet or worth living.” The NACW taught them the “ABC of living by showing them how to make their huts more habitable with the small means at their command.”⁵⁸⁵ The NACW argued that women’s qualities as wives and homemakers qualified them to vote. It relied upon an ambiguous ideology of “relational feminist” or “maternalist” ideology that reinforced women’s roles as wives and mothers.⁵⁸⁶ Yet, it also gave black middle-class women heavy responsibilities by arguing that by proper conduct and individual advancement, they would improve the reputation and quality of life of the entire race; hence the organization’s motto, “lifting as we climb.”⁵⁸⁷

Deborah Gray White has argued that campaigns aimed at encouraging women to “uplift” the race had fallen out of vogue by the mid and late 1960s. Organizations like the NACW threw their weight behind voter registration campaigns and legal anti-segregation movements. By the late 1960s, black women’s clubs also faced opposition from Black Power organizations that argued that it was black men as freedom fighters who would lead an insurgent movement. She argues that organizations like the Black Panther Party stressed

⁵⁸⁴ Eileen Boris, “The Power of Motherhood: Black and White Activist Women Redefine the ‘Political,’” in Seth Koven and Sonya Michel (eds.) Mothers of a New World: Maternalist Politics and the Origins of Welfare States (New York, NY: Routledge, 1993), pp 225-6.

⁵⁸⁵ “Club Work Among Women,” New York Age (1900), p 1, cited in Linda Gordon, “Black and White Visions of Welfare: Women’s Welfare Activism, 1890-1945,” Journal of American History, 78,2 (1991), p 578.

⁵⁸⁶ Karen Offen makes a persuasive case for “relationist feminism” as a unifying ideology in the French women’s rights movement. She posits that feminism has three definitional criteria: recognizing the “validity” of women’s lived experiences, being conscious of injustice towards “women as a group by men as a group” and attempting to alter social institutions and practices to redress these injustices. She argues that not only do maternalist campaigns for issues such mothers’ education and for state benefits for children fit her criteria but that they also be better at unifying women across class and race boundaries. “Defining Feminism: A Comparative Historical Approach,” Signs, 14, 1 (Autumn 1998), pp 119-157, *passim*.

⁵⁸⁷ White, Too Heavy a Load, pp 54-5.

women's responsibility to take subordinate, supportive roles, looking after their men and "having babies for the revolution." Secondly, club women's emphasis on housekeeping skills was at odds with emerging black feminist organizations' moves to overhaul established gender roles.⁵⁸⁸ However, despite changing political opinions, consumer education and housekeeping classes apparently continued to appeal to black women attending citizenship schools. People usually want to live in pleasant, habitable surroundings so it would not be surprising if women who attended either the NACW's classes or the citizenship schools welcomed, indeed asked for, instruction in how to keep a good home. Furthermore, during slavery, maintaining some kind of family home was for many women a form of resistance and, as bell hooks argued, through home life women created emotionally supportive and safe spaces.

African American History

"Black history" was another class introduced to the citizenship school curricula after 1965. Robinson argued that SCLC spontaneously decided to teach it at a time when it was fashionable to do so. She explained, "Nothing was well planned (or) organized, it was something everybody was grabbing at."⁵⁸⁹ Robinson's recollections of early black history classes do sound as if they were impromptu. She put up pictures of famous African Americans like Thurgood Marshall, Constance Bennett, Constance Motley and Harriet Tubman. "Really," she explained, "my reason was to find out how many of those people they knew."⁵⁹⁰ If the inclusion of black history classes in an adult literacy program was new, there had been interest in

⁵⁸⁸ Too Heavy a Load, pp 196-7, 212-56.

⁵⁸⁹ Interview with Thrasher and Wigginton.

⁵⁹⁰ Bernice Robinson, Manuscript of a talk given on Citizenship Training Schools (November 17-18 1979), Bernice Robinson Papers, box 3, folder 8.

African American history in intellectual circles for decades. “Frequently,” August Meier has argued, “history was held to be of value in instilling race pride, solidarity, and self-help” whether it was “directed toward agitation for political and civil rights, toward economic cooperation, toward an all-Negro community or even colonization.” People interested in African American history ranged from “amalgamationists to extreme nationalists and from Booker T Washington to W.E.B. DuBois and Carter Woodson.⁵⁹¹ The study of black history attracted interest at the turn of the century, in the words of a member of the Negro Society for Historical Research, because to learn about accomplishments of African civilizations was designed to “form an effective breakwater against the ever-increasing and cumulative tide of prejudice and discrimination.”⁵⁹² This interest in black history was also evident among grassroots teachers. For example, Septima Clark taught her students about Judge Waties Waring, the district judge who had ruled against all-white primaries in 1944, during Negro History Week.⁵⁹³

The topic received greater attention in citizenship classes after 1965, when SCLC began to broaden the schools’ curricula. Yet, for as long as the discipline had existed, the principles and ethos associated with “black history” were shaped by those who advocated it. In citizenship classes, teachers introduced their students to beacons of racial progress, but focused on those who had demonstrated that they were “good Americans” rather than those who led insurgencies or challenged the status quo. For example, the SCLC workbooks contained a series of short

⁵⁹¹ August Meier, Negro Thought in America: Racial Ideologies in the Age of Booker T. Washington (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1978) , p 260-1. August Meier and Elliott Rudwick have traced the academic African American history. They explain that the emergence, in the 1910s and 1920s, of notable African American history dissertations by DuBois, the establishment of the Negro Society for Historical Research coincided with “a significant crossroads in the teaching and writing of African American history.” Popularizers like Woodson also campaigned for African American history courses in African American colleges and universities. Black History and The Historical Profession, 1915-1980 (Urbana and Chicago, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1986), pp 6-7.

⁵⁹² York Russell, Historical Research (Negro Society for Historical Research, Occasional Papers, No.1, 1912), cited in Meier, Negro Thought, p 262.

⁵⁹³ Letter from Septima Clark to Elizabeth Waring (March 4, 1950), Judge Waties Waring Papers, box 4, folder 52. Carter Woodson had initiated Negro history week in 1926 and it was regularly celebrated in black schools. Meier and Rudwick, Black History, p 10.

accounts of notable historical figures. The accounts were designed for students with limited reading skills. Students were asked to identify particular word endings and to find out what those words meant or to fill in blanks in statements related to the accounts. This enabled students to develop their reading and their vocabulary while they learned some African American history. They were also given some recommended discussion questions which may have been talked about in classes. The content of these accounts, and some of the suggested discussion questions, reveal some interesting themes in the way that black history was taught in citizenship schools. The accounts only cover African Americans, and not Africans, and thus separate SCLC ideology from pan-African nationalists. They portray notable African Americans as patriotic. One account describes Crispus Attucks as a leader of the Boston Massacre and points out that he was the first American man to die for his country. There is also an emphasis on nonviolence. One of the questions asks why he led his people although soldiers had guns. This juxtaposition of a dignified African American freedom fighter without a gun against armed soldiers was relevant for SCLC recruits among the classes who were asked to protest non-violently and face armed policemen and brutality.⁵⁹⁴ In a similar fashion, the account on Harriet Tubman described her pointing a small pistol at fugitive slaves who wanted to turn back. The discussion questions asked students whether this was the right thing to do and this, which was designed to provoke a discussion on nonviolent tactics.

The accounts frequently point to the importance of registering to vote. While the Attucks account asked students to discuss how the “problem of taxes” was like the “Negro problem of voting,” another account discussed Sojourner Truth’s work for voting rights and asked students to discuss whether the ballot was “still powerful.” This was designed to provoke a discussion of the relevance of voting to the problems which students currently faced. The accounts also

⁵⁹⁴ The account does explain however that Atticus led a group armed with “sticks, clubs and snowballs.”

allude to the role of education for social uplift and advancement. For example, an account on Mary McLeod Bethune includes a famous citation which promises that

The doors of progress and advancement will open to the steady persistent pressure of your studied hands, trained minds, stout hearts and your prayers more readily than they opened to me.

The account describes Bethune's commitment to reading and writing because she saw it as the root of racial inequality.⁵⁹⁵ Although Attucks is described as a "freedom fighter," he is also portrayed as a patriotic American. And even though an introductory passage explains that slaves "planned revolts and attempted to fight for their freedom," none of the passages refer to slave uprisings or rebellions.⁵⁹⁶

Welfare

With the increasing availability of social services introduced as part of Lyndon Johnson's Great Society, one of the most relevant topics in citizenship school curricula became health and welfare services. Consistent with the strategy of teaching students concrete ways in which they could improve their lives, welfare education focused on informing students about government services they might benefit from, rather than encouraging debates on welfare reform. For instance, one section of the SCLC booklet details for students the purpose of their social security card and the importance of paying taxes.⁵⁹⁷ A section in the Highlander Folk School booklet described some of the health services in Charleston County, including immunization and pre and ante natal clinics. It left room for students to note the whereabouts and the operational times of

⁵⁹⁵ All accounts from "Southern Christian Leadership Conference: Citizens Workbook," Records of the SCLC, 12:357-391, extracts on 382-6.

⁵⁹⁶ Ibid, p 382.

⁵⁹⁷ "SCLC Citizenship Workbook," Records of the SCLC, 12: 379

local services.⁵⁹⁸ A Savannah teacher arranged for a dentist to visit her class for a talk on fluoridation.⁵⁹⁹ After 1965, sessions on health and welfare were included in training workshops more frequently. For example, a 1966 workshop at Frogmore, South Carolina included a session on family planning and one on “Federally Assisted Programs.”⁶⁰⁰ Another 1966 workshop organized by the Southern Voters Education Project invited Septima Clark’s nephew, an employee at the welfare services department to give a presentation entitled “Who is entitled to Old Age Pensions and Social Security.”⁶⁰¹

Teaching on welfare was highly gendered. Welfare support for female-headed families is one of the most established, and most controversial, elements of American social security provision.⁶⁰² Citizenship school classes are likely to have included unmarried or divorced mothers and, indeed, Robinson had brought up a daughter on her own. The SCLC workbook however uses gender neutral language and couches its discussion in terms of support for stable families. It noted that social security was “family protection” and referred to benefits for “you and your family” and “provisions for you and your survivors when the time comes.”⁶⁰³ To discuss single mothers explicitly would be at odds with the “respectable” values citizenship classes instilled. By discussing ways in which welfare could help to support a family, SCLC may also have been defending African American families from charges that they were inherently unstable.

⁵⁹⁸ “My Reading Booklet,” Records of the SCLC, 12: 487-503, p 12.

⁵⁹⁹ Adline Bradshaw, “Citizenship School Attendance Sheet” (December 1963), SCLC Records, 13:369.

⁶⁰⁰ “Citizenship Education Workshop, Penn Community Center, Frogmore, South Carolina”, Records of the SCLC, 13: 0571-2.

⁶⁰¹ “Report of the 1966 Southwide Voter Education Internship Project for the Period July 12-August 6,” Robinson Papers.

⁶⁰² Linda Gordon, Pitied But Not Entitled: Single Mothers and the History of Welfare, 1890-1935 (New York, NY, Oxford: MacMillan, 1994), especially pp 6-7; Ruth Sidel, Keeping Women and Children Last: America’s War on the Poor (New York, NY: Penguin, 1996), passim.

⁶⁰³ “SCLC Citizenship Workbook,” Records of the SCLC, 12: 379

Classes on welfare also reinforced the emphases on respectability and morality seen in classes on consumer education and on manners. This sentiment can be seen in literacy primers produced by the “New Readers Press,” which Robinson used as a teaching resource. These were simply written with reading exercises that encouraged students to “be informed” about available housing and welfare services, while advising them how to meet their needs affordably.⁶⁰⁴ The primers encouraged students to be responsible, respectable and law-abiding citizens. For example, one booklet on taxation stressed citizens’ responsibilities to pay taxes or “money we give the government to get the things we want” and argued that honest payment of taxes was part of a citizen’s responsibility.⁶⁰⁵ Finally, a 1966 SVEP workshop session on welfare discussed “the many services available through the welfare agency and the limitations imposed on the family receiving any of the services.” It was subsequently

Agreed that since welfare is set up to deal with crisis situations and is not for permanent assistance (except in some unusual cases.)” People should “seek independent relief, where and whenever possible, and in crisis situations only.” “Every effort to restore self independence and dignity should be made as soon as possible.”⁶⁰⁶

Classes on welfare again demonstrated that it was preferable for African Americans to advance through industry and thrift, rather than relying on government. There is no evidence that the

⁶⁰⁴ For instance, the booklets on housing inform readers about benefits available from the HEW department. They also stressed that government resources were finite and encouraged readers to economize on housing. One suggestion was for young couples to “take advantage of reduced need for space in their early years” and told to move to larger quarters gradually. “Be Informed: Meeting Housing Costs, Part One” (New York: New Readers Press, 1968); “Be Informed: Renting a House,” (New York: New Readers Press, 1968, Robinson Papers, box 5, folder 18. Although these were not official SCLC publications, and did not necessarily represent the organization’s ethos and agenda, as they were used by citizenship schoolteachers, they give a good illustration of what was being taught in citizenship school classes.

⁶⁰⁵ “Be Informed: Taxes” (New York: New Readers Press, 1968), Robinson Papers, box 5, folder 18.

⁶⁰⁶ “Report of the 1966 Southwide Voter Education Internship Project for the Period July 12-August 6,” Robinson Papers

schools taught their students that they had a right to welfare or promoted redistribution of wealth, despite the growth of a welfare rights movement by 1967.⁶⁰⁷

Were citizenship schoolteachers and organizers right to promote welfare only as something to be relied upon in a crisis and for ignoring the welfare rights movement? It certainly meant that the schools had a different ideology and ethos from that of Myles Horton and Highlander. A 1966 radio interview illustrates the marked differences between Horton and Jenkins' views on welfare assistance. The interviewer asked both men about their thoughts about the War on Poverty and its achievements. Jenkins pointed to its limitations in Charleston, arguing that African Americans were not represented on Office of Economic Opportunity boards and local authorities had made insufficient provisions. Horton, on the other hand, dismissed the War on Poverty as an "improved social work program." He argued that giving African Americans an "inch," as he believed President Johnson had done would make people see how inadequate provisions were and that they would challenge them. He suggested that African Americans would question why the money spent on war was not spent on social programs instead.⁶⁰⁸

On a broader level, Richard Cloward and Frances Fox Piven have argued that the recruitment of civil rights leaders to administer Great Society programs was one of the contributing factors leading to the decline of the civil rights movement. They argue that "when government is unable to ignore" insurgency, "it will make efforts to conciliate and disarm the protesters." They might do this by offering concessions, undermining "whatever sympathy the protesting group has been able to command from a wider public" or by "making efforts to channel the energies and angers of the protestors into more legitimate and less disruptive forms

⁶⁰⁷ This is even more striking, given that welfare rights movements were emerging in the mid 1960s. See Frances Fox Piven and Richard A. Cloward, *Poor People's Movements: Why They Succeed, How They Fail* (New York, NY: Pantheon Books, 1977), pp 265-361.

⁶⁰⁸ "The New Highlander," interview with Myles Horton and Esau Jenkins, Highlander Audio Recording, Tape 127, Part 1, Side 2.

of political behavior.” They argue that by introducing Great Society programs, Democratic administrations “helped to absorb and divert the civil rights movement.” They held off pressures for legislation “by stressing the need for socio-economic legislation,” while making available jobs in welfare agencies for former civil rights leaders.⁶⁰⁹ This applied to local leaders in the Charleston and Savannah movements and to citizenship schoolteachers particularly. Bernice Robinson took a job with the “Volunteers in Service to America” (VISTA) program; Ethel Grimball managed a “Head Start” program and Mercedes Wright, the NAACP leader in Savannah, worked for the local Office of Economic Opportunity (OEO) board.⁶¹⁰

Such accounts do not recognize the complexities involved in the design of welfare education programs. For citizenship schoolteachers, acquiring a government job was an advantage for individual “uplift” and career development, while still working to ameliorate social problems.⁶¹¹ Additionally, in Charleston and Savannah, specific types of individuals were recruited to take government jobs: female, with higher than average educations and with some work and life experience while still being of working age. Black men like Andrew Young and Hosea Williams may have been more disposed to pursue political careers, while younger participants like Benjamin Clarke and Willie Bolden fit the demographics of late 1960s movements such as the New Left, “Black Power” organizations and anti-Vietnam movements. In this respect, recruitment to government jobs did not necessarily distract social movement leaders from protest to welfare activities as Piven and Cloward argue. Andrew Young explained that civil rights organizations needed to be cautious if they were to engage with emerging

⁶⁰⁹ Poor People’s Movements, citations on pp 30-1, 254-5.

⁶¹⁰ Affiliations: Community Action Program, Robinson Papers, boxes 6, 7; Harris Shrank and Max Gitter (June 16, 1966), Charleston County Child Development Center, Head Start #799, Charleston SC, NARA, RG 381, box 119; Savannah Morning News (February 23 1965).

⁶¹¹ The conclusion will evaluate, in greater detail, the “life course” of local leaders and activists and draw on sociological literature which evaluates whether or not leaders “sell out” by joining organizations unrelated to the civil rights movement.

welfare rights issues. He explained, “Everything we did was considered Communist and I think almost to survive we tended to phrase everything in religious terms and to avoid issues that smacked of economic change.” For Young, “asking for welfare was tactically unsound” so SCLC representatives focused on moral and charitable causes like hunger to which white Christians might relate.⁶¹² SCLC was also concerned with the perceived morality of welfare, particularly concerning gender. As Deborah Grey White argues, “policy makers feared that public welfare would encourage immorality and women’s independence from men.”⁶¹³ SCLC, with its emphasis on respectability and morality was wary of associating with a movement that appeared to condone black women’s sexual freedom.

More pertinently, many citizenship schoolteachers and students may have believed that while welfare provision was imperfect, the Democratic Party had made significant improvements and, hence, had a reasonable amount of confidence in the Johnson administration and in the federal (if not local or state) government. One session of a SVEP workshop discussed the role that the administration played in the Office of Economic Opportunity (OEO), Medicare and Integration. The session participants concluded that

The administration passed bills to give voice to the poor under OEO and the right to attend the school of one’s choice, use public facilities and accommodations (and) equal job opportunities.⁶¹⁴

The difference in attitudes towards government stemmed from the different political and social milieus in which the two programs operated. While participants at citizenship school training workshops may have identified similar social and economic problems as Highlander did, many

⁶¹² Cited in White, Too Heavy a Load, p 233.

⁶¹³ Too Heavy a Load, p 232.

⁶¹⁴ Bernice Robinson “Report of the 1966 Southwide Voter Education Internship Project for the period July 25-August 6,” Robinson Papers, box 5, folder 1.

believed that progress was being made and saw the federal government as a force for change and not as an institution to be overthrown.

In 1969, Clark and Robinson distributed a letter to potential participants at a Dorchester workshop. They told their recruits that SCLC wanted them to “help register all African Americans of voting age,” to learn about Operation Breadbasket and to join in the “ultimate aim” of “putting black men from all counties in the South Carolina legislature.”⁶¹⁵ This invitation illustrates the extent to which the program had changed in the twelve years since Robinson’s first class. Still receptive to the issues facing their constituencies, CEP organizers focused on the social and economic challenges facing their students in the late 1960s. Yet, organizers, teachers and students followed a long tradition in African American educational history, dating at least from the establishment of the Tuskegee Institute, which believed that well-educated individuals would uplift themselves and their race without demanding an overhaul of social, economic and political structures. Had Myles Horton believed that the citizenship schools could do otherwise, he misunderstood the everyday aspirations of poor people living in the South and the kind of “student led” curriculum they would request when they were given the chance to do so.

The Dorchester invitation failed to mention literacy teaching as a priority. The ensuing workshop included programs on “motivation for reading” and “demonstration classes” (both conducted by Robinson), but the emphasis was on a range of political and social orientated classes, such as getting out the vote, discussions on minority groups, legal

⁶¹⁵ Standard letter from Bernice Robinson and Septima Clark to interested parties (September 22, 1969), Robinson Papers, box 5, folder 18.

service and “economics for the twentieth-century.”⁶¹⁶ This illustrates that by 1969, the shift from adult literacy classes to schools that trained people to become politically engaged was now complete. Yet, in 1969, Clark and Robinson were organizing a workshop at a time when the citizenship school was in decline, if not moribund. Despite their best efforts, the post-1965 curricula did not attract external support in the way that the early program had done. The CEP was also subject to the same challenges facing SCLC and other civil rights organizations in the late 1960s, not least the rise of Black Power and a model of black masculinity to rival that which Esau Jenkins embraced. Finally, internal office politics, including gendered conflict, led to poor administration and resentment at both the local and central level. The final chapter will address all of these causes in greater depth in order to explain the decline of the citizenship education program by 1970.

⁶¹⁶ Workshop timetable, n.d. but attached to Ibid. This means the workshop must have taken place in the autumn of 1969. Robinson Papers, box 5, folder 18.

Conflict and Community: The Disintegration of Citizenship

Schools, 1964-1970

Given the weight that historians have placed on citizenship schools for eliminating illiteracy, training local leaders and increasing political efficacy, it is surprising that they have paid very little attention to the question of why the schools died out by the early 1970s. This chapter will explain the disappearance of schools, drawing on themes already discussed in the study. First, if the citizenship schools are to be understood as a stage in a long term movement to secure Fifteenth Amendment voting rights, beginning with reforms to poll taxes and the white primaries and culminating in the passage of the Voting Rights Act, then one might argue that they simply ran their course. There one exceptions to the general lack of historical analysis of the decline of citizenship schools is offered by David Levine, who traced the decline of the citizenship school program to the 1965 Voting Rights Act. He argued that, ironically, the success of the 1965 Voting Rights Act meant that foundations were less likely to see the need for a voter literacy program and it became increasingly difficult to secure grants.⁶¹⁷ However, this only explains their demise partially. This study makes clear that office politics and administrative incompetence, infused with gender and generational divisions shaped the history of the citizenship school program. These elements were also important for explaining their decline. At the administrative level, financial matters and gender conflict undermined SCLC's commitment to citizenship schools. Yet, gender, class and generational factors led to the

⁶¹⁷ Levine, "Citizenship Schools," p 262.

collapse of local programs at different times. There were significant differences between local programs established in Charleston and Savannah and this continued to be the case as the two programs unraveled. Williams' leadership style meant that after his departure to Atlanta in 1964, there was not sufficient will or organizational strength to sustain the CCCV and the citizenship school program in Savannah. Meanwhile, Esau Jenkins continued to work with Highlander to organize the internship program on the Sea Islands until 1967. Eventually, a series of controversies created a fraught working relationship between Highlander and Progressive Club staff. Meanwhile, the local movement fragmented when Bill Saunders, a new younger leader both a competing model of black masculinity and challenged Esau Jenkins' tactics and methods.

Voting Rights Act

The argument that the 1965 Voting Rights Act precipitated the decline of citizenship schools coheres with a “political opportunities theory” line that social movements decline because there is “a significant contraction in the resources available to support insurgency.”⁶¹⁸ It is possible that after passage of the Voting Rights Act, staff at the Marshall Field Foundation and other bodies no longer considered the Citizenship Education Program to be a moral imperative and, hence, chose to fund alternative projects. At the time of its ratification, John Lewis of SNCC described the Voting Rights Act as “a milestone and every bit as momentous and significant as the Emancipation Proclamation or the 1954 Supreme Court decision.”⁶¹⁹ In the short term, the Act had a meteoric impact on African American voter registration. With the bill signed into law on August 6th, President Johnson vowed that it would be implemented expeditiously. By November 1st, federal registrars were working in thirty-two counties in

⁶¹⁸ Political Process, pp 181

⁶¹⁹ Letter from John Lewis to Lyndon B Johnson (August 6, 1965), Box 55, Hu 2-7, Lyndon B Johnson library, cited in Lawson, Black Ballots, p 322.

Alabama, Louisiana, Mississippi and South Carolina. Steven Lawson cites some impressive figures; for example, in the first nine counties chosen to receive federal examiners, the number of black registrants quadrupled from 1,794 to 6,998.⁶²⁰ The implications of this were striking. Both contemporaries and historians have argued that increased voter registration and participation resulted in concrete changes to African Americans' social and political life. Andrew Young called upon the "new breed of Southern Congressmen (and)... Governors" elected after 1965 to deliver "jobs and services and hospitals" and "a New South of economic growth and political development."⁶²¹ Lawson argued that officeholders "respond(ed) to the demands of the newly enfranchised" and that they "paved streets, upgraded sanitary conditions and hired black patrolmen to police ghetto neighborhoods."⁶²²

Most significantly, African Americans ran for office themselves. In Georgia, the overturning of the county unit system in 1962 had already paved the way for the election of both modernizing and "moderate" urban whites and African Americans. In 1962, the attorney Leroy Johnson was elected as senator for Fulton County: the first African American from a Deep South County to take office for half a century.⁶²³ In 1965, Julian Bond of SNCC was elected to the state House of Representatives but he was not allowed to take the oath of allegiance because he refused to retract a statement he had made condemning the Vietnam War. When he was elected to the state Senate in a special election of 1966, he was again denied the opportunity to take office, until this decision was overturned by the Supreme Court. By 1974, there were 20 black Congressmen in the state, including Andrew Young. In the same year, 13 African Americans

⁶²⁰ Black Ballots, pp 329-30.

⁶²¹ Speech given to the Association of Southern Mayors, Holiday Inn, cited in Jack Bass and Walter De Vries, The Transformation of Southern Politics: Social Change and Political Consequences Since 1945 (Athens, GA: Brown Thrasher, 1995), p 148.

⁶²² Black Ballots, p 339.

⁶²³ Bass and DeVries, Transformation of Southern Politics, pp 152-3.

were elected to the South Carolinian State Government.⁶²⁴ Elected officials from Charleston included Jenkins' colleague on the Citizens Committee, Herbert Fielding; Lonnie Hamilton III, the son of a SVEP citizenship school teacher and James Clyburn, who worked with Robinson on the South Carolina Commission for Farm Workers (SCCFW).⁶²⁵ For civically and politically active individuals like Esau Jenkins and William "Bill" Saunders, the Act was an opportunity to organize political associations and get local people elected. Both men, for example, were involved in the formation of the United Citizens Party (UCP) in 1972.⁶²⁶

Yet, the act was far from a "magic bullet" that ensured that African Americans would henceforth participate in electoral politics on equal terms as whites. Southern politicians sometimes found sophisticated and ingenious ways to limit African Americans' political influence. Chandler Davidson and Bernard Grofman argue that in the twenty-five years following the Act, the struggle over voting rights shifted from legal challenges to voter restriction to concerns over minority "vote dilution" through redrawing of electoral districts and the introduction of "at large" elections.⁶²⁷ The Act also did not guarantee that African Americans *would* register or, once registered, turn out to vote at elections. Only a year after the Act's passage, "the flood of blacks pouring out to register had dropped off to a trickle" and by the end of the decade, African Americans remained disproportionately under-represented in the electorate. In 1969, 64.8 percent of African Americans of voting age living in the South had registered; compared to 83.5 percent of white people. Nearly 40% of Southern blacks, then, had

⁶²⁴ Laughlin McDonald, Michael B Binford and Ken Johnson, "Georgia," in Davidson and Grofman (eds.), Quiet Revolution in the South, pp 67-102, pp 86-7.

⁶²⁵ The Chronicle (November 25, 1971); Political Action Committee, pamphlet on electoral candidates, Esau Jenkins box, folder 19.

⁶²⁶ William "Bill" Saunders, interview with author (March 21, 2008, North Charleston).

⁶²⁷ See "Editors' Introduction" to Quiet Revolution in the South, pp 5-17.

yet to register.⁶²⁸ It is possible that the surge of African Americans going to register in the fall of 1965 had already been convinced of the value of political participation through projects like citizenship schools, but for one reason or another had not been able to register prior to the Act's passage. People who did not register immediately might not have seen the value of registering at all.

Steven Lawson argues that African Americans' failure to register and vote had always been due to more than "legal barriers and intimidation." After 1965, any failure to register and vote was due to the "unfavorable socioeconomic conditions in which southern blacks found themselves trapped." He suggests that African American electoral participation would improve had they "acquired higher incomes and better education."⁶²⁹ Various contemporaries agreed that education was the answer to boosting electoral participation. The Civil Rights Commission, noting in November 1965 that the rate of African American voter registration had already begun to decline, argued that "Negroes, who for generations have played no part in the political process of their communities... cannot be expected suddenly to embrace all the responsibilities of citizenship." Two years later, an article in the Harvard Civil Rights – Civil Liberties Review concluded that "more political education and experience are necessary before the southern black man will wield his full share of political power."⁶³⁰ In other words, while the Voting Rights Act removed obstacles to African American voting, extra work was needed to educate people to see the value of registering and voting; that is, precisely the work that Citizenship Schools were doing.

⁶²⁸ Steven Lawson, In Pursuit of Power: Southern Blacks and Electoral Participation, 1965-1982 (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1985), p 36; Lawson, Black Ballots, pp 329-30.

⁶²⁹ Lawson, In Pursuit of Power, p 36.

⁶³⁰ US Commission on Civil Rights, The Voting Rights Act... the first months (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1965) p 35; L. Thorne McCarty and Russell B. Stevenson, "The Voting Rights Act of 1965: An Evaluation," Harvard Civil Rights – Civil Liberties Review III (Spring 1968), p 394, both cited in Lawson, Black Ballots, pp 330-1.

Several civil rights and philanthropic organizations attempted to rise to the challenge of educating and registering Southern blacks. SNCC and CORE, both of which had enlisted voter registration workers in the early 1960s, had been fragmented by debates over Black Power ideology, as discussed below. The NAACP, according to Lawson, “led the field” to recruit new voters, and the Delta Ministry (founded by the National Council of Churches), the Urban League and local associations also conducted registration drives. SCLC remained interested in voter registration, but its primary drive was the 1965 Summer Community Organization and Political Education (SCOPE) program that was, as described below, a fiasco by most accounts. Meanwhile, the Voter Education Project provided much needed financial support; providing, for example, support for thirty NAACP drives between January and October 1967. Costing \$45,000 dollars, these drives were responsible for the enrollment of over 31,000 black voters.⁶³¹ The VEP also provided money for local organizations to hold what they called “citizenship schools.”⁶³² The grant proposals were not specific, but given the removal of literacy requirements, these were very likely to be political education classes. This indicates that the 1965 Act, rather than making citizenship schools obsolete, created a need for political education classes like the “second step” schools Jenkins organized on the Sea Islands and the political topics covered by SCLC’s CEP classes.

The Citizenship Schools met needs other than increasing African American voter registration, needs that were quite unrelated to the provisions in the 1965 Act. Many men and women attended citizenship schools because they hoped to learn rudimentary literacy skills that would enable them to make concrete improvements to their lives, such as finding better-paid

⁶³¹ Lawson, *In Pursuit of Power*, pp 37-8.

⁶³² For example, letter from Reverend Charles James Whitacker to Vernon Jordan (n.d., requesting a grant for a registration program); proposal submitted by Sumter Civic League to Vernon Jordan (n.d., concerning a program to run in April-May and June-August, 1966), *SRC Papers*, 186: 556, 581-5.

work and being able to write letters to their children. In this respect, then, it was ironic that the passage of a largely beneficial piece of legislation undermined a program that had had far-reaching benefits. In a 1980 interview, Bernice Robinson lamented

in spite of all the work that has been done on the islands, and the Charleston area, you know, Voter Registration and citizenship schools and all the workshops... that's over twenty five years of work there, that even with all of that it's just barely scratched the surface.⁶³³

She explained that although “some progress” had been made, it was “minute when you look at the overall picture.”⁶³⁴ Moreover, after 1965, SCLC introduced a range of topics beyond either literacy or political education to the curriculum, such as family planning and black history. Staff members like Septima Clark certainly saw value in continuing a social education and leadership development program. Indeed, in 1967, SCLC staff applied to the Field Foundation for a grant application to extend the CEP to five northern cities.⁶³⁵ This move confirmed that the CEP was concerned with broader educational and social issues than merely voter education. Had the proposal been successful then SCLC staff may have been used it to develop grassroots leaders to support new social justice programs, such as Operation Breadbasket.⁶³⁶

There were many good reasons, and interests at stake, in continuing the Citizenship Education Program after 1965. Why, in that case, could it not attract the continued support of philanthropists and foundations? Perhaps external supporters lost the sympathy they had once had for civil rights organizations. Doug McAdam has measured the levels of external funding

⁶³³ Interview with Sue Thrasher and Elliot Wigginson (November 9 1980, Charleston, South Carolina), Robinson Papers, box 1, folder 3.

⁶³⁴ Ibid.

⁶³⁵ Letter from Andrew Young to Christopher Edley (May 17, 1967); letters from Christopher Edley to Andrew Young (May 4, 1967; June 1 1967), SCLC Papers, Part 2, 12: 292-5.

⁶³⁶ “Operation Breadbasket” was a project aimed at finding “better employment opportunities for black workers at companies whose products were purchased by black consumers.” SCLC would organize boycotts of businesses that would not hire black workers. The project began in Atlanta in 1962 and SCLC staff resolved to expand it nationally after 1964, including the North. For example, Jesse Jackson spearheaded a Breadbasket program in Chicago in 1966. Garrow, Bearing the Cross, p 223, 310-1, 462

given to civil rights organizations between 1961 and 1970. He found that both individual and foundational funding for SCLC, SNCC and CORE peaked in the middle of the decade. He explained that after 1966, the Democratic Party electoral coalition began to fragment because of racial unrest in northern cities, and resulting in the devaluation of the northern vote. Richard Nixon's election to the presidency in 1968 "did more than simply mirror the declining political fortunes of blacks," he argued, "it contributed to them as well," as African Americans felt a reduced sense of political efficacy.⁶³⁷ Whereas in the early 1960s, then, Democratic Party officials made funds available for organizations which intended to bolster African American voting strength, after 1965, this was no longer a priority.

On the other hand, McAdam has demonstrated that foundations and private donors did not simply cease funding civil rights organizations; rather, they chose to distribute the money in different ways. Over the latter five years of the 1960s, the NAACP gradually replaced SCLC as the principal recipient of external funding.⁶³⁸ There was no mystery as to why this should be the case. Martin Luther King and SCLC staff alienated their northern white liberal supporters after King's focus shifted from legal rights to social and economic justice and as he became a vocal opponent to America's engagement in Vietnam. In this climate, the NAACP was a "safe," nonthreatening outlet for northern contributions. It is therefore possible that foundations became unsympathetic not to social, political and literacy education per se but to SCLC and the Citizenship Education Program. As the previous chapter demonstrated, CEP staff went to considerable lengths to distance the program from any charges that it had a pro-communist or insurgent agenda. It may have been the case that the education program was hurt by SCLC's

⁶³⁷ Political Process, 191-205.

⁶³⁸ Doug McAdam, "The Decline of the Civil Rights Movement" in Jo Freeman and Victoria Johnson, Waves of Protest: Social Movements Since the Sixties (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 1999), pp 325-38, especially pp 338-9.

wider public image. However, the Field Foundation's decision to limit funds for the existing program, and its rejection of the northern extension, had more direct causes, dating from at least 1963.

“Questionable Procedures:” The Field Foundation, American Missionary Association and SCLC

As Chapter Two explained, because of the Field Foundation's legal technicalities, the grant was administered through a third party, the American Missionary Association. Unfortunately, because of the incomplete nature of SCLC's archived records, the full details of the relationships between the organizations are not available, particularly for the final years of the program. This is frustrating, as fuller record keeping would give an insight into the precise circumstances surrounding the termination of the CEP. However, surviving records do indicate that SCLC's relationships with both of these organizations became strained very early on in the program's history. This gives some clues as to the problems besetting the administration of the program and possible reasons why it was less appealing to funding bodies during the late 1960s.

From 1963, the Field Foundation and American Missionary Association became concerned that SCLC staff were using CEP funds inappropriately. In 1963, Wesley Hotchkiss twice asked Young to elaborate on documented “miscellaneous” expenditures in his accounting, while AMA secretary Helen Wernert reported that monthly expenditure reports, bank accounts and cancelled checks were overdue.⁶³⁹ In August, Hotchkiss pulled Young up over a cancelled check made to “cash,” reminding him that this was bad practice, and for using CEP funds to pay for bonds for Mississippi teachers. Although he understood the pressure that Young was

⁶³⁹ Letter from Wesley Hotchkiss to Andrew Young (August 6 and 12 1963), letter from Helen Wernert to Edwina Smith (August 1, 1963 and August 6, 1965) SCLC Records, 2:633, 635-6, 740, 822.

working under, he reminded him that they could not “afford to jeopardize our relationship with the Field Foundation by these questionable procedures.”⁶⁴⁰ Despite these concerns, Hotchkiss agreed to pay \$250 to support Hosea Williams’ family during his 1963 jail term, indicating that he appreciated the problems SCLC had keeping their educational and direct action work separate, especially when citizenship schools took place during intense political protest, as in 1963 Savannah.⁶⁴¹

In 1964, however, Young managed to insult his colleagues at the AMA by appearing to reject their educational principles and ethos. Young was known for being more rational than many of his SCLC colleagues, so this was an unusual case where he offended and insulted colleagues.⁶⁴² In June, he wrote to the board of directors to inform them that he was considering offers to work on the COFO program in the Mississippi Delta and to take up employment as King’s executive assistant. While he professed not to have decided upon his future course of action, his letter betrayed his growing sympathy to SCLC rather than the AMA. He argued that his “problem” with the latter organization had been their focus on developing a “talented tenth” of leaders, and that he felt that the confidence African Americans had in King meant that SCLC was the best conduit for social revolution.⁶⁴³ In his reply, Hotchkiss reported that the board had taken umbrage at an article that Young had published in Social Action that failed to acknowledge

⁶⁴⁰ Letter from Wesley Hotchkiss to Andrew Young (August 14, 1963), SCLC Records, 2: 337.

⁶⁴¹ Letter from Andrew Young to Wesley Hotchkiss (August 27, 1963) and from Wesley Hotchkiss to Andrew Young (September 13, 1963), SCLC Records, 2: 338-9, 342.

⁶⁴² Historians and contemporaries commented on Young’s self-styled role as a negotiator and calm, “cool” alternative to tempestuous SCLC colleagues. Septima Clark compared Wyatt Walker who “always tried to iron things out, ... wasn’t nonviolent” and who “cursed sometimes” to Young who “used to say continuously, ‘Let God do it. God’ll answer this question for you.’” This meant, she said wryly, that he “wasn’t going to touch” whatever issue or problem was being debated. While she felt that Young was an effective leader, she argued that she and Cotton had found him frustrating to work with. Interview with Septima Clark by Eugene Walker (September 30, 1976), available online at <http://docsouth.unc.edu/sohp/G-0017/menu.html> (Accessed on October 25th 2008).

(hereafter Walker interview), p 26. Ling, who has described Young as “the in-house conservative, the moderate who sought to restrain the firebrands,” commented on how anomalous his letter to Hotchkiss was, and credited it to Young’s recent “baptism of fire” in St Augustine. “Manhood in SCLC,” p 125.

⁶⁴³ Letter from Andrew Young to Truman Douglas and Wesley Hotchkiss (June 10, 1964), SCLC Records, 2:668-9.

the Association's contribution to the citizenship school program. He defended the organization's commitment to widespread basic education and literacy as well as educating elites. He argued that he had

Always felt that you (Young) considered your relationship to this board as something of a handicap to you in your work and for this reason you preferred to be identified with the Southern Christian Leadership Conference or other organizations.

Hotchkiss then asserted that the AMA refused to be involved "as only a fiscal and administrative convenience, something to which it is necessary for field staff to apologize." While he had previously taken a "passive role" and given Young a "free hand," he demanded a more "direct" role, in which the AMA would "use its own stationery, have our own basic accounts, have our own advisory committee and enjoy our own clerical staff."⁶⁴⁴

Young apologized for the offence, reiterated his commitment to the AMA and assured Hotchkiss that citizenship schools were an entirely cooperative project.⁶⁴⁵ By August, Hotchkiss and Young had healed their rift. Hotchkiss attended a Dorchester training session, in which the two men negotiated ways in which the program would be run cooperatively. While they agreed to credit the AMA on citizenship school materials, "in order to let people know of (their) involvement," Young asserted that SCLC was a "crucially significant organization." As they clarified administrative lines, they should aim to strengthen SCLC's position.⁶⁴⁶ He urged Young to give himself a pay rise and stated that he "sincerely hoped" that he would choose to stay with the Citizenship Education Program.⁶⁴⁷ Nevertheless, these exchanges highlight some of the internal weaknesses within the CEP prior to 1965. Because of the administrative

⁶⁴⁴ Letter from Wesley Hotchkiss to Andrew Young (June 27, 1964), SCLC Records, 2:562-4.

⁶⁴⁵ Letter from Andrew Young to Wesley Hotchkiss (July 20, 1964), SCLC Records, 2:602-3.

⁶⁴⁶ Memo from Wesley Hotchkiss to Truman Douglas (August 14, 1964), SCLC Records, 2:678-9.

⁶⁴⁷ Letter from Wesley Hotchkiss to Andrew Young (August 14, 1964), SCLC Records, 2: 676.

arrangements surrounding the Field Foundation grant, SCLC staff ran the risk of offending or alienating cooperative organizations by its poor accounting or public pronouncements.

The debate over the relative merits of direct action worked in a vicious cycle that gradually undermined the program. Levine argued that as the Field Foundation cut back funding, it called on SCLC to find matching funds. SCLC's contributions had always been small, and the 1964 cutbacks indicate that the organization allowed citizenship schools to contract rather than diverting resources to the program.⁶⁴⁸ This is perhaps an unfair assessment. Civil rights organizations were perennially short of funds and had competing demands on their finances, including bail money, transport, salaries and publicity materials. Given that the CEP had received a generous grant, board members may not have been sympathetic to including citizenship schools in its already tight budget. Nevertheless, if Clark's observations and Young's communications with Hotchkiss and the AMA are indicative, it does seem fair to argue that citizenship education was not a priority for SCLC and, as Levine suggested, it would be one of the first programs to be cut during the challenging times of the late 1960s and early 1970s. Moreover, Young's departure from the CEP was a firm statement that his preference was for direct action over educational work. In his place, SCLC appointed Robert Green, a professor from Michigan State University. With Clark and Green at its helm, the CEP was cemented as a separate, educational program, contributing to the belief that it offered little to SCLC's political and direct action work.⁶⁴⁹

As early as 1964, there is evidence that, in the absence of external support, SCLC chose to cut back the program rather than supplement its budget. In May 1964, Andrew Young wrote to Maxwell Hahn of the Field Foundation. He argued that SCLC found itself "in the awkward

⁶⁴⁸ "Citizenship Schools," pp 260-2.

⁶⁴⁹ Garrow, Bearing the Cross, p 446.

position of having done more than the amount of work which the terms of our grant stated, two months ahead of time.” However pleased he was with this progress, it also meant that they had “spent all of the money allocated for the program in (the) grant.”⁶⁵⁰ Hahn, after congratulating Young for the progress made, suggested “dip(ping) into the money which you received in April,” omitting several schools or raising money from other sources.⁶⁵¹ SCLC staff eventually decided to take the second option and to limit expenditures on the program. In September, Young suggested several cost-cutting measures to help keep the CEP within its budget. He proposed cutting the number of workshop participants to between thirty and forty; holding more regional workshops to reduce travel costs and, crucially, cutting down on the number of operational schools by keeping just 100 open for the following three months.⁶⁵²

SCLC’s administrative problems and staff members’ deprioritization of voter education relative to direct action did not simply pose problems for external funding bodies; it also created problems among staff members. Again from 1963, Septima Clark complained about Andrew Young and other male colleagues’ handling of paperwork and finances and their patronizing attitudes towards both the program and to her as its female director. Clark’s complaints reiterate the themes covered throughout this study dissertation: a neglect of local needs and conditions and strained gender relations within the program.

Gender and Office Politics

The primary arena in which the CEP’s office politics has received scholarly attention is within studies of women in the civil rights movement. For such scholars, the debates over the

⁶⁵⁰ Letter from Andrew Young to Maxwell Hahn (May 5, 1964), SCLC Records, 2: 524.
⁶⁵¹ Letter from Maxwell Hahn to Andrew Young (May 11, 1964), SCLC Records, 2:523.
⁶⁵² Minutes of the CEP Staff Meeting (September 16, 1964), SCLC Records, 3: 54-5.

value of the CEP to SCLC amounted to more than questions over administration and budgeting, it was a debate over the value of women's work within the organization.⁶⁵³ In one of her oral histories, Clark describes the program's administrative team in gendered terms. She explained that there were "fifteen women working to coordinate everything out of Atlanta," and that they were working "under Andy's regime."⁶⁵⁴ Clark complained bitterly at times over Young's management of the program and his dismissive treatment of her and other female staff. In July 1964, following the resignation of executive director Wyatt Walker, Young was in the process of reorganizing SCLC's staff and its budget. He wrote to Clark to discuss how these questions related to the CEP. Although recommending that Clark, Cotton and Annell Ponder should receive pay rises and that Bernice Robinson be included in the budget, he reminded her that SCLC field staff like James Bevel, C.T. Vivien and Harry Boyte were paid far less than those working for the CEP and financed by the Field Foundation. At this point, he betrayed his sympathies to patriarchal family structures that echoed Jenkins' masculine ideals. Low salaries for male field staff, he argued, was "quite a strain on these large families" and SCLC staff needed "to find a way to deal with it."⁶⁵⁵ In her reply, Clark reminded him that "women have great responsibilities also," and she proceeded to outline the unusual arrangements that the women had made in order to carry out their jobs and take part in the civil rights struggle. She was both "paying for maintenance in Atlanta (and) maintaining a home in Charleston with utilities, taxes and repairs," while Cotton was paying rent for a home in Atlanta as well as keeping her house in Virginia. She reminded Young that the women, while not heads of

⁶⁵³ For example, Olson, *Freedom's Daughters*, p 233; Robnett, *How Long, How Long*, pp 94-5; Levine, "Citizenship Schools," pp 219-224; Charron, "Teaching Citizenship," pp 547-551; Greene, "Working Towards Literacy," pp 123; Gyant and Attwater, "Septima Clark's Rhetorical and Ethnic Legacy," pp 587-90.

⁶⁵⁴ Septima Clark, unidentified interview, *Clark Collection*, box 1, folder 12.

⁶⁵⁵ Letter from Andrew Young to Septima Clark (July 9, 1964), *SCLC Records*, 12:723-4.

households, had duties as “other mothers,” such as her obligations to her widowed son’s children.⁶⁵⁶

On the one hand, Young’s concern for his male colleagues was only natural in the early 1960s for a man who was supporting a young family himself. He certainly felt that Clark’s charges were unjust. In a reply, he claimed that he had attempted “to give every consideration to women and salaries” and that he had given each of the female employees a pay rise when he had not taken one himself.⁶⁵⁷ On the other, Young had worked with these women through the CEP for three years and should have been aware of their domestic situations. In oral histories, he has betrayed his ingrained sexism and attitude towards women. For example, he describes an occasion where Dorothy Cotton had insisted on accompanying him to Mississippi to help Annell Ponder out of jail. Not only did his account suggest that she was emotional and irrational, but he recalled that she was wearing a “tight red dress and high heels.”⁶⁵⁸ These details indicate that he was not merely observing highly charged behavior in a colleague, but noting details about her appearance that were specific to her gender. Clark’s complaints and accusations provide symptoms of her growing consciousness of sexism within SCLC and her wider resentment that her work went underappreciated and unnoticed by male colleagues. She tended to vent long-held frustrations in lengthy letters to her colleagues at both Highlander and SCLC. Her letter to Young recounted several grievances, such as the non-payment of teachers’ expenses throughout the year, which suggests that her resentments had accumulated over time.

In the same letter, Clark recounted a list of her grievances with the administration of the citizenship education program. She argued that SCLC staff mistakenly prioritized direct action over citizenship education and literacy training, suggesting that provisions needed to be made to

⁶⁵⁶ Letter from Septima Clark to Andrew Young (July 14, 1964), SCLC Records, 12:725-8.

⁶⁵⁷ Letter from Andrew Young to Septima Clark (July 30, 1964), SCLC Records, 13: 729-32.

⁶⁵⁸ Interview with Taylor Branch (October 26, 1991), Branch Papers, box 134, folder 963.

supervise Hosea Williams' classes while he was on the "firing line."⁶⁵⁹ In a letter to Martin Luther King the previous December, Clark had accused her colleagues of neglecting citizenship schools. In every training session held in 1962-3, she charged, "two or more of the staff members have had some reason to be absent" and when they did attend, they were tired. "It seems," she charged, that "Citizenship Education is all mine, except when it comes time to pick up the checks." She suggested that her colleagues neglected citizenship education because "Direct Action is so glamorous and packed with emotion that most young people prefer demonstrations over genuine education."⁶⁶⁰

Such charges offer further evidence that women in SCLC felt that their work was not appreciated, particularly as teaching was regarded as traditionally "female" work, regardless of the fact that many women took part in direct action protest as well. Clark also felt that class conflict undergirded the tensions between direct action and grassroots education. She criticized not only SCLC colleagues like Woods and Young as well as Horton either for ingrained middle-class attitudes or for their inability to communicate with the poor people with whom they worked. Horton and Woods, she argued,

Couldn't sit and listen to the people from Thomasville, Georgia, tell about the happenings there. It was hard for him to hear them say, "Now this happened the night that that cow had its calf on such-and-such a moon." And he wanted them to come right to the point, and they wouldn't do it.⁶⁶¹

⁶⁵⁹ Letter from Septima Clark to Andrew Young (July 14, 1964), *SCLC Records*, 12:725-8.

⁶⁶⁰ Memo from Septima Clark to Martin Luther King re: Citizenship Education Program, *SCLC Records*, 12:930-3. The memo is undated, but refers to Kennedy's assassination and a recent meeting on December 9th, so must have been written in December 1963. Her letters, expressing a commitment to lengthy processes of grassroots education, echo her disputes with Myles Horton in the 1950s over how best to prepare Johns Islanders for the literacy test. While Horton had felt that a staff member could prepare local people for a registration test, Clark believed that a thorough adult literacy program would be more valuable. "Myles and I just had to shout it out," she argued. "Myles would ask me about methods and I would say, 'Don't ask me about methods. Let me tell you how I'm going to do this thing.'" *Ready From Within*, pp 51-2.

⁶⁶¹ Walker interview, p 14.

She argued that while she had been a “poverty stricken, low-income person” with experience in poor communities, Young was a “highly middle-class man” who needed her support and guidance in order to understand the attitudes of people who came to Dorchester training workshops.⁶⁶² She recalled that on one occasion she had criticized Young for buying breakfast for himself when students had gone without food. As an Avery graduate and a teacher, Clark had had educational and economic advantages that the majority of citizenship schoolteachers and students did not. However, she had been unemployed or forced to work at menial jobs in order to support herself and her son at various points in her life, so she justly identified with the mass of poor African Americans. Her experience working on Johns Island probably led her to believe that a long-term educational program had more to offer people than potential gains from direct action protests. Her class sympathies and/or her experience of being unemployed, meant that she emphasized SCLC’s responsibility to reimbursing volunteer teachers.

Still, gender cannot fully explain the divisions between Clark and the people she charged with prioritizing direct action over education. Her complaints also betray her generational distance from her colleagues in SCLC.⁶⁶³ In oral histories, she suggested that young people’s preferences for direct action were due to youthful exuberance and lack of experience. She described SNCC activists as “young people who didn’t get the facts and just went right off the top of their hats,” and she reflected with some satisfaction about how Stokely Carmichael’s opinions on violence were moderated over time. She explained,

When I went into Washington—I went to a workshop there—the kids at Highlander didn't want Stokely on that thing. That was just two years ago. And Stokely got up and said, ‘I see Mrs. Clark in the audience, and I want to tell you that she tried hard to get me to turn around. I have changed now.’ He said, “When I went over to England and I met Nkrumah, he gave me a book to read, ‘because you say you want the facts.’ And then after I read that book he gave me another one, and then another one. He gave me three books, and he said,

⁶⁶² Walker interview, pp 28-30.

⁶⁶³ Ling, “Manhood at SCLC,” p 123.

‘Now do you still want to fight, now that you have learned all of this’ And he said that he had changed his mind.⁶⁶⁴

When Septima Clark accused SCLC of unfairly prioritizing direct action, she betrayed her own biases, developed through years of working as a schoolteacher and on the NAACP’s advocacy campaigns. Generational divisions beset the CEP in other respects. In an account of a Dorchester workshop, Aimee Isgrig Horton observed that during the evenings, participants were “segregated... by age and by privileged status,” as young people socialized around a rock and roll jukebox instead of participating in group social sessions.⁶⁶⁵ In this case, generational divisions may have impeded group cohesiveness. On the other hand, when she recounted workshops’ content, she implied that the biggest problem was varying levels of educational attainment rather than divisions over direct action conflict. Indeed, Andrew Young even argued that one of the CEP’s strengths was uniting black power activists with elderly people from poor communities.⁶⁶⁶

Clark felt that her primary responsibilities as Director of Education were working with grassroots people and supporting them in everything they did, rather than ensuring gender equality within CEP offices or to managing the program’s budget. Therefore, her biggest complaint was the effects that both poor administration and cuts to the CEP budget had on local affiliates and teachers. As she had feared, citizenship schoolteachers became increasingly frustrated when poor project administration meant that they were not reimbursed properly. When they were asked about their experience of the program on project questionnaires, several complained about SCLC’s poor management of their expenses. One Mississippi teacher said

⁶⁶⁴ Septima Clark, Hall interview, p 95.

⁶⁶⁵ Aimee Isgrig Horton, “A Workshop for Volunteer Teachers in the Citizenship Education Program of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference,” (n.d.), Robinson Papers, box 5, folder 8.

⁶⁶⁶ An Easy Burden, p 155.

that he needed “money, paper and pencils” and when SCLC was unable to provide these, he did so himself, while another complained that she had never received teaching materials. An evidently frustrated teacher from Alabama wrote that she did not know why she had not received her checks as she had “really done (her) bit.”⁶⁶⁷ South Carolina and Savannah teachers and supervisors were similarly frustrated. As early as 1962, Ben Mack considered resigning from SCLC because he was annoyed at not having been paid expenses and VEP staff considered recruiting him instead.⁶⁶⁸ One South Carolina teacher complained that SCLC had failed to send her three promised checks.⁶⁶⁹ Lou Anna Riggs argued that she was “very disappointed” not to have heard from either Williams or Clark after sending her reports to them, and in September 1962, she reported that she had not yet received her expenses from March.⁶⁷⁰ Other teachers were disappointed when SCLC asked them to suspend their classes. One completed a questionnaire in which she explained that SCLC had asked her to stop teaching in January 1964; however, she would be “glad to work again” at SCLC’s request.⁶⁷¹ By asking its trained teachers not to work, SCLC was failing to tap into a large and willing group of volunteers and may have alienated would-be supporters from the organization. Sometimes local teachers were so committed that they continued to hold classes despite not being reimbursed.⁶⁷² However, this depended on either a very high level of individual commitment, possibly in this case because of enthusiasm for the local movement. These questionnaires and correspondence indicate that, despite official reports of the citizenship schools’ proliferation across the South, trained teachers

⁶⁶⁷ Completed questionnaires by Fred Harrison, Dora Anna Carter and Nancy Brown (all stamped July 1965), SCLC Records, 13: 247, 284, 12: 1003.

⁶⁶⁸ “Field Report on South Carolina, October 22, 23 and 24, 1962,” SRC Papers, 180: 512.

⁶⁶⁹ Completed questionnaires by Esther H. Chaplin, SCLC Records, 13: 417.

⁶⁷⁰ Letters from Lou Anna Riggs to Dorothy Cotton (May 16 and September 27, 1962), SCLC Records, 16: 235, 237.

⁶⁷¹ Completed questionnaire by Rickie Dean, SCLC Records, 13:332.

⁶⁷² For example, Ida Mack explained that she had run her Savannah class in April and May of 1963, despite never receiving nor requesting expenses. Letter from Ida Mack to Andrew Young (October 22, 1964), SCLC Records, 16:540-1.

were becoming alienated by SCLC's poor management of their expenses and because they were being told *not* to do the work that they had volunteered to do as early as 1962.

Citizenship schoolteachers were reimbursed thirty dollars for teaching classes, a nominal sum that covered materials, travel and renting spaces for classrooms. Trained teachers were told to submit expense vouchers in order to claim their money. In the summer of 1964, however, she complained that "there were vouchers as far back as January waiting to be paid." The previous year, she had asked her colleagues to pay vouchers that students had submitted at a December refresher workshop. This was not done, and Clark felt that SCLC had let its citizenship schoolteachers down by failing to pay them. She believed that this was particularly irresponsible because "the people for whom we get the money are those in the most benighted areas and to whom \$30 is a great blessing." She felt that these people should be "first on the list to be paid" and that if SCLC failed to do so then "the great battle for rights is in vain."⁶⁷³ She had written a similar letter to Martin Luther King in December 1963, which she accused Young and other CEP staff of holding up vouchers for "three months for sheer frivolous negligence." At this relatively early stage in the citizenship schools' history, Clark believed that "many states are losing their citizenship schools because there is no one to do follow-up work."⁶⁷⁴

Robnett argued that the civil rights movement disintegrated because the marginalization of black women meant that they no longer continued their work as "bridge leaders," bringing local people into civil rights organizations and linking people's "prefigurative" understanding of social problems to the lofty political goals being espoused by civil rights organizations.⁶⁷⁵

While this interpretation cannot encapsulate the range of forces at work to undermine SCLC and

⁶⁷³ Letter from Septima Clark to Andrew Young (July 12, 1964), SCLC Records, 12:725-8.

⁶⁷⁴ Memo from Septima Clark to Martin Luther King re: Citizenship Education Program, SCLC Records, 12:930-3.

⁶⁷⁵ Robnett, How Long, How Long, pp 183, 201.

the CEP, it does cohere with Septima Clark's concerns about the effects of budget cuts and mismanagement at the local level. However, forces were also at work from below that fragmented and destroyed individual citizenship school programs. Because conditions varied so extensively between programs, the reasons for and timing of their failure varied between communities. The chapter will now draw on its case studies in Savannah and South Carolina to illustrate two different sets of circumstances in which the citizenship school programs faltered.

Hosea Williams, Leadership and the future of the Savannah program

This study has highlighted the ways in which Savannah's citizenship school program was idiosyncratic, compared with both the South Carolina schools and traditional narratives of the citizenship schools. These idiosyncrasies explain some of the reasons why the local program faltered, and why it did so several years before the CEP terminated elsewhere. First, the passage of the Voting Rights Act had a more direct influence on the continuation of citizenship schools in Savannah than it did elsewhere. Both Emogene Stroman and Ida Proctor cited this as the main reason for the schools' termination. Whereas Clark had seen the value in a broad, long-term literacy program, Williams had greater sympathy for Horton's approach of training people directly for literacy tests. Because the Savannah program focused so explicitly on training students to register, there was less motivation to continue operating schools after the passage of the Voting Rights Act.⁶⁷⁶ Proctor argues that the schools died out because teachers and organizers believed that the educational needs they had once met were being covered elsewhere. She explained that an adult school was opened at Richard Arnold High School, while Beech High School organized a literacy class for men returning from the army. Prior to the

⁶⁷⁶ Emogene Stroman credited this as the primary reason why schools were discontinued, although as she no longer taught classes at this time, she may have been unaware of other reasons for the program's deterioration. Interview with author (November 21, 2008, Savannah, Georgia).

establishment of the citizenship schools, she argued, local churches had run literacy classes. By the late 1960s, she argues, these classes together replaced SCLC's citizenship schools.⁶⁷⁷

Although organizers may have seen these programs as appropriate substitutes for citizenship schools, Horton and Clark had prided themselves on creating a literacy program that was distinct from the public schools that had existed prior to citizenship schools. Unlike other literacy programs, they treated students with dignity and made classes relevant to them.⁶⁷⁸ Of course, the classes organized by the Office of Economic Opportunity were likely to have been different from those organized a decade previously; however it is still improbable that they covered the breadth of social and political issues that citizenship schools did. More problematically, Proctor and Stroman's interpretations imply that the decline of the program was a natural, positive consequence arising when the state took greater responsibilities for poor African Americans' needs. Given this study's findings on Williams' character and local conflict, it seems unlikely that the program terminated quite so smoothly. Indeed, evidence from the mid to late 1960s indicates that the program ended because of local rivalries and Williams' leadership style.

In 1964, a representative from the Civil Rights Commission visited Savannah and produced a report on local race relations. The report explained that

Hosea Williams at this moment seems a little confused as to where to go next. He is trapped in his own image. His closest followers expect him to do dramatic things.

However, he has probably lost much of the following that produced the crowds a year ago. Chapter 3 gave some indication of the situation in which Williams and the CCCV found themselves by 1964. Hosea Williams had secured VEP money to conduct a diverse voter

⁶⁷⁷ Levine interview. In 1965, Savannah elected an Office of Economic Opportunity (OEO) board, which included NAACP field secretary Mercedes Wright. Public meetings were held to ascertain local people's interests, which included attacking unemployment extending summer recreation and daycares, helping families learn to live with their budgets, providing training for unemployed men and part time jobs for students, the possible establishment of a VISTA program and a literacy program for adults. This probably prompted the introduction of the adult classes Proctor discussed. *Savannah Morning News* (February 23 1965).

⁶⁷⁸ Horton, *Long Haul*, p 100.

registration campaign, which included citizenship schools. However, Wiley Branton had complained about his financial mismanagement of the VEP grant in 1963, so Williams ran the 1964 program cooperatively with SCLC. Martin Luther King had visited Savannah in 1964 and praised it as the most integrated city south of the Mason-Dixon Line. In many respects, 1964 therefore represented the pinnacle of the citizenship school program in Savannah. Apparently Williams professed a lingering interest in citizenship education, as he talked “primarily of educating Negro voters to use the ballot more effectively,” however his commitment was questionable given that he also discussed leaving “the civil rights crusade entirely and return(ing) to his job in the Department of Agriculture.”⁶⁷⁹ However, he was preoccupied with finding a paid position within SCLC and, over the course of 1964, he “volunteered his way” onto SCLC’s staff. This in fact led him to neglect his work running citizenship schools in Savannah, leading to Septima Clark’s charge that he demonstrated an obvious preference for work “on the firing line.”

Myles Horton had envisaged the citizenship schools building grassroots, democratic leadership and organizations. If leadership roles were shared, then in theory if a leader left a city or community, there would be other people to take on organizational responsibilities. In Savannah, this was not the case because of Hosea Williams’ egotistical management of the CCCV and disinclination to share authority with others. The Civil Rights Commission suggested that Williams saw “history entirely as events revolving around him” and while he had “several lieutenants around him,” he did “not appear to have a structured organization. His wife and Benjamin Van Clark (were) his key assistants” and the organization operated “through ad hoc

⁶⁷⁹ US Civil Rights Commission, “Community study of Savannah, Georgia,” p 28, Records of the Commission on Civil Rights: Police-Community Relations in Areas (1954-1965), NARA RG 453, box 5.

communication.”⁶⁸⁰ When Williams left for Atlanta, he took his closest allies with him, leaving a power vacuum in the Chatham Crusade for Voters and nobody with the training or experience to continue the work he had begun.

Instead, Williams’ “rival” Westley Wallace Law resumed his former leadership position in the city. Despite Williams’ visibility in the local press over the course of 1963-4, and his successful administration of a VEP funded project, Law was simultaneously establishing a leadership role for himself. In 1963, Mayor Maclean appointed a biracial committee to negotiate desegregation of local facilities. In oral histories, local white people suggested that the two organizations were complementary because Law and Eugene Gadsden were able to negotiate settlements behind the scenes while Williams staged high-profile demonstrations and campaigns. James Blackburn argued that members of the black community “who... would be around later to pick up the pieces, were always in and around the fringes.” Gadsden, in particular was a

Real tower of strength, sought to find some area of common ground, and worked very closely with the business community... Obviously, his manner or method maybe of accomplishment and objective may have been different from some of them but I’m sure that his objective was the same as theirs.⁶⁸¹

Similarly, city manager A.A. “Don” Mendonsa argued that he rarely saw Law or Gadsden on the streets, because they were “working behind the scene.”⁶⁸² As convenient as this arrangement sounded with hindsight, it was a source of friction between the city’s two leaders. Law speculated that the city’s approach meant that there was “not enough activity” for Williams, so he left to work on more exciting projects elsewhere.⁶⁸³ On the other hand, Williams may have objected not to the negotiations as much as the fact that he had not been included in them. The

⁶⁸⁰ “Community Study of Savannah,” pp 27, 13.

⁶⁸¹ Cited in “... We ain’t what we used to be,” p 56.

⁶⁸² Cited in “... We ain’t what we used to be,” p 56.

⁶⁸³ Law, Crimmins and Kuhn interview, p 92.

Civil Rights Commission report argued that Law felt that the “negotiations (should) be conducted by the NAACP,” while Williams wanted the Crusade for Voters to be involved as well.⁶⁸⁴ Thus, the committee had the dual effect of expediting Williams’ departure and cementing Law’s leadership position in the city.

When he joined the SCLC staff, Williams had ambitious ideas for continued voter registration. In 1965, his first year in Atlanta, he designed a program, “Summer Community Organization and Political Education” (SCOPE) which sought to replicate SNCC’s “Freedom Summer” of the previous year, by bringing one thousand northern white students to southern states to register African Americans in 120 Southern counties with high levels of disenfranchisement. The project failed to live up to Williams’ ambitions. In the first place, it was far smaller than Williams had envisaged. Only three hundred students took part and only 51 counties were covered, while it produced just a “modest” rise in voter registration. In Williams’ native Georgia, one hundred SCOPE volunteers worked in fifteen counties, including the northeast, a region that had not yet experienced any major civil rights activity. In Alabama, meanwhile, “eighty SCOPE workers and a dozen full time staff members operated in fifteen counties.” Although SCLC claimed that these workers registered 26,000 new voters, this was both an exaggeration and represented only a modest increase in voter enfranchisement. In Alabama, eighty volunteers and a dozen full time staff members worked in fifteen counties. Six of these counties received federal registrars and saw significant increases in registration. In Hale County, this rose from 235 to 3,242 between August and September, while the increases rose from 295 to 4,257; 320 to 6,789; 289 to 2,466; 0 to 1,496 and 0 to 6,085 in Marengo, Dallas, Perry, Lowndes and Wilcox counties respectively. SCOPE volunteers did not have similar successes in other Southern counties. In Barbour County, Alabama, where registration was only

⁶⁸⁴ “Community Study of Savannah,” p 26.

permitted on the first Monday of the month, only 265 of the 600 blacks who waited to register on August 16 were able to do so, and this “pattern repeated itself throughout much of Alabama, Georgia and the Carolinas.” Secondly, yet again Williams’ voter registration work became blurred with direct action protest. In the face of serious white repression, he resolved to lift bans he had placed on student volunteers demonstrating, while Bolden and Clarke organized demonstrations in Americus, Georgia. Finally, both volunteers and SCLC staff like Randolph Blackwell and Stanley Levison complained about Williams’ administration of the program. Williams allegedly failed to provide promised financial support to volunteers, wasted money and was financially dishonest.⁶⁸⁵

Perhaps Williams was otherwise preoccupied and perhaps he had simply lost interest in Savannah and the Crusade for Voters. In any case, in his absence, Law and the NAACP assumed primary responsibility for voter registration work in the city. The NAACP had established a Political Action League in early 1964, with financial support from the national organization.⁶⁸⁶ The League held its organizational meeting in St. Phillips Monumental Church in 1965 and pledged to provide the black community with “opportunities for a greater and more meaningful participation in the political life of Savannah and Chatham County through group action.”⁶⁸⁷ The committee did not emphasize political education or extensive registration work; rather, it interviewed candidates to ascertain which parties and politicians would best serve local African Americans’ interests.⁶⁸⁸ Two years after Williams’ departure, Savannah’s NAACP

⁶⁸⁵ Fairclough, *To Redeem the Soul*, pp 263-9; Tuck, *Beyond Atlanta*, p 199.

⁶⁸⁶ Letter from W.W. Law to Roy Wilkins (February 22, 1964), letter from John Morsell to W.W. Law (March 12, 1964), *NAACP Papers*, Part III Box C28, folder 2

⁶⁸⁷ “Statement of the Position of the Political Action Committee Regarding the Endorsement of Political Candidates,” *NAACP Papers*, Part VI, box C158, folder 7.

⁶⁸⁸ A 1984 newspaper reflected that through this work, the NAACP’s Political Action League had been a formidable political force across the state over the past two decades. *Georgia Gazette* (November 22, 1984). However, the League’s work was also controversial. In 1976, the Savannah branch was investigated for using money designed for voter registration for a campaign to endorse specific candidates and for allowing the Political

branch secured VEP funding on the basis that it was the most effective of the city's voter registration organizations.⁶⁸⁹ Williams was incensed when VEP director Vernon Jordan informed him of the grant.⁶⁹⁰ In a follow up letter, Jordan wrote that Williams had "responded immediately with a great emotional outburst and accused the Project of being unfair to... (Williams and presumably) to SCLC." Williams threatened to withdraw from all cooperation with the VEP and "demanded" that Jordan return all of the materials Williams had submitted to him. Jordan refused to acknowledge Williams' threats unless King himself confirmed them. He wrote, "I object to your telephone manners. While I respect your right to disagree with and dissent from decisions of the Project, I can do without the screaming and cursing."⁶⁹¹

In addition to demonstrating Williams' irascible and irrational character, this exchange illustrated his lingering resentment at Law and the NAACP branch and possibly that he believed the CCCV still to be the primary voter registration organization and deserve recipient of external funding. After all, Williams had submitted a proposal of his own a month after Jordan had received the NAACP's submission.⁶⁹² Yet, if Williams did still consider the CCCV to be a viable organization after 1965, he had a misplaced faith in the sustained local movement. In a completed teacher survey, Rebecca Fields reported that she had taught a school at East Perry

Action Committee to show political partisanship. Although Curtis Cooper protested that "NAACP" in this context stood for the "National Association for Allied Community Politics," the national organization justly felt that this was confusing, and told the branch to drop the acronym from their Political Action Committee's title, while the local branch took steps to assure the public that it was apolitical. Letters from Mildred Bond Roxburgh to William Penn (August 23, 1976); William Penn to Mildred Bond Roxburgh (August 25, 1976), Roy Willkins to Curtis Cooper (August 26, 1976), William Penn to Curtis Cooper (October 15, 1976), Curtis Cooper to William Penn (September 7, 1976). Clipping from Savannah Evening Press (August 30, 1976), NAACP Papers, Part VI, box C158, folder 7.

⁶⁸⁹ This represented in microcosm the general trend McAdam observed whereby funding bodies increasingly saw the NAACP as a more attractive outlet for grants than SCLC, SNCC or CORE. See letters from Reverend Harold Baker to Vernon Jordan (February 26, 1966), Eugene Gadsden to Vernon Jordan (February 28, 1966), Vernon Jordan to Eugene Gadsden (April 11, 1966), SRC Papers, 185: 968, 971-7, 980-3

⁶⁹⁰ Jordan became the VEP's director in 1966. Jordan had been concerned that SCLC was using VEP funds for its own upkeep and, under his leadership, most grants were made to local NAACP branches. Freedom's Sword, p 213.

⁶⁹¹ Letter from Vernon Jordan to Hosea Williams (April 28, 1966), Taylor Branch Papers, box 132, folder 954.

⁶⁹² Ibid.

Street between July and September 1965, but there are no other records of schools being taught after this time.⁶⁹³ Writing of the Southeastern Georgia Crusade for Voters as a whole, Gillespie explained that “CEP teachers continued to operate sporadic classes, but attendance never reached the levels they achieved in early 1963.”⁶⁹⁴

Conrad Browne and Office Politics

Existing literature on the citizenship schools in Charleston and the Sea Islands follow the same, problematic, trajectory. Historians discuss a program that originated in the region and was then extended elsewhere, but give scarce information about the schools that ran in the region after the early 1960s. This is, of course, partly due to historians’ tendency to discuss the origins of the schools and close their accounts with the 1961 transfer. Yet, even accounts which discuss the SCLC-led years of the program and which end in 1970 are remarkably silent about the history of schools in the Lowcountry region after 1961. For example, Gillespie offers case studies of three regions in which citizenship schools were organized, but uses her results to describe different periods in the citizenship schools’ history, rather than comparing different stages of the programs in each region. This could lead one to assume either that the schools had run their course or that they continued to operate without any changes. David Levine and John Glen both briefly document the summer internship program, which Chapter 3 of this study discussed briefly. Glen introduced the program only as one of the projects run by the new Highlander Research and Education Center. Levine went a little further and described a new generation of community leaders who arose on Johns Island in the late 1960s, but did not describe the ways that these men challenged Esau Jenkins’ leadership or explain how

⁶⁹³ Completed questionnaire by Rebecca Fields (1965), *SCLC Records*, 13: 184.

⁶⁹⁴ Gillespie, “They Walk, Talk and Act Like New People,” p 190.

intergenerational conflict gradually undermined the citizenship schools on Johns and surrounding islands.⁶⁹⁵ By contrast, this section will make a fuller contribution to the narrative of the citizenship schools by discussing the kinds of schools that ran in the Lowcountry region after 1961 and why, by 1967, they were no longer viable. It will analyze first, the changing relationship between Jenkins' organization and Highlander Folk School and second, the effects of local generational conflict on the demise of the local citizenship school program to explain why, how and when the Sea Island schools disintegrated.

Tensions arose between Highlander staff, Clark and Robinson from the initial planning stages of the internship program in 1963. These followed familiar lines: Robinson and Clark's gradual dissatisfaction with their work being undermined by male colleagues, poor administration and organization and differences of interests between local people and administrators. Robinson and Clark initially had complaints about Horton's management of the project and, more pertinently, their work for it. Problems arose during the planning stages, when Horton, Clark and Robinson realized that they had different assumptions as to how the project would best be run. In June, Robinson wrote to her cousin that she was "across the barrel and cannot straddle it." She felt that she had been left to bear the brunt of the preparatory work for the program and that she had been given insufficient information about the CEP supervisor Ben Mack and the conditions under which he would assist the project.⁶⁹⁶ Her letter underlines that Robinson felt under pressure and was dissatisfied with the lack of satisfactory communication from Horton. The two women also argued with Horton and Browne over the form that the internship workshop would take. While the men suggested that it should be organized along the lines of Highlander's 1962 Mississippi registration workshops, Clark had designed sessions with

⁶⁹⁵ "Citizenship Schools," pp 129-32.

⁶⁹⁶ Letter from Bernice Robinson to Septima Clark (July 22, 1963), Highlander Papers, box 24, folder 13.

“specific” reading and writing instruction, probably akin to the Dorchester workshops. Having completed this work, Browne informed he that their “aim should be to stimulate discussion of local problems and use resource people to help students come up with answers to their own situations.”⁶⁹⁷

In June, a frustrated Clark wrote to Horton to vent her complaints over her treatment over the previous few weeks. In part, she may have merely wanted to defend the broad-based citizenship education SCLC offered and demonstrate the limitations of Horton and Browne’s approach in much the same way that she had done during the initial preparations for citizenship schools described in Chapter 2.⁶⁹⁸ Yet, she was also evidently once again frustrated at having her work criticized or devalued by a male colleague. She wrote to Horton and explained that she and Robinson had spent an entire morning planning the workshop and that her cousin had not once mentioned that they should be modeling their plans on her work in Mississippi. Her letter also indicates that she was frustrated that Horton had not yet determined whether or not he would use Benjamin Mack for the program in the pilot 1963 summer project. Clark lauded Mack for his work with the Citizenship Education Program but explained that he needed to give notice if he wanted to take time off work and asked Horton to confirm by the end of the week. In this case, this was not a question of gender relations but the ways in which a lack of planning could

⁶⁹⁷ Bernice Robinson had run workshops for members of SNCC and other students. These included training leaders to return to communities to carry out field work, intensive voter registration clinics, showing films and organizing citizenship classes. “Mississippi Voter Education Report of Bernice Robinson of Highlander Center (1962)”; Schedule of Voter Education Clinics (July 23-8, 1962),” Highlander Files, 7: 905-9, 915-21.

⁶⁹⁸ In October, she wrote to Browne to explain why focused voter registration work was limited, thus demonstrating her sympathy for broad citizenship classes. “The people you will bring into this Internship (sic) Program,” she explained, “have been in a Citizenship School, and there are registration offices now in every state and almost every city even in Mississippi. The thing they really need is how to organize a community with the help of the people in the community.” Contemporary problems, such as “taxes, social welfare programs, labor management relations, schools, and old age pensions... getting jobs, eliminating drop-outs, seeing that children share in the dream of the founding fathers” affected people’s daily lives and were all “tied to the vote.” Letter from Septima Clark to Conrad Browne (September 24, 1963), Highlander Papers, box 9, folder 12.

strain personal relations. However, when Clark reminded Horton to treat Mack with thought and consideration, her own treatment during the transfer was likely to have been fresh in her mind.⁶⁹⁹

Despite these initial problems, however, Horton was pleased with the way that the first project worked. He praised Clark and told her that she had done a “great job welding” together a group of participants from wide ranging backgrounds.⁷⁰⁰ The following year, however, conflict among Highlander staff threatened to mar the program again. Bernice Robinson had resigned the previous November and moved to SCLC. However, Browne hoped that she would return to work as Director of Activities and he requested that SCLC second her for the July project.⁷⁰¹ Much to Browne’s consternation, Clark responded that she would be unable to spare her.⁷⁰² It may have been true, as Clark explained, that Robinson was preoccupied with her new duties at SCLC and, hence, too busy to assist with the project. After all, she was happy to return to assist in 1965, 1966 and 1967. However, given that she had only recently left because of personal problems with Highlander staff, it is also likely that her decision had been influenced by strained relations at the administrative level. The workshop went ahead without Robinson’s assistance; but several problems arose over the summer. In a letter to Progressive Club business manager William Saunders, Browne complained that he was “not at all satisfied with the amount we paid you... in the light of what little was accomplished.” He accused Saunders of using project funds to provide free lunches for people in the community and paying travel costs for people who left the workshop early.⁷⁰³

⁶⁹⁹ Letter from Septima Clark to Myles Horton (July 20, 1963), Highlander Papers, box 9, folder 12.

⁷⁰⁰ Letter from Myles Horton to Septima Clark (Oct 15 1963), Highlander Papers, box 9, folder 12.

⁷⁰¹ Letter from Conrad Browne to Septima Clark (April 20, 1964), Highlander Papers, box 9, folder 12.

⁷⁰² Letter from Septima Clark to Conrad Browne (April 24, 1964), memo from Conrad Brown to Highlander staff (April 24, 1964), Highlander Files.

⁷⁰³ Letter from Conrad Browne to William “Bill” Saunders (August 6, 1964), Highlander Files, 34: 627-8.

Despite these problems, Highlander staff and Johns Islanders agreed to run the project again the following year. However, in 1965 and 1966 relationships broke down even further. In the planning stages, Browne complained to American Friends Service Commission representative Stuart Meachen that the summer workshop was the first time that he had trouble communicating with Jenkins. “He had one idea and I had another,” he explained, “and we just did not talk out our differences.” While he was not specific about the details, he believed that Jenkins had been intransigent, stubborn and closed to change.⁷⁰⁴ In the same year, Highlander’s response to an accident provoked some controversy. In August, a local church, the largest in the county, and the site of well-attended “floating workshops” and citizenship education classes was burnt to the ground. Jenkins informed Browne of this event, and suggested that Highlander use its contacts to find funds to rebuild the church. Although Brown expressed sympathy and that the school would accept donations, clearly local people believed that their support was insufficient. The next summer, in 1966, Robinson was disappointed by “the cancellation of one floating workshop and in the small attendance of others.” She had heard rumors after the fire, “many organizations and individuals contributed financially to the rebuilding (but) no contribution was received from Highlander.”⁷⁰⁵ In this case, perceived insensitivity from the sponsoring organization affected both relationships with local organizers and reduced local enthusiasm for the program, as evidenced by the falling attendance figures. In the same year, Browne alienated Bill Saunders when he yet again accused him of poor bookkeeping. Stating that he hoped that reports of overdrawn accounts were mistaken, he told Saunders that there was “no excuse for this kind of reputation to get started and asked him for “as careful accounting as

⁷⁰⁴ Letter from Conrad Browne to Stuart Meachen (July 27, 1965), Highlander Files 34:836

⁷⁰⁵ News and Courier (August 21, 1965), letter from Esau Jenkins to Conrad Brown (August 24, 1965), letter from Conrad Brown to Esau Jenkins (August 28, 1965), Bernice Robinson, “Report of the 1966 Southwide Voter Education Project,” Highlander Files, 34: 846, 854-5, 861, 1032-7.

possible for the two workshops.” Saunders was clearly upset by Browne’s accusations. Complaining that he seemed to do “nothing but the wrong thing,” he told Brown to “get somebody else to do this job that is more capable. I am always on the wrong side.”⁷⁰⁶

How can one account for the shift in relations between Highlander Folk School and Progressive Club members from 1962, when Horton was eager to continue Highlander’s working relationship with people on Johns Island to 1966, when Browne claimed to be unable to communicate with Jenkins and local islanders were unwilling to attend workshops? In the first place, it may have been because Conrad Browne found it more difficult to build working relationships with local people than Myles Horton had done. After all, in the early years of the program, Horton had struggled to persuade Jenkins to share leadership roles with people from outside his family but had eventually been successful. With greater tact and a different approach, Browne might have been able to achieve more favorable results. On the other hand, in the incident with the church, perhaps Jenkins was unreasonable to expect Highlander to pay. After all, it had always been Highlander’s mission to stimulate and support local movements and not to offer continued financial support. By this time, the Progressive Club was being lauded for its self-sufficiency and surely no longer needed extensive support. Yet, had the fire been retaliation against Jenkins’ association with an allegedly “communistic” organization then a small financial donation from Highlander would have spoken volumes.

Whatever the causes of conflict in 1963-6, they had a serious effect on the working relationship between the two organizations that would come to a head in the final summer workshop, held in July and August 1967. To begin with, in line with more general trends, foundation funding was not as forthcoming as it had been in previous years. Highlander’s

⁷⁰⁶ Letter from Conrad Browne to Bill Saunders (September 21, 1966), letter from Bill Saunders to Conrad Browne (October 5, 1966), Highlander Papers, box 99, folder 5.

application for Field Foundation support for the project was rejected. Early in 1967 Browne had hoped that sympathetic individuals might grant additional funds, but by May, he had become pessimistic because the Tennessee legislature passed a resolution calling for an investigation into Highlander and its activities. With no guarantee of grants or support for future summers, Browne was anxious to ensure that a portion of the available \$3500 could be carried over to the following year.⁷⁰⁷ Therefore, he recommended several amendments to the program. He suggested involving fewer participants; inviting fewer lecturers and devoting more time to discussion instead; and possibly cutting back on planned field trips to Columbia and Penn Center, although Ben Mack (who organized the first week) felt that this element should not be compromised.⁷⁰⁸ Browne's previous experience working with Jenkins may have made him cautious about organizing the 1967 project. Browne wrote to Mack and urged him to press Jenkins to consider inviting fewer speakers and arranging group recreation, admitting that little ground had been made organizing this during planning meetings.⁷⁰⁹ The fact that Browne felt the need to work through an African American intermediary suggests that his working relationship with Jenkins had seriously deteriorated by this point. When he reflected on the workshop, Browne felt that it had been the "most exhausting" of which he had ever been a part. Yet again, Browne and Jenkins had been unable to establish an effective working relationship. The workshop culminated with a mass meeting, organized by the Citizens Committee and addressed by Martin Luther King. Although Browne praised the meeting as being "tremendous," he also felt that Jenkins had been preoccupied by this and had not given adequate attention to the

⁷⁰⁷ Letter from Conrad Browne to Esau Jenkins (January 5, 1967, April 10, 1967, May 23rd, 1967), letter from Conrad Browne to Mary Twining (June 4, 1967), Highlander Papers, box 68, folder 8.

⁷⁰⁸ "Planning Meeting for the SVEP" (January 1967), letter from Conrad Browne to Ben Mack (March 4, 1967), letter from Conrad Browne to Lonnie Hamilton (March 7, 1967), letter from Conrad Browne to Esau Jenkins (May 23, 1967), letter from Ben Mack to Conrad Browne (n.d), Highlander Papers, box 68, folder 8.

⁷⁰⁹ Letter from Conrad Browne to Ben Mack (March 4, 1967), Highlander Papers, box 68, folder 8.

workshops.⁷¹⁰ Jenkins may have intentionally distanced himself from the program because of the problems with Browne the previous summer or because of another local conflict with Bill Saunders.

Following the workshop, Browne hinted that it would be the last one of its kind. He questioned the validity of holding workshops and suggested that effective change could only be brought about through intensive grassroots organization. He suggested that freedom songs did not have the resonance and impact that they once did. He concluded that unless he could secure additional funds, Highlander would be unable to support future workshops and urged Jenkins to think of ways to run them independently. Browne tactfully repudiated future commitments to Jenkins when he thanked him for his work and support over the past five years.⁷¹¹ Late in the summer, Jenkins resigned from his part-time position at Highlander, thanked Horton and Browne and their wives for their support and offered Progressive Club space for any future programs.⁷¹² For ten years, Highlander had invested in Jenkins and the people on the Sea Islands and they had achieved a great deal. The citizenship schools not only had an impact on their teachers and students; they were extended across the South, albeit in different forms and Highlander had incorporated them into an innovative new project, the summer internship program. Yet, over three years, this working relationship deteriorated to the extent that a cooperative citizenship project was not possible.

Generational Problems

⁷¹⁰ Second Workshop of the Southwide Voter Education Project, July 26-30, 1967," letter from Conrad Browne to Esau Jenkins (n.d.), Highlander Papers, box 68, folder 8.

⁷¹¹ Letter from Conrad Browne to Esau Jenkins (n.d.), Highlander Papers, box 68, folder 8.

⁷¹² Letter from Esau Jenkins to Conrad Browne and Myles Horton (August 7, 1967), Highlander Papers, box 96, folder 8.

The termination of local citizenship schools on the Sea Islands and Charleston County cannot be reduced to merely problems with Highlander Folk School. After all, the internship project may have disintegrated, but the Progressive Club and Citizens Committee surely had the means to continue its own programs. However, local projects were themselves proved unviable because of generational conflict within the community. A new generation of activists who were sympathetic to Black Power ideology challenged Jenkins' established methods and ideology and proposed an alternative model of black masculinity. Generational divisions had beset the *Savannah* program from at least the early 1960. They also posed problems for CEP training workshops. Alongside race, gender and class, age shaped activists' identity, attitudes and behavior. Before the mid 1960s, however, Charleston County was relatively free from such problems. When members of the NAACP youth branch staged direct action protests in Charleston in 1963, the local branch organized committees to support them and middle-aged men like NAACP President J Arthur Brown joined them on the picket lines.⁷¹³ Jenkins genuinely believed that the facilities and programs he offered at the Progressive Club ameliorated social problems facing the young urban poor while citizenship schoolteachers had attempted to make their classes inclusive by including sewing classes for young girls. This began to change after the transfer and organization of the internship program.

After the first workshop, Horton and Conrad Browne became concerned that housing young people with community members encouraged them to become delinquent and that there might have been serious implications if the police had discovered that they had accommodated

⁷¹³ Report of Field Secretary, South Carolina State Conference of Branches (June 10 – August 17, 1963), *NAACP Papers*, Part 25, Series D, 30: 733-9. Strikingly, in 1974, the local black newspaper ran a piece on a selective buying campaign being organized in the city center. The article pointed out that the “same freedom fighters” who had led the 1963 campaign were again at the forefront of a direct action campaign. The article was intended to demonstrate the dearth of new leaders arising in the 1970s; however, it also proved that middle aged, middle-class black activists had protested alongside students in the 1960s and continued to do so as relatively old men in the 1970s. *The Chronicle* (January 26, 1974)

minors in the Progressive Club.⁷¹⁴ While documented evidence is sketchy, this concern seems to have stemmed from an incident involving Roger Phenix, a white student who helped Jenkins run both sets of workshops in 1964. Browne referred to him as a “stalwart” and praised him for “step(ping) in and buoy (ing) several sessions that would have lagged had your spirit been any different than it is.”⁷¹⁵ When Browne told the Carawans about his concerns over young people in the movement, he hinted that this stemmed from a conversation he had had with Horton about Phenix.⁷¹⁶ About a week later, Phenix wrote to Browne himself and alluded to the incident himself. “You’re completely right about the thing with Ellie,” he wrote. “I really messed so many things up with the decisions I made.”⁷¹⁷ Local African American girls were interested in him and Guy Carawan’s interviews recorded three young girls flirting with him.⁷¹⁸ It is possible that Phenix had a sexual relationship with an intern or a local girl, possibly an African American or a girl under the age of consent, which reflected badly on Highlander Folk School and the internship program. Phenix recognized that he had made an ill-advised decision, but he was a young man and, coming from a northern liberal college, probably relatively inexperienced with southern customs and taboos. He felt that Horton and Browne treated him unfairly after the workshop. He wrote that he did not

See that anything was really accomplished by Myles just writing me off as he apparently did without even talking to me about it. Well I realize that there’s all sorts of ways of looking at things like this by myself- not that I’ve ever been confronted with anything like this before... I guess there’s not much point in writing about it.⁷¹⁹

⁷¹⁴ Letter from Conrad Br3owne to Guy and Candie Carawan (August 6, 1964); letter from Conrad Browne to Esau Jenkins (November 19, 1964), Highlander Files, 34: 624, 761-2

⁷¹⁵ Letter from Conrad Browne to Roger Phenix (May 22, 1964), Highlander Files, 34: 615.

⁷¹⁶ Letter from Conrad Browne to Guy and Candie Carawan (August 6, 1964), Highlander Files, 34: 624.

⁷¹⁷ Letter from Roger Phenix to Conrad Bowne (August 19, 1964), Highlander Files, 34: 635-6.

⁷¹⁸ Interview with three young people: Doris, Carol and Johnny, Carawan Collection, FT 3587

⁷¹⁹ Letter from Roger Phenix to Conrad Bowne (August 19, 1964), Highlander Files, 34: 635-6.

Phenix later spent two years volunteering on Johns Island through the American Friends Service Committee.⁷²⁰ He helped the Carawans record interviews and songs for Aint You Got a Right and several years later, worked on the production of You've Got to Move, a documentary about Highlander. The earlier incident should not therefore detract from his commitment to working for social progress and his interest in Highlander, Johns Island and its residents. However, it does demonstrate that Jenkins and Highlander had to countenance the public relations problems that working with young activists who socialized, drank and had sex, entailed and which were similar to SNCC's experiences during the Freedom Summer. After 1964, they made changes to the program, first by accommodating interns at the Progressive Club rather than in the community and second, by ensuring that all participants were over 21 years of age.⁷²¹

Intergenerational conflict also created problems in workshop settings. Highlander staff and organizers commented on the problems that younger and more experienced activists had communicating with one another. They felt that because younger participants had become involved in the movement recently through sit-ins and demonstrations and did not relate to the community activism espoused by Jenkins, Herbert Fielding and Septima Clark. In a report on the 1964 program, Conrad Brown argued that there had been a noticeable

cleavage between young people who had actively involved themselves in demonstrations, which were the means through which they were incarcerated and mistreated, and the older leaders of the communities who worked mainly in educational, legal and communication media.

Younger participants felt irritated about having to report their whereabouts and not being taken seriously in workshops. "Little by little, this bifurcation over mostly minor personal issues

⁷²⁰ Letter from Bill Saunders to Conrad Browne (October 20, 1966), Highlander Records, box 99, folder 5.

⁷²¹ Letter from Conrad Browne to Guy Carawan, Candie Carawan and Esau Jenkins (August 6, 1964); letter from Esau Jenkins to Conrad Browne (August 12, 1964; letter from Conrad Browne to Esau Jenkins (November 19, 1964), Highlander Files, 34: 631-2, 624, 761-2.

marred the unity that had been apparent in the first few group meetings.”⁷²² After reflecting on the 1964 workshops, Highlander and Progressive Club staff decided to modify the internship program. Rather than asking local families to provide accommodation, the Progressive Club hosted residential workshops. Meanwhile, rather than asking interns to observe local classes, they were trained and asked to run “floating workshops” which required their active participation and contributions.⁷²³

The internship program highlighted the problems involved with running workshops for people from different generations with different interests and styles of activism. This put strain on the internship experiment and led Horton and Highlander to revise the program. Meanwhile, the administration of citizenship schools was threatened by local conflict between Jenkins and a younger generation of local leaders. No one individual embodied this new generation better than the Progressive Club’s business manager, William “Bill” Saunders.

Bill Saunders and Black Power

Bill Saunders returned to his native Johns Island in 1954 following his service in the Korean War. He recalled that he became conscious of racial injustice almost as soon as he returned to South Carolina. When he had to change Greyhound buses in Columbia in order to return home, he explained,

I went into the bus station to buy a ticket; the cop came at me with a gun and said, “Boy, what’s wrong with you. You don’t belong in here...” And I said, “No, officer, I didn’t know that, where do I belong?” And he pointed to a place behind the stations where blacks bought their tickets. All of the white guys that I’d been fighting with for years, all they did was just dropped their heads. None of them said, “Well I’ll buy you a ticket” or “Let him get his ticket.” No one reacted. And I began to get real bitter from that point on.

⁷²² Conrad Brown, “Report on the Southwide Voter Education Internship Workshop,” Highlander Files, 34:354

⁷²³ Letter from Conrad Browne to Guy Carawan, Candie Carawan and Esau Jenkins (August 6, 1964); letter from Conrad Browne to Esau Jenkins (November 19, 1964), Highlander Files, 34: 624, 761-2

When he returned to Johns Island, he found work at a mattress factory and immediately became active in Sea Island civic life. Initially, he “supported Esau Jenkins in everything that he did.” Saunders explained that Jenkins “was one of the founders of the Progressive Club in 1948. I ended up being the business manager of the Progressive Club in 1956, I joined them all.” He was secretary for the Palmetto Voters’ Association and vice president of the Citizens Committee.⁷²⁴

However, between 1964 and 1968, Saunders grew increasingly frustrated with Jenkins, Herbert Fielding and Conrad Browne. This conflict manifested itself in various ways. In the first place, Saunders was one of a growing number of African Americans who resented Carawan promoting local Sea Island folk songs, storytelling and customs. Speaking of a 1966 folk festival the Carawans scheduled for Johns Island, Saunders explained that young people had wanted to “get away” from the children’s songs and stories. He felt that the festivals amounted to “saying Negro” and put African Americans into a separate category. While his wife admitted that she loved shouting and singing traditional songs in church because it felt like it was coming from “inside,” Saunders said that he and other young people objected to local people being watched on stage. He recognized that the Carawans were genuinely interested in people and wanted to help and suggested that young people’s attitudes reflected their growing political consciousness. Younger people, he explained, “want to stand now and be counted and let you know how we feel. And this is the big difference of opinion coming between the old people and the young.”⁷²⁵

Saunders also clashed with Highlander staff over management and administrative issues. Browne queried Saunders’ accounting and management of project funds after more than one

⁷²⁴ Interview with author (March 21, 2008).

⁷²⁵ Bill and Henrietta Saunders, interview with Guy and Candie Carawan, Carawan Collection, FT 3612.

workshop. For example, in 1964, he accused Saunders of spending a portion of the SVEP grant on lunches for local people.⁷²⁶ Two years later, Saunders responded to further accusations with a bitter diatribe in which he revealed his changing political views. When Browne criticized Saunders' accounting again in 1966, he refused to continue working with Highlander and declared that "registering and voting is not the solution to our problem. And trying to get along with the white power is not either. We are going to have to fight and die right here in America for what belongs to us. And dam (sic) all laws."⁷²⁷ Saunders made peace with Browne just weeks later. He asked Browne to "forgive him" for his rash outburst, explaining that he became "down sometimes."⁷²⁸

The following year, Saunders fell out with local leaders Fielding and Jenkins. In 1967, Saunders was elected to the Charleston County Office of Economic Opportunity (OEO) War on Poverty Commission, but Governor Robert McNair would not confirm his appointment. Saunders discovered that this was because a group of black leaders, including Fielding, had submitted a petition opposing it.⁷²⁹ Saunders had begun to publish a Lowcountry Newsletter to raise awareness of local events and problems. Following his discovery, he included an open letter to Fielding lambasting him for harming the interests of Charleston and its poorest people. He criticized existing local movements for integration as being removed from the socio-economic problems affecting Johns Island residents. "I am not interested in eating at the Fort Sumter Hotel," he wrote.

⁷²⁶ Letter from Conrad Brown to Bill Saunders (August 10, 1964), Highlander Files, 34:630

⁷²⁷ Letter from Bill Saunders to Conrad Browne (October 5, 1966), Highlander Research and Education Center Papers, box 99, folder 5.

⁷²⁸ Letter from Bill Saunders to Conrad Browne (October 20, 1966), Highlander Research and Education Center Papers, box 99, folder 5.

⁷²⁹ Bill Saunders, interview with Felice Knight (North Charleston, September 17, 2004), cited in Felice Knight, "Portrait of a Community Activist" (Unpublished MA thesis, College of Charleston, 2006), p 38.

I am interested in justice for me and my people. I am interested in justice for this poor young fellow that was written about in the opening of our newsletter. I am interested in justice for all the young black men that are serving on the county prison farm.⁷³⁰

Saunders also became involved in activities and organizations that were independent from Jenkins, the Progressive Club and Citizens Committee. In the late 1960s, his main project was to press for an investigation into conditions at Haut Gap, the local black high school. In December 1966, he formed a grievance committee that attended PTA and trustee meetings to raise parents' concerns.⁷³¹ Under Saunders' leadership, local people had pressed successfully for adequate lights and money for the science department by September 1967 and for a new kitchen and clean running water by January 1968. They also asked for additional classrooms and a gym, and even offered the Progressive Club for physical education classes, which the principal refused.⁷³² When, later in the month, the state government allocated an additional \$10.6 million for South Carolina schools, it deferred funding for Haut Gap, because it was not deemed to be sufficiently integrated.⁷³³ In 1967, the Committee attempted to have three men of their choosing appointed to the board; however, by late 1968 this had not been done. Saunders threatened to form an alternative, all-black educational board, so eventually the local all-white board decided to include Esau Jenkins.⁷³⁴

⁷³⁰ Bill Saunders, "An Open Letter to Herbert Fielding," Lowcountry Newsletter, 2, 9 (January 3, 1968), Thomas Waring Papers, box 410, folder 6.

⁷³¹ Bill Saunders interview (interviewer, place and date unknown), Ralph Bunche Oral Histories, # 204 (hereafter Bunche interview). At one point in the interview, Saunders discussed the unlikelihood of changes being implemented by September 1968, so the interview was probably conducted at this time.

⁷³² Lowcountry Newsletter, (September 1, 1967), Highlander Papers, box 96, folder 8, "The Situation in School District 9," Lowcountry Newsletter, 2, 9 (Jan 3 1968), Thomas Waring Papers, box 410, folder 6.

⁷³³ "Money for District 9 Schools (Almost)" Lowcountry Newsletter, 2, 9 (March 5, 1968), Thomas Waring Papers, box 410, folder 6.

⁷³⁴ Lowcountry Newsletter, (September 1, 1967), Highlander Papers, box 96, folder 8, Saunders, Bunche interview, interview with author. He pointed out the irony of Jenkins being the first black man to be appointed to the school board, since it had been his attempt to run for office in 1956 that led the board to cease elections.

Possibly because of his experiences working to improve school conditions, Saunders spoke out against school integration, arguing that it was often inimical to black children. He explained,

The kids that were going to the integrated school were suffering a hell of a lot more than the kids that were going to the all black school. Although maybe the kid at the all black school getting less, he was more balanced. He was more at rest or at ease in his school and his surroundings, more the kid that had been going to the white school. From then on, I felt like the other part about it that was bothering me most is that we, as black parents, have been putting out kids into a situation that we, as black parents, should straighten up and not the kids. It's not their fault that our condition is like it is, and I don't think they should be pushed into it. We see kids that are going to school and getting beat up everyday, or somebody's taking their books or their money is being taken away from them.

He went on to argue that black children should learn black history and African languages like Swahili. They should meanwhile “forget about French, and all that other stuff that we've been going through. To hell with that.” He pointed out that black children had pride in their segregated schools and that an African American girl attending St John's chose to wear her Haut Gap uniform to school. “Black kids,” he explained, “are standing up for their black schools and you know, the black situation.”⁷³⁵ This pronouncement indicted most of the work that Jenkins and local NAACP activists like J. Arthur Brown had been doing for years. Brown and the NAACP had focused on testing Brown versus Board by enrolling black children in previously all-white schools. Saunders argued that this approach was a mistake and resulted in traumatic experiences for black children. Brown's daughter Millicent, one of the first African American children to attend an integrated school, reflected that while she respected her father's work, she had missed opportunities to be a popular student with an active extracurricular life and boyfriends because she had transferred to a white school where she felt lonely and ostracized.⁷³⁶

⁷³⁵ Bunche interview, pp 2, 12-13, 44-5.

⁷³⁶ Interview with Kirk Heindenreich (1998), Millicent Brown Papers, box 1, folder 8.

Saunders' disenchantment with integration was also due to his identification with SNCC and his disputes with Jenkins, Brown and Fielding were a local manifestation of the wider divisions within the civil rights movement. He argued that he was "looking out, strictly, for the betterment of the black race, the pride and everything else. I don't want to get myself hung up in the white thing at all." He said that he admired Stokely Carmichael more than he admired any other living person and in early 1968, he hosted the controversial SNCC activist on Johns Island.⁷³⁷ Carmichael then gave a speech at Penn School, in which he articulated similar arguments to those Saunders described in his oral history. Carmichael dismissed integration as a salient issue, claiming that "whether or not we sit next to white folks in a white school has nothing to do with the kind of education that we as black people need." He explained that "our present educational system is nothing but the white man's tool that he uses to keep his system going and keep us in our place. It has served him well for over 400 years- but it has never served us at all."⁷³⁸

The growing conflict between Saunders and Jenkins was not unique to the Sea Islands. "Black Power" has been associated with several organizations and figures, such as Malcolm X and the Nation of Islam; Stokely Carmichael and CORE; and Huey Newton and the Black Panther Party. While definitions of Black Power differ (for example, some subscribers advocated black-owned businesses, while others believed in revolution and the overhaul of American capitalism), most included celebrating black history and culture, downplaying or eliminating white people's participation in the Freedom Struggle, and favoring separate institutions over integration. Disputes between "Black Power" advocates and integrationists resulted in numerous intramovement disputes. For example, during the 1966 Freedom March in Mississippi, Martin Luther King reiterated his commitment to an integrated, nonviolent freedom

⁷³⁷ Bunche interview, p 14; Lowcountry Newsletter (March 5, 1968), Thomas Waring Papers, box 410, folder 6.

⁷³⁸ Lowcountry Newsletter (March 5, 1968), Thomas Waring Papers, box 410, folder 6.

struggle, while Floyd McKissick of CORE and Carmichael argued that the march should celebrate African American culture and advocate separatism.⁷³⁹ Meanwhile, “Black Power” created divisions issue within both SNCC and CORE. In SNCC, central committee members like Julian Bond and John Lewis and local leaders like Charles Sherrod left when the Committee voted to exclude white supporters.⁷⁴⁰ Sympathetic, educated, middle-class whites had once formed the bulwark of CORE’s local chapters as they had time and varied skills to volunteer. From 1964, however, CORE’s National Action Committee (NAC) members increasingly subscribed to Black Power ideologies and debated whether white supporters had a place in the organization. Meier and Rudwick explain that a “sharp drop in the proportion of white members often coincided with the end of viable chapter programs.”⁷⁴¹ Finally, Black Power ideology was at least partly responsible for the fragmentation of large civil rights organizations by the late 1960s. McAdam found that national civil rights movements fragmented in the late 1960s and small, splinter groups were subsequently responsible for increasing numbers of protest events.⁷⁴² Saunders’ campaigns against facilities at Haut Gap almost certainly falls into this category. Often, as in the case of the 1965 Watts riots, spontaneous, unorganized events tended to be more violent than the marches and sit-ins that SCLC had staged in the early 1960s. Such events may simply have been local people’s way of protesting injustices, such as King’s assassination, in

⁷³⁹ August Meier and Elliott Rudwick, CORE: A Study in the Civil Rights Movement, 1942-1986 (New York, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1973), p 412. The march originated when James Meredith, the first African American student at The University of Mississippi, decided to test whether or not he could walk safely through Mississippi during the primary election week. He was wounded and national civil rights leaders planned a renewed march in the state.

⁷⁴⁰ Clayborne Carson, In Struggle: SNCC and the Black Awakening of the 1960s (Cambridge, London: Cambridge University Press, 1981), p 231.

⁷⁴¹ CORE, p 384.

⁷⁴² Between 1961 and 1965, the NAACP, CORE, SNCC and SCLC were responsible for 75 percent of all protest events; whereas between 1966 and 1970, this figure dropped to 56 percent. Political Process, pp 183-4.

their own, spontaneous ways.⁷⁴³ Yet, they also tended to be associated with rising black militancy and as an alternative to the nonviolent direct action protests SCLC had pioneered.

Black Power activists, including Saunders, also embodied a different form of black masculinity to men like Jenkins and Fielding. First of all, advocates of Black Power almost universally believed in using violent force when necessary. In his study on the Black Panther Party, Steve Estes argued that the Party's emphasis on violence, from training members to use firearms to the construction of a "hypermasculine" image through a uniform of leather jackets and black berets had a greater effect on gender identity than on tactics.⁷⁴⁴ According to Estes, Black male Panthers found that the "masculine rhetoric" of the early years gave them an opportunity to prove their manhood, rather than furthering revolution.⁷⁴⁵ Saunders openly

⁷⁴³ See Chapter 2.

⁷⁴⁴ Estes explained that Black Panthers "consciously wielded" their image as an "organizing tool," giving recruits a masculine image which they could emulate through their dress and style. *I am a Man*, p 157. Men in other civil rights organizations, gangs or associations did likewise; for example, Marcus Garvey and the UNIA donned militaristic attire to reinforce masculine characteristics such as discipline and a willingness to engage in military conflict, while during "Operation Breadbasket," SCLC staff wore blue jeans in order to identify as working class black males. Hosea Williams, himself a well paid chemist with a Masters degree, characteristically wore dungarees to demonstrations as part of his populist, working class image. Robin Kelley provides a sophisticated study of the ways in which Malcolm Little adopted the conk hair style, the "zoot suit, the lindy hop and the distinctive lingo" of the "hep cat" subculture of pre World War II Boston. This enabled him to "negotiate an identity" that rejected both his own rural background and the "integrationist attitude of middle-class blacks." Arriving in Boston to live with his sister, he was marked out as a country "hick" until he had his hair straightened and bought a zoot suit. Wearing a zoot suit, furthermore, was an act of resistance against American patriotism, because its pleats and padded shoulders ignored strict clothing rations imposed by the War Productions Board. Styles and subcultures, Kelley proposed, could be deeply political. Of course, after his religious conversion, Malcolm X dressed "respectably" in a jacket and tie and in his autobiography, dismissed his "conk" hairstyle as a sign that he had been "brainwashed" by dominant white style conventions. Robin Kelley, "The Riddle Zoot: Malcolm Little and Black Cultural Politics During World War II," in Joe Wood (ed.), *Malcolm X in Our Own Image* (New York, NY: St Martin's Press, 1992), pp 155-182, citation on p 159. For black activists in the late 1960s, wearing one's hair naturally was a way to identify with "Black Power" ideology and reject white standards of beauty. It also created visible generational and urban-rural cleavages within the civil rights movement. For example, Belinda Robnett cited an "indigenous bridge leader," Mrs. Unita Blackwell's amazement at the Afro sported by a black SNCC volunteer from New York. The woman "came in with her hair looking funny. Well, at that time, it was Afro so we didn't know what to do with her. I didn't. I just told her that Louise that fixes hair was down the street there, and she kept saying, 'Okay' and 'I got to wash it.'" When the woman did wash her hair, she stunned the community by standing around and letting it dry naturally." Unita Blackwell, interview with Belinda Robnett (January 30, 1990), cited in Robnett, *How Long*, p 145.

⁷⁴⁵ *I am a Man*, pp 153-77. Estes argues, however, that gender relations within the party changed markedly in the late 1960s and 1970s. He drew attention to changes made under Elaine Brown's leadership, when the Party began to focus on political and community action rather than violent revolution, and pointed to black male's participation in community projects, like breakfast programs.

advocated violent resistance, arguing that the principal difference between Jenkins and himself, the reason why he was described as “militant” was because he had never been prepared to let anyone hit him without retaliating.⁷⁴⁶ Thus, Saunders challenged both SCLC’s nonviolent philosophy and Jenkins’ belief that manhood was defined by economic sufficiency and moral virtue. For Saunders, “manhood” involved defending oneself, one’s family and African American communities and using violence if it was necessary to do so.

However, although Saunders openly advocated violent resistance, he never led riots or violent protests in Charleston. In 1969, he was one of the instigators of a direct action event in support of Charleston hospital workers. Not only was this nonviolent, but Saunders in fact mediated a peaceful conclusion to the dispute.⁷⁴⁷ He did recruit members of a local street gang, which he referred to as “The Panthers,” to join marches and joked that SCLC stalwarts had been startled by the nature of some of their cellmates.⁷⁴⁸ This tactic resembled the Chatham County Crusade for Voters’ goal of making “new men” out of gang members and alcoholics. The concept that manhood should be defined by defending oneself, women and children was also remarkably widespread among black men from different regions, generations and social classes and hardly the preserve of Black Power activists in the late 1960s. For example, Simon Wendt has demonstrated that there was a chasm between civil rights organizations’ public support of nonviolent philosophy and the deeply held convictions of black working-class Southerners that men who did not defend their families were weak and effeminate.⁷⁴⁹

⁷⁴⁶ Saunders, interview with author (March 21, 2008).

⁷⁴⁷ Minutes of the Charleston Community Relations Committee (June 26, September 3, 1969), Herbert DeCosta Papers (Community Relations Committee folder),

⁷⁴⁸ Interview with author (March 21, 2008).

⁷⁴⁹ The idea that black men should be expected to use violence to defend their families had been popular since the late Reconstruction period, when American leaders called for “manly self defense” against white terror. For example, on one occasion, DuBois argued that lynching would stop only when white mobs were “faced by effective guns in the hands of people determined to sell their souls dearly.” When CORE, SCLC and SNCC extolled nonviolent methods in the 1950s and 1960s, they met resistance from black men across Southern communities.

It is more likely that Saunders distinguished himself as part of a new generation of black male activists because of his ideology and rhetoric than by being violent. On the one hand, campaigning for better conditions at a local school was not the most likely choice for a “macho” Black Power male leader. Teaching was a historically “female” profession and, particularly in rural African American communities, female teachers tended to be community leaders. Furthermore, women had played a key role in civil rights campaigns centered on education, such as the 1957 Little Rock school desegregation controversy.⁷⁵⁰ In a remote, rural community, however, conditions at the local school was a tangible issue to which Saunders could apply his separatist ideology. He was also a man who genuinely cared about community wellbeing and was likely to see this as a pertinent issue on which to campaign.

However, in other areas, Saunders demonstrated a concern for new issues that were a clear departure from those that occupied Esau Jenkins for the first part of the decade. He was highly conscious of problems facing black men in the late 1960s. Since he was a boy, he had been troubled by police brutality and had plotted to kill a police officer on the island who had killed 15 black men. He would have “nothing to do with” black criminals, but believed in supporting men who were falsely accused, convicted and incarcerated.⁷⁵¹ He also became an opponent of American military operations in Vietnam, which he described as “an unjust war fought for the elimination of people of color from the world.”⁷⁵² Although his antiwar convictions were influenced by anti-imperialism, he was principally concerned (justly) about the

While they may have seen the virtue nonviolent marches and demonstrations, men in Deep South communities regularly faced white intimidation and violence and needed to defend themselves. Simon Wendt, “They Finally Found Out that We Really Are Men’: Non-violence and Black Manhood in the Civil Rights Era,” Gender and History, 19, 3 (November 2007), pp 543-564.

⁷⁵⁰ For example, Ann Standley, “The Role of Black Women in the Civil Rights Movement,” in Crawford et al, Women in the Civil Rights Movement, pp 183- 202, p 186-90.

⁷⁵¹ Bunche interview, p 37.

⁷⁵² Interview with Bill Saunders, Lowcountry Newsletter (March 5 1968), Thomas Waring Papers, box 410, folder 6.

adverse effects the draft had on young black men.⁷⁵³ He worried that by 1968, Charleston's black community had lost more young men in Vietnam than they had in Korea and World War II and World War I. "It's been happening here in Charleston County at least two black guys a week. And they all these are the age of between 16 and 25." He feared that the black race would not survive unless America withdrew from Vietnam.⁷⁵⁴ On another occasion, he said frankly that "Black guys... is a whole lot better off going to jail than going into the armed forces (sic)."⁷⁵⁵ Saunders was likely to be particularly sensitive to black men's treatment in the military, because he felt that he had been unjustly treated after he risked his life for his country in Korea.⁷⁵⁶ By engaging in debates on international affairs, Saunders moved beyond the local, community-based issues that Johns Islanders had previously focused on, while he also demonstrated a concern for issues facing young black men.

Bill Saunders and Hosea Williams

In some ways, the conflict between Jenkins and Saunders paralleled that between Williams and Law in the early 1960s. In certain respects, Saunders represented a similar kind of

⁷⁵³ Estes has pointed out that while African American men were underrepresented in the armed forces (9% as opposed to 11% in the population as a whole), they were overrepresented among those fighting and dying in Vietnam. In 1965, the percentage of blacks among enlisted troops and casualties in Vietnam was 15% and 22% respectively. There were two reasons why this was the case. There were policy drives, sponsored by Daniel Patrick Moynihan, the author of the controversial Negro Family: Case for National Action. In a 1965 memorandum to President Johnson, Moynihan suggested that black unemployment could be reduced by 5% if 100,000 nonwhite men were recruited into the armed forces. Furthermore, men from socially deprived backgrounds were more likely to either be drafted or enlist in the armed forces. They were less likely to get an educational or professional deferment in order to escape the draft, while men who were not drafted may still have enlisted because of the attracting offer of steady pay and employment or because the army offered an opportunity to demonstrate their manhood. Estes, I am a Man, pp 124-5, 166.

⁷⁵⁴ Bunche interview, p 59.

⁷⁵⁵ Bunche interview, pp 40, 59.

⁷⁵⁶ Estes has used gendered analysis to explain why black men's participation in World War II was a precursor to the civil rights movement. He cited a black chaplain stationed in the Pacific, who told his men not to "be satisfied with the way things were... Don't let anyone ever again tell you inferior because you are black... Be a man! We owe it to ourselves." White servicemen also "came to respect and admire" black men they commanded and worked with. Estes suggested that this was because combat encouraged camaraderie and a special kind of male bonding. Similarly, he pointed out that many Panther activists, including Bobby Seale, were veterans and hence sympathized with the black men fighting in Vietnam. I am a Man, pp 35-6, 166.

masculinity as Williams, Clarke and Hankerson had done. Like Williams and his inner coterie, Saunders displayed a range of “macho” social traits like drinking, gambling and using strong language, including in oral history interviews. He told Carawan that he enjoyed socializing with other men who liked to drink and felt that it was perfectly acceptable for high school pupils to drink as long as it was “in moderation.” In a rural setting like Johns Island, this would take place in different spaces than in Savannah. Saunders argued that men gambled in their homes and in the woods and that it went on “all around” them. Although he claimed that substance abuse was not a problem on Johns Island, he did argue that it was understandable that men would use drugs to ameliorate some of their daily hardships. He suggested that men were entitled to enjoy drinking and gambling, as long as they supported their families as well. “If a man makes \$40 and gives \$30 to his family” and saved \$5, Saunders believed that the remaining money is “his whether he wants to drink, gamble, burn it etc.”⁷⁵⁷

Saunders and Williams both positioned themselves as a “militant” alternative to the dominant middle-class masculinity. Yet, in practice, they had different tactics and strategies regarding protests and demonstrations. On the one hand, Saunders condoned violence without ever organizing a violent protest. However, his militancy was more than mere rhetoric and style. Whereas citizenship school materials had promoted a positive view of the government, despite injustice, Saunders’ advocacy of autonomous black institutions and rejection of militaristic states was openly antagonistic. Williams, on the other hand, argued publicly that racial equality and social justice could only be achieved through voting and by participation in American political institutions, like parties and civic groups. He became an SCLC stalwart, idolized King and never openly advocated violence. Nevertheless, in 1963, the CCCV earned a reputation as a violent organization. This is largely because they held protest marches at night. Night marches

⁷⁵⁷ Carawan interview.

was ostensibly peaceful, but black demonstrators were vulnerable to attacks from white “onlookers” and this could lead to violent clashes. Savannah’s television news covered the repercussions of these clashes, for example, by depicting broken windows and vandalism. For these reasons, Mayor Maclean banned night marches during the summer protests of 1963.⁷⁵⁸

Both Williams and Saunders emerged as alternatives to established civil rights leaders in the city. They presented themselves as young, radical and working class – whether or not this image was entirely accurate. Both embodied a “macho” masculinity and enjoyed drinking and gambling with other men. They also differed with established leaders over tactics and strategy, although in different ways. Saunders was openly hostile to “integrationist” movements and advocated separate schools and an end to the Vietnam War, yet he never led any violent protests. Williams, conversely, promoted electoral participation and working “within the system” for radical change, yet he also pioneered “night marches” which led to violence and destruction of property. Most significantly, the emergence of a “young”, militant, alternative leader led to friction in the civil rights movements in both cities. In Charleston, this would also undermine coalitions with Highlander and the citizenship schools.

Bill Saunders and Highlander Folk School

Saunders’ emergence as a new leader was both a cause and a symptom of growing disenchantment among young men, and sometimes women, in Charleston County with the issues, causes and events that Jenkins had advocated for decades. It also coincided with the deterioration of relationships between Jenkins and Highlander staff. It might have been logical for Highlander staff to begin cooperating with Saunders instead of with Jenkins by the late

⁷⁵⁸ Savannah Morning News (August 1, 1963).

1960s. In some respects, Saunders embodied the grassroots leader that Highlander hoped to nurture more closely than Jenkins had done. He was working class; was enthusiastic about civic affairs, but was hardly an “established” leader. Given his advocacy of armed revolution, he may also have had more sympathy with the concept of education as a means of revolutionary upheaval. Indeed, for a brief period in 1967 and 1968 it did seem as if Saunders might replace Jenkins as Highlander’s partner in the Sea Islands. Although they had had differences in the past, Conrad Browne believed that Saunders offered refreshingly innovative leadership and welcomed his contributions to SVEP workshops. Following the 1967 summer program, Browne wrote to Saunders and thanked him for his contribution. He admitted that he did not know where the workshop would have gone had it not been for Saunders’ presentation of the situation at Haut Gap School. Saunders’ project, it seemed, epitomized Highlander’s mandate of encouraging innovative local leadership. “Here for the first time,” Browne wrote, “the group was taking hold of an issue which stirred memories of problems in their local communities.”⁷⁵⁹ The following year, Saunders and Esau Jenkins’ son James organized a communications workshop directly with Highlander staff. Browne was “impressed with the thought and care they had given their ideas.” Despite recognizing the problems this involved, Browne suggested that Jenkins participate in the workshop and offer guidance to the younger men.⁷⁶⁰

Yet, if it seemed that Highlander might have been able to develop a working relationship with this younger generation of activists instead, this did not come to fruition. On the one hand, Highlander staff may merely have felt that their role as a “movement mentor” had been spent. Highlander was beginning to move away from work on civil rights issues by this time and

⁷⁵⁹ Letter from Conrad Browne to William Saunders (August 7, 1967), Highlander Papers, box 99, folder 5. Browne expressed similar evaluations of the workshops, and Saunders participation in letters to Bernice Robinson (August 4, 1967) and to Mary Twining, a musicologist who volunteered with folk festivals on Johns Island (August 4, 1967), Highlander Papers, box 68, folder 8.

⁷⁶⁰ Letter from Conrad Browne to Esau Jenkins (April 8, 1968), Highlander Papers, box 96, folder 8.

towards projects for poor white communities in Appalachia. Horton might also have been responding to renewed attacks on the Center, including a Ku Klux Klan march past its grounds, vandalism, firebombs, critical coverage in the Knoxville Journal and, albeit unsuccessful, attempts by the Knoxville council and Tennessee general assembly to revoke Highlander's charter.⁷⁶¹ Saunders, meanwhile, had discovered a new cause, quite separate from Highlander, the Progressive Club and the citizenship schools. In December 1967, Mary Moultrie and four other nurses' aides walked out during their shifts at Charleston's Medical College Hospital and they immediately dismissed.⁷⁶² Over the course of 1968, Bill Saunders helped Moultrie and her colleagues build a covert organization that eventually enlisted union support and erupted into a strike and direct action protests in 1969.⁷⁶³ Horton requested information on the strike, but clearly had little involvement in its planning or organization.⁷⁶⁴

Meanwhile, attempts to organize further Highlander workshops on Johns Island after 1968 were not successful. Highlander received a grant to run workshops on city, local and state and government in 1968 and Browne offered to run one on Johns Island. Although Ben Mack showed interest in the offer, his request came too late for Browne to organize an effective program.⁷⁶⁵ In 1971, Jenkins resigned from the Highlander board and in 1973; he died suddenly in a car accident.⁷⁶⁶ By this time, both his working relationship with Highlander staff and with younger leaders on the island had deteriorated to the extent that there was neither external support for citizenship schools and workshops or local cohesion over community activities.

⁷⁶¹ Glen, Highlander, p 257.

⁷⁶² Martha Alston and Mary Moultrie, interview in South Carolina Voices of the Civil Rights Movement Conference (Charleston, November 5-6, 1962, transcript), pp 42, 46

⁷⁶³ Bill Saunders, interview with Leon Fink (March 1, 1980, Charleston), pp 13-14, Steve Estes box folder 3; interview with author (March 21, 2008, North Charleston, SC).

⁷⁶⁴ Letter from Myles Horton to Bill Saunders (May 13, 1969), Highlander Papers, box 99, folder 5.

⁷⁶⁵ Letters from Conrad Browne to Esau Jenkins (April 8 and July 12, 1968), Highlander Papers, box 96, folder 8.

⁷⁶⁶ Letter from Myles Horton to Esau Jenkins (June 1, 1971), Highlander Papers, box 96, folder 8.

Explaining the End of Citizenship Schools

SCLC booked training sessions at Penn Center for 1970, by which time financial support was limited.⁷⁶⁷ On the one hand, it is quite remarkable that the program continued for this long: five years after the passage of the Voting Rights Act and two years after King's assassination created so many challenges for SCLC. On the other, although 1970 marked the final stages of the Atlanta-sponsored program, local programs in Charleston County and in Savannah had already disintegrated. This was due to conflicts that were unique to local communities, but also followed the generational, gender and class cleavages evident throughout the movement. In Savannah, Hosea Williams' personal dispute with Law expedited his departure from the city in 1964 but prior to his departure, he had sown seeds for its failure. Because he devised citizenship schools as one component of a voter registration plan, there was little flexibility for a broader educational program following the passage of the 1965 Act. Because he structured the organization around himself and some key allies, when he left for Atlanta, he left a leadership vacuum, which Law and the NAACP filled. Local conflict began affecting the Sea Island schools relatively late in their development. It was largely representative of intergenerational conflict seen across civil rights organizations, in CEP workshops and in Savannah from the early 1960s. And unlike in Savannah, the emerging local young leadership moved away from SCLC and voter registration work: its advocacy of Black Power ideology made workshops harder to organize, while younger leaders championed new causes, such as the Haut Gap situation and hospital workers' plight, rather than sustaining the programs Jenkins had put in place in the late 1950s. Local conflict intersected with Progressive Club staff members' relationships with

⁷⁶⁷ Use of Facilities May 1969- April 1970, [Penn School Papers](#), folder 86.

Conrad Browne of Highlander. As Browne perceived local workshops becoming less effective, and had problems communicating with Jenkins, he became less committed to organizing the summer internship program. When foundational funding was no longer forthcoming in 1967, he withdrew Highlander's resources from the cooperative citizenship school program. By the late sixties, Charleston's civil rights movement had a younger generation of leaders with a revised agenda, and these men turned their attention to new problems affecting the region in the 1970s and 1980s.

Meanwhile, Septima Clark felt (justly) that educational work was undervalued in an organization focused on direct action and which did not always recognize women's contributions. This had been true from the earliest days of the citizenship school program; however, the CEP was sustained with a separate foundational grant and spearheaded by Andrew Young, a member of King's inner circle. Young's departure and cuts in funding exacerbated these problems. After 1968, the challenges facing the organization mounted further. The impact that Martin Luther King's assassination had on SCLC staff members' morale and interpersonal relationships cannot be overstated. Fairclough has observed,

SCLC itself was far more than King (but)... his death revealed how completely he dominated it through intellect, personality, moral example, and organizational skill. King raised at least half of SCLC's funds virtually single-handed. Only he could move and influence such a variety and number of Americans. None of his colleagues matched the depth of his commitment to nonviolence. King's courage, dedication and idealism have often been noted. But he also possessed more subtle qualities of leadership. He had the ability to use people- not in a manipulative or exploitative manner, but in the sense of utilizing their talents to further an ideal.⁷⁶⁸

After King died and Ralph Abernathy was appointed his successor, personal rivalries were barely contained and several staff left SCLC. Jesse Jackson quarreled with Abernathy and subsequently resigned, transforming Chicago's Operation Breadbasket into his own, independent

⁷⁶⁸ To Redeem the Soul, p 404.

organization.⁷⁶⁹ Andrew Young, meanwhile, never challenged Abernathy's position, but had other ambitions and left SCLC in 1970 in order to pursue a political career.⁷⁷⁰ Also in 1970, Septima Clark retired. Clark's departure should not be seen as a vindication of SCLC's gender politics or as frustration with the program's mismanagement. Despite written evidence of her frustration with SCLC, she claimed that she never considered resigning prior to 1970.⁷⁷¹ By this time, she was seventy-two years old and it was natural that she should retire, although she continued her civic and community activism, for example by serving on the Charleston school board, well into her retirement years. Yet, Clark was the individual employee most committed to maintaining and continuing citizenship education, so the program dissipated after her departure.⁷⁷² In addition to undermining SCLC's reputation, visibility and ability to raise funds, King's death and the loss of SCLC stalwarts may have meant that there were even fewer staff members who appreciated the CEP and its value to SCLC. As Levine argued, "since the CEP had never been fully appreciated by most of the inner circle, it is not surprising that (after 1968) the program fell to the wayside."⁷⁷³

⁷⁶⁹ To Redeem the Soul, p 394.

⁷⁷⁰ Fairclough, To Redeem the Soul, p 392.

⁷⁷¹ Walker interview, p 10.

⁷⁷² Bernice Robinson left SCLC at a similar time as her cousin in order to work for the South Carolina Commission for Farm Workers (SCCFW) where she worked as a supervisor for VISTA volunteers.

⁷⁷³ Levine, "Citizenship Schools," p 262.

Conclusion

This dissertation has explored many “myths” about the citizenship schools that have now become established wisdom. Most crucially, it has challenged historians’ assumptions that the schools were an outgrowth of Myles Horton’s educational philosophy and that the first school organized by Horton, Septima Clark and Esau Jenkins on Johns Island was a blueprint for the schools organized throughout the South in the 1960s. In relation to the first assumption, an inherent contradiction in Horton’s philosophy was that although he believed in using education to help people devise their own solutions to their own problems, he had preconceptions about what these should be. Yet, Jenkins and the Progressive Club were not a “tabula rasa” on which Highlander could experiment in grassroots community development and insurgency. Jenkins had an ideology of his own that can best be explained by understanding his identity as a middle-class black man living in a rural community. Jenkins envisaged community projects that encouraged thrift, enterprise, industry and moral behavior not just because it would make the community a better place to live, but also because that was how he defined manhood. Even during the 1954 United Nations workshop, there was a clear conflict of interest between Horton, who saw the workshop as a chance to link international issues to community problems and Jenkins, who already had a clear idea of the kind of project he wanted to run and had little interest in the UN and how it affected Johns Islanders. From the outset, Horton struggled to persuade Jenkins to share leadership roles with others and put time and investment into the first school that would not be possible elsewhere. This tension is also apparent in citizenship school curricula. When Bernice Robinson asked her students what they most wanted to know, the response was not how to challenge authority or foment social revolution but to learn concrete

skills that would help them to improve their daily lives, like how to fill in a mail order catalogue or write a letter to their children. Citizenship school curricula changed markedly, particularly following the transfer to SCLC and the passage of the Voting Rights Act, but they continued to focus on teaching skills that would help people live more comfortable, prosperous lives.

Case studies of citizenship schools in Lowcountry South Carolina go some way to explain the degree to which the programs differed from one another. Highlander invested time and energy in Johns Island prior to the establishment of the first citizenship school, most significantly by encouraging Jenkins to share leadership roles with others and by loaning money so the Progressive Club could create its own space for the school and other projects. When it came to neighboring projects, Highlander could not make a similar investment and relied on resources that were already in the community. Classes took place in spaces that already had gendered social meaning inscribed on them and teachers tended not to be undiscovered leaders, but people with some authority in the community, such as ministers and trained teachers. Furthermore, when these resources were not present, as on Daufuskie and St Helena islands, the schools did not take root at all. When the program was extended to Savannah, it changed yet again. Facing a legal challenge to its future, Highlander had even fewer resources to invest in the program and was working with a man with a strong, charismatic personality and clear ideas about the kind of project he would like to run. In Savannah, citizenship schools were not the broad based educational project Clark had in mind, but rather more explicitly linked to a voter registration movement. Williams' ego meant that he was not willing to share leadership roles and instead relied on a small circle of cronies. He also had a personal quarrel with Law and the NAACP. Gender, class and generational identities shaped further differences between the South Carolina and Savannah project. Williams drew on community resources available to him when

he used young student demonstrators to teach citizenship classes; however, their age meant that they approached teaching very differently from middle-aged women like Robinson and Alleen Brewer. Savannah's citizenship schools also took places in spaces that tended to be used by working class (or "underclass") black men, such as longshoremen halls, bars, pool rooms and street corners. This brought into the fold people who genuinely benefited from all that citizenship schools had to offer, but meant reshaping the curricula. Savannah's citizenship school classes discussed issues like drug and alcohol addiction and endeavored to make "new men" out of their students.

After the transfer to SCLC, the South Carolina and Savannah programs became even more different. Historians argue that Myles Horton willingly relinquished the citizenship school program to SCLC because it had become "too big" for Highlander. On the contrary, Wesley Hotchkiss of AMA, Maxwell Hahn of the Field Foundation and Andrew Young of SCLC rejected outright Horton's offer to remain involved in the program, through a citizenship school committee or as a researcher and advisor. Upset by his marginalization from the program he had devised, Horton resolved instead to continue working with Esau Jenkins on the Sea Islands. He offered the Citizens Committee financial support and together, they devised the summer internship program with Voter Education Project money. SCLC, meanwhile, developed citizenship schools in Columbia and surrounding counties but because Jenkins was relatively self-sufficient, staff did not invest as many resources in Charleston County. In Savannah, meanwhile, Williams gradually became closer to King and SCLC between 1961 and 1964. Frustrated with a perceived lack of financial support from Highlander, he affiliated with SCLC but still identified himself as an NAACP stalwart. He sought financial support from the national NAACP and ran for the board of directors. However, he fell out with the local NAACP branch

when Law refused to support his bid and turned the Chatham County Crusader for Voters into an independent organization financed by the Voter Education Project. When the VEP withdrew funds following several controversies, they made continued support conditional on Williams' cooperation with SCLC. In late 1963 and 1964, then, the CCCV closely cooperated with SCLC on voter registration and developed SCLC's presence in the city although, not to the extent that Williams may have liked. In 1964, Williams was offered a paid position on SCLC's staff.

Although this may have marked a high point in Andrew Young's strategy of building a strong SCLC affiliate in Savannah, it was also the point at which the CCCV and Savannah's citizenship schools began to disintegrate. Because Williams had been unwilling to share leadership roles, he left a power vacuum in the city that Law and the NAACP naturally assumed. Because Williams had seen citizenship schools strictly as part of a voter registration program, local teachers like Stroman and Proctor did not understand the value of continuing schools after the passage of the Voting Rights Act. In South Carolina, Jenkins continued working with Highlander Folk School until 1967. However, the summer programs faced problems welding together a mixed age group and dealing with social problems that working with activists in their late teens and early twenties entailed. Jenkins and Browne's relationship broke down and, without guaranteed funding after 1967, Highlander no longer chose to invest in projects on the island. At the local level, Saunders challenged Jenkins' ideology, tactics and models of black masculinity. Although he never led a threatened violent protest, Saunders led competing movements to deal with new issues, such as defending all-black educational facilities, supporting trade union activities in the city, opposing the war and working on behalf of young black men. At the administrative level, meanwhile, Septima Clark felt that her colleagues at SCLC did not value either educational work or women's contributions to the organization. This was a fair

assessment of the situation because when SCLC faced cuts in funding and organizational problems following King's death, the program "fell to the wayside." Although the program officially ran until 1970, local programs often finished earlier either because of local problems like those besetting South Carolina and Savannah or because teachers became frustrated with SCLC's poor administration and levels of support.

The Citizenship Schools' Legacy

A final assumption that historians reiterate about the citizenship schools is that as the "foundation on which the civil rights movement was built," they held a deep legacy in Southern communities.⁷⁷⁴ Septima Clark asserted, "From one end of the South to the other, if you look at the black elected officials and the political leaders, you find people who had their first experience in the training program of the Citizenship School."⁷⁷⁵ This was certainly true of individuals at

⁷⁷⁴ It is appealing for historians with sympathies and interests in a particular movement to be able to "prove" that social movements succeeded in making conditions better for future generations and that activists were personally affected by their experiences during the 1960s and refused to "sell out." Many historians focus on the "life course" of former activists and demonstrate that their choice of career, voluntary work and even personal relationships were influenced by their experiences in the social movements of the 1960s. For example, Doug McAdam, Freedom Summer and "The Biographical Impact of Activism" in Marco Giugini, Doug McAdam and Charles Tilly How Social Movements Matter (Minneapolis, MI: University of Minnesota Press, 1999). Two relatively recent works have studied the legacy of SNCC's "Freedom Schools" in Mississippi. Sandra Adickes listed examples whereby former "Freedom School" participants either went on to implement their goals for social justice at policy levels at Washington DC, or remained in the community to continue the grassroots activism that they had initiated in the 1960s. She also explained that former activists adapted their understanding of social, racial and economic justice to incorporate new problems, such as the effects of the HIV/AIDS epidemic in black communities. Sandra Adickes, Legacy of a Freedom School (New York, NY: MacMillan, 2005), pp 157-191. Kenneth Andrews sought to measure the relative successes and failures of the Mississippi civil rights movement. He examined not only whether people remained involved in social activism, but how this activism benefited their communities, focusing on areas like the Child Development Group of Mississippi (CDGM), African American voter registration, turnout and numbers of black elected officials; and work done to integrate the state's schools. Freedom is a Constant Struggle. Nancy Naples investigated the influence of generational shifts and conflicts on women's antipoverty movements. She explained that while sometimes, daughters of former activists were inspired by their mothers to become community activists in their own right, other young women saw their parents' work as irrelevant or became interested in other issues, such as environmental justice. Grassroots Warriors. Of course, another measure of a social movement's legacy is whether it stimulated the emergence of counter movements and historians have duly acknowledged this. See Suzanne Staggenborg, The Pro-Choice Movement: Organization and Activism in the Abortion Conflict (New York, NY Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994).

⁷⁷⁵ Walker interview.

the CEP's administrative level. Andrew Young had an illustrious political career; serving as a Congressman, as mayor of Atlanta and as ambassador to the United Nations during the Carter administration.⁷⁷⁶ Septima Clark's political ambitions were consistent with her lifelong work on education and helping people at the grassroots, local level. In 1974, at the age of 76, she was elected to the Charleston School Board, on which she served until 1978.⁷⁷⁷ Bernice Robinson remained a committed community activist and went to work for James Clyburn's South Carolina Commission for Farm Workers as a supervisor for the Volunteers in Service to America (VISTA) recruits, although she was not successful when she attempted to run for the South Carolina Senate in 1972 and 1974.⁷⁷⁸

Historians have also been eager to grasp examples whereby citizenship schoolteachers and students went on to do other activities within the community and have cited this as "proof" that citizenship schools trained the next generation of civic and political leaders. For example, Oldendorf, Ling and Lathan discuss Anderson Mack, Ethel Jenkins' pupil. Mack established a community center on Wadmalaw Island; campaigned for paved streets and a kindergarten and was active in Rural Mission, a community service organization on the Sea Islands.⁷⁷⁹ Alleen Brewer (later Wood) and Ethel Grimball both continued to be active community leaders. Wood took part in a range of activities, including organizing protests against the practice of "integrating Edisto Island schools by putting black children in trailers and white children in the buildings" and coordinating day care facilities for children under the auspices of the South Carolina

⁷⁷⁶ Young, An Easy Burden, pp 511-31.

⁷⁷⁷ Certificate of Septima Clark's election to the Charleston Consolidated School Board (1974); School Board Agendas and Minutes (Jan 1975- August 1978), Clark Collection, box 4, folder 34; boxes 5 and 6.

⁷⁷⁸ Thrasher and Wigginton interview, Linda Lingle, interview with author (September 9, 2008, Washington DC), Correspondence concerning electoral campaigns, Robinson Papers, box 13, folder 8-9.

⁷⁷⁹ Oldendorf, "South Sea Island Citizenship Schools," pp 178-9;

Commission for Farm Workers.⁷⁸⁰ In 1965, Esau Jenkins secured an Office of Economic Opportunity (OEO) grant to organize a Head Start program for Johns Island and appointed Ethel to be its director.⁷⁸¹ Oldendorf argues that these examples prove that citizenship schools “empower(ed)” people to become civic activists, while Ling suggests that they prove that citizenship schools “recruit(ed) and inspir(ed) the rank and file” to take part in activities that complemented other activities on Johns Island.⁷⁸² This may have been true in the case of Anderson Mack, but Grimbball and Wood’s were unlikely to have been “inspired” by their Highlander training or their experiences teaching citizenship schools to become civic activists. Alleen Brewer took part in a range of social work and community activities prior to, and in conjunction with, her citizenship school teaching and her activities in the 1970s were a continuation of this. Ethel Grimbball’s selection to administer the Head Start program demonstrated Esau Jenkins’ continued tendency to rely on members of his family to assist him in his business and community ventures. Moreover, scholars have faced serious obstacles in undertaking research projects that ascertained how many citizenship school participants continued to be civically and politically active, mostly because of the dearth of surviving students and teachers who were willing to share their experiences.⁷⁸³ Finally, the issues and

⁷⁸⁰ Oldendorf, “South Sea Island Citizenship Schools,” p 178; “Edisto Island Community Self Development Program,” Robinson Papers, box 8, folder 6.

⁷⁸¹ Harris Shrank and Max Gitter (June 16, 1966), Charleston County Child Development Center, Head Start #799, Charleston SC, NARA, RG 381, box 119. Guy Carawan outlined plans for the Head Start program and Jenkins’ role in applying for funds in his interview with Laura and Willis Rivers, Carawan Collection, FT3589.

⁷⁸² Oldendorf, “South Sea Island Citizenship Schools,” p 177; Ling, “Local Leadership,” p 419.

⁷⁸³ For example, when Oldendorf researched her 1987 dissertation, she admitted that she had faced obstacles to measuring the effect of the schools on students and their communities. She explained that there “was no immediate follow-up on the impact these students had on their communities,” while her own attempts to interview former students were frustrating. “Many of the students from the Sea Island classes are no longer living,” she concluded, “some are in ill health, some could not be located and one refused to be interviewed.” “Highlander Folk School and the South Carolina Sea Island Citizenship Schools,” p 92. Perhaps unsurprisingly, as time passes, it becomes increasingly difficult to find former students, their family members or people who remember the schools and their effects. For example, Carolyn Jenkins is an African American native Charleston woman with roots and contacts in the community. She worked with Cleveland Sellers, the SNCC activist, who had been friends with Septima Clark and other South Carolina activists. She interviewed Anderson Mack and Ethel Grimbball, who has

challenges raised in this dissertation hint at some of the complications involved in evaluating the legacy of the citizenship schools. Citing examples of individual citizenship school students who were active in their community simply does not go far enough.

This study has cast aspersion on the concept that, by developing citizenship schools, Highlander Folk School unleashed a powerful tool that taught communities how to organize and challenge injustice. There were drastic variations between citizenship schools in different locales in terms of the people recruited to organize and teach them; gender composition, spaces in which classes took place and the topics taught in citizenship school classes themselves. Yet again, the legacy of the citizenship schools in Savannah offers an alternative to the traditional narrative. Hosea Williams and his inner circle were undeniably affected by their experiences of working with SCLC through citizenship schools and voter registration and this shaped their future lives and careers. Williams continued to be a dedicated, if erratic and disorganized civil rights leader in the 1960s. He stayed with SCLC until 1979, but he presented himself as King's natural heir and resented both Abernathy and Joseph Lowery's appointments as SCLC President. In the early 1970s, he attempted to create an autonomous power base in Atlanta through forming the Poor People's Church of Love. He also became a colorful figure in Georgia politics, serving in the Georgia House of Representatives and the Atlanta City Council and running unsuccessfully for mayor in 1989. He attracted controversy on more than one occasion; for example, when he was investigated for collecting \$4.2 million in donations from his "church" and when he was implicated in a hit and run accident in the 1990s. Yet, he remained dedicated

since deceased. Yet, she could not find any former students from Johns Island to interview, despite regularly frequenting social events such as a seafood jamboree run by Rural Mission. On one occasion, she heard about Mrs. Ella Pinckney, then 101 years old, who had attended the Johns Island School. She arranged an interview but found that Mrs. Pinckney could not remember the school or any details about it. Her PhD was completed in 2005, so she would have been attempting to do this research two decades after Oldendorf had done. Jenkins, "Septima Clark," p 57. I faced similar problems locating former students or community activists who are still alive, in good health or who felt comfortable speaking to me.

to the cause of social justice when he founded a charity, “Hosea Feeds the Hungry and Homeless” in 1971 and organized a march against racism in 1987.⁷⁸⁴

When he moved to Atlanta, Williams took his most loyal followers, Benjamin Van Clarke, Lester Hankerson, Henry “Trash” Brownlee” and Willie Bolden, with him. The latter three had turned their lives around through their involvement with the citizenship school program and found meaningful work as field workers in SCLC. Hankerson and Brownlee both were employed as field workers and they took part in a variety of demonstrations. They were a generation older than the other two men were and this represented the pinnacle, rather than the instigation, of their careers as activists.⁷⁸⁵ Willie Bolden, on the other hand, was one of the Citizenship Schools’ “success stories.” Perhaps because he was a generation younger (he was just nineteen when he began attending citizenship schools), he had a varied and rich career following his time with SCLC. Remarkably, he received an MA in education from Harvard in 1972 before finding work in the labor movement and at Atlanta public library. He eventually became a pastor.⁷⁸⁶ Clarke, similarly, had an active career with SCLC as a field worker. Yet, he was a victim of some of the problems facing young black men in Savannah. He was drafted to fight in Vietnam in 1967. Although he appealed his notice and became a committed antiwar activist, he was devastated after his twin brother was paralyzed in Vietnam. Mrs. Scott Stell, wife of a former NAACP activist, argued that Clarke suffered severe emotional problems in the aftermath of his brother’s accident and that he depended on the community’s support when he returned to Savannah. Clarke himself admitted that he had been sent to see “many

⁷⁸⁴ Clippings from Atlanta Constitution (July 2, July 20, 1991), Taylor Branch Papers, box 134, folder 956, <http://W.W.w.hoseafeedthehungry.com/history.aspx> (Accessed on July 26, 2009).

⁷⁸⁵ Lester Hankerson died in 1988 at the age of 63; however, I have not been able to trace Brownlee’s activities following his time at SCLC. He was still alive and able to take part in the oral history project accompanying the first exhibition of Baldwin’s photographs in 1983. See obituary of Joseph Lester Hankerson, New York Times (August 6, 1988); Baldwin, “.... We ain’t what we used to be.”

⁷⁸⁶ See http://crdl.usg.edu/people/b/bolden_willie_1938/?Welcome (Accessed on July 26, 2009).

psychiatrists.”⁷⁸⁷ Furthermore, according to Septima Clark, one young black man (who may have been Clarke) was devastated by the macho drinking and substance abuse culture among Savannah’s civil rights activists. In 1976, she explained that Hosea Williams had “ruined a young man there who is sick now, almost a vegetable.” She suggested that “Hosea's downfall (was) sitting down and drinking with the young boys, and they didn't know when to stop.”⁷⁸⁸

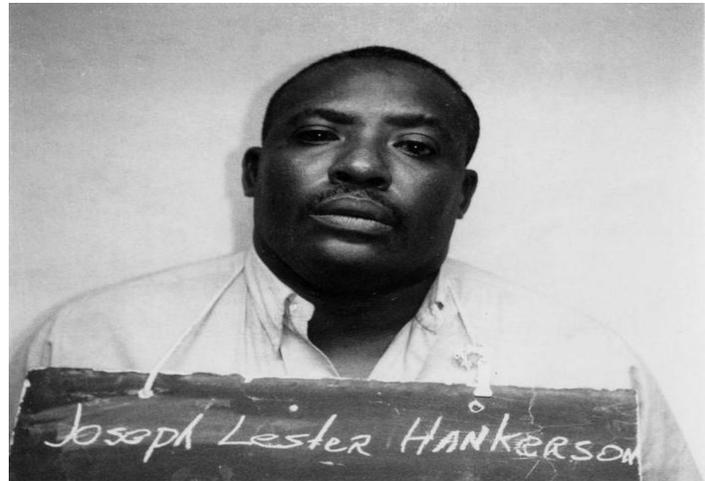


Figure 15 Mugshot of Lester Hankerson, following his arrest in Grenada, Mississippi, 1966

Hosea Williams, SCLC and the Citizenship School Program undoubtedly had a significant, long-term effect on the men in Williams’ inner circle. However, because the men all chose to move to Atlanta and join SCLC, it is debatable how far the Citizenship School Program left a legacy in the city itself. After 1964, Law and other NAACP leaders such as the Savannah State Professor Prince Jackson were the most visible African American leaders in the city. They oversaw a range of racial justice activities and issues. These included campaigns for hospital desegregation; cooperating with one of the first and most successful school bussing programs from 1971; investigating police brutality cases concerning young black men (thus demonstrating

⁷⁸⁷ Notice of Right to Appeal from Chatham County Local Board to Benjamin Van Clark (21 July, 1967), letter from Benjamin Van Clark to Andrew Young (January 30, 1968), SCLC Papers, Part 4, 27:443, 450; Benjamin Clark, contribution to “We ain’t what we used to be,” Mrs. Scott Stell, interview with Taylor Branch (October 29th, 1991), Taylor Branch Papers, box 120, folder 865.

⁷⁸⁸ Walker interview

an awareness of pertinent issues). They also arranged cultural activities including organizing historical tours and founding two museums on African American history and culture (the King-Tisdell and the Ralph Mark Gilbert civil rights museums).⁷⁸⁹ Ida Proctor went as far as to argue that as Law promoted the city's civil rights history, he consciously undermined Hosea Williams and his contribution.⁷⁹⁰ When I visited the Ralph Mark Gilbert museum in late 2008, I found few references to Hosea Williams, although he featured prominently in the Telfair Museum's exhibitions of the Baldwin photographs.

Meanwhile, it is debatable whether the individuals who participated in the program as teachers and students were "recruited" or "inspired" to take part in further political action. Some teachers did go on to have related careers in education and social work. Ida Proctor was the first African American teacher to teach in an all-white school in Port Wentworth in 1963, while Emogene Stroman-Middleton became a child psychologist and later ran, unsuccessfully, for the Savannah School Board.⁷⁹¹ I will discuss the interplay of gender, class and generational identity in the legacy of the movement in more detail below; however, here it is worth noting that it is perhaps not surprising that young African American female college graduates would choose this kind of career. They were steady professions open to educated women at a time when they may have struggled to make a career in another field such as business or law. There is no evidence to suggest that either Proctor or Stroman chose to work in education or civic-minded professions because they had been inspired by their Highlander training or experiences with the citizenship schools. Stroman recalled explicitly that she had wanted to be a social worker while at college,

⁷⁸⁹ "Georgia State Conference of NAACP Branches, News Bulletin, August 2, 1966," NAACP Papers, Part 29, C 1:700-4; Personal correspondence with Debra Andrews (Chatham County School Board, January 7, 2008); Savannah Morning News, February 14 1965, February 23 1965; Memo to NAACP General Council from Earl T. Shinhoster, Region V Director NAACP (June 21, 1984, NAACP Papers- LC, Part 8, box 118, folder 4; Law, Crimmins and Kuhn interview.

⁷⁹⁰ Levine interview.

⁷⁹¹ Proctor, Levine interview; Stroman, Levine interview, interview with author.

but knew that she needed to finish a Masters' degree first. Unable to find a job after graduation, she taught citizenship schools because although it only paid expenses, it gave her some work. When she reflected upon her time with the program, she reflected that she might have benefited more than her students did. She explained, "It made me feel good to help individuals." When she talked to her children about the civil rights movement, she did not have to say "They said," or "They did," I can say "we."⁷⁹² In other words, she could look back on her time teaching a citizenship school and feel that she had made a contribution to the civil rights movement and to black history. There is scarce information available about students other than Bolden; however, as Chapter 4 explained, the mainly middle-aged students played supportive roles in a movement led by young people like their teachers. Undoubtedly, citizenship schools had a personal effect on individuals, as in the case of the alcoholics and drug addicts who became "new men." I do not wish to underestimate the value of these personal experiences, but they do fall short of Clark and Andrew Young's assertions that citizenship school students became the next generation of civic and political leaders.

This is related to a second problem in the historiography of the legacy of citizenship schools. Historians look for examples of citizenship school students continuing to take part in social and political action without considering where this action fit in the broader social and political context of communities in the 1970s and beyond. In the South Carolina case, this stems from the tendency to focus only on the early schools organized by Highlander in the 1950s and to ignore the history of the summer internship program and Bill Saunders' contesting leadership. Citizenship schoolteachers and students may have continued to manage community and/or day care centers and join church or school based associations; but there was also a new cadre of black leaders. These leaders emerged to deal with problems facing African Americans

⁷⁹² Stroman, interview with author, Levine interview.

(particularly young black men) in the 1960s and 1970s, including unemployment, problems with the city's housing associations (essentially slum dwellings), drug addiction, crime and police brutality.⁷⁹³ One of the most important associations to emerge in the late 1960s was the Charleston Community Relations Committee. The Committee had been established at the request of Governor Robert McNair following the Orangeburg Massacre of February 1968.⁷⁹⁴ The Committee's stated mission was to create a "complaint review program" to represent and tackle problems experienced by people in the region, "improve coordination" between community, governmental and private organizations in the region and, through equal treatment, housing, education, welfare and employment, improve cooperation within the community.⁷⁹⁵ Its members included both black and white representatives from Charleston's military bases, the black architect Herbert DeCosta, black ministers like Reverend Z Grady and Reverend Enwright and an NAACP voter registration coordinator, Mrs. Johnetta Edwards. Esau Jenkins served until 1970 then resigned due to other commitments; however, his son Bill joined in 1975.⁷⁹⁶ The committee worked on issues that had concerned Jenkins in the 1950s, such as school facilities and substandard housing, but had a strong focus on problems facing young black men. For example, in an attempt to tackle juvenile delinquency, members organized a summer program for disadvantaged boys at the naval barracks, while the committee simultaneously investigated cases

⁷⁹³ There is a wealth of books and articles discussing the "crisis" facing young black men from the 1970s. One of the most comprehensive is Gibbs, Young, Black and Male in America.

⁷⁹⁴ On February 8, police opened fire on a group of student demonstrators led by SNCC's Cleveland Sellers at the All-Star bowling alley in Orangeburg, South Carolina. Three students were killed and twenty-seven injured. See Cleveland Sellers, The River of No Return: The Autobiography of a Black Militant and the Life and Death of SNCC (New York, NY: Morrow, 1973); Jack Bass and Jack Nelson, The Orangeburg Massacre (Macon, Georgia: Mercer University Press, 1984, 1st edition 1970).

⁷⁹⁵ Charleston Area Community Relations Committee bylaws, DeCosta Papers, folder on CCRC.

⁷⁹⁶ Minutes (2 May 1968), CRC folder, DeCosta Papers. Enwright ministered to Reverend Brewer's former parish on Edisto Island and both he and Grady were vocal African American leaders in the 1970s and 1980s.

where police officers were accused of unfairly arresting, or behaving violently, towards black men.⁷⁹⁷

On October 6 1969, Saunders announced that he wished to form his own group to work in the community. In November, he betrayed his prevailing “militant” or stubborn streak when he turned up late to a meeting where the CRC was due to discuss the role that a new organization of this kind should have. Saunders replied frankly that he was not sure that “the community relations committee should be involved at all.”⁷⁹⁸ Despite this initial conflict, Saunders continued to serve on the CRC and also founded his new organization, the Committee for Better Racial Assurance (COBRA). He recruited Jessie Reid, a young man who had once been unfairly arrested and had worked with substance abusers and the former NAACP President J Arthur Brown.⁷⁹⁹ Once established, COBRA had a reputation for being militant and “an enigma to many in the Charleston community.” However, it dealt with similar problems to the CRC, such as sponsoring housing projects and investigating police brutality claims. It currently sponsors “COBRA Sickle Cell,” which tests Charleston residents for sickle cell anaemia and offers advice for treatment and healthy living.⁸⁰⁰

Surveying back issues from the 1970s of The Chronicle, Charleston’s black newspaper, gives some idea of the issues facing the black community and who were the most visible community activists and organizations. Other than Saunders, COBRA and the CRC, the newspaper ran frequent articles about a tenant association founded in the Ben Tillman housing estate in 1971 and its chair Lewis Sanchez. The association campaigned on several issues. For example, in 1973, it issued a list of demands. It asked that a resident manager be retained, that

⁷⁹⁷ See minutes of the Community Relations Committee, 1968-1974, CRC folder, DeCosta Papers.

⁷⁹⁸ CRC Minutes (October 6, November 5, 1969), CRC folder, DeCosta Papers.

⁷⁹⁹ The Chronicle, (May 3 1975)

⁸⁰⁰ The Chronicle (March 30, 1972; May 18, 1972); Bill Saunders, interview with author; Linda Lingle, interview with author.

blacks from the project work in the office, that a competent maintenance manager be appointed, that there should be more security guards, that garbage pickup should be improved, that there be decent playgrounds, that streets should be repaired and drains unstopped and that streets should be named and there should be better lighting.⁸⁰¹ Some of these, like street paving and lighting, were issues that motivated activists like Mary Lee Davis in the 1950s; others, such as security were clearly responses to rising concerns about crime and drugs. Local people also founded new single-issue organizations to protest police brutality. For example, residents in Moncks Corner, Berkeley County founded the Black Star organization that boycotted white-owned stores and held local demonstrations culminating in a march on Columbia in January 1976.⁸⁰² In the city of Charleston, Jerome Smalls founded PULL-L (People United to Live and Let Live) in 1975 to protest police brutality.⁸⁰³ The fact that these organizations, rather than rural community centers and day care programs, took center stage in the black press does not negate the value of the contributions made by people like Anderson Mack, Ethel Grimball and Alleen Wood in the 1970s and thereafter. Police brutality and housing disputes may simply have been seen as more “newsworthy” and received greater media attention. However, the fact that the black press and community organizations repeatedly focused on these problems suggest that they were seen as the most salient issues facing Charleston County in the post civil rights era. Hence, people became community leaders if they were seen to be tackling these issues, and these “leaders” tended not to be citizenship school students, teachers or organizers. The leadership training that citizenship schools offered was valued, but what counted was the flexibility to deal with issues arising in a changing society and community.

⁸⁰¹ The Chronicle, March 17 1973.

⁸⁰² The Chronicle, (May 17; August 23 1975).

⁸⁰³ The Chronicle, (July 19, 1975).

The final consideration that is necessary for understanding the legacy of the citizenship schools is the ways in which race, gender, class and generational identities shaped people's experiences in the post civil rights era, and who would emerge as key leaders. The first question was raised in relation to Savannah's citizenship schoolteachers. As Chapter 2 explained, young women like Ida Proctor and Carolyn Roberts found throughout the 1960s that they were excluded from Williams' inner leadership circle because they were not macho men who discussed CCCV strategy over a beer. They were not among the inner group who moved to Atlanta or joined the SCLC staff. Instead, when the citizenship school program ended, they looked for work and lived their lives. Their career choices would inevitably be conscribed because of their gender and they tended to follow traditionally "female," nurturing professions like teaching and social work. The same is true for South Carolina women like Clark, Robinson, Wood and Grimbball, who found jobs or civic roles dealing with "maternalist" issues such as child care and education, or in which they used their skills as mentors and nurturers. Septima Clark did identify herself with the Women's Liberation movement and was even invited to address the first meeting of the National Organization of Women (NOW) in Washington DC.⁸⁰⁴ Additionally, some of the "maternalist" roles that other black women filled, such as organizing day care, helped the cause of women's liberation by enabling women to combine work and family responsibilities. However, for a number of reasons, many black women (especially in the South) were often alienated from joining white-led women's liberation organizations.⁸⁰⁵

⁸⁰⁴ Clark, Ready from Within, pp 80-2. Clark estimated that this took place in 1958; however, NOW's founding meeting was in fact held in June 1966.

⁸⁰⁵ Some black women believed that racial, and social justice, issues trumped gender equality and should be their primary focus; others did not feel that women's liberation organizations focused on problems that were relevant to black women. For example, for black women the "right" to work was not appealing as they had had to balance work and family life for generations. Black women with deep roots in churches also rejected some of the feminist movement's interests, such as abortion and sexual freedom, as immoral. See, for example, Wini Breines, The Trouble Between Us: An Uneasy History of Black and White Women in the Feminist Movement (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996).

This dissertation has shown that African American women frequently were excluded from leadership positions in SCLC and local civil rights organizations organized by black men who did not always value educational or women's work. If anything, conditions in the post civil rights period exacerbated this. In the first place, publications like the Negro Family: Case for National Action fuelled debates over the problems facing young black men. In some cases, policy makers and black men vilified African American "matriarchs" for emasculating black men. In the second, in many cases, the rise of "Black Power" meant the contraction of leadership for women. Women in the "Black Panther" party recalled that they were often subordinated to administrative positions and faced discrimination and sexism on a regular basis. Kathleen Cleaver, the wife of the Party's Minister of Information Eldridge Cleaver, argued that "Black men were seeking to be more assertive and more in control" and to demonstrate that they were "not submissive to the dominant white man or to the police." In this environment, it was "very tricky to create something that's not totally male dominated."⁸⁰⁶ "Pantherettes" were expected to support the Party as "revolutionary mothers." They were to produce "babies for the revolution" and to support men by keeping home, cleaning, cooking and raising children.⁸⁰⁷ Estes points out that by the late 1960s, this had begun to change. Eldridge Cleaver urged Party members to "purge" the Panthers of chauvinism and in 1974, Elaine Brown became head of the

⁸⁰⁶ Kathleen Cleaver and Susie Linfield, "The Education of Kathleen Neal Cleaver," Transition O (1998), pp 172-95, citation on p 186, cited in Estes, I am a Man, p 163.

⁸⁰⁷ Estes, I am a Man, pp 160-6. Elaine Brown's autobiography is replete with examples of sexual discrimination within the BPP. For example, on one occasion, they were asked to contribute towards a communal fund for food during a party meeting. When they went to collect their meals, they were told first by another young woman and then by a male leader that "Sisters" were expected to wait until after "Brothers" had eaten. "Sisters... did not challenge brothers... (They) stood behind their black men, supported their men, and respected them." They were also expected to conform to party rules in their sexual conduct. Brown was aghast when, at one meeting, a young girl "maybe fifteen years old" told the assembled "sisters" that they had a duty not only to learn the party platform, but to cook and look after men and use their sexuality to "reward" "the Brother (when he) is on his job and hold it back when he's not." Another female party member even encouraged her to stop taking birth control pills as it was her duty to "have a baby for the revolution." Brown became pregnant as a result. Elaine Brown, A Taste of Power: A Black Woman's Story (New York, NY: Random House, 1992), p 109, 189, 203.

Party.⁸⁰⁸ The reason why men like Saunders and Lewis Sanchez graced the pages of The Chronicle more frequently than black women did was not likely to be because organizations like COBRA and PULL-L consciously relegated women to subordinate roles. Rather, by the 1970s, organizations were emerging to deal with new problems such as police brutality and crime and, because these were problems facing black men, black men tended to lead them.

Yet, again gender intersected with class and age to determine the legacy citizenship schools had in communities and on participants. Young black women like Proctor, Roberts and Stroman were excluded from leadership roles in Savannah's civil rights movement and did not go on to have careers in SCLC. Yet, as college-educated, young women they had opportunities to excel in professions, albeit traditionally "female" ones, that their middle-aged, working class, often male students did not, no matter how much they might have benefited from a citizenship school education. Even men like Hankerson, whose lives were transformed by SCLC and citizenship schools, did not have the educational background or simply the advantage of youth, which would enable them to pursue a professional career in the post-civil rights movement. Younger men had greater chances to take advantage of new opportunities open in the post-civil rights era than middle-class men did, and Bolden was living proof of such a local success story. However, other (often working or "under" class) young black men did not always have these advantages. If the authors of works like The Negro Family are to be believed, they were more likely to drop out of school, join gangs, be imprisoned and become drug addicts. In the late 1960s, young black (particularly working class) men were vulnerable to being drafted. This overview of the interplay between gender, race, class and age in the legacy of citizenship schools demonstrate the problems involved in making sweeping claims about the program's long term "success stories."

⁸⁰⁸ Estes, I am a Man, pp 169, 176.

Scholars have been publishing books and articles, and completing dissertations and theses, on the citizenship schools for over two decades and it remains a popular topic. With the important exception of David Levine and Deanna Gillespie's work, scholarly work tends to follow well-trodden themes and lines of argument. Existing work has provided overviews on the first Johns Island School, extolled the schools for cultivating grassroots leadership and asserted that they were an opportunity for black women to become leaders. While challenging a range of long-held assumptions about citizenship schools, I hope that the most useful contributions the dissertation has made has been, first, that an understanding of gender in the civil rights movement involves more than showing where black women did or were not able to contribute. There are very few studies of black masculinity in the civil rights movement, especially in a traditionally "female" arena like the citizenship education program. As this field grows, it will be more sophisticated and interesting if scholars consider the intersections between gender, class and a hitherto understudied category: age and generational identity.

Secondly, the dissertation has shown the extent of local variation between just two citizenship school programs. As historians are keen to assert, SCLC extended citizenship schools across the South, yet the only other schools that have received historical attention have been those in Mississippi, which attract interest because of their link to Fannie Lou Hamer and the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party. Future works could examine a range of other schools in other states; for example, in Florida. In 1964, an NAACP voter registration fieldworker funded by the VEP explained that two people were not able to register because they did not have naturalization papers, so may well have been recent immigrants from Cuba. This suggests that there was a more complex relationship between race, citizenship and voter

registration in the state than the history of African American disfranchisement can explain.⁸⁰⁹

Meanwhile, there would be scope to examine the relationship between citizenship schools and the 1964 St Augustine protests. There may prove to be parallels between St Augustine and the 1963 Savannah protests, and future work could evaluate how far protest events were “spontaneous” or cultivated through leadership training, and reiterate that SCLC’s involvement in local protests was not always or universally welcome. Whatever direction future work on the citizenship schools does take, there is far more to contribute to the story than accounts of Bernice Robinson and her first class in the Johns Island Progressive Club.

⁸⁰⁹ Mrs. Margaret Jones, registration report (Riviera Beach, Florida, September 7-12, 1964), NAACP Papers, Part VI: box J2, folder 5.

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