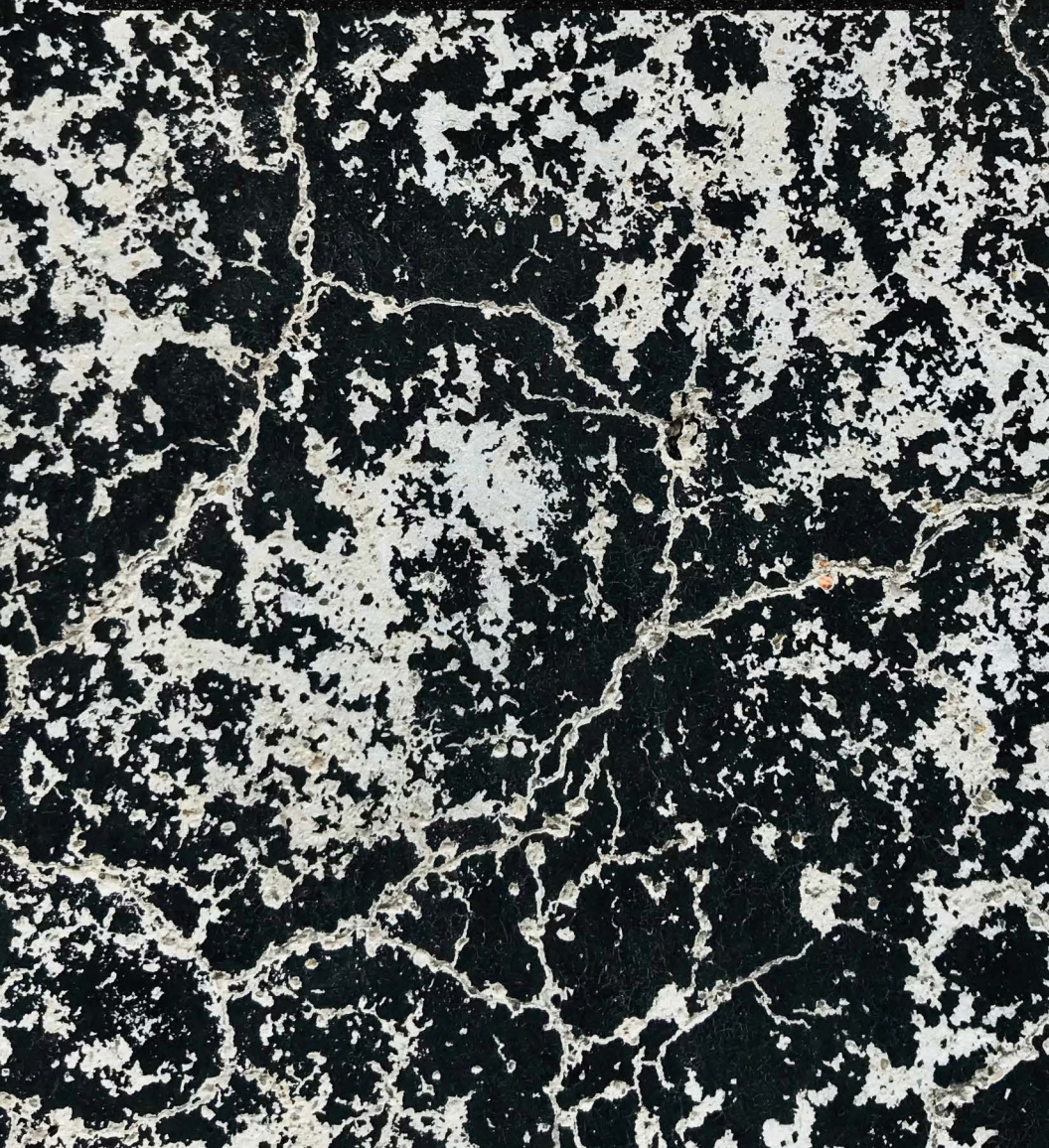


Citizenship and Liberation

An Analysis of Mid-20th Century
Community Schools for 21st Century Organizers

by Erica Veal and Nate Hubler



Citizenship and Liberation

An Analysis of Mid-20th Century

Community Schools for 21st Century Organizers

"Education work is political work. The teacher is a political worker whether you want to do it or not. You're an agent of the state...the curriculum is sanctioned by the state. That's what the state tells you to do. So you're reproducing those conditions ideologically."

--James Eber Campbell

Excerpt from James Campbell, "Conversation with our Donors," (2008), Unprocessed Collection, Avery Research Center for African American History and Culture, College of Charleston, Charleston, SC, USA.

Special thanks to Tey Saunders, Nino Brown, Ebony Sade Watson, Shania Damon, and Annie Meyer for their help making this Academizine a reality.



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Introduction

Community schools were popular during the era of civil rights as a means of combatting the “political and economic subordination”¹ that characterized Black life. The Citizenship Schools aimed to address the material needs of African American adults in the American South. They improved students’ core handwriting, literacy, and math abilities as well as helped build fundamental skills required to register to vote amidst the racist restrictions of Jim Crow on Black enfranchisement. To that end, the schools were rooted in an unwavering belief in American democracy and a deep-seated love for the United States of America. The Citizenship School organizers believed that real enforcement of school desegregation could only happen if political decision makers ability to maintain power was tied to their responsiveness to their Black constituents. What began as a single Citizenship School in the back of a grocery store on Johns Island, South Carolina in 1957 quickly spread throughout Charleston County and, within a matter of a few years, became a model adopted by many of the leading civil rights organizations.



While Citizenship Schools met their goal of decreasing illiteracy and increasing Black political participation, this did not lead to extensive shifts in the material conditions of working class Black people in the United States. As a result, out of the shortcomings of civil rights emerged a Black nationalist movement for self-determination in the form of Black Power.



The Organization of Afro American Unity (**OAAU**) was a vanguard organization during this new era of struggle. A key element of the OAAU was the Liberation School, an educational space established in 1964 for the community to learn the lessons of African American history extracted from dominant narratives through a curriculum rooted in the Marxist-Leninist method of historical materialism.² The hope was that the Liberation School would prepare a vanguard of Black organizers to usher in the qualitative and quantitative shifts necessary to radically reorganize society in a way that would improve the material conditions for all working class people in a way the civil rights era of struggle could not and did not.



Understanding the different ways in which the Citizenship Schools and Liberation School responded to the material reality of Jim Crow leads to a crucial research question: what can today's organizers learn from the experiences of two of the leading adult education programs of the mid twentieth century?

The multiple answers to this question lead to the argument that centering the material needs of the communities we organize within and using the mass line to achieve the intended goal of societal change is essential for successful organizing work.

This academizine begins with a historiography of the Citizenship School and Liberation School models. The discussion focuses on the history of the schools, their lead organizers, curriculum, and the ways in which they evolved over time, the former having emerged during the civil rights era and the latter from Black Power. It then identifies key lessons to be learned from both models, specifically as they can be applied to the work of today's organizers aiming to create broad societal change in American society.

These lessons are positioned within the liberatory cannon of Marxism-Leninism to provide added context and help highlight additional ways for organizers to think about their work in the present political climate. Additionally, this academizine is grounded in research done using the archival collections and the closed-stacks library housed at the College of Charleston's Avery Research Center for African American History and Culture. To this end, it utilizes archival materials to help bring the ideas discussed to life and demonstrate the power of

PRiMArY SOURCES ←

Citizenship Schools



Years before Citizenship Schools spread rapidly across the American South, they were only an idea being carefully nurtured by community leaders and organizers at the Highlander Folk School on Monteagle Mountain in Tennessee. Founded in 1932 by Myles Horton, it grew slowly into a racially integrated social justice training center focused on helping Appalachian communities address their material needs by training workers to organize and unionize.³ Twenty years later, in recognition of the enormous power of the expected Supreme Court decision to overturn legal segregation in the *Brown v. Board of Education* court case, the center turned its attention toward explicitly addressing the American South's racist Jim Crow system of oppression. They understood that community organizers needed to be prepared to see a positive court decision through to its logical conclusion and support the work of toppling apartheid as it appeared in their local communities.



Highlander Reports

One such community organizer who recognized the power of the moment and heeded Highlander's call was Charleston, South Carolina native, educator and activist Septima Poinsette Clark.



Clark was neither new to the struggle against racist Southern segregation nor the world of community organizing. Her journey started with her education at the Avery Normal Institute, a teacher training school for African Americans in Charleston. After graduating, since it was

illegal for Black teachers to teach in Charleston public schools, she accepted a teaching position on Johns Island, a neighboring Sea Island 20 miles south of the city. There her eyes were opened to the harsh material conditions forced on rural Johns Islanders due to segregation and systemic underfunding. Two years later, she returned to the Avery Normal Institute to teach, an option that was only possible because Avery was a private institution. Around this time, she also joined the Charleston branch of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) and supported the campaign to end the ban on Black teachers in city schools.⁴ Clark, along with other NAACP organizers, went door-to-door canvassing to get petition signatures in support of the campaign. Their work was successful, and the law was overturned. This marked the beginning of decades of grassroots organizing for Clark as she worked to erode the racist restrictions enforced on Black people in Charleston and beyond.

CLASS

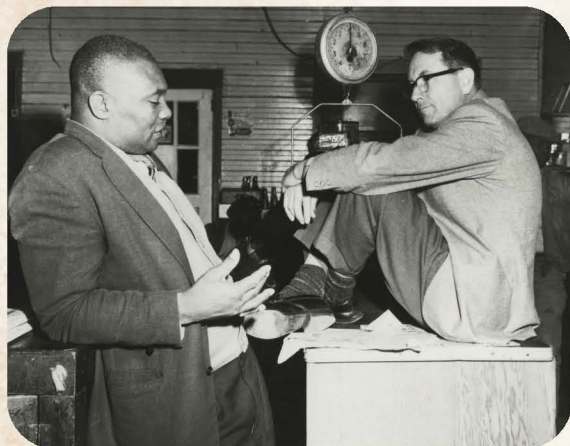


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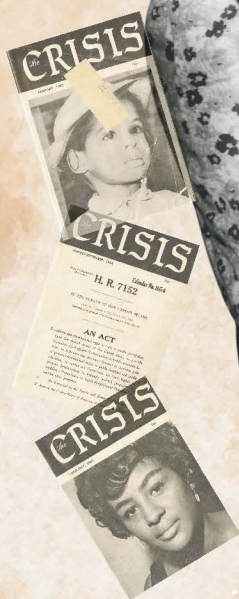
In June 1954, at the encouragement of a friend, she drove to Tennessee to attend a Highlander workshop on strategies for school desegregation. Clark was left inspired. Much of the discussion throughout the workshop centered on brainstorming ways for participants to engage their communities and increase voter registration to ensure that public officials would be held accountable to their Black constituents.⁵ Like any great organizer, Clark was committed to helping others step fully into the struggle against segregation. The first person she brought into the fold was Esau Jenkins, a Black community leader from Johns Island. To circumvent the county's lack of infrastructure, he drove a bus from Johns Island to Charleston to help members of the community get to and from jobs in the city. While driving, he advocated voter registration to his passengers and helped coach them on how to answer the required questions to pass the literacy test.



He also founded the Progressive Club in 1948 to organize John's Islanders to address the need for improved schools, paved roads, and power lines that had long been denied to the community. Just two months after Clark's visit to Highlander, she brought Jenkins along with her to an August 1954 workshop to help him develop the skills needed to achieve the material changes he sought on Johns Island. Jenkins had long recognized that his impromptu lessons on the bus would not be enough to generate a large enough pool of Black voters to force the monumental changes he desired—he knew that he needed a school.⁶



In addition to Jenkins, Clark also brought her cousin, Bernice Robinson, to Highlander to get involved in the push to make school desegregation a reality. Robinson was a beautician with her own salon, a community organizer, and registered member of the Charleston branch of the NAACP. She often worked in both roles at the same time, encouraging customers in her salon to register to vote and read issues of *The Crisis*, the NAACP's monthly magazine,⁷ while visiting her shop.





Her first trip to Highlander was in August 1955 for a United Nations workshop, which was also the pivotal session where Jenkins brainstormed with others on how to develop a school on Johns Island for adults and voter education. The workshop concluded with Horton verbally agreeing to find funding for the school if Jenkins could find a space to house it.⁸

By the fall of 1956, a school building was secured, and Jenkins and Clark set to work looking for a teacher for the would-be Citizenship School. Robinson promised that she “was willing to give [her] assistance in any and every way possible, since [she] had been working with Esau in his community and the Charleston community since 1948,”⁹ However, she was hesitant to take on the role of lead teacher. Despite her concerns, Clark and Jenkins were convinced she was the perfect fit because of her deep connections in the community and lack of formal teacher training. Both elements were equally important to them because they felt they needed someone that the adult students could feel comfortable being vulnerable with about their illiteracy, which required the teacher to have pre-existing relationships with the community. They also desired a teacher who could adapt to the conditions of the classroom without having more rigid expectations that formal training might provide.



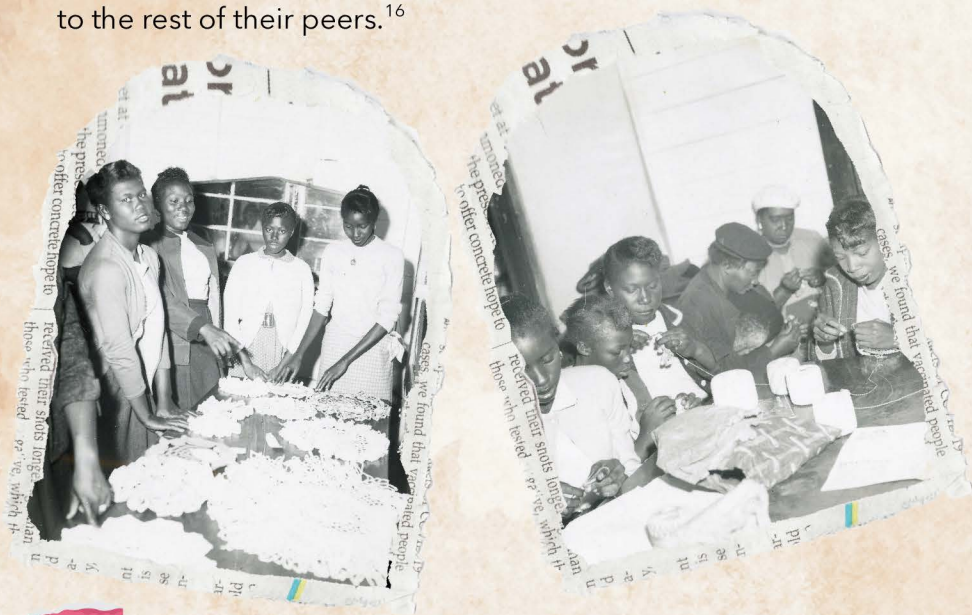
“I’m not a teacher. We’re here to learn TOGETHER”¹⁰

Robinson ultimately agreed to teach the school despite her reservations and found herself driving to Johns Island on January 1, 1957 to begin working with the first group of students. Ultimately, Clark and Jenkin’s assessment of the most important qualities of a Citizenship School teacher shined in Robinson’s classroom. In Robinson’s account of the very first class, she describes how she arrived with elementary school materials given to her by her sisters-in-law, both of whom were public school teachers. She soon realized the materials were “too elementary to present to Adults”¹¹ and that she “would have to build a curriculum that would meet their expressed needs.”¹² This included teaching students to write their name, fill out money orders (so they could acquire items by catalog), read mail, and register to vote.¹³ These expressed needs grew into the curriculum that came to define Citizenship Schools as they expanded, first in Charleston County and then across the Black Belt South. Students’ desire to write their own name and read personal letters became the first building blocks of the handwriting and literacy aspect of the schools. Their desire to write money orders emphasized the literacy component of the budding curriculum and introduced an opportunity to teach math. Finally, their desire to vote, again reinforced the need for handwriting since exercising this right meant passing a racist and restrictive literacy test.



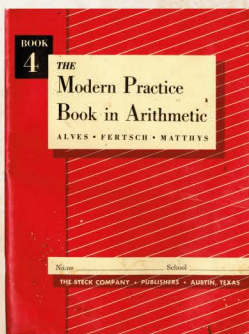
The curriculum demonstrated the necessity “for learning to read and write as tools in the process of assuming civic responsibilities.”¹⁴ These skills were taught with signature tracing, the use of newspaper ads, and stories and songs rooted in Black history.

Another element for Robinson to consider was the fact that Citizenship Schools were attended by adult learners and, because the classes were held in the evening, they often brought their children. It was especially important for her to engage the children and teens while also creating a climate in which young students didn’t make adults feel self-conscious about their abilities.¹⁵ At first, Robinson used crocheting to keep the children’s minds and hands busy, but Horton eventually sent her materials related to public speaking, so she had the teenagers study and prepare talks on topics of their choosing. This created an even playing field where both the adults and the teenagers had to make themselves vulnerable to the rest of their peers.¹⁶

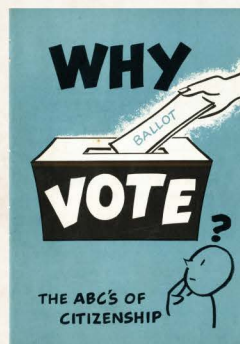


Sewing classes

Through teaching, the need for individualized instruction also became clear. Elementary and advanced reading and writing books were selected so students could work at their level rather than feel out of their depth or like they were being talked down to. A general workbook was chosen for math so that areas of difficulty could be identified for later individual help. As the class went on, the students worked their way up to the civic education and voter registration aspects of the curriculum.



Math & Civics



Robinson had Highlander reproduce the voter registration application and later handprinted the application on chart board to tack onto the wall of the classroom. She used the blackboard to write difficult and unusual words found on the application providing their definitions and breaking them down into syllables for easier pronunciation.¹⁷ The purposeful teaching and coaching by Robinson led to her students successfully registering to vote in Charleston County. They felt empowered, not only through the ballot, but because of the practical skills they had learned. The students' excitement was infectious and adults in neighboring communities were soon inquiring about how they could bring the Citizenship School to their own backyard. As a result, more schools soon opened, with one on Wadmalaw Island, one on Edisto Island, and two in North Charleston.¹⁸ However, before each school opened Robinson, Clark and Jenkins would bring prospective teachers to a Highlander workshop "to let them get a feel for the way we work with people and what we do... Then we'd take them back and help set up a class."¹⁹

★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★

HIGHLANDER FOLK SCHOOL MONTEAGLE, TENNESSEE

MYLES HORTON, DIRECTOR



HENRY SHIPHERD, Associate Director

January 26, 1957

Dear Bernice:

Septima showed me your last letter and I was so pleased to learn of the unusual progress you are making at the Adult School. You have certainly developed into an excellent teacher in a very short time. I cannot resist bragging about having told you so. I remember that you had some hesitancy about teaching, although you volunteered to do so while we were at the Johns Island workshop.

My guess is that your love and understanding for people plus tying the purpose of learning to understanding and living up to the Declaration of Human Rights and the responsibilities of citizenship is the key to your teaching ability.

The purpose of this letter is not, however, to tell you what a wonderful job we feel you are doing, but to let you know that I am planning to pay a hurried visit on Wednesday, February 6. I have a meeting in Atlanta the day before and cannot resist the temptation to drive over to Charleston from there. I will probably be getting in just a little before the meeting but will definitely be there.

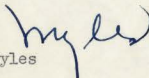
I want to see for myself what the setup is so I can more fully understand your reports and the developments there. Please do not change your program in any way, because it is not my intention to take part.

If you and Esau think it advisable and would not interfere with the program in any way, you might ask Bob Wagner (Telephone 3-5729) if he would come out and take some photographs and movies. I will bring the equipment along in case you decide to do this. If you think it would interfere in any way, forget it.

It will be fun seeing you on the 6th and it might be that I could stay over the following day. If so, it would be good if we could spend a little time going over your plans and program.

Thanks again for all you are doing. Highlander is very proud of you.

Cordially,


Myles



Adult Citizenship School
Wadmalaw Island,
South Carolina

December - February
Wednesday + Thursday
Hours ----- 7 to 9 P.M.

Teaching Time	Preparation Time	Traveling Time	Procedure
			A. Reading: 1. <u>I Want to Read & Write</u> a. This worktext is prepared for teaching adult beginners to read and write. 2. <u>Vester's Reader</u> a. This book is based on the assumption that adults have a wide experience in entering school and the lessons are centered around topics in which they are interested.
2 hrs./night	1 hr./wk.	1 hr./wk.	C. Modern Practice Book in Arithmetic 1. Book Three + Four a. Pupil-achievement level and areas of difficulty and weakness are established in these books. D. Registration 1. Adults are taught how to read and fill out the Application blank. 2. They are given mimeographed paragraphs of the Constitution to read
			8. Writing - Imaginary Line Handwriting 1. Book One a. Help adult to write correct manuscript writing. 2. Advanced Cursive Book a. Help adult to write legibly the cursive form of writing.

Different books are used because individual instruction is essential.

(Mrs.) Ethel J. Grimboll, Teacher

Citizenship

Edisto Island Adult School.

Held at Larimer Community Center.
Nov 3rd thro March 4.

Purpose -

1. To help people meet requirements for registration.
2. To help adults become aware of their responsibilities as Citizens of their Community, State, County, Nation and the World.
3. To help adults to become equipped with tools or skills that they need in ordinary life, reading, writing, arithmetic some fundamentals of history and citizenship - Sewing & Crafts -
4. To encourage them to inspire others - "I am my brother's keeper."

Methods used: - Audio-visual - lecture - demonstration and pupil participation. trips and actual attending and participating in meetings of interest to broaden their view outside of themselves, and their Community.

Education

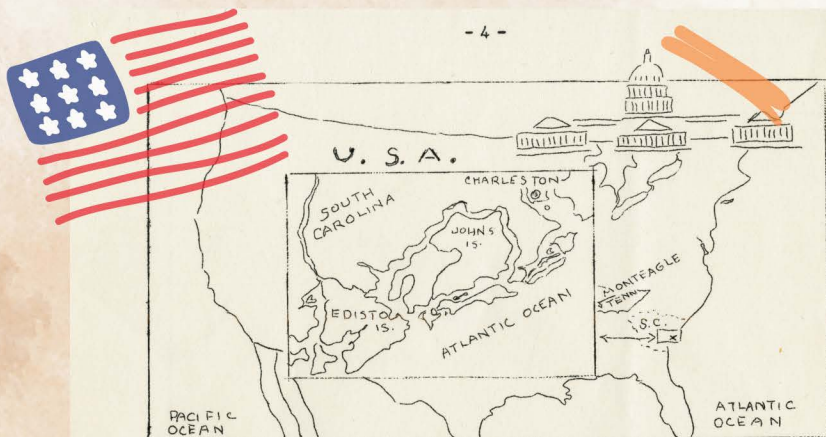
From Teaching Students to Teaching Teachers



The Citizenship School model continued to grow in popularity and soon Robinson and Clark found themselves faced with the impossibility of, respectively, teaching Citizenship School classes and fundraising for Highlander. While thinking through solutions, Clark said, "We've got this thing; we've got to do it a different way. Let's start getting organizations to send people into Highlander to be trained as teachers."²⁰

And so, they began to do just that, with Robinson's focus shifting to training would-be Citizenship School teachers and organizers at Highlander. The teacher training workshops began with a presentation of the Citizenship School idea on the opening night and were then followed by a demonstration class and lessons.

On day two, they also covered topics such as "Belief in America and her Government," "Belief in the Sacredness of the Individual," and "Listing of Problems in the Community as Seen by the Students."²¹ Other materials provided to workshop attendees balanced similar sentiments of American patriotism with "how to" instructions for tasks like writing money and mail orders, addressing officials, guidance on paying taxes and state election laws. Finally, the workshop concluded by stressing how to identify potential students for the Citizenship School and organizations that might make good partners in the organizers' local communities.²²



OUR AMERICA

This is a map of the United States of America. It is the home of a great American Nation. We are a part of that great nation. We are all Americans.

Our home is on islands in the Atlantic Ocean in Charleston County on the southeast coast of South Carolina.

We love this great land. It has given us our living for many years. It holds opportunities for our children and grand children.

Day by day we silently pour the concrete of love into the furious violent ocean of hate. Some day that concrete will build a foundation that will

-5-

The Supreme Court building and its justices are the symbol of law. The White House is the symbol of the free representative government. We accept the results of election and abide by the ruling of the courts.

We, in America know that an educated child is more important to the future than any man's political future.

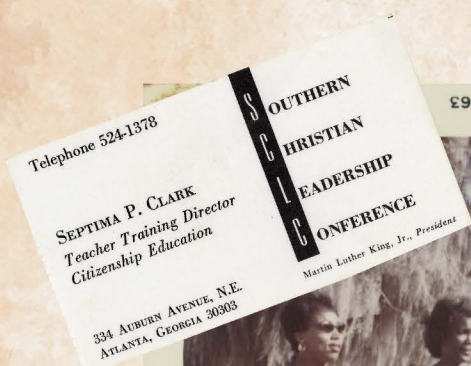
The voice of the school child can be heard asking "What about me?"

The American way is law and justice.

Yes, we love this great land -- America!

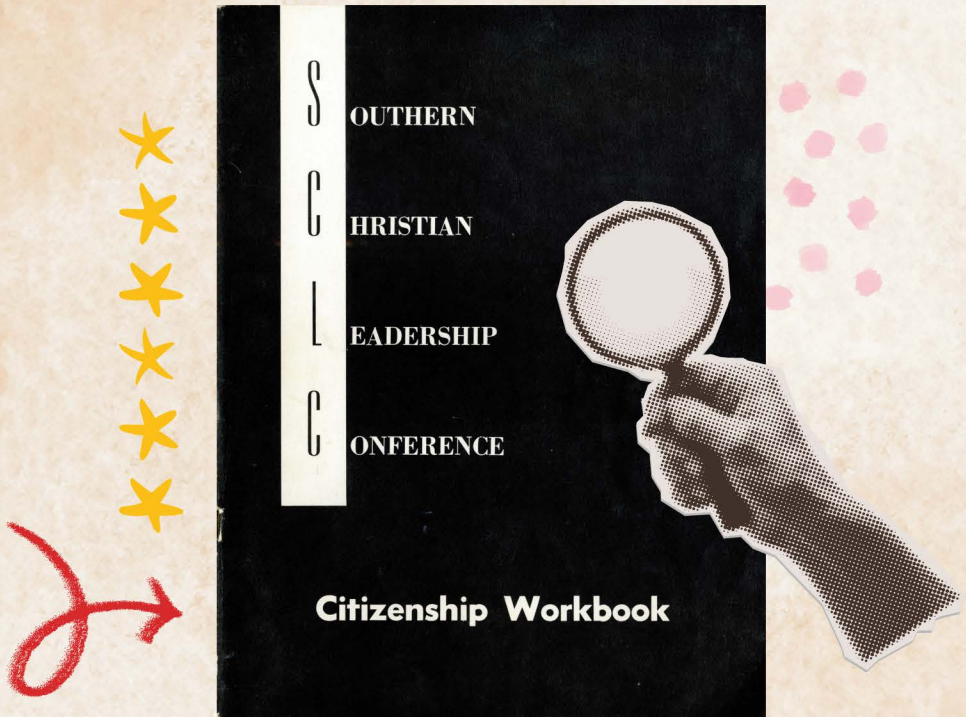
This

model of training teacher organizers to coordinate Citizenship Schools in their own communities expanded beyond Highlander's purview in 1961 through a partnership with the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC). The two were perfect partners. Highlander's donors were becoming wary of funding large projects due to increased Tennessee state repression against the school and SCLC needed a new Voter Registration program.²³ After months of continued negotiations, the male leadership of the two organizations reached an agreement. Clark joined the SCLC staff as the Citizen Education Program Training Supervisor alongside Andrew Young and Dorothy Cotton. Both Clark and Robinson strongly disagreed with being separated from one another, especially because the decision was made without their input, but they also recognized the work still had to continue.²⁴





's program operated out of the Dorchester Cooperative Community Center in southeastern Georgia. Groups of future Citizenship School teachers bussed to the campus each month for training.²⁵ Learning many of the skills that Robinson and Clark had honed in the initial Citizenship School classrooms and training workshops, teachers were prepared to guide students in lessons on writing, reading, math, and civic education. SCLC adapted a Highlander booklet about the schools to emphasize the program's commitment to American democracy and the role of the ballot in creating social change. Much like she did for Highlander, Clark spent much traveling around the South visiting in Black community spaces conducting social investigation, to better understand the local context. During these trips she also spent time asking Black community leaders to identify people they thought could lead a Citizenship School. This formed the basis for recruiting people to Dorchester to further the spread of Citizenship Schools throughout the South.





Mrs. Lizzie Graham
1219 Player St.
Newberry, S.C. 29108

FOREWORD

One of the basic weapons in the fight against prejudice and loss of human rights is education. The fine edge on that weapon is understanding. The Southern Christian Leadership Conference Citizenship program is designed to acquaint citizens with the way in which our government is run and to help them meet voting requirements. It is devoted to helping adults help themselves by learning how to solve their community problems. Reading and writing skills are invaluable in such a program. The Citizenship School is so organized that those who lack these skills may acquire them. It is in these ways that we strive to improve the lot of all citizens and extend the boundaries of democracy and full freedom for all.

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.



Dr. King and S.C.L.C. Vice-President, Dr. C. O. Simpkins confer with Attorney General Kennedy on voting problems in the Deep South.

Citizenship



The Purpose of the Citizenship School

The Citizenship Schools are for adults. Their immediate program is literacy. They enable students to pass literacy tests for voting. There is also involved in the mechanics of learning to read and write an all-round education in community development which includes housing, recreation, health, and improved home life. Specific subjects are emphasized such as safe driving, social security, cooperatives, the income tax, an understanding of tax-supported resources such as water testing for wells and aid for handicapped children, and the structure and function of our local and national government.

The Citizenship Schools provide a service to the people which is not available through any other private or public program at the present time.

They are open to all people of a community who face problems related to first-class citizenship and want to do something about them.



I**F** the SCLC's adoption of the Citizenship School model signaled the dawn of a new era for citizenship education in 1961, the creation of the Voter Education Project (VEP) ushered in this new era in 1962. VEP was a non-governmental agency started by the Kennedy administration to alleviate the embarrassment that widespread non-violent direct action represented for the United States government in the world of global politics. The VEP offered an opportunity to redirect civil rights organizations toward a focus on voter registration initiatives and away from nonviolent direct action through grants administered by the agency. Groups like the NAACP, SCLC, Urban League, Congress of Racial Equality (CORE), and Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) were all invited by the agency to apply for grants.²⁶ Despite differing levels of debate within each organization about accepting the money, most groups ultimately agreed and began their own version of the Citizenship School following the models established by Highlander and further cemented by SCLC.

The crescendo of the citizenship era was reached during the Freedom Summer, an initiative to register as many Black voters as possible in Mississippi in 1964 through the establishment of Freedom Schools (which were modeled on Citizenship Schools). The project was a coalition between SNCC, CORE, NAACP, and SCLC and was met with intense racist violence. Organizers and community members faced arrest, brutalization, and the bombing of churches and businesses by local police, members of the Ku Klux Klan, and other white vigilantes. Given the immense level of assault by white Mississippians on the Freedom Summer project, relatively few Black voters were able to register. However, it did highlight the need for not only the Civil Rights Act of 1964 (which had passed just as the first Freedom School volunteers were leaving training) but for more to be done to combat segregation and the violence of racist reactionaries.²⁷



The Voting Rights Act passed the following year in 1965 and while it didn't bring about the end of Citizenship Schools; it did lead to their retooling as civil rights organizations shifted or expanded their mission. For example, Highlander returned to its roots of focusing on poor, white Appalachians, while the SCLC expanded its mission to focus on class and economic inequality. The impact of Citizenship Schools during the era of civil rights is undeniable. Black voter registration surged as did the number of Black elected officials in southern states.²⁸ Elaine Weiss estimates that more than forty thousand adult students attended Citizenship Schools and that "by conservative estimates, the citizenship schools directly influenced the enrollment of hundreds of thousands of new voters."²⁹

ANNUAL STATISTICAL REPORT

June 1963 - June 1964

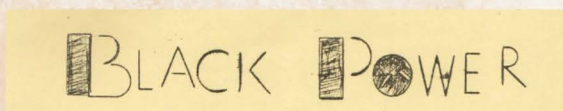
Number of persons trained	502
Number of states represented.....	12
Number of classes conducted after training.....	413
Number of persons in classes	6,581
Number of persons registered.....	25,962
(Students and others influenced by Citizenship Training)	

NUMBER TRAINED AT FIVE-DAY WORKSHOP

<u>Dates</u>	<u>Students</u>
June 17 - 21, 1963	57
August 19 - 23	65
September 16 - 20	36
November 18 - 22	68
January 6 - 10, 1964 (Penn Center)	43
February 17 - 21	63
March 23 - 27	46
April 27 - May 1	36
June 15 - 19 (Bricks)	42
June 22 - 26	46
	502

Education for Liberation

The rise in Black voters and Black elected officials did not necessarily translate to widespread change in material conditions for the majority of working class Black people in the United States. The continued gaping disparities in education, housing, health care, income, infrastructure, and policing led to a Black populace increasingly disillusioned by the shortcomings of civil rights. It was out of this fog of dismay that the Black Power era arose. Black Power was the psychological antidote for the feelings of "impotence and despair" running rampant in the community in the early 1960s.³⁰ The term was coined by Mukasa "Willie Ricks" Dada and popularized by Kwame Ture (formerly Stokely Carmichael), both of whom were members of **SNCC**.



It appealed to organizers and activists who saw its emergence as an opportunity to redefine themselves and their struggle on their own terms by revising what it meant to be Black. Black Power stood for Black self-pride and Black self-determination, and it "transformed America's racial, social, and political landscape."³¹ The Black Power era birthed numerous Black-led organizations from self-help and quasi-capitalistic formations to Marxist, anti-imperialist, and Pan-African organizations, which sought a radical restructuring of American society and fundamentally challenged the idea of Black citizenship. The collective impact of these groups led to a watershed shift in Black consciousness in the United States, wherein Black people no longer narrowly grappled with the question of integration versus separation and instead began to question their relationship to and the legitimacy of American democracy. It was within this socio-political context that the OAAU emerged.



The **OAAU** was one of the most progressive human rights organizations of its time founded by Shabazz in 1964 after a trip to Africa. It was an international Pan-African organization meant to serve as the United States chapter of the Organization of African Unity (OAU), which had been founded the year before in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia by Kwame Nkrumah, Ahmed Sekou Ture, Julius Nyerere, Gamal Abdel Nasser and other African heads of state.³² Shabazz saw the issues facing these leaders as inseparable from the issues faced by African descended people in the United States. As such, the OAAU was envisioned as a platform through which to shift the terrain of the Black liberation struggle in the United States away from the limitations of domestic civil rights and toward an international human rights platform to build solidarity with the oppressed peoples of Africa, Asia and Latin America.³³

#1399 July 5, 19 64
 Received from James E. Campbell
lep 2.00 Dollars
 ORGANIZATION OF AFRO-AMERICAN UNITY
 HOTEL THERESA - 125th ST. & 7th AVE., N. Y. C.
 MOnument 6-4093
 \$ 2.00 Elizabeth Geisler

REGISTER
 UNION FEDERAL SAVINGS
 AND LOAN ASSOCIATION,
 BOSTON 15, MASS. October 6, 1964 0007924
 PAY TO THE ORDER OF O.A.A.U. Blacklash
 UNION FEDERAL #2 AND 50 CTS
Ellen Collins SIGNATURE
 416 MASS. ADDRESS
 PAYABLE AT
 THE FIRST NATIONAL BANK OF BOSTON
 BOSTON, MASS.
 ⑆0110⑆00394300⑆0017⑆9 0007924

OAKLAND, CALIF. 11
 PM
 4 NOV 1964
 AIR MAIL
 8c
 AIR MAIL
 O.A.A.U., Hotel Theresa
 Suite 128
 2090 7th Ave.
 New York City, New York.
 Air Mail



believed "our problem was no longer a Negro problem or an American problem, but a human problem. A problem for humanity. A problem which should be attacked by all sides of humanity."³⁴ In terms of domestic goals, the OAAU promoted "freedom, equality, justice and dignity" and self-determination for Black America.³⁵ Its goal was to fight exploitation, racism and white vigilante violence. "The OAAU is going to have classes in all the various sciences that you and I need to know- karate, judo... You come on in the OAAU and we'll train you. Show you how to protect yourself," Shabazz said.³⁶ "You can't use kids against the Ku Klux Klan. What you need are armed and equipped units, and if the government won't send them, we will. I've never advocated violence, but I do believe in protecting ourselves from those who want to harm us."³⁷

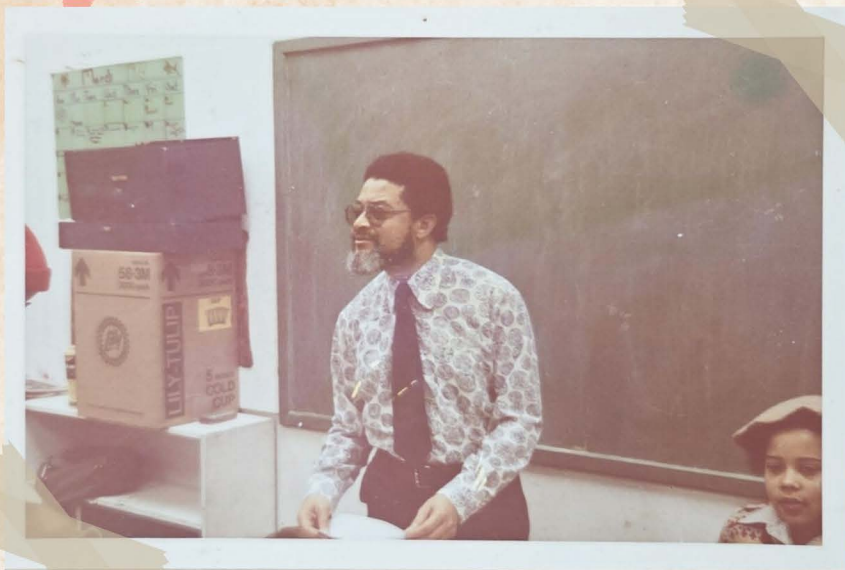
In early 1965, Shabazz hosted an **OAAU** interest-meeting at a cafe in Harlem where he expressed his desire to develop the educational component of the OAAU.³⁸ James Eber Campbell attended the meeting and volunteered to lead this charge.



Campbell was a revolutionary organizer, English Language Arts educator and native of Charleston, South Carolina.³⁹ He was a veteran of World War II, the Korean War and civil rights organizing. He graduated with a degree in English and a minor in Theatre from Morgan State University in Baltimore, Maryland in 1953 and eventually relocated to New York City where he pursued a career in acting.⁴⁰ The typecasting and limited roles available to Black actors at the time proved demoralizing. It became clear that the more desirable roles were reserved for Black actors able to "pass" for white, while those who could not were relegated to playing stereotypical parts like domestic workers. To circumvent this, Campbell cofounded a Black theatre group called the Arena Players as a creative space for Black artists.⁴¹



While short lived, he did make meaningful connections with other radical artists like Amiri Baraka, a principal voice of Black Arts who later became a revolutionary socialist, and member of a Marxist-Leninist formation.⁴² Together Campbell and Baraka embarked on a venture to bring theatre to the inner city, traveling around Harlem putting on street corners plays.⁴³ This venture too was short lived and ultimately, theater work proved too unreliable for Campbell. However, the connections he made in the theatre world altered the trajectory of his teaching. During this time he connected with blacklisted actors while working off Broadway. They encouraged him to study the writings of communist thinkers like Karl Marx, Vladimir Lenin, and Mao Zedong and their contributions to the revolutionary theory of Scientific Socialism.⁴⁴ Campbell used these teachings to shape the Black Studies curriculum he developed after he left acting to pursue a more stable job as a full time English Language Arts teacher and, it was around this time that he joined the OAAU.⁴⁵



The **OAAU** statement of aims says education "is a means to help our children and people rediscover their identity and thereby increase self-respect... We must realize the need for adult education and for job retraining programs that will emphasize a changing society."⁴⁶ Campbell's experience as an educator made him an asset to realizing these organizational goals and he volunteered to lead this effort. Campbell founded the OAAU Liberation School in the fall of 1964 and his background as a Marxist meant that it would take on a different character than the Citizenship and Freedom Schools that came before it:

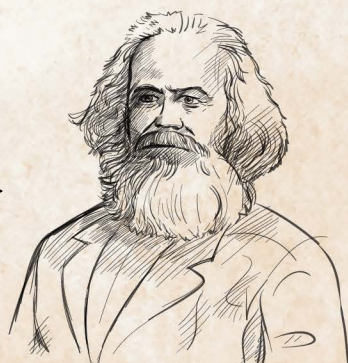
I wanted to call it the Liberation School because I saw the OAAU in alliance with what the OAU was doing and they were supporting liberation movements. Liberation is a breaking away from your previous conditions of servitude. Freedom [or citizenship], I read as applying for a job at an agency that had just been oppressing you.⁴⁷



A Foundation of Historical Materialism

The qualitative distinction between Citizenship/Freedom Schools and the Liberation School, was its "Liberationist" ideological framework and Campbell's use of historical materialism to ground the lessons.⁴⁸ Historical materialism is a term that stems from the Marxist tradition of dialectical materialism, but the terminology was not coined by Marx, nor did he create the concepts of dialectics or materialism. Rather, his revolution was in building upon previous philosophical schools of thought. For example, under Marxist philosophy dialectics is a concept which suggests contradiction, or the unity of opposites, is the inherent driving force in all things.

ExAmPLeS of this include plus and minus in mathematics, action and reaction in mechanics and the class struggle, e.g., slave versus master or the working class versus the ruling class, in social science. Materialism, under Marxism, asserts the primacy of matter over consciousness, e.g., "I am, therefore I think," as opposed to idealist philosophy which starts with the "idea" or consciousness first approach, i.e., "I think, therefore I am." Taken together, the Marxist theory of dialectical materialism suggests the material conditions of society are the primary drivers of social change, especially as it relates to economics. The theory of historical materialism extends from this base and applies dialectical materialism to the study of human history.⁴⁹



Historical **M**aterialism is a worldview which suggests societies are defined by their modes of production and develop around their relation to the means of production, i.e., what commodities societies produce and how those commodities are produced and exchanged. Modes of production are composed of a base and superstructure, i.e., a dialectic of varying elements which interact with and feed off one another. The base includes the means of production (raw materials, land, tools, and machines), labor power (or one's ability to sell their labor) and relations of production (the social relations in which workers produce goods and services).⁵⁰ These elements determine the superstructure, or the legal, political and cultural practices which develop out of the economic base.⁵¹

SUPERSTRUCTURE

PHENOMENA UNRELATED TO PRODUCTION

Art	Law
Family	Media
Culture	Science
Religion	Politics
Philosophy	Education

Maintains (and shapes)

Shapes (and maintains)

BASE

LABOR POWER

MEANS OF PRODUCTION

tools, machines, factories, land, raw materials

RELATIONS OF PRODUCTION

Lumpen proletariat, working class, petit bourgeoisie,
non-monopoly capitalist, monopoly capitalists

For Example in slave societies the economic base consisted of enslaved labor and the means of production upon which slavery depended included large tracts of arable land, farm equipment, agricultural seed, etc. which was owned by the enslaver class who also appropriated the wealth generated by the enslaved class. The superstructure, which developed from this base, existed to justify the economic reality wherein human beings were commodified and owned as chattel. This manifested materially in laws such as the Three-Fifths Compromise, the 1850 Fugitive Slave Act, and the promotion of biblical scriptures by enslavers, such as Ephesians 6:5-8, and Colossians 3:22-24, which suggest slaves should respect and obey their earthly masters. As the economic base develops, the superstructure must keep pace in its capacity to reflect and reinforce the mode of production from which it arises. Revolutions occur when irreconcilable contradictions in a particular society advance to such a degree that existing class forces must be abolished and new ones established with new relations of production (base) and thus governance (superstructure), in accordance with the established mode of production.⁵²

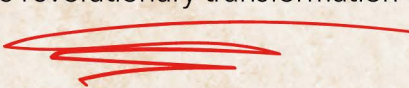
Examples of revolutions which led to the end of the slavery mode of production can be seen in the Haitian Revolution on the island of Saint Domingue and the American Civil War, particularly after the period in which Black soldiers were granted the legal right to bear arms up through the period of Radical Reconstruction. Capitalism is the current mode of production under which the masses of the world's people live and what Campbell trained Liberation School students to critically analyze.



Capitalism

is an economic system based on the exploitation of surplus value, i.e., the unpaid labor of the working class by the ruling (owning) class.⁵³ Under this system there is an inherent contradiction between workers and owners that cannot be reconciled. The means of production are privately owned by the ruling class and wealth is collectively created by the working class. Wages are depressed and working conditions are poor, in accordance with the concentration of wealth at the other end of the class spectrum. Human rights such as housing, food, health care, and education are commodified and sold to the highest bidder. The superstructure functions to reinforce this through a repressive legal apparatus, militarized police force, criminalization of the poor, corporate-owned media which glorifies overconsumption and a political system which obscures the true nature of the functioning of society under the guise of a genuine democracy.⁵⁴

Liberation School class sessions, whether led by Campbell or other instructors, were structured in such a way as to illuminate contradictions of capitalist society such as that between the working class and the ruling class, i.e., those who create the wealth and those who appropriate it. An essential element of these classes were the ways in which they highlighted how capitalism was made possible through the primitive accumulation of wealth via the occupation of Indigenous land and natural resources, coupled with the capture of enslaved African labor to work said land. In this way, and through these educational means and methods, Campbell attempted to prepare students for the inevitable responsibilities that come with the revolutionary transformation of society.⁵⁵



“We must prepare a way for those who come after us”⁵⁶

The **OAAU** Liberation School met every Saturday. It consisted of two consecutive sessions, the first for youth (mostly middle school aged) and the second for adults.⁵⁷ Campbell developed the curricula for the respective classes, which he said centered on Black Studies with a Marxist influence and historical materialist orientation.⁵⁸ Guest lecturers like James Shabazz, John Henrick Clarke, Jack O'Dell, Dr. Keith Baird and Dr. Ben Jochanan, under Campbell's guidance, led sessions on topics like the “Arab Slave Trade and Exploration,” the “After the Partitioning of Africa” and “Foundations of Racism in American Life.”⁵⁹ Grounding Liberation School students in this history was central to giving the OAAU “direct contact, direct communication and cooperation with [their] brothers and sisters all over the earth” and connecting the Black liberation struggle to liberation struggles of oppressed people around the country and the world.⁶⁰

JOIN MUSLIM MOSQUE INC.
2090 7TH AVE. NYC.

LEARN ABOUT ISLAM, THE
RELIGION FROM GOD, THE
RELIGION OF ALL THE PROPHETS.

JOIN ORGANIZATION OF
AFRO-AMERICAN UNITY
2090 7TH AVE. SUITE 12B
NEW YORK 27, NY.

JOIN US IN OUR STRUGGLE
TO OBTAIN HUMAN RIGHTS
FOR AFRO-AMERICANS,
POLITICAL, ECONOMIC
SOCIAL AND

ACTION

HELP US ESTABLISH
CHAPTERS IN EVERY
COLLEGE AND UNIVERSITY
WHERE THERE IS A
STUDENT OF AFRICAN
DESCENT.

LiBeration School

OAAH

LIBERATION SCHOOL

THURSDAYS: 7:30pm - 9:30pm

Modern Survival

SATURDAYS:

CHILDREN 9:30am - 10:30am

ADULTS 10:40am - 12:50pm

EVERY WEEK 

FOR DETAILS CALL

HOTEL THERESA - MO6-4693

SUITE 128

One of the many prominent OAAU members and Liberation School students was Japanese American human rights activist Mary "Yuri" Kochiyama. During WWII, Kochiyama and her family were incarcerated at a concentration camp in Arkansas.⁶¹ The discrimination she experienced at the hands of the United States government set her on a revolutionary path of activism. Later in life, when she and her husband settled in Harlem, Kochiyama's anti-war and human rights organizing led her to cross paths with Shabazz after being arrested at a Brooklyn protest.⁶² Her subsequent relationship with Shabazz led her to help co-found the OAAU. She also began attending Liberation School classes and recorded detailed notes.

LiBeration School

OCT. 17, 1964

ATTENDANCE

Wm. J. Bailey
 Mabel Gray
 James Jenkins
 C. Milton Ellis 170-09-107 AVE JAM NY
 Lorraine Chauvaud
 Stephen Antrey SE 3-1343
 Charles 37 X
 Jerome Lopp
 James 61 X
 NORMA ROGERS - 140 COLUMBIA ST, N.Y.C.
 WILLIE HARRIS - 614 OAK Tree PL. BX 57, N.Y.
 Virginia Bell 170-30 130 Ave Jam. 528-3427
 Merle Stewart
 Herman Ferguson
 Jamie Campbell
 Clarence Brown Mo 9-3644
 George Kelly Mo 3-9381

✓

Kochiyama's

class notes attest to Campbell's masterful grasp on historical materialism and curriculum development, as evident in documents dating from a December 12th, 1964 lesson based on a recording of activist and organizer Fannie Lou Hamer.

Hamer was a **SNCC** field secretary who, in June of 1963, had been severely beaten by white police, along with five other organizers, after attempting to integrate a lunch counter in Winona, Mississippi.⁶³ Still bruised from her brutalization by police, she traveled to Harlem to meet with the lawyer of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. about her experience. Campbell, who was connected with key organizers in Harlem, was told to pick Hamer up from the subway station and host her at his home. He also accompanied her on some of her subsequent speaking engagements where she discussed her beating and experiences growing up in apartheid era Mississippi.⁶⁴ Many of these discussions were recorded and Campbell used one of them to ground a her early childhood experiences in historical materialism:

Was asked to pick cotton at the age of [six]. 30lbs by the end of each week for a community tract...father bought mules, wagon, farming equipment over years. White neighbor killed mules, cows with Paris Green (a poison) placed in [a] trough. Had to go back to back breaking work... Mother was paid \$1.25 a day (11½ [cents] an hour).⁶⁵

Her recording illuminated an economic base which centered around the production of short staple cotton and the labor exploitation she and her parents experienced. Regarding the base's impact on the superstructure, especially with regard to education and family life, Kochiyama noted, "School lasted but 4 months. Had no clothes to wear. Twenty children in family...6 girls and 14 boys."⁶⁶



LIBERATION SCHOOL

AFRO-AMERICAN STUDIES

Dec. 12, 1964

Tape - Mrs Fannie Lou Hamer

"Knew something was wrong with the South. Moved to Sun Flower County at the age of 2. Was asked to pick cotton at age 6. 30 lbs. by end of each week for community tract. School lasted but 4 months. Had no clothes to wear. Twenty children in family. Father bought mules, wagon, farming equipment over years. White neighbor killed mules, cows - with Paris Green (a poison) placed in trough. Had to go back to back-breaking work, work, work."

"Mother was paid \$1.25 a day. (11 1/2¢ an hour). Mother chopped up stumps to clear new ground. Mother wore old patch-work clothes, year in and year out. Tried to keep kids in clothes. Invalid from 1933 to 1961 when she passed away. Mother tried to keep kids in school, 6 girls and 14 boys. Knew then she wanted to do something for her people. Glad the Movement came to Mississippi."

(Gave the story of Joe Pulliam)

Black people in Mississippi must upset the apple-cart. Show the whole world the truth. Must destroy this system.

LiBeration

FREE

COAAAU

PRESENTS

FREE

IBRO.

MALCOLM X:

"DISCUSSION OF HIS AFRICAN
TRIP AND THE CONGO CRISIS"

SUNDAY DEC. 13 8 PM

ANTHONY BON

BALLER COON

W. 166TH STREET & BROADWAY
MANHATTAN

FREE

Lecture : Mr. Mushashu from Zambia
 (Did under-grad. + grad. work in Bombay and East Africa)
 * Passed 2 maps; one marked, and one unmarked

A subsequent Liberation School lesson on the history of Africa, led by a Zambian PhD candidate K. Mushasu, was broken down into six parts beginning with early human history on the continent and ending with the African independence struggles.⁶⁷

LIBERATION SCHOOL

Kochiyama's notes from part one of the series dated January 9th, 1965, highlight his explanation of the mode of production during the "earliest time in East Africa" as primitive communalism (base). He described the region as having been occupied by groups such as the San and Khoi who hunted using bow and arrows and spears as well as built "dome-shaped" shelters (superstructure) from native grasses and other materials. As time progressed he described the development of some ancient African cultures to a feudal mode of production (base) with chiefs who had "representatives with judicial power" (superstructure) that traveled throughout the empire on their behalf. He described tribes who fought and won political power becoming lords over less powerful peasant communities.⁶⁸ Campbell's historical materialist teaching of history and his encouragement of Liberation School guest lecturers to do the same, was done in an attempt to raise the class consciousness of his students. He hoped to develop them into revolutionary organizers capable of leading the liberation struggles that would reshape society so that oppressed peoples could live lives free from exploitation, bigotry and inequality.



ORGANIZATION OF AFRO-AMERICAN UNITY

HOTEL THERESA - 125th ST. & 7th AVE., N. Y. C.

January 16, 1965

Announcement: Ghana-Nigeria films - with
Malcolm X commenting. Audubon Hall, 8:00 p.m.

ARAB SLAVE TRADE AND EXPLORATION

Must know causes and consequences



Arabs main interest - to get
palm oil, rhinoceros, iron, ivory
When Arabs settled in Africa
(700 AD), then they began get-
ting people as commodities
to take back.

Supply of labor - when arrange-
ments could not be made (Sub
as today on contract basis)

Plantations needed laborers Extracted from interior
to work on these coastal plantations. Later taken
to Arabia and India.

Two groups: one on East Coast; and one in Middle East
Why didn't Africans resist when Arabs came to interior?

African tribes indulging in conflicts. Arabians
had superior weapons. Had gun-powder.
Egypt tribes that cooperated. Tribes then
had to be grateful. So conquered tribes were
sold into slavery.

Lake Victoria - Mombasa

Tanganyika - Zanzibar

No Nyassaland - Mozambique (or Sofala)

So, Tanganyika

Zanzibar - greatest slave market.

Paypbell: "Here to discover ourselves.
must have pride in ourselves, and
confidence in our power as human-beings"

The Demise of the OAAU

Shabazz was the OAAU's center of gravity, and he too made guest appearances in Liberation School classes. However, like many prominent Black revolutionaries, he had come under increased surveillance on the part of the United States government at least since his first visit to the continent of Africa. His house was also mysteriously firebombed on February 14th, 1965.

February 20, Saturday



Rally - tomorrow - Sunday afternoon
2:00 p.m. at Audubon - Malcolm X

One week later, on February 21st, 1965, Shabazz was assassinated. Kochiyama's class notes from the day before indicate Shabazz would be speaking at the Audubon Ballroom the next day at 2:00PM. Little did she know she would be the one cradling his body in her arms after the shots rang out.⁶⁹ Her class notes suggest that the Liberation School continued to meet largely uninterrupted through April of that year, but the devastating loss of Shabazz was a demoralizing blow to the movement.

March 6, Saturday
Brother Campbell

Send money to: Reuben Francis 4AL2
125 White Street
NYC, NY



Today - no lesson - but to establish
stability from this crisis... and
go from there.



ORGANIZATION OF AFRO-AMERICAN UNITY
HOTEL THERESA - 125th ST. & 7th AVE., N. Y. C.

March 6, Saturday



Force of gravity that kept us anchored, was embodied in Brother Malcolm. He took it for granted that it would always be. But nothing is sacred and lasts forever. Now, we will do things more consciously. In the coming months, we must grow.

When it's over, a lot of us won't be here. Now, this casts a different light on what we do or say. We have become brothers and sisters whether we realized it or not.



LiBeration School

3

March 6 (Cont.)

What the system has done to the group:



1. Made to hate ourselves
2. Pitted^{us} against each other.

Organized, controlled, oppressive forces in society; the people who run the machinery; the power-structure and system...

We are the pebble on the track.
We can get the train off that track.

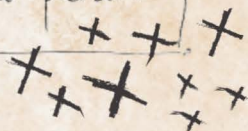


CIA runs the invisible govt. Has kept us mentally, spiritually, politically, economically, and educationally oppressed.

But Afro people — most strategically, placed people. We are in the "man's" house.

Malcolm was close to assessing political reality.

Ray Woods ^{is said to have been} ~~was~~ seen also running out of Audubon; was one of two picked up by police. Was the second person running out.



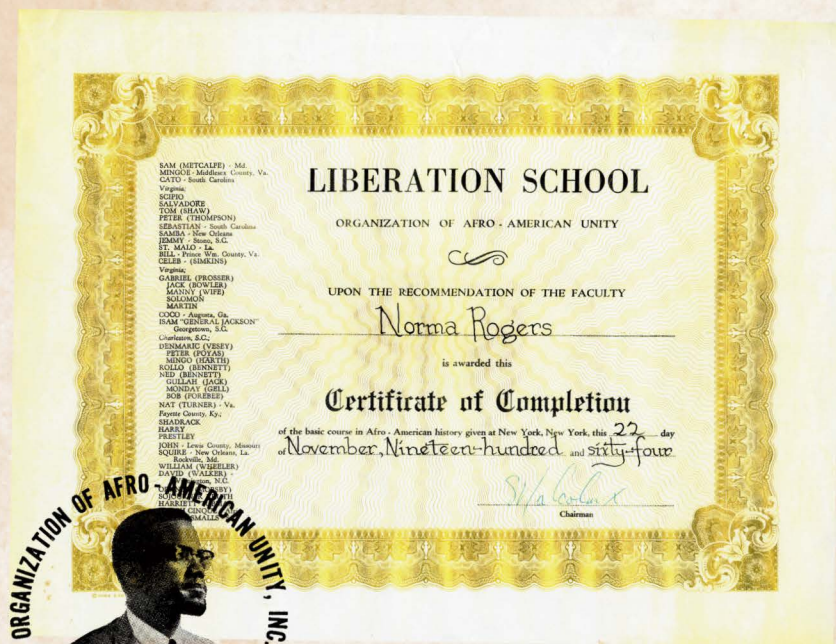
ORGANIZATION OF AFRO-AMERICAN UNITY

March 20

Discussion - Words, propaganda, policies

* Malcolm - killed because he couldn't be brought, manipulated or function to certain black people.

"Leadership, like diamonds, emerge from tremendous pressure." Malcolm was produced by pressure... out of the barrel of this country. Inst. ground him up & flushed him out. Emerged unconsciously



OAAU



Shabazz's sister Ella Little-Collins attempted to keep her brother's legacy alive by taking over as president of the OAAU, but its members faced increased repression by the Federal Bureau of Investigation, and the Liberation School ultimately closed its doors after nine months of operation with only twelve official graduates.⁷⁰

Ella Collins, President

O.A.A.U. Inc.
Hotel Theresa, Rm. 128
2090 Seventh Avenue
New York, N.Y. 10027





Campbell eventually enrolled in a master's program at the Bank Street College of Education where he developed Black Studies courses grounded in historical materialism, building on the foundation he laid during his time leading the Liberation School.⁷¹

COINTELPRO

During this same time, the FBI's counterintelligence program (COINTELPRO) also increased its surveillance of suspected communists, socialists, Black radicals and other groups, relying on informants to infiltrate their organizations, gather information, sow discord and spread dissent.⁷² Coincidentally, Campbell's house was broken into and his recordings from the Liberation School, including many of Shabazz's tapes, were stolen. He became increasingly paranoid and soon after he earned his masters in Education, Supervision and Administration in 1972, Campbell moved to Tanzania where he would remain for the next decade.⁷³



Reaching for Liberation

Educators and organizers today can glean multiple lessons from a close examination of both the Citizenship and Liberation Schools. The first, core lesson is that the Citizenship Schools were never a static or fixed concept in the minds of the organizers who brought them to reality. They were living and evolving places of learning. While they were guided by central ideas and the aim to register African Americans to vote, they were always rooted in the local context in which they operated. One of the most important strengths of the Citizenship Schools was their inadvertent application of an organizing methodology—seen in the Chinese revolution: Mao Zedong’s theory of the mass line. Mao states that:

“The people, and the people alone, are the motive force in the making of world history.”⁷⁴



The night was long and dark
 A Chinese Land
 For a century darkness had been
 will dance,
 And the first hundred million people
 danced.
 Now the earth has opened and
 is bright,
 How is made from all our people
 men,
 And the great is inspired as never

WHEREVER THERE IS OPPRESSION THERE IS RESISTANCE



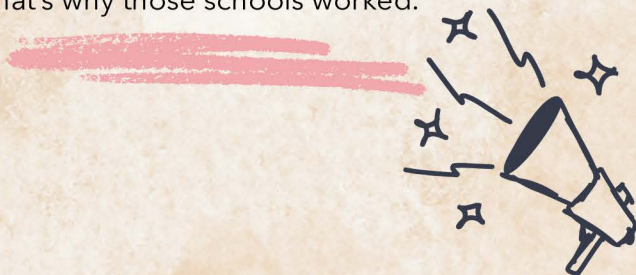
In other words, change makers must first orient themselves around the felt needs of the people, basing the work on their actual concerns and from there developing "policies, plans, ways to fight back, that people will take up as their own. And this is the only way to test whether the theory, analyses, plans, etc. are correct."⁷⁵ Reflecting on the success of the Citizenship School methodology, Robinson states:

You may feel that a certain situation is bad and you need to change that overnight. But the way you might want to go about it might not be the way the people want to go. And the situation you want to change might not be the one they think needs changing. You are going to have to work with people. You are going to have to find out what they feel is their greatest need in any particular area. When you find what their greatest need is, then you work with them on that need.⁷⁶



She continues:

Causing political change through voting was too intangible at first. They wanted to be able to order something out of a catalog, or read a letter from one of their children from out of town without having to take it to a neighbor or their white madam. That meant more to them than a registration certificate at that moment. They just couldn't see that far down the road. So you dealt with them on that level. You had to. Then the rest followed. That's why those schools worked.⁷⁷



While Mao's analysis of the mass line is framed with the goal of ushering in a socialist revolution, it holds relevant lessons for all organizers seeking to create large-scale societal change. In her reflection, although she doesn't refer to it as such, Robinson frames the Citizenship School model as being reflective of a mass line approach for African Americans who were living under and seeking to escape the racist brutality of Jim Crow. There is no evidence to suggest that Robinson, Clark or Jenkins identified as communists, but the care with which they incorporated the mass line into the Citizenship School model speaks to the universality and usefulness of its application. Without regard for the concrete and specific needs of the masses, any organizing effort will struggle to grow and connect with the people it aims to support—it will either be too far ahead of or too far behind the people. The Citizenship Schools avoided this by centering the material needs of the communities in which they organized instead of a dogmatic emphasis on civic education and voter registration alone.

The other lesson of the Citizenship Schools requires an assessment of their goal to effectuate political change through voter registration and voting. Undoubtedly, the Citizenship Schools brought about significant change in the American political landscape. They, alongside non-violent direct action and the threat of violent direct action, helped contribute to the toppling of Jim Crow apartheid as well as address the material needs of Black southerners.

Did you know that
the word **"IDIOT"**
comes from a Greek word
meaning **"THE MAN
WHO DIDN'T VOTE"?**



LiBeration

However, more than fifty years removed from the widespread popularity of the Citizenship School model and ratification of the Civil Rights and Voting Rights Acts, it is evident that Black southerners and, more broadly, Black Americans are still barred from full participation in American "democracy." African Americans face the same capitalist exploitation, racial discrimination and violence that were enshrined in both the law and societal customs of Jim Crow. In an undated essay, entitled "The Vocation of Black Scholarship: Identifying the Enemy," Clark lays out her analysis of how structural oppression in America persisted despite the end of legal Jim Crow.

The black scholar must speak the truth about the enemy nationally and locally. We must produce and encourage precise carefully documented studies of the educational, political, economic, military and cultural systems of white oppression. We study these systems of oppression... they are systems built on the blood and subjugation of our ancestors. We seek to know them to speak the truth and to free our minds so that we may sweep past their deathly hold, disassemble the structures, ravage the very foundations of evil and move towards the new acts of building which are the first calling of every human society.⁷⁸



50 years later, one such study was published in the form of "The State of Racial Disparities in Charleston County, South Carolina, 2000-2015," which elucidates many of the ways these systems still shape modern life for Black Charlestonians.⁷⁹ Police violence still shapes society in the form of shooting unarmed Black people in the back,⁸⁰ brutalizing Black children selling Palmetto Roses,⁸¹ or turning a blind eye to deaths stemming from purposeful neglect and abuse in the Al Cannon Detention Center.⁸²

Citizenship

The intentional over policing of Black communities leads to the disenfranchisement of millions of American voters through felony convictions.⁸³ Regarding education, separate but equal is no longer the law of the land, but segregation still dominates the Charleston Country School District as white parents opt to send their children to private and charter schools, while Black and Latino children are the predominant population of the lowest performing and most underfunded public schools.⁸⁴ Historically Black neighborhoods are plagued by underinvestment manifesting in the form of food deserts and unsafe housing conditions for the residents.⁸⁵ At the same time, rapid development and high property taxes have forced many Black families to give up their homes in pursuit of more livable conditions outside of the city or county.⁸⁶ Furthermore, the racial pay gap is alive and well in, with Black families earning 60% of what white families earn in Charleston County.⁸⁷

This material reality begs the question of whether civic responsibility and voter registration still offer the same promise of a better tomorrow. Rather than suggesting that voting lacks power, especially considering how anti-democratic forces have restricted voter rights (e.g., voter identification laws, gerrymandering, and corporate lobbying), the lesson from the Citizenship Schools is that today's organizers need to think much larger than the ballot. Especially if the goal is to create a societal change capable of eradicating these interlocking systems of oppression which restrict life for the vast majority.



LiBeration School

organizers attempted to do just that. By training community members through a curriculum grounded in historical materialism, Campbell hoped to prepare and equip nascent Black and working class leaders with the tools to not just understand society as it is, but to fundamentally transform society—root and branch.

For organizers today, or people seeking to make positive societal changes, the Liberation School model demonstrates the necessity of an approach to education wherein people are empowered to govern themselves rather than provide consent to be governed. Campbell drew inspiration from successful revolutions across the world, like those of Cuba and China, wherein poor and oppressed people not only challenged injustices but won state power and went on to govern themselves in their own interest. Liberation school organizers tried to go beyond the Citizenship School model and anticipate where the movement was going. They understood that the civil rights movement would face structural impediments due to the nature of democracy under a capitalist system. They were correct in this assessment, so much so that their organization fell apart under the weight of anti-democratic forces of the state, culminating in the assassination of Shabazz, and many of his contemporaries.

The years that followed the end of the Liberation School only revealed more interest in the kind of political education that the school offered. Had the school existed in the latter half of the 1960's and into the early 1970's, it likely would have had the opportunity to absorb and influence the waves of Black youth oriented toward liberation and more class-based emancipatory projects.

LIBERATION SCHOOL

While the Liberation School no longer existed, the need for it made itself clear and felt as young Black people drifted out of the civil rights camp and more firmly into the era of Black Power.

The Liberation School was cutting edge and would have been a vital part of the ensuing Black Power political developments. However, without the ability to root itself in a place or community, ideas alone cannot change the world or our material reality. Unlike the Citizenship School model, which was institutionalized, the Liberation School model was unable to create lasting infrastructure due to the assassination of its founder and the subsequent state repression of its remaining members. Schools are institutions that train, and the training that many young Black people interested in progressive and radical social change needed, they found in the actual struggles against the state. The building of a school is a struggle, but the struggle is a school in and of itself—it is educational terrain where participants learn about society and themselves. Without institutions like the Liberation School, generations of Black youth interested in revolutionary change had to learn from the raw, and often deadly, experience of the fight for social justice in the United States. The struggle was their school, in lieu of having actual schools where strategies, tactics, and questions of organizing liberation could be worked out.



So

despite the short-lived existence of the OAAU Liberation School, we need it now more than ever before because those facing injustice will not give up seeking liberatory ideas and emancipatory frameworks. In fact, these yearnings will continue to exist and will deepen in a society as dynamic and contradictory as the United States. The Liberation School may no longer exist, the founders may have all passed, and the actual work of the school may not be widely known, but the yearning of oppressed and exploited people to fight against their oppression will never dissipate, nor will the desire to know not just what is happening to them, but why? After all, philosophers have interpreted the world in this or that way, but the point is to change it and the organizers' work is to do just that.



NO WEAPON CAN DEFEAT A PEOPLE DECIDED TO BE FREE



CAPITALISM IN ADVANCED COUNTRIES CANNOT SURVIVE WITHOUT COLONIES AND SEMI-COLONIES. IT NEEDS THE RAW MATERIALS AND MARKETS OF THESE COUNTRIES. IT BOLSTERS UP THE DECADENT CAPITALIST SYSTEM IN ITS HOME BASE BY EXTRACTING SUPER PROFITS FROM THESE COUNTRIES. THIS IS WHY THE NATIONAL LIBERATION STRUGGLES IN THESE COUNTRIES BECOME AN IMPORTANT PART IN THE STRUGGLE AGAINST CAPITALISM IN THE ADVANCED COUNTRIES THEMSELVES. Lenin



I think we have to recognise the extent to which the British standard of living is dependent today, as it has been throughout this century, on our invisible earnings, particularly on our investment income from overseas. The figures speak for themselves. The origin of our overseas investment which served as our financial mainstay in the two world wars, and which provide the foreign exchange we need so badly today, lies of course in our history.

Lord Carver, Ex-Governor of the Bank of England

COMES THE REVOLUTION,
WHO'D PROTECT YOUR
OVERSEAS INVESTMENTS?

ECGD

advertis in the British national press

SINCE IMPERIALISM IS TRYING SIMULTANEOUSLY TO DOMINATE THE WORKING CLASS IN ALL THE ADVANCED COUNTRIES AND SMOTHER THE NATIONAL LIBERATION STRUGGLES IN ALL THE UNDER-DEVELOPED COUNTRIES, THEN THERE IS ONLY ONE ENEMY WHOM WE ARE FIGHTING! Cabral

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ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Erica Veal is an archivist and heritage interpreter. She is a co-founding member of the Lowcountry Action Committee and the Charleston Community Service Organization. She is also a board member of the National Alliance Against Racist and Political Repression.

Nate Hubler is an archivist, a member of the Lowcountry Action Committee Solidarity Network and the Elbit Out of South Carolina Coalition.

Erica



Nate

Notes

