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ORGANIC CLASSROOMS:

RHETORICAL EDUCATION AT THE HIGHLANDER FOLK SCHOOL,

1932-1961

A Thesis in

English

by

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ABSTRACT

Organic Classrooms: Rhetorical Education at the Highlander Folk School, 1932-1961 evaluates the programs taught at one of the twentieth century's most controversial educational institutions. Highlander, a residential adult education center located in Appalachian Tennessee, became famous (and infamous) for its work with the Southern Labor Movement and the Civil Rights Movement. Specifically, this study attends to the ways that the school prepared students for symbolic action—or the rhetorical use of local cultural media—within their communities and larger social movements.

My dissertation describes the development of the folk school's educational programs—particularly drama, labor journalism, music, and literacy education—as agencies for promoting and achieving social change. These programs proved important not just for the various skills and strategies that were taught to students, but also for the ways in which they organized students into larger communities. In this way, Highlander staff saw education for social change not simply as a question of curriculum, but rather as a means of political action.

CONTENTS

Acknowledgements	v
Introduction	1
Chapter One: Origins of the Highlander Idea	24
Chapter Two: Labor Drama, Collaboration, and Communication	75
Chapter Three: Labor Journalism, Identification, and Organization	117
Chapter Four: Music Education and Collective Action	163
Chapter Five: Literacy, Community Organization, and the Civil Rights Movement ..	200
Conclusion	252
Bibliography	260

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INTRODUCTION: RHETORICAL EDUCATION AND SOCIAL CHANGE

Historian John Glen has commented that “[t]he name ‘Highlander’ rarely evokes a neutral response” (1). Throughout its thirty-one year history, the Highlander Folk School became one of the most controversial educational institutions of the twentieth century. Among the individuals involved in establishing and supporting the school were John Dewey, Norman Thomas, Reinhold Niebuhr, Rosa Parks, and Martin Luther King, Jr. Chief among its opponents were J. Edgar Hoover, the Georgia Commission on Education, the Tennessee state legislature, and the Ku Klux Klan. Whether described as a heroic contributor to the Southern Labor and Civil Rights Movements, or as a “communist training school,” Highlander’s enigmatic role in the history of the American South is indisputable.

This enigmatic reputation has inspired many writers to record Highlander’s story, and reflect on the meaning of that story for American society. John Glen has provided the most comprehensive history of the school and the broader social milieu that influenced its programs. Aimee Horton has further provided a general discussion of the development of the school’s pedagogy and the range of programs initiated at Highlander. Journalists Frank Adams and Thomas Bledsoe have provided more positively biased assessments of the school and its contribution to social change in America, while sociologists Aldon Morris and Francesca Polletta have further elaborated on the contribution of the folk school to the development of the Civil Rights Movement. Further studies of the school have been completed by students in education, theater studies, and mass communication.

Despite the range of scholarly and journalistic work on the school, the Highlander Folk School has received less attention by scholars working in the field of rhetoric and composition. Only two dissertations within English Studies have considered the contribution of Highlander to our understanding of rhetorical education, and in both cases the consideration is limited to a chapter at the most. Nonetheless, the field of rhetoric provides a powerful lens through which to analyze Highlander's programs and assess the relationship between rhetorical education and social change. In particular, rhetorical theory provides a means of describing the ways in which the folk school's staff members articulated the relationship between education and social change.

Education for Social Change

Arguably, the most sustained theoretical effort to define the relationship between education and social change has come from field of critical pedagogy. Scholars of critical pedagogy have rightly identified the role that schools have played as “agents of socialization,” and have argued for a more democratic conception of this function (*Theory and Resistance* 45). As Peter McLaren puts it:

Critical pedagogy commits itself to forms of learning and action that are undertaken in solidarity with subordinate and marginalized groups. In addition to interrogating what is taken for granted or seemingly self-evident or inevitable regarding the relationship between schools and the social order, critical pedagogy is dedicated to self-empowerment and social transformation. (Critical Pedagogy 32)

I quote Peter McLaren's definition in its entirety to emphasize both the scholarly and social contributions that critical pedagogues attempt to make. In Henry Giroux's words, critical pedagogy tries "to provide the foundation for using the schools as important sites to wage counter-hegemonic practices" (*Theory and Resistance* 71).

Responding to these political claims, Harold Entwistle has cautioned that "[t]he notion that the schools is hegemonic threatens to become one of those slogans which frequently serve as substitutes for detailed consideration of our educational arrangements" (1). While this statement is potentially too strong, it nonetheless points out to the often narrow way that hegemony is often defined by critical pedagogues. As I argue below, this has led to a focus on curricular reform within traditional classrooms as counter-hegemonic practice, often to the exclusion of alternative conceptions of education for social change.

Critical pedagogy's counter-hegemonic work is typically understood as a response to the "hidden curriculum" that defines education within a capitalist society. Henry Giroux provides a useful general definition of the hidden curriculum as "the unstated norms, values, and beliefs that are transmitted to students through the underlying structure of meaning and in both the formal content and the social relations of school and classroom life" (*Teachers as Intellectuals* 23). These "norms, values, and beliefs" echo the social tenets of capitalism, and thus transform schools into sites for the maintenance of capitalist hegemony.

The hidden curriculum is typically understood via the "correspondence principle," articulated most famously by Bowles and Gintis in *Schooling in Capitalist America*:

The educational system helps integrate youth into the economic system, we believe, through a structural correspondence between its social relations and those of production. The structure of social relations in education not only inures the student to the discipline of the work place, but develops the social-class identifications which are the crucial ingredients of job adequacy. (131)

For Bowles and Gintis, this correspondence involves both the provision of different levels of education to different social classes and the espousal of capitalist work values in the structure of schooling. Henry Giroux, following Basil Bernstein, describes these values as “a respect for authority, punctuality, cleanliness, docility, and conformity” (*Teachers as Intellectuals* 29). As such, the correspondence principle, following Marxist theories of overdetermination, emphasizes schools as sites where students are interpellated into a broader capitalist society (Carnoy 109).

Most critical pedagogues recognize that correspondence models of the hidden curriculum potentially state the case too strongly, leaving readers with the impression that schools are too thoroughly in the grips of capitalist interests. Scholars such as Henry Giroux and Michael Apple emphasize that schools are “sites of both domination and contestation” (*Theory and Resistance* 62-3). In Gramscian terms, the hegemonic function of schools must necessarily remain incomplete, and allow room for dissenting views and a wide range of educational experiences. Critical pedagogy, then, becomes a means of exploiting this contested space and producing democratic educational reforms.

It is in this context that critical pedagogues often turn to the work of Paulo Freire, and particularly his contention that education should not be a process of transmission (or banking) but rather one of discovery and growth. Freire’s pedagogy emphasizes the need

for learners to interact dialectically with the world around them, thereby achieving a sense of agency in it. For Giroux, Freire's "notion of agency...is particularly important because conjures up images both of critique and possibility" (*Teachers as Intellectuals* 87). Freire's view of education as a form of democratic cultural action centered on empowerment at once accords with McLaren's definition of critical pedagogy and provides an ostensible model for progressive educators.

Described in this way, critical pedagogues could be characterized by two primary educational goals. First, they are concerned with constructing an intellectual tradition—drawing primarily on Bowles and Gintis, Gramsci, Freire, and the Frankfurt School—to serve as a foundation for critically informed and politically aware educational practice. Second, they are concerned with constructing counter-hegemonic curricula that will democratize classrooms and empower students. However, these pursuits have also led critical pedagogues to often ignore the rich history of democratic educational practices within the United States. The strong focus on building a critical intellectual tradition could mistakenly encourage the belief that American educators were, prior to the 1970s, silent on the need for democratic classroom practices. Likewise, the focus on reforming curricula often excludes the history of community-based educational programs that directly attest to the relationship between education and social change.

This second critique can be traced back to the narrow way in which critical pedagogues typically read Gramsci's notion of hegemony. Hegemony is often used to describe the ways in which capitalist ideologies are more or less implanted in students by various means; counter-hegemony, then, becomes the proffering of an oppositional ideology. But for Gramsci, hegemony referred instead to the terrain of civil society, and

the manner in which that terrain encouraged “spontaneous assent” to the ideology of the ruling class. Far from being the simple set of practices by which ideology is transmitted, hegemony describes dominant institutions and practices that allow members of all classes to agree upon what social and economic structures will govern their lives. Counter-hegemony is achieved by the establishment and growth of alternative institutions built around marginalized ideologies, particularly those capable of producing a more democratic social order (such as trade unions).

Traditional classrooms are, for Gramsci, already articulated in hegemonic terms; that is, they are necessarily a part of the social and economic structures governing a society. While this articulation does not mean that classrooms correspond directly to capitalist work formations, it does mean that formal classrooms and the educational practices that attend them are seldom capable of directly threatening the dominant social order. As a result, counter-hegemonic education must be built within non-formal educational institutions such as adult education centers and union halls. These institutions are in turn central to the development of competing ideologies capable of supporting broader struggles for social change.

This conception of counter-hegemonic education, while largely ignored by critical pedagogues, has nonetheless been acknowledged by scholars in the field of adult education. Peter Mayo and Diana Coben have both argued that counterhegemony needs to be understood within Gramsci’s concept of a war of position, which “entails the building of alternative, revolutionary forms of organization” prior to any revolutionary seizure of power (Coben 15). In Mayo’s terms, the war of position demands a program of “radical, non-formal education” focused on various “sites of practice” (44-45). If

counterhegemonic education is understood in this way, then “the burden of such an enterprise lies squarely in institutions for adult education, especially in those political associations dedicated to social change and in economic associations where workers are involved in productive relationships which have their own educational imperatives” (Entwistle 176).

These counter-hegemonic institutions and their role in fostering social change should be of particular interest to scholars in rhetoric and composition, as they point to ruptures in the disciplinary histories of rhetorical education in the United States (Fox). That is, they point to those places in rhet/comp’s “extracurriculum” where educators and organizers made direct efforts to secure democratic social change (Gere). While one strand of composition studies has followed the lead of critical pedagogues (Shor, Hardin, and Greenbaum, for example), another has followed the example of historians such as Richard Altenbaugh, Adam Fairclough and Janet Cornelius in describing non-traditional and non-formal sites of critical rhetorical education. Jacqueline Jones Royster’s work on nineteenth-century African American women, Susan Kates’s description of “activist rhetorics,” Karyn Hollis’s work on the Bryn Mawr Summer School for Women Workers, and my own work on Stokely Carmichael and the Waveland Work-Study Institute, all point to those sites in which counter-hegemonic rhetorical education has been organized and practiced.

These scholars point to sites where education was understood rhetorically, and deployed as an agency of community organization and social change. But just as importantly, they point to American antecedents to critical pedagogy that emerged in conjunction with the struggle for marginal populations to secure the promises of

American democracy. However, the individuals and institutions that comprised these antecedents saw education for social change as less a question of curriculum and more one of organization. Furthermore, this crucial difference gestures to an alternative intellectual foundation by which to understand such education: namely, in the debates between John Dewey and Walter Lippmann on the status of the American public.¹

Rhetoric and the Great Society

Rhetoric was, in the decades following the Progressive Era, arguably a public issue. The effects of industrialization could be felt across the United States, as people responded not only to dramatic shifts in transportation, communication and capitalism, but also to the world's first industrialized war. For intellectuals of the period, these shifts didn't simply affect society—rather, they transformed the very definition of society itself. As business and land ownership became increasingly centralized, terms such as “community” and “the public” no longer represented the shared political interests and power of various geographically identifiable groups. As a result, the relationship between government, capital, and the general population—and the communicative practices appropriate to such a relationship—also became a topic of debate among some of the country's leading intellectuals.

Nowhere was this discussion more clearly articulated than in the debate between Walter Lippmann and John Dewey on the status of the American public. One could hardly have asked for two more prominent interlocutors; Lippmann was one of the most influential journalists of his day, having founded the *New Republic* in 1914 and advised President Wilson during World War One, while Dewey was at that time America's most prominent public intellectual. Nor could one have chosen a weightier topic for them to

tackle. While their debate increasingly centered on the role and function of the public itself, it started out as a discussion of public opinion, and the communication appropriate between government and its constituents. Lippmann and Dewey's exchange could, then, be described as one of the first public debates on rhetoric to occur in modern America.

While Lippmann and Dewey would disagree on what it meant to live in the Great Society, for the most part they agreed that the very conditions for that society's emergence had changed the concepts of citizenship and democracy. Both agreed that the Great Society was symptomatic of sudden technological developments in transport and communication alongside the global expansion of capitalist enterprise. As a result, the United States and its citizens were increasingly drawn into wider and wider webs of association and causality, which increasingly obscured their ability to function effectively within a democratic society.

For Lippmann, citizens could hardly be expected to have an educated understanding of all the policies, interests, and forces at work in their lives; as such, they could hardly be expected to make thoughtful and informed contributions to discussions on government and politics. A public built on such foundations could only be a "phantom public," which vanishes under scrutiny and can barely support the various claims made upon it. If the public was to play a substantial role in American democracy, it needed instead to be assembled around carefully constructed public opinion, defined by Lippmann as "the use of symbols which assemble emotions after they have been detached from their ideas" (47).

Under these conditions, "[w]hat the public does is not to express its opinions but to align itself for or against a proposal" (61). These proposals are in turn crafted by an

expert government with the requisite experience and education to make informed recommendations. Lippmann, then, doesn't discount the role of the public in resolving political controversy; rather, he limits it to effectively adjudicating which proposals brought before them are worthy of administrative attention and development. But such a conclusion, in the final analysis, nonetheless demands that "we... abandon the notion that democratic government can be the direct expression of the will of the people" (61).

For a progressive intellectual like John Dewey, Lippmann's conclusions about the role of the public in American government were at once pessimistic and problematic. Dewey remained committed to the sort of democracy that Lippmann had dismissed as delusional: a democracy defined by the active participation of all citizens in decision-making processes. As a result, Dewey set about redefining the public and its role, in the hopes of remedying the apathy and bewilderment he saw in American citizens. Where Lippmann's project was one of circumscription and control, Dewey's is one of revitalization and engagement.

For Dewey, the public "consists of all those who are affected by the indirect consequences of transactions to such an extent that it is deemed necessary to have those consequences systematically cared for" (16). Indirect consequences, negative or positive, occur when two parties enter into a transaction that affects other groups and individuals. Publics emerge from the recognition by these groups that they have an interest in somehow regulating the original transaction, which in turn constitutes the "primary problem" of the public: "to achieve such recognition of itself as will give it weight in the selection of official representatives and in the definition of their responsibilities and rights" (77).

Even this short definition of Dewey's public indicates some of the major distinctions between his project and that of Lippmann. Where Lippmann sees government as an expert cadre, Dewey rather believes that it is representative of the people. Lippmann sees the public as having a disinterested role in the adjudication of competing social claims, while Dewey believes that the public coalesces around a shared interest in a common problem. But most importantly, Lippmann and Dewey disagree substantially on who should be responsible for setting social and political agendas and the discourses surrounding them. For Lippmann, the modern world demands that this be done by an educated elite; for Dewey, it is more urgent than ever before that the public be able to address and transform the ever-increasing indirect consequences that affect it.

The problem of the public, then, could be seen as a rhetorical one: what kinds of symbolic action are appropriate for the rank and file, and what bearing should they have on policy formation? But for Dewey, there is also a second problem facing the public: how are individuals to learn the various symbolic resources required to form strong, invigorated publics? For Dewey, the answer lies both in philosophy and in education. First and foremost, a new public philosophy is required, a philosophy that extends pragmatism's experimental method to all questions of social and political policy. By assessing political interests and agendas based first on their consequences, Deweyan publics would at once reconstruct older philosophical models and extend the conditions of publicity required in an active democracy.

But just as importantly, education needed to provide students with the means to negotiate the problems that surrounded them in a democratic manner. It is worth noting here that Dewey uses democracy not as a means of describing a political system, but

rather an ideal set of relations between individuals. “Creative democracy,” as he called it, allows for the free association of individuals in such a way as to suggest social responsibility and to broaden individual horizons through open and encouraged interaction. Under such conditions, students are best able to learn the foundations of democratic thinking and the various schemes and strategies required to negotiate the world around them. While it was published eleven years prior to *The Public and Its Problems, Democracy and Education* outlines the kind of educational program needed to support public deliberation in an experimental fashion.

Dewey was not without his critics, and even those intellectuals politically close to him expressed doubts over the plausibility of the program he outlined. Writing in 1932, Reinhold Niebuhr saw Dewey’s arguments as being at once too optimistic and too rational. Niebuhr criticizes Dewey’s political and ethical agenda for being founded on “the assumption that our social difficulties are due to the failure of the social sciences to keep pace with the physical sciences which have created our technological civilization” (xii). This assumption suggests that “with a little more time, a little more adequate moral and social pedagogy and a generally higher development of human intelligence, our social problems will approach solution” (xiii). Such thinking, however, fails to take into account the increased dogmatism and egoism that defines social groups, which in turn makes the collective exercise of reason virtually impossible.

Read another way, Niebuhr suggests that Dewey’s greatest oversight is to mistakenly equate individual ethics with the politics that govern group behavior. Thus he overlooks class interests and antagonisms, and fails to account for why such difficulties continue to exist. For Niebuhr, it is only with the recognition that individual morals are

incompatible with larger social structures that the true challenge of the Great Society can be fully understood. However, this critique of Dewey's philosophy overlooks his involvement with progressive educational causes, including Brookwood Labor College and the Highlander Folk School. Furthermore, these schools were only two among hundreds of organizations devoted to workers education in the 1930s. And these groups—which included labor colleges, workers' theater troupes, and trade unions—could be understood as the very publics that Dewey was looking for.

While many labor colleges were Marxist in origin and in political commitments, the link between Highlander and Dewey's conception of active democratic publics was more direct. John Dewey was an immediate influence on Highlander staff, and personally chaired the Friends of Highlander fundraising body. The folk school further developed Dewey's conception of publics by working not only with the communities that surrounded the school, but also with emerging social movements. Dedicated to social change and, more often than not, a democratic political vision, these movements were exactly the sort of active publics that Dewey called for. By helping these groups to develop their rhetorical capacities—that is, their ability to communicate their concerns with a wide range of sympathetic and not-so-sympathetic audiences—Highlander was directly involved in democratic educational activism.

Rhetorical Action and Social Change

Dewey's concept of the public, or multiple publics, as a means of representing the interests various groups within American society could also be seen as an antecedent to more recent work on social movements. While it should be noted that Dewey's public is

deliberately vague, and is certainly not limited to political campaigns and movements, it nonetheless provides a description of how social action occurs and why it remains important to American society.

Nancy Fraser, in a famous 1992 essay, articulated a similar theory of multiple publics. While her argument doesn't make explicit use of Dewey, instead being written as a response to shortcomings in Jurgen Habermas' concept of the bourgeois public sphere, Fraser argues for the necessity within democratic societies of "contestation among a plurality of competing publics" (122). This argument, far from being simply prescriptive, is further based on the historical existence of multiple publics, many of which represented subordinated social groups. These alternative publics, which Fraser terms "subaltern counterpublics," are for the most part active arenas constituted by twentieth century American social movements.

Fraser's counterpublics are, first and foremost, rhetorical structures. Her definition is worth quoting here in its entirety:

I propose to call these subaltern counterpublics in order to signal that they are parallel discursive arenas where members of subordinated social groups invent and circulate counterdiscourses to formulate oppositional interpretations of their identities, interests, and needs. (123).

According to this definition, counterpublics perform important work in helping subordinated groups constitute collective identities capable of social action. But this is only one of three important functions performed by such publics. Aside from helping movement participants to form and perform collective identities, counterpublics also

mobilize these identities for both sympathetic and hostile audiences, which in turn form the basis for continued political action.

Communication scholars Robert Asen and Daniel Brouwer make explicit the connection between contemporary work on counterpublics and Dewey's earlier formulation of multiple publics. Asen and Brouwer remind us that the problem for Dewey was that "there are too many publics and too much of public concern for our existing resources to cope with" (*Public* 126).² The problem, then, for movement counterpublics lies in mobilizing economic and cultural resources strategically, in the hopes of achieving broader social change. Insofar as counterpublics introduce participants to movement goals and practices, they function pedagogically to expand individuals' rhetorical capacities. By presenting these goals and practices to broader audiences, counterpublics further expand the reach of movement discourses. Thus it could be said that communication and education are central concerns within active counterpublics.

These arguments for the representative and communicative functions of counterpublics in many ways echo sociological work on social movements. While much of this work was initially devoted to describing the psychological disturbances that produce social movements, movement studies has become increasingly focused on the communicative resources and strategies that constitute and maintain movements. With the rise of resource mobilization theory, and subsequent challenges to that theory, movement studies as a field has focused more and more of its attention on the rhetorical dimensions of collective social action.

Resource mobilization theory was first presented as an alternative to the classical model for movement studies, which emphasized societal strain and the psychological disturbances it produces. Advocates of resource mobilization theory argue that psychological disturbances are too common to account for the emergence of social movements, and instead suggest that movements emerge “from a significant increase in the level of resources available to support collective protest activity” (McAdam 21). While Doug McAdam alludes to the often slippery definition of resources within resource mobilization theory, he nonetheless notes that it was responsible for shifting social movement scholarship from a psychological to political model of analysis (32).

With the publication of McAdam’s *Political Process and the Development of Black Insurgency, 1930-1970*, and Aldon Morris’ *Origins of the Civil Rights Movement*, social movement studies began to explore more carefully the rhetorical aspects of social movements. The work of both these scholars differs from resource mobilization theory in its emphasis on indigenous organizations and the resources they provide in the early stages of movement development. McAdam’s work centers on the concept of “cognitive liberation,” which describes the ways in which movement organizations help participants develop new symbolic responses to the material conditions that surround them:

...the altered responses of members to a particular challenger serve to transform evolving political conditions into a set of ‘cognitive cues’ signifying to insurgents that the political system is becoming increasingly vulnerable to challenge” (49).

For McAdam, then, social movements emerge as counterpublics increase their rhetorical capacities to respond to the political structures surrounding them, and thereby increase the range of challenges they are capable of mounting.

Aldon Morris similarly emphasizes the ways in which local activists and organizations “transform indigenous resources into power resources and [marshal] them in conflict situations to accomplish political ends” (xii). Among these indigenous resources, Morris lists music, oratory and other cultural traditions and practices. He further identifies the various institutions—described as movement halfway houses—responsible for rhetorically reconfiguring these resources into protest agencies, and emphasizes the processes and to a certain degree the pedagogies involved in such transformations. Morris argues that focusing on the educational role of movement centers and halfway houses allows social movement scholars “to explicate the conditions that produce tactical innovations within movements, and to account for the timing and forms of such innovations” (284).

The role of rhetoric within social movements receives even more prominent attention within discussions of grievance frames. Frame analysis, borrowed from Erving Goffman, describes the process of “focusing attention on some bounded phenomenon by imparting meaning and significance to elements within the frame and setting them apart from what is outside the frame” (Buechler 41). Framing, then, is the collective symbolic process by which movements assign and circulate the meanings of various political phenomena, and thereby create a rhetorical foundation for movement discourse and action. Grievance frames can be diagnostic, prognostic, or motivational in nature, suggesting the various ways in which structural inequalities are interpreted and transformed into resources for social action. The process of “frame alignment” describes the manner in which individual frames are articulated with collective movement frames, and involves various strategies such as bridging, amplification, extension, and

transformation. Insofar as frame analysis emphasizes the manner in which discourse constructs movement knowledge, it profitably refers to the functions that various individual and collective rhetorics play in movement development.

By identifying the various rhetorical dimensions involved in the development and maintenance of social movements, social movement scholars have also opened the field of movement studies to pedagogical inquiry. Social movements are not simply sites for the deployment of rhetoric, but also sites in which participants learn movement rhetorics. To date, however, little attention has been paid to the role of education within social movement. The works of Aldon Morris and Frances Polletta, both of who treat the Highlander Folk School as a central site, are notable exceptions to this trend. Morris and Polletta describe the importance of education within the Civil Rights Movement as both a means of mobilizing indigenous cultural resources and as a model of deliberative democratic practice.

Much work remains to be done on the relationship between education and social movements. Scholars of rhetoric can play an important role in this work, by describing both the development and effects of movement rhetorics along with the pedagogies adopted by activist educators. Studies of education within social movements not only promise to fill in some of the blanks about movement emergence and development, but also further develop our understanding of rhetoric's "civic mission" in non-institutional contexts. Considered in this regard, the Highlander Folk School is an important site for historical and theoretical inquiry.

Rhetorical Education at the Highlander Folk School

At first glance, talking about the Highlander Folk School as a site of rhetorical education seems like a stretch. After all, no staff member of the original folk school ever used the term “rhetoric” to describe the work that they did. In fact, the deliberative democratic nature of Highlander’s pedagogy and programs, with its emphasis on collaboration and the assumed value of consensus, would seem to be anti-rhetorical at its foundation. The folk school, in devoting its time to helping oppressed students to decipher the news and interpret the pressing issues of the day from their own cultural perspective, sought to counter the dominant discourse of capitalism. Insofar as the school trained students to produce shop papers, workers’ theater, meaningful song movements, and effective political action, it also trained them to intervene and transform the cultural and political forces that marginalized them. Such programs were thus defined by their distaste for “systematically distorted communication,” and by their attempts to arrive at a truth capable of transforming society.

However, even a cursory glance at the Highlander Folk School archives indicates the large extent to which the school focused on extending the repertoire of symbolic, or rhetorical, actions that students had available to them. By symbolic action I do not mean tokenistic forms of protest (those aimed at producing figurative rather than material political effects), but rather various means of communication capable of effecting political or cultural changes on behalf of an individual or collective agent. Following this definition, many of the programs run by Highlander staff could be seen as courses in rhetorical action. Drama, journalism, music, and literacy education classes were at all times linked to the political effects that these respective mediums could produce.

This dissertation hopes to contribute both to the growing scholarship on Highlander, and to the history of rhetorical education in the United States. By focusing on Highlander as a site of rhetorical education, I hope to draw attention to the ways in which rhetoric was discussed and deployed in the first half of the twentieth century. Thus Highlander's history is linked both to discussions of rhetoric and communication by intellectuals of the era and to the social movements in which the school participated. In particular, the folk school's pedagogy is studied as a rhetorical development of progressive educational theory, and assessed according to the intended and unintended social effects that the school's programs produced.

The goal of this study, then, is to provide an account of the programs developed by Highlander and the ways that those programs developed students' capacities for responding to the oppressive conditions that determined much of their lives. To do so, I attend to what I call the rhetorical agencies used by the school as means of symbolic action: drama, journalism, music, and literacy education. Staff at the folk school used these agencies to build a dynamic, student-centered pedagogy that assisted in the development of the Southern Labor and Civil Rights Movement. Thus the theories and practices developed at the school are assessed against staff and student accounts of class sessions, and against the effects these classes had within larger social movements.

Chapter one describes the development of the Highlander Idea, the name by which the folk school's pedagogy came to be known. In particular, I trace founder Myles Horton's intellectual and physical journeys during the late 1920s and early 1930s, and the ways that his travels influenced his thoughts on education and social change. The Highlander Idea can be understood as an organic pedagogy, or a set of educational

practices determined by the communities of learners rather than the dictates of the institution. As such, the Highlander Idea focused on helping learners to develop their own rhetorical capabilities, to organize their communities and forge collective identities, and engage in collective action in order to achieve long-term social change. The idea was realized in the physical founding of the folk school, and took its final form out of the early struggles the school was involved in. It was from engagement with events such as the Wilder coal strike and Grundy County bugwood strike that the school's tripartite approach to pedagogy—residential education, extension work, and community programs—emerged.

Chapter two analyzes the school's drama programs, particularly the ways that labor drama was used both as an agency of publicity and a means of achieving critical communication. Influenced by New York's New Theater League and the work of the Prolet-Buehne, Highlander's drama program emphasized the need for workers to develop a theatrical tradition capable of representing their own lives and needs. Drama classes at the folk school not only taught students to craft such plays, but also to use play-writing as a means of critically analyzing their own experiences. This analysis helped students to connect playwriting activities to the oppressive conditions they faced as workers, thereby expanding their capacities to respond such situations.

Chapter three analyzes the shop papers and yearbooks produced in Highlander's labor journalism classes. While staff did not draw on an explicit tradition as they had in the school's dramatics courses, journalism classes helped students to organize and produce a range of shop papers and story collections. These documents are analyzed as agencies of identification, which enabled students to reconstruct their own experience

within the collective sensibility of the Southern Labor Movement. Journalism, then, represented not only a means of building class consciousness, but also a material extension of the labor movement itself.

Chapter four evaluates the folk school's music programs, and the ways that music built solidarity among movement participants. The folk music of the labor movement and the freedom songs of the Civil Rights Movement are described not as a means of communicating movement ideologies, but rather as a material agency capable of galvanizing participants as a larger body capable of collective action. The focus here is not on the ideological appeal of the songs, or on the messages that these songs contain. Rather, the performances of the songs are themselves studied as rhetorical acts, with attention given both to the ways in which songs were developed and taught, and also the very real political effects that these songs had on the front lines of labor and civil rights struggles.

Chapter five describes the citizenship schools developed by Highlander staff as an organizing tool during the Civil Rights Movement. While these schools taught reading and writing, they were primarily understood as an extension of broader educational struggles, and as a means of organizing African American communities. These schools connected Highlander to a broader tradition of African American educational activism, and further acted as local movement centers for Southern civil rights activists. By linking functional theories of literacy education to the African American freedom movement, the Sea Island citizenship schools established a "floor methodology" that used literacy as an agency for political action. In this context, literacy became a technology of freedom, and

a means of developing African American cultural resources into political resources for the Civil Rights Movement.

The Highlander Idea, and the programs that the folk school built around various cultural media, represent an alternative theory of rhetorical education that extends our understanding of progressive educational theories and can be seen as an antecedent to more contemporary theories of critical pedagogy. The organic pedagogy developed at Highlander attests to the impact of non-institutional forms of rhetorical education on social movements in the United States, particularly the concrete contributions of educational activists to the rhetorics used by labor and civil rights activists. Thus the history of Highlander's education attests to the civic contributions of rhetorical education, at the same time that it challenges us to locate those contributions beyond more traditional classrooms and pedagogies.

NOTES

¹ In suggesting that we can understand the Lippmann-Dewey debates as an alternative theoretical foundation for critical education, I do not mean to suggest that there were no critical educational practices or theories before 1922. As I make clear in the chapters that follow, Highlander availed itself of many traditions established long before the school opened. Rather, I take theoretical foundations to be a means of framing and analyzing the history that follows; the Lippmann-Dewey debates provide a different vantage point from which to describe the history of critical rhetorical education, one that extends backwards as well as forward from those events. Indeed, Dewey's response to Lippmann, it could be argued, itself relied on his own relationship to a democratic educational tradition.

² Dewey's argument makes clear that subaltern counterpublics are only one form of counterpublic. In *Publics and Counterpublics*, Michael Warner describes subcultures such as movie audiences as publics. The rise of what could be termed middle-class social movements, such as Slow Food and the open source software movement, further indicate the diversity of counterpublics in contemporary society. These examples also make clear that, while counterpublics are defined in part by their exclusion from mainstream society, this exclusion isn't necessarily forced upon them and doesn't function the same way from counterpublic to counterpublic. The diversity of counterpublic goals—from total separation from mainstream society to complete integration within it—likewise attests a counterpublic's oppositional status is often defined by perceived contestation with mainstream society rather than by contradictory value systems.

CHAPTER ONE: THE EMERGENCE OF THE HIGHLANDER IDEA

The Highlander Folk School first opened its doors to Appalachian Tennessee on November 1, 1932. The school, which was to remain a controversial institution throughout its life, was primarily the realization of one man's dream to open a "southern mountain school" that would help people to better their lives and prepare for "a new social order" (Horton, *Long Haul* 61-2). That man was Myles Horton, a Tennessee native whose varied intellectual career had taken him to Union Theological Seminary, the University of Chicago, and the folk high schools of Denmark, before returning him to the American south. While the school's cofounder, Georgia poet Don West, was to leave the school within a year, Horton remained at Highlander for the entire life of the school.

For many authors, the Highlander Folk School represents the materialization of "the Highlander Idea." Thomas Bledsoe and Frank Adams both refer to the Highlander Idea in the titles of their books on the Folk School, and John Glen and Aimee Horton discuss the school's history and educational programs with reference to the same concept. Used to describe both the operating philosophy of the school and the theoretical foundation upon which Myles Horton founded the school, the Highlander Idea is often hard to differentiate from the school itself.

There is good reason for this confusion. The Highlander Folk School, over its thirty year history, remained remarkably faithful to Myles Horton's educational beliefs. Insofar as the school became a residential school for materially oppressed Southerners, with a focus on crisis education and student-initiated learning, it represented the fulfillment of an intellectual journey that took Horton from Appalachian Tennessee to

Chicago and New York, to Denmark, and back again to Tennessee. These travels introduced Horton to many of the figures and movements that would remain influential throughout his life: Reinhold Niebuhr, John Dewey, and the Danish Folk High Schools. Horton's synthesis of the ideas he received from these various influences would be embodied in the "southern mountains school" he established.

It was also with the founding of the Highlander Folk School that Horton saw his vision for adult education grow into the Highlander Idea. In the first year of the school's operation, staff developed the tripartite focus that would determine much of Highlander's further work. The school's commitment to residential education grew out of Horton's initial travels to Chicago, New York, and finally Denmark. A particularly violent labor dispute in the nearby town of Wilder gave the staff immediate experience with extension work and crisis education. Finally, the school's community education program developed from the staff's efforts to organize local bugwood cutters. These three educational programs represent the foundation upon which Highlander's organic pedagogy was built.

New Education for the New South

It is hardly surprising that the Highlander Folk School was founded when and where it was. Appalachian Tennessee was, by 1932, one of the poorest regions in the country. The region, like many other areas in the South, was defined by poverty, sharecropping, and absentee ownership of property and businesses. The depression was felt so acutely in the South that by 1938, President Roosevelt declared the region "the nation's number one economic problem."

The problems that faced the South in the 1930s were the product of over fifty years of economic and political exploitation. In many ways, southern poverty emerged alongside the New South, with the Hayes-Tilden compromise of 1877. While the aftermath of the 1876 presidential election saw the ascendancy of the Democratic Party in the region, it was also attended by increasing Northern control of businesses. This situation was only exacerbated during the Progressive Era, with more and more business dollars made in the South being removed from the region. This in turn deprived the area of tax dollars, which, along with laissez-faire state policies regarding welfare, affected education and welfare programs.

However, with the emergence of the New South, the region gradually found itself responding to both increasing industrialism and a certain degree of new found prosperity. By the 1920s, southern states played host to several booming industries: textiles, cotton, tobacco, oil, lumber, paper, chemicals, steel, and aluminum. The growth of cities such as Birmingham, Atlanta, and Houston reflected a broader (though far from complete) migration of families to urban areas as well as the growth of southern-owned industries. This in turn led to real estate booms during the first half of the decade, and a climate so ostensibly prosperous that one Greensboro writer declared “there is no God but Advertising, and Atlanta is his prophet” (Tindall 99).

The prosperity of the New South did not necessarily remedy the problems of the Old South. African Americans continued to suffer poverty and disenfranchisement under Jim Crow laws, while poor whites and farmers found themselves bound to the uncertain fortunes of agriculture. Alongside the emergence of business progressivism came the resurgence of the Ku Klux Klan in many southern states, leading in some cases to the

election of reactionary candidates in state elections and the passage of regressive laws. Anti-evolutionists likewise sought to pass laws banning the teaching of evolution in public schools, leading to the infamous 1925 Scopes trial in Dayton, Tennessee. The trials of the Scottsboro boys and Angelo Herndon in 1931 and 1932 likewise reminded those living in the New South of the political realities that had carried over from an earlier age.

Nor was the prosperity of the New South evenly distributed among all classes. The development of company villages in the textile and mining industries led to the further exploitation of workers, most notably through payment in company scrip that was good only at company stores. These stores in turn inflated prices so severely that scrip in turn became known as “robissary money” (Tindall 329). Business owners also worked to keep workers docile and wages cheap, principally through the sponsorship of open-shop associations and the exploitation of racial strife among workers. Despite positive events such as the establishment of the Southern Summer School for Women Workers in 1927, labor organizing in the South was uneven and typically ineffective.

To say that labor organizing was ineffective was not to say that it was non-existent. Rather, as George Tindall comments, southern labor “seized upon the union as an instrument of immediate protest rather than as an agency for long-range collective bargaining” (350). Thus the 1920s saw the eruption of some of the bloodiest labor disputes in the region’s history: textiles workers in Gastonia and Marion struck during the spring and summer of 1929; rayon plants in Elizabethton, Tennessee, were shut down by walkouts during the same period; miners in Harlan and Bell Counties, Kentucky, struck during 1931 and continued to protest working conditions through much of the following

decade. These protests often resulted in the eviction of families from company-owned quarters, the looting of commissaries, and the use of company-hired deputies and National Guard contingents to break up pickets and maintain order. In the cases of Gastonia and Harlan, strike leaders, miners, and deputies were killed in gun battles or ambushes.

These labor disputes took place against the backdrop of the Great Depression, which arrested much of the economic progress of the region. Textile mills, which had struggled to break even for much of the 1920s, began to report real losses. Cotton and tobacco prices plummeted in the wake of overproduction and rampant competition among small producers. A severe drought in 1930 likewise disrupted already impoverished state of agriculture in the region (which in many cases depended on sharecropping and tenancy). These conditions grew so dire that southern author W.J. Cash, writing in 1941, believed that the area was preparing for social and economic revolution (371). But even in 1931, Mississippi governor Theodore Bilbo reported that “I’m feeling a little pink myself” (Tindall 381).

Roosevelt’s triumph in the 1932 presidential election brought with it new hope among southerners. In W.J. Cash’s words, “it was almost as though the bones of Pickett and his brigade had suddenly sprung alive to go galloping up that slope to Gettysburg again and snatch victory from the Yankee’s hand after all” (365). Roosevelt demonstrated an abiding interest in the South, and his summer home in Warm Springs, Georgia, did not go overlooked with the region’s inhabitants. And while the Brain Trust, the Hundred Days, and the New Deal were yet to come, Southern voters welcomed the

prospect of federal relief from the poverty and uncertainty of Hoover's Republican administration.

Arguably, what Roosevelt held out was the promise of an effective response to the challenges of a modern society, just as Dewey had called for in the *Public and its Problems*. But what was also needed was, in educational theorist Joseph Hart's terms, "education for an age of power." In a book bearing the same title, Hart emphasized the need for educators to address "the problems and opportunities of our age with a courage and intelligence equal to their own" (10-11). In order for education to adequately respond to a new world, one "revealed to us by our scientists and under reconstruction for us by our technologies," it must itself undergo reconstruction and attend to the social and economic conditions facing the New South.

Writing in 1935, Hart imagined that such education would be democratic, rooted in the resources of modern society and the experiences of the individual. But educators in the New South had not waited for Hart to provide them with a direction for their work. With the founding of Highlander three years earlier, Myles Horton—with assistance from Georgia poet Don West and a number of other friends—had already dedicated himself to just the kind of education that Hart describes.

Myles Horton's "Southern Mountains School"

Myles Horton was born in 1905 in Savannah, Tennessee. His parents held a range of jobs during his childhood, including school teaching until the state implemented educational requirements for public school teachers. Nonetheless, despite long periods of poverty, Myles' parents ensured that he and his siblings received quality elementary and

secondary education. It was from his parents that Horton learned his strong sense of social justice and his commitment to education.

Horton attended Cumberland University in Lebanon, Tennessee, from 1924 to 1928. He intended to complete some form of religious education, while also majoring in English literature. But during this time, his extracurricular activities had just as much impact on his thinking and his further plans. His work as president of the Cumberland YMCA in 1927, and as director of a Presbyterian bible school in Ozone, Tennessee in the summer of 1927, taught Horton a great deal about the people and the problems of the American south.

Horton's experience at Ozone was particularly important. His work at the bible school soon made him aware of the economic and social problems faced by the community. Many workers in the area had been laid off, or had become physically unable to work, while farmers lived at bare subsistence levels. In the hopes of helping the community to address these problems, Horton called a meeting of the parents of the bible school students and other interested adults:

...I said that I'd been working around this part of the country for the past two years and wondered if we could spend a little time talking about some of the things I'd been seeing, such as sanitation projects, co-ops, and so on. I had to do a lot of probing to them started talking, because though they may have talked about these things individually or been to co-op or union meetings, they'd probably never been to a community-wide meeting where such topics were discussed. (*Long Haul* 22)

The meeting proved successful, and people requested Horton's help in addressing the problems that he had helped them to face. But it was here that Horton was most lost; he realized that, while being able to raise the problems among the people at the meeting, he was unable to answer their questions or provide them with solutions.

Nonetheless, that Ozone meeting shaped Horton's understanding of adult education in a fundamental way. In realizing that the people of Ozone were able to raise their own problems and work out their own solutions, Horton discovered what would be the underlying principle behind Highlander's pedagogy; by addressing the Ozone gathering on their own life experiences, Horton forged a link between education and community action. The meeting was not just an attempted intervention by a well-intentioned bible school teacher, but also a point around which to organize and better the community as a whole. When asked to stay on in the area as a teacher, Horton promised to return when he had more answers. In the four years that followed, Horton would return to his experience at Ozone constantly, using an "O" in his notes to indicate those lessons applicable to community-based adult education.

After Horton graduated from Cumberland, he worked for a year as the state secretary for the YMCA. In that time, he travelled around Tennessee, visiting old utopian communities in Rugby and Ruskin in an attempt "to find ways to work with people in co-ops and learn more about the miners' union" (*Long Haul* 26). But these communities proved to be a disappointment, offering Horton a model of how to live apart from society rather than effect any change within it. Horton found more of worth in the writings of William James, and in his conversation with Abram Nightingale, a Presbyterian minister whose congregation was based in the small town of Crossville.

It could be argued that Nightingale, more than anyone else, was responsible for launching Horton's career. Nightingale told Horton in no uncertain terms the biggest obstacle he faced in pursuing his dreams: "You don't know enough" (*Long Haul* 32). He also helped Horton secure a place at Union Theological Seminary in New York. It was there that Horton would meet many of the figures foundational to his thought: Harry Ward, George Counts, John Dewey, Sherwood Eddy, and—perhaps most importantly—Reinhold Niebuhr. While Horton was to stay at Union for only a year (1929-1930), the ideas he found there remained with him throughout his career.

Horton had already read Harry Ward's *Our Economic Morality and the Ethic of Jesus* before attending Union. Nevertheless, Horton felt remarkably underprepared for the academic climate of the seminary. He nearly withdrew from an advanced graduate course with the newly-appointed Reinhold Niebuhr when he couldn't understand what the theologian was talking about. As it turned out, few students in the class knew what Niebuhr was talking about, and Horton was convinced to see the course through.

The lectures and arguments that Niebuhr presented in that course would later become his famous work, *Moral Man and Immoral Society*. In this work, Niebuhr argued against both the optimistic rationalism of pragmatists and progressives, and the inattentive moralism found in proponents of the social gospel. Niebuhr argues that both these groups mistake the moral realm of the individual and the immoral, political realm of society; thus they provide moral solutions incompatible with political relations of force. For Niebuhr, Marxist class analysis provides the means to arrive at politically sensible solutions to social problems.

Horton learned from Niebuhr the necessity of class analysis and political action in attending to social problems. The conflicts between classes, between union workers and mine owners, between the southern poor and those in power, were incapable of rational or moral solution. Rather, historical under-classes needed to learn how to address their problems and achieve results through direct, community-based action. Individual morals and Christian ethics would amount to little without this attention to broader power relations. Education, in Horton's eyes, must direct its attention to these broader goals.

Despite the lessons he learnt, Horton felt that the faculty at Union "didn't understand the problems I wanted to work on" (*Long Haul* 59). While Niebuhr, Ward, and others "knew the problems of the cities, and...were generous, committed people who weren't afraid to take risks," they "didn't know the people in the mountains or mountain ways." But the fellow students that Horton met there not only proved receptive, but in many cases offered their services as future teachers for the southern mountain schools. It was at Union that James Dombrowski, Elizabeth "Zilla" Hawes, and John B. Thompson, first signed on to the Highlander Idea (58-9). These three would eventually become staff members at the school, and make considerable contributions to Highlander in the school's first decade.

Nonetheless, Myles Horton had not enrolled at Union to get a degree, and, feeling he could find no further answers at the seminary, he enrolled at the University of Chicago with the hopes of studying sociology. In 1930 he commenced studies with Robert E. Park and Lester Ward, who furthered his thinking on the relationship between education and political conflict. Robert Park, like Horton, saw conflict situations as necessarily educative. But where Park was attempting to find solutions to social problems, Horton

believed that participation in crisis situations would help people to develop their own responses and solutions that would help them to improve their lives.

Horton's year in Chicago also brought him into contact with three other people who would help him develop the Highlander Idea. The first was Jane Addams, whom he met at Hull House. She suggested to Horton that the school he was thinking of founding sounded more like a rural settlement house, and encouraged him to pursue his goals. The other individuals were two Danish Lutheran ministers, Enok Mortensen and Aage Moller. Upon hearing Horton's ideas about education, Moller remarked that Horton's school sounded a lot like a Danish folk high school. For the first time, Horton had a concrete model for the sort of educational institution he was hoping to found.

The Danish Folk Schools grew from the educational vision of Bishop Nikolai Grundtvig, widely considered one of the greatest Danish poets of the nineteenth century. Born in 1783, Grundtvig was raised to take up a position among the clergy, but left this formal schooling to pursue interests in Norse folklore and Danish culture. His contact with the Danish peasantry led him to see in Danish culture the means by which to awaken the life of the nation and its citizenry. To this end, Grundtvig proposed a School of Life, which would place adult education at the service of the Danish peasantry, and thereby help the latter to take up their role as preservers of the national culture. He himself attempted to open such a school in 1844, but this initial effort proved unsuccessful.

The first successful folk school opened in 1851, under the direction of educator Kristen Kold. The gains made by this first school encouraged other educators to found similar institutions, all devoted to linking education to the needs of their local communities. These efforts proved essential to Denmark's recovery from military defeat

at the hands of Austria and Prussia in 1864, a defeat that deprived them of much of their best farming land. The folk high schools were uniquely positioned to address the ensuing poverty and desperation, and thus focused their attention on agriculture and the development of cooperative business. By 1926, the folk schools had served over 300,000 students (Hart, *Light from the North*).

It was at the suggestion of Moller, and with the support of Niebuhr that Horton travelled to Denmark to see the folk schools for himself. Horton arrived in September, 1931, and travelled to the Borups Folk High School in Copenhagen to learn the Danish language. To support himself, he gave lectures on various aspects of American culture, including one thought-provoking consideration of the plight of African Americans. Between lectures, Horton visited a number of folk schools and discussed with folk school leaders the underlying philosophies behind the folk school movement.

Horton was most drawn to the folk school concept of the “Living Word,” or “the spoken word dealing with a vital subject” (Horton, “Grundtvig” 25). In most cases, this “Living Word” was a combination of an individual school’s purpose, and primarily oral instruction methods. Horton remarked that “each school, which was usually built around the personality of the director, had its own purpose” and “never was the purpose of any Folk High School vocational” (24). The unique purpose of school was the foundation for the “Living Word,” which was delivered via lectures and personal examples.

However, the young Horton felt that many of the schools no longer dealt effectively with the conditions faced by students. Many continued to rehearse the lessons offered to earlier generations, and failed, in Horton’s estimation, to live up to their calling:

But fighting the ghosts of one's grandparents' enemies does not call forth the "Living Word"—and it is the "Living Word," or the spoken word dealing with a vital subject around which the Folk Schools were built. (25)

For Horton, the concept of the "Living Word" had to be dialogic, involving teachers and students in vital discussion on those issues most urgent to them. More than lectures or academic analysis, the "Living Word" needed to be a response, a response that came from students and their lives, rather than from the teachers.

Of the various schools that Horton visited, The International People's College at Elsinore and the Folk High School for Workers at Esbjerg seemed to offer more dialogic models of the "Living Word." Horton observed study circles and discussion at the International People's College, which no doubt influenced his understanding of the "Living Word." But Horton was most impressed by the adaptation of the folk school idea to meet the needs of an industrial and increasingly global age:

Peter Maniche saw the planet Earth as the International People's College campus, and he sought to build bridges among nations; Paul Hansen at his workers' school in Esbjerg was students to live in a new society which they were helping to build and, in his words, to "enlighten and meet the workers where their greatest problems lie." (*Long Haul* 53)

These educators convinced Horton that the folk school idea could be used to meet the needs of communities like Ozone in the American South. But if the idea was to form the foundation for a successful school, then it would need to emerge from the immediate material conditions facing students and staff.

Horton's time in Denmark also convinced him of the value of residential education, and the need for students to live and learn together. Residential education allowed for the control of the educative environment, allowing Highlander staff to provide "not only a physical arrangement and setting, but a clear and simple purpose as well" (Aimee Horton, "Pioneer of integration" 245). This control of environment allowed Highlander staff to establish the school as a demonstration community, in which democratic living and decision-making permeated all areas of the curriculum.

The opportunities afforded by a controlled residential environment led Horton to comment on the social advantages that were also available to students at Highlander. Horton argued that "[r]esidential adult education appears to be especially appropriate for dealing with human relations problems" (Horton, "Pioneer of Integration" 244). Residential schools provide students not only with a relaxed setting "where learning takes place by means of a variety of educational experiences" but also a place where they can "be together outside discussion, lecture and study periods" (244). Highlander's pedagogy would thus concern itself with the "cooperative rather than competitive use of learning, and with general above personal improvement and advancement" (Cobb 1). In this way, the school itself could function as the kind of community staff were trying to build elsewhere, and further provide students with direct experience in the kind of community living they were trying to find.

Myles Horton returned to the United States early in 1932, ready to realize his own educational vision. In notes on his travels in Denmark, Horton concluded that "[t]he job is to organize a school just well enough to get teachers and students together AND SEE THAT IT GETS NO BETTER ORGANIZED" (*Long Haul* 53, emphasis in original). So

after four years searching for the knowledge or the model he needed for his own work, Horton determined that he simply needed somewhere to start. To this end, he enlisted the help of Reinhold Niebuhr, and other prominent figures such as Norman Thomas, George Counts, and Sherwood Eddy to sign the first fundraising letter for a new “Southern Mountains School.” This school, the letter explained, would “give the students and the community an understanding of the total problem of modern civilization” (*Long Haul* 61).

Aside from fundraising, Horton also set about finding potential teachers and coworkers for the school. In the summer of 1932, Horton befriended Georgia poet and activist Don West, whose similar plans to open a school for the Appalachian poor made him an ideal co-founder for the Southern Mountains School. It was West (or possibly his wife) who also suggested changing the school’s name to the Highlander Folk School, in keeping with the then-popular term for the Appalachian people. At the suggestion of Abram Nightingale, Horton also enlisted the help of community educator and former college president Lillian Johnson. After hearing West and Horton describe their plans for Highlander, Johnson agreed to give them a house in Monteagle, Tennessee, as a location for their school. Upon taking over the property later that year, Horton and West set about developing an educational program to serve the needs of the Appalachian poor.

Those needs could not have been more apparent in Grundy County, Tennessee, where the new folk school was established. One issue of the *Highlander Fling* described Grundy County as “one of the eleven poorest counties in the United States—a foothill country of slashed-out timber, worked-out mines, washed-out land” (*Highlander Fling* 6.3, 1). In an article entitled “Mountain Men,” Myles Horton noted that in 1938 “1700 of

the 2250 families, or almost 80 per cent, [were] on relief” with “900 of this number certified for WPA” (1). Grundy County’s two primary industries – lumber and coal – were suffering the effects of the depression, and the cropland that remained was “incapable of supporting a farm population” (Glen 23). Of the 355 families with farms in the county, less than 7 per cent were able to support themselves (Horton, “Mountain Men” 1).

Despite the desperation that Grundy County residents faced, conditions offered Horton and West some optimism about potential gains that a southern mountain school might generate. Horton notes that the county had a strong history of unionism that extended back to the nineteenth century and the knights of labor (“Mountain Men” 2). Southern journalist W.J. Cash further suggested that poor throughout the south “were falling into the impatient mood natural to simple men...they were using the word ‘revolution.’” (Cash 371). Grundy County’s desperation thus produced receptiveness to the Highlander Idea. The local community was at once curious and for the most part supportive of Horton and West’s efforts, allowing the educators to maintain friendly relationships with the surrounding residents for much of the school’s lifetime.

These relationships also emerged from Horton’s belief that community-building was a central element of adult education. While formulating the method and philosophy that was to drive Highlander, Horton noted that “community education, with the family as the unit, offers a natural approach” (Aimee Horton, “Crisis Education” 1). In adopting this community-centered approach, Horton recognized the importance of cultural work as well as economic and political intervention; and it was this recognition that led to the

foundation of Highlander's community programs, which proved to be among the most successful the school offered.

The Highlander Idea was thus built around residential adult education, with a direct focus on crisis education and community activism. Students were encouraged to make their own problems opportunities for education, and to further have these opportunities drive their participation at the folk school. But these commitments led Highlander staff to link their residential sessions to activism within the community. In the school's first full year of operation, from 1932 to 1933, staff discovered early opportunities in the surrounding communities—most notably among woodcutters in the Cumberland region and miners in the town of Wilder—to link their developing residential program to broader social action.

Adult Education in the 1930s

While the Highlander Folk School represented the unique materialization of Myles Horton's intellectual and geographical journeys, it certainly wasn't the first Labor College or folk school in the United States. Folk schools had long been established by European immigrant populations within the United States as centers for education and cultural and linguistic preservation. Following the death of her husband, Olive Dame Campbell established the John C. Campbell folk school in Brasstown, North Carolina, with the similar goal of preserving local cultural traditions and helping residents address the socioeconomic issues facing them. Meanwhile, labor colleges were being established across the country, in response to the organizing efforts of the American Federation of Labor and the Industrial Workers of the World. Commonwealth College in Arkansas and

Brookwood College in New York—arguably the two most famous labor colleges of the 1930s—influenced Horton and Highlander considerably in the folk school’s early years.

However, the earliest—and potentially least acknowledged—institutions to influence Horton’s thinking were the settlement houses such as Hull House in Chicago. As has been noted above, Jane Addams already saw in Horton’s idea for a southern mountains school similarities to her own work at Hull House. Specifically, Horton’s idea of establishing a residential school focused on the needs of the surrounding community would have seemed familiar to those who “settled” in urban centers in order to address the needs of immigrants and the poor.

Lillian Johnson’s original Monteagle school likewise bore close similarities to settlement houses. Lillian Johnson had relocated after serving as a college president in order to address the educational, cultural and social needs of Grundy County residents. According to Grundy County resident and Highlander staff member May Justus, Johnson succeeded within a short time in turning the school into “the center of life for the community” (Wigginton 42). After enlisting Justus and her friend Vera McCampbell to assist with teaching, Johnson also oversaw the establishment of classes in cooking, sewing, agriculture and handicrafts; the last of these classes in turn provided the community with a source of income (42-3). Justus in turn became responsible for establishing an adult education program, with classes focused on reading, writing, and arithmetic. While Justus remarks that “[i]t was a rather unusual mountain school, especially for that time,” such a program would have been familiar to many settlement house residents (42).

While authors such as John Glen and Frank Adams have commented on Johnson's aloofness and charity-based model for education, her considerable efforts in organizing the community allowed Horton and West to more easily establish their own adult education center. Similarities between Johnson's idea of a community school and Horton's plans for residential education no doubt allowed Highlander's initial staff to capitalize on the familiar location. While the folk school's early years were far from smooth, Johnson's provision of a school and a location helped in part to ensure its survival.

Horton was also not the first person to see the suitability of the Danish Folk School model for adult education in Southern Appalachia. John C. Campbell, with the financial support of the Russell Sage Foundation, had conducted a lengthy survey of social and economic conditions in the area between 1908 and 1919. Following Campbell's death in the same year, his wife Olive Dame Campbell continued his work, devoting herself to improving the area by providing programs suited to the region and its inhabitants. While this work was initially pursued through agencies such as the Council for the Southern Mountains (of which John Campbell had been chair), it eventually led the Campbells to consider the appropriateness of the Danish Folk Schools as a model for mountain education (Whisnant, *Modernizing* 3-5).

Compiled by Olive Dame Campbell after John's death and published in 1921, *The Southern Highlander and his Homeland* presented both the research completed by the Campbells and their argument for folk school education in Southern Appalachia. In describing the appropriateness of these schools, the Campbells noted that the folk school movement in Denmark had grown in response to similar economic conditions facing

southern mountaineers (290). While acknowledging that “there would need to be a readjustment to conform to generally accepted American ideals” for Appalachian folk schools to be effective, they remained optimistic that “[i]n such a school the beauty of the Highlander country, its part in the pioneer life of the nation and the great advance to the Far West, its native culture which has been too much ignored, and its folk-song in particular, would all be given expression” (296-7).

Olive Dame Campbell finally saw her vision for a southern folk school come to fruition in 1925, with the founding of the John C. Campbell Folk School in Brasstown, North Carolina. This folk school focused more on cultural preservation than on the kinds of political education Horton oversaw at Highlander, and built considerable programs in handicrafts, cooperatives, and agriculture. Campbell saw the folk school contributing to “the development of a wholesome and satisfying life on the basis of agriculture” (Whisnant, *All That is Native* 143). On the whole, the programs established at John C. Campbell contributed to the economic organization and cultural development of the surrounding areas, and must have given Horton further proof of the folk school model’s viability.

Despite the fact that Highlander grew out of the same tradition as the John C. Campbell Folk School, Horton’s school bore stronger similarities to many of the labor colleges that had been established during the first decades of the twentieth century. As Richard Altenbaugh has argued in *Education for Struggle*, these colleges pursued an educational mission similar to Horton’s—namely, to provide workers and their families with the necessary skills and knowledge to build a new social order. Furthermore, the three colleges that form the basis of Altenbaugh’s study—Brookwood Labor College,

Commonwealth College, and Work Peoples' College—share the pedagogical and structural foundations that guided Horton and West.

Brookwood Labor College, located in Katonah, N.Y., was arguably the most famous of the independent labor colleges. Founded as a preparatory school by William and Helen Fincke, Brookwood became a residential college for adult workers in 1921 (Altenbaugh 71). The Finckes' “expressed their devotion to democratic principles by making the school democratic almost to a fault” (70). A.J. Muste, the adult school's first president and a well known labor and peace activist, continued this tradition upon assuming control of the school. Under his stewardship, and with the active contributions of staff members such as Arthur Calhoun and David Saposs, Brookwood saw that workers were “imbued with socialist theory and trained to participate in social change” (77-78).

While Brookwood earned wide support from liberals and progressives such as Jane Addams, John R. Commons, Stuart Chase and John Dewey, the school quickly distanced itself from the American Federation of Labor. Critiques of the Federation's conservatism and craft unionism emerged from the Brookwood affiliated Labor Publication Society and Muste's *Labor Age*. This earned Brookwood enmity and eventually censure from the AFL, who condemned the school as a communist institution following their 1928 national conference. Nonetheless, the school continued to garner support from individuals and unions, and was operating much as it had in 1932.

Brookwood exercised a strong influence over Highlander and its staff. Staff member Elizabeth “Zilla” Hawes briefly attended Brookwood in preparation for her work at Highlander, and Zilphia Horton initially attended Highlander as a means of preparing

for further work at a college such as Brookwood. The Brookwood Players provided a model for Highlander's own theater program, and many of the subjects initially covered at Brookwood—labor history, economics, and journalism—were also covered at Highlander.

Commonwealth College also exerted some influence over Highlander, owing more to its geographical proximity. Commonwealth was established by labor activists William E. Zeuch and Kate Richards O'Hare, initially on the grounds of the Newllano Cooperative Colony in Western Louisiana. Following financial disputes and a move by the colony to subsume Commonwealth into the Colony's own educational system, Zeuch and O'Hare moved the school to Mena, Arkansas, which was to be a temporary stop while they looked for a more suitable location. Despite early financial struggles, and difficult relations with the local religious community (who believed the school to be a Roman Catholic organization), Commonwealth soon became an accepted part of the Mena landscape.

In many ways, Commonwealth anticipated the kind of residential education that Horton and West hoped to use at Highlander. Zeuch and O'Hare fervently believed that “[i]n order for a resident labor college to maintain a commitment to social change, it had to remain autonomous” (Altenbaugh 89). Furthermore, “only a nondogmatic educational program guaranteed a democratic and scientific approach to finding practical solutions to pressing social and economic problems.” While Commonwealth's program was more academic in nature than those found at Brookwood or Highlander, its pedagogical and institutional foundations were for the most part the same.

But perhaps the labor college that had the most foundational similarities to Highlander was the Work Peoples' College in Duluth, MN. While there is no evidence in Highlander's records that there was any overt acknowledged relationship between the two schools, their similar histories are worthy of comment. Work Peoples' College was initially founded in 1903 as a Finnish folk high school, with the goal of preserving Finnish culture and nationalism through language and religious instruction. Following several years of disputes between Finnish Lutheran Clergy and socialist lay members over who should control the school, members of the Finnish Socialist Federation succeeded in securing majority ownership of the school and its curriculum. They hoped to use the school "to develop [their] own cadre—including editors, teachers, and agitators—who would serve the cause...in preparation for the advent of the socialist commonwealth" (65).

Various political disputes impeded the effectiveness of Work Peoples' College. The school became embroiled in disputes among Finnish Socialist Federation members, including disagreements over political action vs. direct action and over increasingly divided loyalties of federation members. The growth in industrial unionism, embodied by the Industrial Workers of the World, further tested the school's sense of solidarity. As early as 1909 the college indicated its support for the I.W.W., a move that further placed it at odds with the Finnish Socialist Community. The school survived these controversies to become the I.W.W.'s official school in 1921, but its influence waned along with that of the Wobblies. By 1932, the school found itself the target of attacks from both Finnish socialists and conservatives, which only increased its isolation from the community surrounding it.

Admittedly, the Highlander Folk School never found itself embroiled in such controversies, as the Tennessee school was able to handle its non-affiliated status and its various organizational partnerships far more effectively. But Work Peoples' College nonetheless remains an earlier example of how the folk school model could be successfully mobilized to meet the needs of the burgeoning labor movement. However, where the Minnesota College encountered difficulties owing to its nationalist program and ethnic affiliations, the Tennessee Folk School was established along more inclusive lines and more directly anchored in the broad social and economic life of the South.

Winter 1932: Early Residential Education

Residential sessions at Highlander were deliberately kept small, as the folk school's staff were well aware of the financial and educational limitations of the institution. In an article for the *New World Commentator* in 1949, Myles Horton acknowledges that Highlander's impact on the South was strategic, but necessarily small in scale:

It was early obvious that such a school, surviving on the voluntary contributions of those who learned of the experiment, could not hope to do a job of mass education of rank and file citizens. And because it was clear that mass education was infeasible, Highlander people sought to enlarge its potency and effect by training leaders. From this comes part of John Dewey's analysis. The idea of training leaders, of training men and women to go home and train their fellow workers and neighbors in the precepts and practices of living democracy hit hard at the heart of Southern feudalism. ("Highlander Folk School" 12)

In order to focus on leadership training, Highlander residential sessions were limited to individuals aged 18 to 35 with a union or community organization endorsement. Sessions were initially planned at five months, but eventually ran for ten weeks. Costs to the students were modest, as Highlander was also a working farm, and payments could be made in comparable goods as well as cash. Scholarships were made available to those students who were experiencing extreme financial hardships.

The first residential session opened on November 1, 1932, with one out-of-state student in attendance. John Glen has commented that, despite the lofty ideals to which Horton aspired, this first session was “a loosely organized curriculum of relatively traditional courses for a painfully small number of students” (28). Horton described the formation of residential classes in an article for *The Social Frontier* in 1936:

There was no curriculum. One evening while visiting a neighbor, we started to discuss psychology. The farmer, his wife, and the resident student wanted to continue the discussion so we met at the school the following evening and held our first class. Soon we had a class of twenty-five, including farmers, miners, unemployed, college graduates, and one minister. Their ages ranged from 18 to 80. No classes were started that were not asked for or that did not grow out of some life situation. (“Highlander” 117)

The absence of any curriculum or detailed class descriptions in the Highlander records would seem to bear this description out. Horton continues in his article to describe the various classes and the manner in which they arose: a cultural geography class grew out of interests in photos taken by Horton in Europe; reports on the Wilder miners’ strike

encouraged a discussion of economics; the recent presidential campaign also provided material for classes.

Despite Glen's appraisal, there is good reason to think that Highlander staff deliberately let classes form out of the needs and experiences of the students. By allowing courses to grow in response to student experiences and interests, Horton and other staff members hoped to establish an organic relationship between the classroom and the community. This relationship would help students to leverage educational experience to further life experience; this education for life was the driving force behind the Highlander Idea.

However, the classes themselves were less than successful in implementing these principles. Aimee Horton notes that all the classes but one – John Thompson's class on "Religion and Social Change" – were cancelled well before the end of the session (Glen). Some of the failure of these courses lay in circumstance beyond the folk school's control. Work opportunities had prevented many of those initially signed up from attending, and late harvest work left local residents too tired to participate regularly in evening classes. Bad weather conditions and an influenza epidemic only made matters worse.

The account of Highlander's first classes offered by Walker Martin, the one out-of-state student to attend Highlander for the entirety of the 1932 winter session, indicates that other problems with the classes resulted from the attitudes and practices of staff. Martin notes that an "intensive program of clubs and classes were decided upon in the outlying communities" (Martin, "Criticism" 1). This program, however, did not meet the needs of the community, whose ideas "were turned over as if by a storm." Martin further comments that "[v]ery little of this work was participated in directly by Myles" (1).

Similar problems emerged in the classes held at Highlander. Further misunderstandings and dissension occurred when classes became “personal discussions” and “the wide range covered by most of the classes was narrowed down to fit the individual cases” (2).

In private notes on the first residential session, Myles Horton offers a similar assessment. Despite the efforts of staff to “keep the discussions from becoming artificial” by taking “the experience for the group as a starting point,” classes failed to inspire the response that staff were looking for (Horton, “Christmas Night, 1931” 2). Reflecting on the classes, Horton commented that there was “a gap between our classes and the natural learning process that is life itself” (2). Horton comments that staff had no lack of theoretical knowledge, and certainly provoked students to think. But Horton concluded that this was not enough: “Thinking is only part of the educational process and must lead to action” (2).

In his autobiography, Horton offers a more detailed reflection on the failure of the first residential session:

Although we accomplished some things by the end of that first year, we knew we really weren't reaching people the way we wanted to. The biggest stumbling block was that all of us at Highlander had academic backgrounds...We still thought our job was to give students information about what we thought would be good for them. (*Long Haul* 68)

As a result, Highlander staff “ended up doing what most people do when they come to a place like Appalachia.” In identifying what they believed to be problems, and offering the solutions that they believed most appropriate, Horton and other staff members failed to engage “the problems and the answers that the people had themselves.” The

educational methods thus used cut directly the aims of the school, and reestablished a “drip” model of instruction.

The academic background of the staff further impacted the communication between them and the students. Aimee Horton notes that “the youthful teachers often moved considerably beyond the perceived problems and interests of their mountain neighbors,” and that discussions “were too abstract to be meaningful to...unsophisticated adult students” (41). Myles Horton himself noted the communicative difficulties faced by staff:

We’d joke about the fact that between us we had several foreign languages: I knew Danish, somebody else knew French and we had somebody who happened to know Greek, but the one language we lacked was a nonverbal one the people spoke. Since we didn’t have the right language, we had to learn to observe people: to watch the way they related to each other, how they took care of their kids, and to be sensitive to their reactions to their experience. (*Long Haul* 69)

In short, the folk school needed to reconstruct their own educational methods in the face of the unfamiliar experiences students brought to the school. The language that Highlander staff sought to develop was the means by which to identify their own educational theories and methods with the lives of their students. Such a reconstruction of Highlander’s curriculum would be essential to developing the necessary links between the school and the Cumberland community, and the school and the emerging Southern Labor Movement.

Horton and the rest of the Highlander staff were quick to respond to the curricular problems encountered in the first residential sessions. Reports on the 1934 winter session

(run from March 19 to May 25) indicate changes to both the classes offered and the ways that classes were taught (“Report on Winter Session”). Classes were offered in industrial problems, public speaking, English grammar, labor history and literature. While the literature class ran into problems similar to those identified by Horton in the first residential session, other classes appear to have been more successful. The English grammar class is particularly noteworthy, as changes were made to the course while it was being taught. While the class initially used exercises from a textbook, students’ work gradually became the instructional materials for the course; drills were dropped in favor of discussions centered on sample sentences found in student papers. This shift—from textbooks to student experience—continued to draw Highlander’s residential sessions closer to the goals that Horton had initially laid out for the school.

Despite problems with their instructional methods, Highlander staff did incorporate several positive features into the first residential session. The most noteworthy of these was the experience provided in cooperative living:

From its first tentative months of existence, when the unorthodox adult school served primarily the surrounding community of some seventy-five families together with a resident student population of six, a conscious and painstaking effort was made to practice democracy in educational planning and living arrangements. Great importance was placed on co-operative decision-making, involving community and resident students with staff in determining the educational and social activities to be offered as well as co-operative sharing of responsibility for such physical chores as school housekeeping, growing food and chopping wood. (Horton, “Analysis of Selected Programs” 12-13)

Myles Horton remarked that “[i]f you believe in people running their own unions, you let them run the school so that they can get the practice of running something” (*Long Haul* 69). By sharing the work associated with operating the school, and involving students in policy, staff attempted to make the school a “demonstration community” for democratic experience. But far from telling students about democracy and the value of democratic practices, staff involved students directly in those practices with the hope of developing further capacities for democratic action. It is these capacities that Horton believed to be the “human relations” aspect uniquely covered by residential education.

Viewed in light of educational and social outcomes, the 1932 winter residential session was at once a successful exercise in promoting cooperative living, and a failed attempt to articulate an organic pedagogy that would help students to build community relationships and engage in progressive social action. However, events taking place near the school—both in the Cumberland Mountain region near the school, and a hundred miles north in the town of Wilder—would allow the staff to link crisis education and community activism to the residential program being developed at Highlander.

Wilder, Tennessee: Crisis Education

While residential sessions continued to be a work in progress, Horton didn’t have to wait long to explore his theories on crisis education. The conditions facing workers in the South had long been desperate, and only became more so with the arrival of the depression. Violent strikes, such as those in Gastonia, N.C., and Harlan County, Kentucky, broke out companies continued to tighten working conditions. In Wilder, Tennessee, 100 miles north of Highlander, a similar strike broke out when Fentress Coal

and Coke Company informed miners at its Wilder and Davidson mines that they would be required to take a 20% pay cut, and cancel their union contract, in order for the mines to remain solvent. The events of the Wilder Strike would become so hard-fought that newspapers would dub the town “Bloody Wilder,” in reference to the better-known strikes in Eastern Kentucky.

The situation in Wilder was already desperate. There were far fewer jobs than there were families, and miners had already weathered cuts to pay and working conditions. These cuts were further complicated by the fact that Wilder was, like similar towns in Harlan County, a company town:

The town’s only store was owned by Fentress Coal and Coke Company, as were its few unpainted shacks. Miners were paid in scrip good only at the company store, which charged higher prices than independent stores in the area. The company made weekly deductions for rent on the shacks, for a bathhouse which didn’t exist, and for a doctor who was frequently unavailable. No matter how hard or long the men worked in the mines, they couldn’t break even, much less get ahead. (Adams, *Unearthing* 31)

In a report on wage conditions among the Wilder miners at the time of the strike, Highlander student Walker Martin reported that Fentress Coal and Coke deducted \$30.77 from one miner’s pay, while only paying him \$20.14 to begin with (Martin, “Report by Walker Martin”).

For most of the miners, striking was no worse economically than working in the mines. So on July 9, 1932, the miners struck. Fentress Coal and Coke attempted to break the strike by bringing in non-union labor, and by turning off the power and removing the

doors from the shacks in which the miners lived. With winter approaching, and no money for food, clothes and medicine, living conditions among the miners continued to worsen.

Upon hearing of the strike, Myles Horton made a visit to Wilder. He spent Thanksgiving, 1932, in the home of Barney Graham, the charismatic leader of the striking miners. It was unlike any Thanksgiving Horton had experienced:

I ate Thanksgiving dinner with Barney Graham, the president of the Wilder branch of the United Mine Workers Union. Just before dinner his four year old girl, undernourished but pretty, found a Christmas tree in a tattered picture book, and pointed it out to her mother. The mother patted her on the head and said, "I guess Santa Claus is a scab and won't come to see us this Christmas. (Horton, "Thanksgiving at Wilder" 1)

Dinner consisted of "sweet potatoes, turnips, and sweet potato pie." No one mentioned Thanksgiving. The solemn state of the Graham family, and the lack of food, drove home to Horton the urgency of the strike. So did his arrest while returning home the next day.

In a Jan 1933 release for the Federated Press, entitled "New Troops Sent to Wilder Strike Area", Horton described his arrest:

"Capt. Crawford took me to the home of the mine owner, Boyers, which has been turned over to the officers. He said I should have come to him from information and later insisted I could have obtained all the information I wanted from the newspapers, for he was furnishing the reporters with most of the stuff they printed. When I demanded my notes he threatened to jail me. The bayonet-pricks given by the high school soldiers when I refused to go to the "company mansion"

are easy to forget, but it will be hard to forget that while I was under arrest word was spread around that I had gone to Crawford voluntarily to report what I learned from the strikers. They tried to make me out to be a company spy.” Upon first being arrested, Horton suggested to the company guards that they should probably present him with a charge. The charge of “coming here and gathering information and going back and teaching it” became famous among Highlander staff. In an interview with journalist Bill Moyers, Horton added that “this was the only time I was ever arrested where the charge was accurate” (*Myles Horton Reader* 133).

The situation worsened as the strike entered its six month. Fentress Coal and Coke secured an injunction from the Tennessee Courts preventing strikers from picketing, impeding non-union labor, and entering company property, and “effectively deciding the fate of the strike (Glen 30). The Tennessee National Guard had been deployed to keep order, but spent most of their time protecting Fentress property and harassing strikers’ families. The United Mine Workers, who were unable to secure funds and did not yet have the protection of the National Recovery Act, were unwilling to sink resources into the Wilder Strike.

Nor did conditions improve in the New Year. The National Guard, sent home over Christmas, was sent to Wilder once more in January of 1933. When they left a month later, violence again broke out. This violence was capped off on the 30th of April, when deputized Fentress employees murdered Barney Graham. State and federal officials had been warned repeatedly of plots against Graham’s life, but refused to offer assistance. The strike leader was ambushed while attempting to secure medical aid for

his sick wife, fittingly enough outside the company store. Don West reported on the murder in a Federated Press Release dated May 8:

Fifteen or twenty shots rang out. Barney Graham writhed in the coal dust before the company store, with 10 bullet holes in his body. Four bullets entered from the back. Others were fired while he lay in the dust. As he lay in the grime and dirt mixed with his own blood, the gunmen rushed up and crushed his skull with their gun butts. (West 1)

The murder was considered cowardly even by the strikebreakers, who contemplated a strike of their own in the face of Fentress' tactics.

West concluded that press release with the following sentence: "All is quiet in Wilder Hollow—the quiet that always comes before the storm breaks." But the line now seems more a rhetorical flourish, or an optimistic call to action, than an accurate prediction of what was to happen. With Graham dead, the strikers' morale was broken. In the meantime, even those assisting the miners concluded that the strike was futile. In a June 28 letter to Myles Horton, Alva Taylor offered the following assessment:

There is no use fighting windmills at the sacrifice of children's lives. Have you read "Machine in the Hills"? There is no cure for coal but to get 200,000 men out to other jobs—and no real hope for unionism so long as a starving miner stands at the mine mouth asking for a job. (Taylor to Horton)

While Horton was reluctant to concede the failure of the strike, he eventually assisted Taylor and others in finding miners work with the Tennessee Valley Authority, the Civilian Conservation Corps and other federal resettlement projects. A small number reluctantly returned to work in mines.

While direct evidence of Highlander's involvement in the Wilder Strike is limited to press releases from Horton and West, fundraising letters, and a host of anonymous and undated writings, we can draw some conclusions about Highlander's role. The first is that Highlander was central to managing press relations for the strikers, and for providing much-needed accounts of Wilder events from the miners' side. ("Highlander Folk School Summer School Report" 6). In the absence of organized and well-funded union action, Highlander's efforts in this regard were particularly important. Horton used his arrest as a platform from which to indict Fentress Coal and Coke, local and state law enforcement, and the Red Cross. Following Barney Graham's death, Horton also publicized the prior knowledge that state and local officials had of the assassination plot.

Secondly, it seems reasonable to suggest that Highlander helped striking miners in familiarizing themselves with the laws surrounding their employment, and in gathering information on wages and conditions. It seems likely that Highlander staff would have been responsible for reviewing the laws forbidding mining companies from charging bathhouse rent, and for coordinating the legal suits presented by miners against Fentress. Highlander's role as a mobile resource center for striking miners extended as far as organizing Norman Thomas's highly successful visit to the striking miners on March 5, 1933. Highlander staff thereby helped Wilder strikers to better negotiate the terms and conditions of the strike, while creating broader interest in the strike and providing much needed emotional support.

The concrete effects of Highlander staff members on the Wilder situation should be considered cautiously. Don West said in February of 1933 that Highlander had done nothing for the strikers "except stir up a lot of hell," which no doubt sells the political and

relief efforts of the school short (Glen). However, it does accurately represent the failure of the strike to secure even pre-strike wages for union miners. We might, however, be tempted to say that Fentress Coal and Coke did get some measure of justice: L.L. Shivers resigned as mine superintendent in May 1933 following several attempts on his life, and the company filed for bankruptcy on August 9 of the same year. The company was further brought under the scrutiny of the state labor board and was considered an outlaw organization after abuses of the compensation laws were brought to light.

Horton and West made more effective use of the Wilder Strike as a site of crisis education for the folk school. Aimee Horton reports that “[t]his was the beginning of a new reality-oriented phase of the Highlander Folk School’s evolving program to develop leadership for the projected southern industrial union movement” (82). Walker Martin’s articles on the Wilder miners, which can tentatively be taken as representative of student work on the strike, present insightful analyses of the wage conditions that led to the strike, and journalistic accounts of visits made to the Wilder mines by Martin and West. By using this crisis situation as a site for education, Highlander staff were able to provide students with direct experience in many aspects of labor education. Students made use of journalistic and analytic media to develop critical responses to the Wilder Strike (Walker Martin provided an editorial on the situation for a local paper) and to develop their own capacities for responding to similar conditions elsewhere.

But perhaps the most notable pedagogical development to come out of the Wilder Strike for the folk school was that it allowed Horton and West to articulate the school’s pedagogical program within the goals of the Southern Labor Movement. John Glen and Aimee Horton note that this articulation brought the school to the attention of southern

industrial unions, and was the foundation for strong relation the developed between the school and the Southern Labor Movement from 1933 up until the early 1950s (Horton, *Highlander*). But more immediately, three students for the 1933-1934 winter residential session came from families of Wilder strikers. Highlander thus used education rhetorically – as a site for organization, and as means to collectivize, structure, and deploy political action – within broader social and community movements. This rhetorical function was to remain a constant feature of Highlander, and the foundation of its most successful programs.

The Bugwood Strike: Community Education

By July 1933, Highlander staff were dealing with worker activism in their own backyard, as local woodcutters went on strike over pay and conditions. These woodcutters were responsible for cutting bugwood, which was used by the Tennessee Products Company for the distillation of alcohol and other chemicals. In return for their services, woodcutters were paid 75 cents per cord of wood, half what they had been paid on previous jobs; furthermore, pay did not include the maintenance of tools.

Pay and management practices among TPC agents and their foremen were similar to those of Fentress Coal and Coke. Management forced woodcutters to trade at the company store, whose prices were often three times higher than other stores, by paying workers only once a month. The process for measuring bugwood cords was also questionable, and favored the agents. Finally, a woodcutter named Henry Thomas, calculated that “he was making between fifty and seventy-five cents for a ten hour day,” and determined along with other workers to strike. On July 3, they stopped work.

The local contractor for the Tennessee Products Company, Marian Sanders, offered the men a five cent raise to return to work, which only further incensed the woodcutters. The workers met on July 5 at Highlander, in order to determine what their next move would be (“Notes on Bug-wood Strike” 1). At that meeting, they shared complaints against local contractors and foremen and determined to set up a union to represent their needs. They also settled on their demands – most notably for \$2.00 pay per cord – and set up committees to research the company and meet further with Sanders (1).

In the next month, the woodcutters met another five times. On July 7, another well-attended meeting drew in additional support. On July 10, with the assistance of Highlander staff member Dorothy Thompson, the workers formed the Cumberland Mountain Workers’ League, and further appointed office-bearers. On July 14, following difficulties in meeting with the TPC company representative, the League nonetheless drew up their demands and attached 70 signatures to the document. On July 18, the constitution for the League was drafted, and members took membership oaths on July 27-28 (1-2).

On July 29, the League issued two letters. The first, signed by Myles Horton, conveyed the strikers’ demands to the Tennessee Products Company. These demands were:

That the Company pay \$1.50 per cord;

That the men be allowed to rick their own wood;

That the rick must be eight feet long, four inches high, and the sticks fifty-two inches in length;

That the men receive pay twice a month. (Horton to Tennessee Products Company)

These demands sought not only to secure adequate pay, but also to address the measuring and payment issues that affected working conditions. The League further stated that, should the demands not be met by August 3, the strike would close down all work in the Summerfield and Monteagle area.

The second letter, signed by Dorothy Thompson, was written to the Federal Secretary of Labor, Frances Perkins. This letter describes the work conditions faced by the bugwood cutters, and creation of the CMWL. The letter then states that “[u]nder the new Industrial Recovery Act this League feels that it has legal backing to make their demands to the company, and hold out for them” (Thompson to Perkins). Following this, Thompson provides a more emotional appeal: “The men are badly in need of work, but have decided to try to live on blackberries and air until they can get a living wage.” The letter closes by requesting from the Secretary “a word of advice” that would demonstrate federal support for the strike.

Both these letters provide evidence of the educational program that Highlander was able to set up for the bugwood strikers. While the letters were certainly composed and edited by the Highlander staff members who wrote them, the process by which claims and arguments were formulated seems to have involved the bugwood cutters themselves. Highlander staff helped the strikers establish committees responsible for writing the letters, and further made sure that the letters reflected the strikers’ demands. Aimee Horton remarks that for committees to complete their job, they had “to put their requests for information in writing, had to pore over the technical letters and reports

coming to them in reply, and, on the basis of these, recommend to the larger membership what appeal should be made, what action taken” (*Highlander* 49). This is clearly seen in the second letter, where Thompson shifts topic from labor conditions to conservation:

It seems a strange paradox to us to allow the wholesale destruction of the forests here, and at the same time for the government to sponsor a reforestation camp over in the other end of the same county near Palmer. It seems only common sense that our forests, too, should be cleaned and the best saplings preserved.

(Thompson to Perkins)

The contradiction in the argument – for higher pay for woodcutting, and protection against destruction of the forest – was faced by the CMWL in their meetings. It would also appear that the argument for conservation, an argument that would seem irrelevant to the Secretary for Labor, was included at the request of the strikers.

More educative for the bugwood strikers was what happened to their letter to Frances Perkins in the months that followed. On August 15, Secretary Perkins sent the strikers a letter noting that the case was being referred to the Department of Agriculture; on August 22, the Department of Agriculture referred the case to the National Recovery Administration; on September 22, the National Recovery Administration referred the case to their legal division; on October 7, the legal division of the NRA finds that there is a case to answer against the Tennessee Products Company; on October 25, however, the Lumber Code Authority writes the strikers informing them that the NRA legal division is mistaken and that there isn’t a case to answer—the matter was being referred back the NRA (“Bug-wood Strikers”).

Frustration among the strikers was such that they wrote another letter to Secretary Perkins, this time signed by Roy Lane—the president of the CWML. The letter opens with the suggestion that “[w]orkers here in the mountains of Tennessee are beginning to feel that the Labor Department and the NRA are making a joke of our efforts to get an increase in our present wage scale of from 60 to 85 cents for 10 hours work” (Lane to Perkins 1). Immediately following this, the letter again reminds Secretary Perkins that children are starving while the strikers wait for an answer.

Lane then recounts the various departments to which the strikers’ initial letter had been referred. Following this description, he mentions that the promises made by the Roosevelt Administration to provide a living wage to workers “couldn’t be used for buying clothing and food” and that TPC subcontractors have laughed at the strikers for expecting federal intervention (1). After declaring that the strikers have been “patient, much too patient” in this matter, Lane further informs Secretary Perkins that a delegation of woodcutters will be visiting Washington, D.C. on November 23, with the intention of finding out “what rights workers really have under our present form of government” (2).

This letter is noteworthy as it shows a shift in authority from Highlander staff to the strikers themselves, as evidenced by the change in signatory and the decision by strikers to visit Washington D.C. Lane’s letter also demonstrates a greater mastery of the laws and industry code issues at play in the case, as well as the various appeals required of the letter. While some of the information presented isn’t accurate—the claim, for example, that the strikers’ first letter said “contractors for the wood we cut had signed the lumber code but had refused to pay code wages”—even these inaccuracies show a greater mastery of the issues and the language required to present them (1).

The strikers' visit to Washington was, a well-written letter notwithstanding, a failure. After arriving at Secretary Perkins' office, the bugwood strikers were informed that the Secretary was in a meeting with important industrialists and would not be able to meet with the delegation. When the strikers suggested that they would be prepared to stay in Washington as long as their funds held up, they were informed that the Secretary "could not be expected to give her attention to every delegation of workers that came to Washington." ("Tennessee Strikers" 4). Matters only worsened when the strikers returned home to find out that the Tennessee Products Company had cancelled all bugwood contracts in the area (Eaker to Norwood).

Meetings of the CMWL continued for several months, as did efforts to secure a wage increase. W.C. Liller, a federal conciliator, was sent to the area, only to suggest that \$1.00 to \$1.12 was a fair price per cord for woodcutting, and that strikers were jeopardizing their jobs with prolonged action (Liller to Brown). On May 1934, League secretary Will Brown again wrote a letter—this time to President Roosevelt himself. After describing the hoops and hurdles that the League had jumped through so far, the letter expresses its disappointment with Secretary Perkins and with the lack of assistance provided by the federal government. Finally Brown writes "Now Mr. President, please don't refer this letter to another department" and "don't tell us there will be an investigation soon" (Brown to Roosevelt). The sum request of the letter is for aid in the form of seed and food.

The strike faltered soon afterward. Liller was unable to reach a compromise with the strikers, who refused to work under old foremen who had exhibited hostility to the CMWL. The strikers also failed to secure recognition by the National Labor Temple for

the Workers' League, on the grounds that it was an unaffiliated organization (Cheek to Brown). But the real blow was the withholding of state relief to strikers by local county officials. Marian Sanders and other bugwood contractors attempted—successfully—to sabotage the strikers' relief appeals by claiming that woodcutters had access to work but refused to do it (Webb to Roosevelt). The cancellation of bugwood contracts and the refusal of the CMWL to work under old foremen left many of the strikers to seek county relief.

While the gains for strikers were extremely small, the education that Highlander organized around the bugwood strike seems to have been the first successful development of an organic pedagogy. Crisis education was linked to community-building efforts, and student concerns were used as the foundation for the teaching that followed. Aimee Horton comments that:

The strike and the educational efforts which followed then, represent the first putting into practice of the director's and staff's ideas of purposive community education. The curriculum was, henceforth, to include not only discussion of subjects of concern and interest and social-recreational activities, drama, singing and square dancing, but direct participation in achieving an improved (if not a new) local social order. (Aimee Horton, "Crisis Education" 4)

Horton comments that this curriculum was possible because "league members knew that they needed education." Highlander's emphasis on organizing and implementing community-based activism accelerated the process by which the strikers recognized themselves as a community and lobbied on that community's behalf. (Aimee Horton, "Crisis Education" 7)

Thirty years after the bugwood strike, strike leader Henry Thomas commented that “The most important thing that people ever learned from Highlander was that we learned how we could help ourselves.” While the strike itself, and the appeals for relief that followed, were less than successful, the strikers nonetheless recognized the vitality of the education that they had received. But this vitality resulted from Highlander staff responding to the students’ needs, and organizing their efforts around those needs. It was the process by which Highlander staff helped students structure and implement their own responses to the issues faced within the community that led Myles Horton to call Highlander’s pedagogy a “yeasty” idea. In a 1963 interview, Horton said that the educational program built around the bugwood strike “provided the basis for the development of subsequent educational programs with farmer and labor organizations and civil rights groups” (Horton, *Highlander* 52).

The Highlander Idea as Organic Pedagogy

In many ways, it is tempting to see the opening of the Highlander Folk School as the heralding of greater changes in American society. Highlander opened the same month that Franklin Roosevelt was elected president, and many of the school’s early programs anticipated and coincided with the arrival of the New Deal and the National Industrial Recovery Act.

But the effects of the depression, still felt with alarming urgency in Appalachian Tennessee, also took their toll on the fledgling institution. Operating costs left the school with virtually empty coffers at the end of its first year, and financial concerns caused friction between Myles Horton and Don West during the school’s first six months.

Insecurity about the school's location and whether or not Lillian Johnson would renew the school's lease also caused distraction. These administrative problems, along with the stress of organizing residential and community programs, further caused Horton to temporarily enter convalescent care.

Don West left Highlander in 1933 to organize new workers' education programs elsewhere in the South. West's departure was precipitated by continual arguments between himself and Horton, many over what Horton perceived to be West's frivolity with school funds. However, it should be made clear that the Highlander Idea was very much Horton's idea, and Horton often ran the school along those lines. Thus while West saw the folk school as a means by which to distribute his poetry, Horton saw such activity as a misuse of school resources. It would also appear that, with Horton and West both having made up their minds on the issue, there was little room for compromise.

But despite administrative and curricular difficulties, Highlander staff made considerable steps toward implementing the Highlander Idea. First and foremost, the folk school had become a community center, with locals using the school's building and staff as resources for improving their own lives. This can be seen clearly in the use made of the school by the bugwood strikers, and the extent of organization made possible through the school's efforts. Despite the difficulties experienced during early residential sessions, Highlander's community work in the Cumberland area demonstrates successful implementation of many Horton's theories on adult education.

The success of Highlander's educational programs was intimately linked to the school's development of an organic pedagogy. The term "organic" is used here in the sense that Antonio Gramsci used it when describing the organic development of

movements and intellectuals (177-178, 189). For Gramsci, organic intellectuals are defined by their “connection with a fundamental social group,” primarily in a “functionary” capacity (12). Organic intellectuals, then, are commonly regarded as the intellectual expression of non-dominant groups within civil society, and typically derive their knowledge from non-traditional sources. In these cases, the term “organic” is taken to express a vital and normally home-grown connection between intellectuals and the communities they represent.

However, in Gramsci’s usage of the term, organic intellectuals are defined by the “organizational and connective” roles they play within a particular social structure (12). This definition of the term stresses the link between “organic” and “organization,” rather than the more common association of “organic” with some form of life-world. Furthermore, this latter relationship—one which is typically opposed to the more mechanical “organization”—is an English development not attested in Gramsci’s original Italian (Williams 227-228). Organic intellectuals, then, are determined not by their vital link to a particular community nor their championing of non-dominant groups. Rather, they are determined by the role they play in organizing and representing the needs of the group they adhere to; thus for Gramsci even dominant capitalist social formations have organic intellectuals in the form of administrators and government agents (13).

In general terms, then, an organic pedagogy is determined by its direct relationship to a specific community. This community’s needs establish primary pedagogical goals, as well as the means of measuring instructional success. Programs are dictated less by an established curriculum, or by particular knowledge to be mastered, and more by their effectiveness in responding to pressing community problems. In most

cases, the lack of a formal assessment model and the reconstruction of programs in response to shifting community needs can be seen as the two factors differentiating organic pedagogies from more traditional models of instruction.

To say that Highlander Idea was an organic pedagogy is not, however, to say that it was an idea without theoretical or practical influences. As a pedagogical theory, it cannot be discussed outside the general impact of progressive theories of education on thinking of the time. The work of John Dewey, George Counts, Eduard Lindeman, and Joseph Hart directly informed Myles Horton's thinking on education, and provided an intellectual foundation for the Highlander Idea. Horton's contact with Reinhold Niebuhr, and with sociologists Lester Ward and Robert Park, provided him with a means of linking progressive education directly to social change. The Danish Folk Schools provided Horton with a real model for the kind of school he was hoping to found, and further emphasized the ways in which culture could be used as an educational medium.

The impact of educational progressivism on Highlander cannot be overstated. The scholars most intimately associated with progressive education were also directly involved in founding and administering the Highlander Folk School: John Dewey chaired the Friends of Highlander; George Counts signed the first fund-raising letter and served on the executive council; Joseph Hart and Eduard Lindeman were also members of Highlander's advisory board. It is hardly surprising, then, that the educational theories of these men also influenced the pedagogical approach of the folk school.

Central to progressive pedagogy is the idea that education is social in character, and therefore extends well beyond formal schooling. Education is the process by which life harnesses the energies that surround it for growth. In the case of human society,

education is the means by which individuals learn to make sense of the world around them, as well as being the vehicle by which older generations preserve social knowledge and order. Progressive pedagogy thus starts with individual experience, and takes as its goal the development of creative intelligence. This intelligence provides individuals with the means by which to analyze and reconstruct their experience, and to thereby grow more fully as a social and individual being.

For Dewey, such pedagogy was central to his concept of creative democracy, which was in turn an ontological more than a political theory. Progressive education was the means by which students encountered the plurality of the world around them, and learned to reconstruct their own relationship to it. But for scholars such as Hart and Lindeman—who it should be said focused more on adult education—progressive pedagogy was the both the foundation for a new social order, and the means by which to achieve such a vision. Responding to both the democratic promise of modern society, and the economic crises that society had produced, Lindeman and Hart saw in adult education the means by which to reinvigorate American communities and their constituents.

These thinkers provided Horton with a foundation upon which to build his own educational theories. It was, however, the work of sociologists Robert Park and Lester Ward, and that of Christian socialists Reinhold Niebuhr and Harry Ward, that provided Horton with a concrete approach. Niebuhr and Harry Ward emphasized the importance of social and economic action, particularly a class-based analysis of politics, to the achieving of a Christian society. Park and Lester Ward emphasized the role of conflict in learning, and provided Horton with crisis education as an approach to his own work.

This approach acknowledges Lindeman's contention that real learning occurs when intelligence is applied to concrete situations, and that real education must start with "actualities not abstractions." Crisis education took this argument one step further, insisting that the greatest educational work was to be done around sites of social and political conflict. These situations provided students with real problems to solve, and established concrete goals and consequences as the yardstick by which education could be measured.

Horton placed student experience and crisis education at the heart of his own pedagogy. It was his trip to Denmark, however, that provided Horton with the model he needed to actualize his thinking. The Danish Folk Schools, and particularly the Workers School at Esbjerg, convinced him of the importance of residential education as a means of centering instruction in experience, and of the Living Word as a dialogic approach to the classroom. But just as importantly, the folk high schools demonstrated to Horton the central role played by culture—what Aldon Morris has called indigenous resources—in educational reconstruction. The more successful folk high schools were able to reconstruct Danish folklore and music as a means of address the contemporary problems faced by the Danish people. These cultural resources helped students to develop both their individual and collective sense of identity. This lesson was not lost on Horton, who would continue to emphasize the importance of cultural traditions and resources throughout his career.

However, the physical structure of the school and the experiences of staff in Highlander's early years were just as important to the development of the Highlander Idea. Horton initially referenced his emerging educational theories with the letter "O," in

reference to the formative experience he had organizing a bible school in the Tennessee town of Ozone; it was only after establishment of the Highlander Folk School that these theories became the Highlander Idea.¹ The school's rural setting and cooperative structure provided a "demonstration community" for students, centered on democratic living and collaborative problem-solving. Thus the school embodied the social changes possible in the New Deal South, which allowed it to function as an organizing point for activists, intellectuals, and local leaders.²

The school's work with communities in Grundy County and Wilder further developed the rhetorical nature of the school's programs. While both these programs most immediately developed Highlander's community and crisis education programs, they also linked education materially to social change and community action. By focusing on community goals as the means by which to assess educational success, Highlander developed the organic relationships that marked the Highlander Idea. Insofar as crisis and community education also became an agency for intervening in social problems, it became a rhetorical vehicle in its right. And as a rhetorical vehicle, the Highlander Idea focused primarily on three outcomes: first, the development of learners' rhetorical capacities; second, the organization of communities and formation of collective identities; and third, the mobilization of these collective identities through meaningful symbolic action. Conceived in this way, pedagogy is less a means of transmitting knowledge and more a form of symbolic action in its own right.

While the Highlander Idea was to undergo several changes throughout the folk school's thirty years of operation, it nonetheless maintained its organic focus. Indeed, the changes it underwent were essential to maintaining an immediate functional relationship

to the communities the school worked with. Thus it embodied the very educational reconstruction that pragmatists and progressive educators believed essential in an industrial, scientific age. Just as important, however, was the effect that this understanding of reconstruction had on Highlander staff members' approach to pedagogy. Staff members adhered in practice to Eduard Lindeman's contention that true teaching involves eschewing any dogmatic adherence to a particular school, and rather engagement directly with students and their lives. Thus the Highlander Idea should be understood less as a coherent theory, and more as the mobilization of educational practices as an agency of social change.

NOTES

¹ The name "Highlander" came not from Horton, who initially called the folk school a "Southern Mountain School," but from the school's cofounder Don West. While the term was widely used to describe the residents of Southern Appalachia, it became even more prominent after the publication in 1921 of John C. Campbell's *The Southern Highlander and his Homeland*. Campbell had a similar interest in the Danish Folk Schools, which his wife Olive visited following John's death in 1919 (she was also responsible for the posthumous publication of his book). She then founded the John C. Campbell Folk School in Brasstown, N.C. in 1925. While the John C. Campbell Folk School shares a similar name to Highlander, its programs were devoted more to arts and crafts classes as a means of preserving Appalachian heritage. Despite the curricular differences between the two schools, both Horton and West were familiar with the John C. Campbell Folk School.

² I do not mean here that the Folk School was the material reflection of the Highlander Idea, or of some broadly-conceived progressive Zeitgeist. I mean, quite literally, that the school was the idea. In making this argument, I follow Marx's discussion of the social intellect in the *Grundrisse*. In the section of that work most commonly called the "Fragment on Machines," Marx argues that the social intellect – those ideas that structure and describe industrial society – are to be found in the machines of an industrial society. These ideas are not reflected in machines, but are rather produced by the operations of those machines, and emerge as the ideological expressions of capitalist relations of labor and value. Ideas, then, function alongside physical social structures, and are not separable from their material consequences. Insofar as ideas have material consequences, and serve as the ideological articulations of capitalist social relations, they are themselves material. Insofar as ideas are implicated in shifts in material economic and political relations, they are also always already historical forces. If we follow this argument, it should come as little surprise that scholars discuss Highlander as an idea, or that such an idea is not sensible beyond the school itself and its programs.

CHAPTER TWO: LABOR DRAMA, COLLABORATION, AND COMMUNICATION

One of the hallmarks of the pedagogy developed at Highlander was the attention paid to cultural programs. These programs, which focused initially on traditional square-dancing and folk music but grew to cover drama as well, helped the folk school to build an organic relationship with the Cumberland community. The programs also helped students to recognize the value of cultural traditions as the foundation of their own communities, and as rhetorical resources for building solidarity. Drama, music and dance were, in this way, treated not only as pedagogical agencies, but also as means of symbolic action in their own right.

Highlander's cultural programs grew out of the community meetings run in the first months of the school's operation. From these meetings, which were initially intended to help community members raise and address problems of local concern, grew the community evenings that formed the basis of Highlander's cultural programs. Run once a week, community evenings provided a recreational environment built around traditional folk music and square-dancing. In many ways, these evenings were responsible for reviving square-dancing in the Cumberland region, as such dancing had been declared immoral by local church and government authorities.

These evenings also allowed students attending the folk school to meet members of the local community, and vibrant conversations often ensued. An unpublished article from the school's records, titled "Fiddlin' and Square-dancin,'" records the interactions of the local bugwood cutters with more privileged students from urban areas. Highlander staff member thus recognized early the ability of cultural programs to introduce students

to a broader range of socio-economic perspectives, and thereby broaden students' ability to work in solidarity with workers from all walks of life.

The folk school's early cultural programs were run by staff members Rupert Hampton and Ralph "Teffie" Tefferteller. Hampton taught piano lessons, while Tefferteller coordinated the square-dance program ("Summer School Report" 7). This second program further brought the school into conversation with folk dance organizations across the country, which culminated in Tefferteller giving the introductory address at the First National Dance Congress in New York in 1936 (Tefferteller). But it wasn't until the arrival of Zilphia Johnson at the school in 1935 that the cultural programs received the shape they would retain for the next 25 years.

Zilphia Mae Johnson was born on April 14, 1910, in the Arkansas town of Spadra. She was of mixed Spanish and Native American heritage, her father a local coal mine operator. A talented musician, she majored in music at the College of the Ozarks from 1929 to 1932, and later became a devoted follower of radical Presbyterian minister Claude Williams (Adams 73). Her "revolutionary Christian attitudes" so infuriated her father that he forced her to leave home, though this did nothing to quell her radical spirit (Glen 43). Zilphia arrived at Highlander for the 1935 winter residential session, with hopes of learning more about the labor movement and moving to a large labor school such as Brookwood Labor College. As it turned out, Highlander was the last professional stop in Zilphia's career: she and Myles Horton fell in love, and married March 6, 1935 (43).

There is little doubt that Zilphia Horton made major contributions to the Highlander curriculum. She established successful drama and music programs at the

school, and served as musical director from 1935 until her death in 1956. During that time, she was widely recognized as a popular and effective teacher, whose “completely open and natural nature” complemented her musical talent (Austin 49). Folk singer Pete Seeger remarks that Zilphia’s “straightforward directness couldn’t help but affect anybody who came into contact with her” (50). “People who wouldn’t usually sing with strangers,” wrote Frank Adams, “would sing with her” (Adams 73).

Zilphia’s early work also consisted of establishing Highlander’s drama program. Her time at the New Theater School introduced her to the conventions of agit-prop workers’ theater and to the educational value of labor dramatics courses within workers’ education (Glen 45). Building on the labor dramatics classes found at Commonwealth College, Brookwood Labor College, and the Bryn Mawr Summer School for Women Workers, Zilphia began to develop dramatic scripts and performances for Highlander.¹ However, she soon turned her attention to the ways in which improvisation, collaborative script-writing, and play-directing could assist students in setting up educational programs for their respective unions. As such, Zilphia pushed labor dramatics beyond the performance-oriented practices of workers’ theater and helped students use drama to develop the rhetorical resources they needed to help the Southern Labor Movement.

The Workers’ Theatre Movement

Labor dramatics, as an element within workers’ education, grew primarily out of the Workers’ Theater Movement of the 1920s and 1930s. Workers’ theater, as a set of performance practices, organizations, and artistic theories, emerged in response to both the bourgeois theater of the day and to the company recreation programs that were

increasingly offered to factory workers. Workers' theaters were primarily an attempt to provide the working class with a theatrical form that dramatized the social and economic concerns that defined much of their lives, and would thereby serve as an incitement to social and political action.

Hiroko Tsuchiya has detailed the circumstances that surrounded the emergence of workers' theater in the United States. Focusing on the years 1910-1929, Tsuchiya highlights two important factors that influenced the emergence of working-class theater. The first is the social importance to urban workers of live theater and working-class leisure institutions such as vaudeville, dance halls, and saloons, "with more than one-third of NY working men visiting a theater during the week, and twenty percent of married men" (98). The second was the initiation of company-run leisure programs that used dramatic productions of their own, which ran in competition with the institutions mentioned above. These programs were typically intended to depoliticize working-class audiences by avoiding overtly political themes; those programs that did cover the subject of work typically did so in strong nationalist terms, and emphasized a love of work as a patriotic duty.

Various workers' organizations attempted to respond to these conditions. Some hoped to bring cultural refinement and an appreciation of bourgeois theater to the working class, in an effort to raise the intellectual aspirations of workers. On the other hand, the Industrial Workers of the World organized sporadic dramatic productions of their own. IWW theater typically "turned nationalist productions to their own account, showing them for the sentimental cant they were" (Nochlin 93). While these productions hardly constitute a Workers' Theater Movement, one performance—the 1913 production

of the *Patterson Strike Pageant*—proved particularly noteworthy. Written by the famous journalist John Reed, the *Patterson Strike Pageant* was played by a cast of over 1000 striking silk-mill workers, and performed in New York’s Madison Square Gardens (“Paterson Strikers” 2).

Just as important to the development of workers’ theater was the growth of American little theatres. The Provincetown Players, formed in 1915, represented one of the first production groups to actively encourage socially conscious drama, and counted among its members writers John Reed, Eugene O’Neill, and Max Eastman (Williams 7-8). Mike Gold, along with John Howard Lawson, Ida Rauh, and Jasper Deeter, would later form the Workers’ Drama League, the first group “which devoted itself exclusively to the cause of the worker” (McDermott, “The Theater Nobody Knows” 67). The Washington Square Players, who would be Provincetown’s main competition when the group moved to New York in 1916, likewise demonstrated a commitment to social drama. When the Washington Square Players changed their name to the Theater Guild shortly after 1918, they became one of the more prominent progressive production companies in the city and one of the earliest groups to perform expressionist theatre in the United States (Williams 10-12).

During the same period, foreign-language troupes were also forwarding progressive and working-class theatre productions. The Arbeiter Teater Verband (the Workers’ Theater Alliance, or Artef) was formed by New York’s Jewish community in the mid 1920s, and staged impressive productions of more well-known plays. The Prolet-Buehne, which would exercise enormous influence over American workers’ theatre in the years to come, was formed by the German immigrant community in New

York in 1925 as the dramatic arm of its Workers Club (Williams 36). Eventually, the troupe became an independent company under the direction of John Bonn and his wife Anne Howe. This change in organization led the group not only to perform beyond New York's German community, but also to focus its attention almost exclusive on agit-prop theater (Friedman 113).

Agitation-propaganda theater was adopted by the Prolet-Buehne following the model of soviet workers' theater troupes. Following the 1917 Russian Revolution, there had been an explosion of workers' theatrical activities in the new Soviet Republic (Friedman 113). These activities were defined by "a style and form that reflected both the political goals [Soviet worker-actors] set for their theatre and the physical and temporal limits they faced as amateurs playing in factories, meeting halls, and streets" (113). Simple sets and costumes, archetypal characters, montage rather than linear plot developments, and radical political content became the hallmarks of the agit-prop style.

Such theatre was explicitly rhetorical, as actors engaged in mass chants and repeatedly called workers to action. But the rhetorical function of agit-prop theater should not be read in too narrow a fashion. Even the often sympathetic Jay Williams concedes "that agit-prop plays could convert nobody who wasn't already at least partly convinced" (43). Nonetheless, these performances provided "that emotional confirmation common to people who watch high school pageants on the Fourth of July," making them an important agency for building solidarity and shared purpose. The high energy, rapid movement, and coordinated chants further impressed upon the audience the momentum possible within an organized labor movement.

Theater scholar Daniel Friedman has noted that, following the stock market crash of 1929, workers showed a renewed and sustained interest in developing a working-class theater (111-112). Friedman has suggested that the stock market crash, along with the model of working-class society offered by Russia, opened American workers to specifically class-oriented cultural institutions (113). As a result, there was a marked increase in the number of workers' theater organizations, along with increase in English-speaking memberships of these organizations and in troupe-written and produced material.

By 1930, two more influential companies were performing in New York. The Group Theatre had originally been founded as a studio the Theatre Guild, and was one of the first companies to make extensive use of Stanislavsky's method acting principles (Williams 54-7). As noteworthy as the Group's techniques were its members, who included Elia Kazan and then-actor Clifford Odets (64). Meanwhile, Pro-Lab had emerged from the ashes of the Workers' Drama League, and quickly renamed itself the Workers Laboratory Theatre (38-41). The WLT was possibly one of the most innovative companies of its time, stressing audience interaction (to the point of removing the proscenium from its performances) and taking its performances to strike sites and worker actions (42).

The Workers' Laboratory Theatre was heavily influenced by the Prolet-Buehne's techniques, but, in a move that was common among American workers' theatre groups, continued to emphasize more naturalistic characters and performances. It was this use of existing theatrical traditions that most clearly set American workers' theater apart from its German counterpart, which insisted on the need for a revolutionary rejection of all

bourgeois theatrical conventions. Nonetheless, the two organizations amalgamated to form the Dramatic Bureau of the New York Cultural Federation in 1931, and by April of 1932 the Bureau represented 150 groups across the country. They changed their name to the League of Workers' Theatres in 1932. *Workers Theatre*, first published by the WLT in 1931, became organ of the LOWT in 1932 with an editorial board bolstered by members of the PB. The group finally changed its name to New Theatre League in 1935 (114).

Despite constant financial troubles, the New Theatre League managed to provide a “discursive voice” for the Workers’ Theatre movement for nearly five years (McDermott, “The Theatre Nobody Knows” 76). During this time, the League published *New Theatre*, *Theatre Workshop*, and *New Theatre News*, and organized the New Theatre School in New York. At the same time, other theater groups were experiencing some of their greatest success: the Group Theater achieved a new level of prominence and popularity when it produced Clifford Odets’ *Waiting for Lefty*. The Workers Laboratory Theatre transformed into the Theatre of Action, a permanent production company. The newly formed Theatre Union produced Bertolt Brecht’s *Mother*, with direction provided by the German playwright himself. The New Theatre League found a measure of success with its production of Irwin Shaw’s *Bury the Dead*, a play that drew stylistically from both agit-prop theatre and Odet’s techniques in *Waiting for Lefty*. Finally, the founding of the Federal Theatre Project in 1935 brought a marked increase in the amount of money and resources available for working-class theatrical productions.

Unfortunately, the critical success of workers theatre companies also threw into sharp relief the financial problems they faced. Many companies felt the need to

professionalize to secure the scripts and production quality they hoped for. This led them to also seek out more widely-appealing scripts, often to the detriment of their political agendas. But despite the increasing costs that groups accrued as a result, they continued to offer tickets at prices that workers could afford. Under these conditions it became virtually impossible for workers theatre productions to recover their costs, which in turn led to the demise of most major workers theatre companies by 1940.

Theatre and Workers' Education

Arguably, workers theatre set itself apart from traditional “bourgeois” theatre by emphasizing its rhetorical and educational—rather than just its aesthetic—functions. Workers theatre was understood first and foremost in terms of its contribution to the development of the working class, as an attempt both to seize the cultural “means of production” and portray accurately the various dimensions of class struggle. Understood in this way, workers theatre companies could be seen as a pragmatic enactment of Marxist theory and as a means of raising the consciousness and spirits of workers. Due to these commitments, “[f]rom the moment of the movement’s inception, there was a concern with educating the audience in revolutionary theory and practice” (McDermott “New Theatre School” 278)

For the most part, the educational function of workers theatre was understood in terms of a dialectical antagonism with traditional theatre. Just as bourgeois society had produced its own necessary negation in the form of the working class, so bourgeois theatre was in process of producing its own negation. John Howard Lawson’s article in the July 16, 1935 issue of *New Masses* elaborates on the problem of modern theater, as

captured by playwrights Henrik Ibsen and George Bernard Shaw (Lawson 28). For Lawson, Ibsen is the exemplar of modern bourgeois theater, whose task as a playwright was “crystallizing the final psychological crisis of the bourgeois family” (28). But modern playwrights proved unable to respond to this crisis, relying on heightened realism and a limited range of subjects (characterized by an “emphasis on sex, a nostalgic rebellion against the conventions of a humdrum world, and mystic pessimism”). Even the most socially-minded of playwrights, George Bernard Shaw, was reduced to “pure talk,” rather than achieving class-based social change.

For participants in workers’ theater, this problem arose as a result of the depiction of universal cultural norms in more traditional theater. Even when traditional theatre did attempt to deal with conflict and change, these themes were depicted not as a struggle between classes, but rather between “the individual and nature” (Zilphia Horton, “What is Workers’ Dramatics?”). By anchoring dramatic performances in appeals to a universal human condition—whether it be the classical antinomy between man and the gods, or the recurrent family narratives of the modern theater—playwrights and theatrical troupes presented the worldview of the dominant class as a permanent condition.

Workers’ theater was seen by participants as a two-fold response to these conditions. First, workers’ theater groups saw themselves as reclaiming the means of theatrical production, and thereby wresting their leisure time away from the continued influence of bourgeois culture. Second, these groups set about depicting the “struggle of the millions of disinherited, of the men and women who build the machines, factories, ocean steamers, etc.” (“What is Workers’ Dramatics?”). Thus workers’ drama attempted to move theater beyond its function as an “opiate,” and instead recast it as a cultural

outlet appropriate for working-class culture. It was this definition of workers' theater that led Prolet-Buehne member John Bonn to argue in 1931 that workers' theater's "only purpose is reflecting (dramatizing) the class-struggle and promoting (propagandizing) the class-struggle" (Friedman 115).

At the same time, the influence of Bertolt Brecht was also apparent among workers' theater groups. Douglas McDermott, writing on the Workers' Laboratory Theater, emphasizes the continuity between the adoption of the agit-prop style and the influence of Brecht's "abstract agit-prop" plays (McDermott, "Workers' Laboratory Theater"). Writing for the December 31, 1935 issue of *New Masses*, Eva Goldbeck emphasized the "educational" quality of Brecht's theater (Goldbeck). While Greek drama encouraged audience members to identify with the protagonist of a play, Brecht's "non-Aristotelian drama" attempted to awaken the spectator's reason and their potential for revolutionary political action. Similar to agit-prop theater, Brecht rebelled against the modern "trance theater" and its "methods of hypnotism," and encouraged not the identification of character and audience, but rather the critical observation of the characters by the audience (27).

The educational goals of workers theatre, then, could be said to lie in the attempts by playwrights, actors, and production companies to produce an aesthetic agency that accurately depicted working-class life and its struggles. In the case of American plays like *Waiting for Lefty*, this form of representation combined agit-prop staging with naturalistic dialogue in the hopes of rallying the audience to take a stand against oppressive capitalist forces. Brecht's theatre, much like the work of the Prolet-Buehne, went one step further by disallowing the audience to identify with the play's characters as

individuals. Instead, actors overtly embodied aspects of class struggle, and attempted to motivate their audiences by shaking them out of their normal spectator roles.

However, the educational goals of the Workers' Theatre Movement were not restricted to consciousness-raising performances on the stage. Increasingly, dramatic companies within the movement ran their own classes and schools to meet the needs of working-class audiences and actors. By 1932, the Workers Laboratory Theatre was offering "a lecture, play, and discussion" to audiences on a weekly basis (McDermott, "New Theatre School" 278). At around the same time, the League of Workers Theatres sponsored its first "Workers' Theatre Training Course" (279). These classes "embraced not only theoretical and practical training in the craft of play production, but also political education" (279).

Increasingly the dual function of these theatre schools—the revolutionary training of audiences and movement members and the pragmatic and professional training of would-be actors, directors, and playwrights—gave way to schools more focused on professional development. The Theatre Union, possibly the first professional company within the Workers' Theatre Movement, was the first organization to establish a permanent studio (280). But perhaps the most noteworthy school established along these lines was the New Theatre School in New York, founded by John Bonn and the New Theatre League in 1935.

The school represented the formalization of theatre classes run by Elia Kazan and Lee Strasberg in the *New Theatre* office (283). Classes at the school focused on acting, playwriting, and directing, as well as the "social and technical basis of the theatre" (283). Through these classes, Bonn and the New Theatre League hoped to provide the workers'

theatre movement with dedicated and skilled participants. League participants arguably saw these classes as some of their most important work, and continued to try and expand theatre schools across the United States even as the League itself encountered the financial shortfalls that would eventually lead to its dissolution. By 1940, Bonn had established a successful New Theatre School in Cleveland, Ohio, and the League itself had decided that “every new theatre shall be operating a New Theatre School in connection with its production work within the next year” (279).

Nonetheless, as these theatre schools became increasingly professional in outlook, workers’ schools became increasingly aware of the value that dramatics might have for workers who weren’t theatre professionals. A 1935 article for *Workers Education News*, on the dramatics program undertaken by the International Ladies’ Garment Workers’ Union, argues that labor drama “should be considered primarily as an effort in the dramatization of labor problems” (1). Mabel Leslie, who was during the same period the director of the Arts Workshop for Women Workers in New York, likewise noted that the purpose of labor dramatics was “the development and interpretation of ideas” (8). Dramatics classes thus allowed workers to critically engage many of the same issues raised by workers’ theater performance, in many cases as active participants.

Mabel Leslie also argues that dramatics classes “[offer] the individual scope for self-expression while requiring group correlation” (8). By providing workers with a space for individual recognition and collaborative production of relevant plays, labor dramatics classes were a particularly useful agency in the training of union leadership. Ransdell likewise argues that “the poetic imaginative qualities, the dramatic instinct found in the working class and the dynamic self-confidence which its recognition would

bring, constitute an educational force of untold possibilities” (1). The focus on self-expression as a means direct social action, a theory commensurate with the reclamation of theatrical production by the working class, can thus be understood as an important rhetorical project. Labor dramatics classes provide a site where workers can develop the means to communicate with one another on the exploitation and oppression found in class culture, and use dramatization as a means of transforming the way such problems are depicted and addressed in other cultural arenas.

These classes found their way into labor schools in the mid-twenties. Brookwood introduced drama classes in the fall of 1925, and had converted an old barn into a theater by 1932. Commonwealth College formalized its informal drama program in 1927, emphasizing its “psychological and social import” (qtd. in Altenbaugh 104). Both these program emphasized how drama might “appeal to exploited workers and convince them of the hopelessness of their current situation and the necessity of forming militant labor union if they hoped to better their lot” (105). Brookwood’s program achieved fame with the performances of the Brookwood Players, who also wrote a considerable number of the plays they produced. In 1934, the Brookwood Players undertook a fifty-three city tour, which brought both workers’ theater and workers’ education before an estimated audience of 14,500 (113). In contrast to this large-scale tour, students at Commonwealth College performed primarily for smaller rural audiences, dealing with issues such as the agricultural impact of the Great Depression.

As Richard Altenbaugh reminds us, labor dramatics program in schools such as Brookwood and Commonwealth didn’t simply draw upon existing workers’ theater traditions. Rather, these schools were active in creating them. Brookwood played a

particularly important role, with participants in its drama program often playing active roles in the Workers' Theater Movement. As such, it is possible to argue that workers' education and workers' theater intersected in such a way as to help workers' theater troupes refine their understanding of theater's educational potential, and to help labor educators recognize the value of drama for both spectators and participants.

It was initially in the hopes of preparing herself to work at Brookwood that Zilphia Horton had come to Highlander. After marrying Myles, Zilphia studied at the New Theatre School, returning to Highlander not only with a dramatic program for the folk school, but also a far deeper understanding of the Workers' Theater Movement and its philosophical foundations. She would continue to build on these foundations as she established one of Highlander's earliest cultural programs.

The Development of Labor Dramatics at Highlander

Highlander's drama program was, in many ways, influenced by the development of workers' theater in New York. However, Highlander was one of the first institutions to introduce this theatrical tradition to the South. From the first labor chataqua held at the school in 1935, through to the more fully developed courses in improvisation and play-directing, Highlander's program was also one of the most developed educational programs to emerge from the Workers' Theater Movement. As such, it was also one of the earliest significant developments in the folk school's cultural program.

The folk school's first sustained program in labor dramatics centered on the production of a Labor chataqua, involving plays, puppet shows, and labor songs, to be performed in front of union audiences in the South. The performances were intended to

promote Highlander's extension programs, and were greeted enthusiastically by all (Aimee Horton 98). This initial program was based on the chataqua developed by Brookwood Labor College, and seems to have followed the workers' theater principle of performing workers' problems for audiences comprised of workers. The chataqua program lists five events: "We Ain't A-Goin' Back", a labor play; country dances; screen pictures from local labor disputes; labor songs; and "Mopping Up," a play by staff member Elizabeth Hawes ("Program").

During the 1936 Winter Session, which commenced in January, residential program participants staged a reenactment of the 1935 events that led John L. Lewis and the United Mine Workers to found the Congress of Industrial Organizations (Glen 45). The CIO formed out of the older American Federation of Labor, which had devoted itself to organizing American workers since its founding in 1881. However, the AFL's conservative policies and focus on craft unionism left the organization unprepared for the Great Depression and the social unrest of the 1920s and 1930s. Poverty and growing industrialism led Lewis and others within the AFL to focus on organizing mass production and nonagricultural industries (Jacobson 130).

The New Deal further extended the ability of unions to organize, following the passage of the Norris-La Guardia act in 1932, the National Industry Recovery Act in 1933, and the Wagner act in 1935 (Marshall 34-35). These acts outlawed "yellow dog" contracts, gave workers the "right to organize and bargain collectively through representatives of their own choosing," provided workers with the right to elect their own bargaining representatives, and outlawed various unfair labor practices. It was in response to these conditions that Lewis and other representatives from ten other unions

founded the Committee for Industrial Organization at the 1935 AFL convention. The Congress officially formed in 1937, following the expulsion of Lewis and the CIO unions from the AFL (Biles 87)

The partnership that developed between Highlander and the CIO was natural, given the school's interracial status and its efforts to organize southern laborers. While the AFL had long professed nondiscrimination toward African American workers, the Federation had become increasingly tolerant of segregation within trade unions.

(Marshall 16) Some of this was the natural result of African Americans being denied access to craft vocations; however, AFL efforts to organize and affiliate discriminatory unions led officials to turn a blind eye to such racism. Facing what officials believed to be the reality of racism within the union movement, the Federation encouraged the establishment of separate unions for African Americans.

The CIO, committed to organizing industrial unions, was outspoken on the need to organize African Americans and poor white workers. When unorganized, African Americans were often used as strikebreakers, which in turn heightened racial tensions and kept white organizing efforts in check (Marshall 16). As such, it was crucial to organize these laborers rather than perpetuate existing relations. The youthful idealism of the Congress, increasing Communist agitation on the question of race, and increasing competition with the AFL, only heightened organizers' desire to work productively with African Americans (36). While the CIO also fell victim to ingrained racism, particularly in among Southern affiliates, Highlander and other progressive organizations rallied behind the Congress in its earlier years.

Nonetheless, labor dramatics classes at the folk school dealt as much with the craft of dramatics as they did with contemporary political events. Notes from the school's 1936 summer session further indicate that early drama classes focused primarily on the performance of plays (Untitled Notes on 1936 Summer Session 3). A full page of notes detail the process by which the director of the classes was to prepare plays and performance venues, and while there is reference to encouraging students' improvisation skills for use in local union environments, most space is given to the efficient running of a performance schedule (4). The large number of Brookwood plays in the Highlander archives, along with documents such as *Dramatics for Amateur Groups* (published by the University of Wisconsin Agricultural Extension Service in 1914), also suggest that the folk school initially developed and followed a fairly production-oriented program.²

Student feedback from the same summer session seems to indicate that workshop participants initially questioned the apparent "specialization" of the dramatics class, and its place in the curriculum over more "practical" classes (Untitled Notes 2). While it is impossible to say whether staff were responding to these evaluations, records for the dramatic classes offered in subsequent years indicate a shift in focus toward improvisation and student development of plays. Rather than focusing primarily on the performance of these plays, Zilphia and other folk school staff instead emphasized dramatics as a means of raising and attending to problems faced by labor unions.

Improvisation was not new at Highlander, and had been a part of the drama program from its inception ("Experiment," 1). This was used to warm students up during drama classes, and was also a means of dramatizing union problems in other classes. But Zilphia Horton increasing focus on improvisation seems to have occurred for two

reasons: first, it allowed students to raise and present issues that were immediate concerns for them; second, improvisation introduced students to transportable skills that could be used in organizing drama programs within trade unions.

The improvisations that formed the basis of Highlander's programs were, despite what the name might suggest, structured around the development of short scenes that depicted union problems. Highlander's archives contain eighteen outlines for student improvisations performed between 1939 and 1941.³ Students were responsible for directing each scene, and normally determined the purpose and basic structure of the scene prior to its performance. Student improvisations thus dealt with such issues as maintaining strong picket lines, resolving grievances, negotiating contracts, and winning over strike-breakers to unionization. Along with the problem to be presented, student directors also determined the number of characters, the time and location of the dramatic action, and the position actors were to be in when the curtain was raised and lowered.

Within this structure, the student directors then asked other workshop participants to play various parts and help them depict the problems they had selected. The level of scripting and direction given to each scene varied widely, with some outline containing one paragraph of notes on the action of the scene, and other containing nearly three pages. Following the performance of each scene, students were asked to provide the director with constructive criticism. While these comments occasionally covered the actual content of the scene, more often than not they covered issues of timing, vocal projection, and the degree to which actors appeared interested in what was occurring on stage.

More noteworthy than the absence of content-based criticism in the improvisation outlines is the absence of didactic structure to much of the dramatic action. While a few contained more obvious messages about maintaining strong picket lines or the need to engage strike-breakers in conversations about unionization, many outlines simply depict the problem under discussion (such as lack of solidarity among union members) with little or no depiction of a solution. The reason for this is unclear, though we might presume that audience members were encouraged, after watching a given scene, to discuss the problem depicted and its potential resolution.

By using a program based on improvisation and students' own concerns, Highlander staff were also able to avoid lecturing in favor of practical exercises. "As different elements of drama were introduced," Zilphia remarked in a 1940 article on the dramatics program, "it was always in relation to specific improvisations" ("Experiment" 2). These specific exercises were normally based on issues raised in the previous "Union Problems" class. Staff members were thereby able to emphasize essential elements of improvisation—"familiarity of theme, action, and characters" ("Experiment" 2). By beginning in this way, Highlander staff were also able to introduce students to more stylized dramatic conventions. For example, students adopted more abstract body language and improvised sound effects to simulate machines for one play. While one staff member notes that the word "stylized" was never introduced to students, classes nonetheless covered a wide range of dramatic skills in this way (Untitled Notes on 1940 Dramatics Class 49).

Naturally, there were limits to the amount of abstraction that students would tolerate. While rehearsing a play called *Stretch-out*, an agit-prop play that covered the

problems of wage decreases and hour increases for factory workers, students were non-plussed about suggestions that they use a “pantomime of dynamic movement” to dramatize the situation (Dyer 7-8). But the school report on the play indicates that it was, in the end, well received. The same report also indicates that students eventually performed five plays, which covered such styles as farce, musical farce, and combined “graphic and dramatic techniques.”

During improvisation sessions, students were also asked to consider themselves directors, and to compose small scenes with other class-members. Once the director and cast were selected, plays were put on in a more or less impromptu manner. Following these initially raw performances, the rest of the class was invited to offer criticism and to help the cast improve the action. Untitled notes on the 1940 dramatic class discuss the manner in which students engaged the problem of striker laxity on a picket line (Untitled Notes 48-49). Notes on the same class by Leon Wilson record the manner in which students decided to depict a weak line, which scabs could easily cross (“Notes on Dramatics Class”). The play eventually showed a number of strikers leaving a quiet picket line for various reasons, and returning only to find that the factory had been re-manned during their absence. The strike leader offers a few humorous lines to make the point clear, as he attempts to explain to the bewildered workers how the scabs were able to cross the picket line.

It was from improvisations like the one discussed above that published plays were also developed. Once students had developed an improvisation into discrete scenes, and had developed some memorable lines, the class set about preparing the script. This led to the publication of the plays *Gumbo*, *Labor Spy*, and *North-South*. While the school also

published a musical, *Lolly-Pop Poppa*, written by Zilphia Horton, and performed another play called *Dues Blues*, there is no indication that these were the products of improvisation sessions.

An anonymous report on the 1939 summer session (probably written by HFS staff member Choteau Dyer) provides a detailed description of the manner in which the play *North-South* was written (“Report...Labor Drama HFS”). Group criticism followed every performance of the play, and performers were more than willing to admit to the play’s shortcomings. Criticism covered evaluation of individual scenes, as well as suggestions on how to reveal particular information and shorten some of the longer speeches in the play. But criticism also covered issues such as the plausibility of dialogue and the credibility of the characters presented. During these sessions, more characters were introduced, along with sophisticated theatrical devices (such as using a telephone to remove a character from the central action while other characters reveal central information to the audience). While the report downplays the importance of stagecraft in student productions, the range of topics covered by students is nonetheless impressive.

Once students decided that the script was worth preserving, they broke into groups in order to write up the scenes. One boss’s interminably long speech drew some comment, but the collaborative process minimized the need for much more work. But the process of recording lines caused various students and staff members concern. Choteau Dyer, a visiting dramatist during the 1939 summer session noted that improvised dialogue rarely stood up to the test of the page (“Drama Workshop Report” 5). But more importantly, she noted that many workers, when faced with their own amateur dramatic

skills, would focus on memorizing lines rather than adapting plays to meet their own needs (6). Dyer also noted the difficulty students had with providing effective endings to their plays, and with the increased attention to artistic standards that attended the writing process (6).

Despite these misgivings about the value of scripted plays, Dyer did believe the improvisation sessions were of great value to the students involved. She notes that drama classes introduced students to the wide uses that could be made of theater in union meetings: as “an opportunity to educate the membership”; “a means of stimulating attendance at union meetings”; a “healthy and attractive source of cooperative recreation”; “valuable training in individual poise and self expression”; and as a “way of elucidating the union point of view for the general public” (9-10). Thus students were introduced to the rhetorical purposes to which labor drama could be put, and thereby equipped with a range of skills that could be taken back to the various unions they represented.

Highlander’s Dramatic Productions

While Highlander’s drama program increasingly focused on improvisation and the development of union leadership, the school also produced several plays and play-scripts. In many cases, these plays were performed during the residential sessions in which they were written, and were then distributed on request to union locals. Thus the scripts served to promote Highlander’s drama program, as well as to further the use of labor dramatics within union education programs.

The folk school's records contain seven published play scripts. *Labor Spy* is the earliest script available, originally written in 1937, and was one of the school's most requested plays.⁴ *Gumbo*, another popular play, was written in 1938. The remaining five plays—*North-South*, *Look Ahead Dixie*, *Lolly-Pop Poppa*, *Stretch-Out*, and *Dues Blues*—were written primarily during the summer session of 1939, and published in the collection *Five Plays About Labor*.

The school's first published play, *Labor Spy*, was based on *The Labor Spy Racket* by Leo Huberman. Huberman's book is a description of the LaFollette hearings into anti-union activities by employers and detective agencies such as the Pinkertons, and catalogues the many ways in which labor spies were used to hijack and bust union organizing efforts. The play draws awareness to "the gentle art of hooking," and follows the recruitment of Tom Chattuck, a local worker, as a spy for his employers. Chattuck is recruited by Detective Pinkman of the Burns Agency, who informs Tom that he is assisting minority shareholders to evaluate the company. By the time he realizes that he is being asked to report on union activities for his employers, Tom is too far in to turn back; blackmailed by Pinkman, he continues to perform espionage until he is discovered by other union members. The play treats the subject with considerable complexity, particularly in its depiction of the ways in which labor spies are often recruited without their knowledge. In depicting the poverty faced by many workers, *Labor Spy* also shows the ways in which existing conditions make workers susceptible to characters such as Pinkman. Thus the play not only dramatizes Huberman's book for consumption by workers, but also emphasizes the need for solidarity.

Gumbo, published a year after *Labor Spy*, does not show the same sophistication in its treatment of the subject matter. Named after the thick mud found in the Mississippi Delta, *Gumbo* depicts the violence used by landholders to prevent the organization of sharecroppers in the south. The play depicts the murders of two African American sharecroppers, Frank and Jessie, after their bosses discover their attempts to organize a union. The play is noteworthy for its use of “dialect writing,” and the inclusion of the hymn “No More Mourning,” which later became the civil rights anthem “Oh, Freedom.” The play also shows evidence of the performance-oriented nature of Highlander’s early dramatics classes, with long speeches and more complicated staging directions included in the script. Most noteworthy, however is *Gumbo*’s dramatization of racial cooperation in the labor movement, as white sharecroppers stand side-by-side with African American sharecroppers in the face of organized anti-union violence.

The remaining five plays, collected in *Five Plays about Labor*, were written during the 1939 summer residential session and show a more developed interest in improvisation and the value of plays within local union meetings. The introduction to the collection notes that each play “was made up in about eight hours for an audience before it was written down” (*Five Plays* 2). As such, worker-actors are reminded that “the lines of the script should not be taken word-for-word,” and that “any detail that may bring the play closer to the particular group that performs it, [can] be changed to suit each new situation.” *Five Plays about Labor* differs in this way from *Labor Spy* and *Gumbo*, emphasizing the ways in which drama programs can be easily adapted to meet the educational and rhetorical ends of individual union locals.

However, not all the scripts were suited to these lofty goals. *Lolly-Pop Poppa*, written primarily by Zilphia Horton as a musical farce, involved lyrics to be learned and a full musical score. While the play's subject—the attempt of bosses to combat the wage and hour bill with paternalism and minimal diversions— is straightforward enough, the complexity of the script no doubt inspired some of Choteau Dyer's reservations about the value of scripts to amateur drama programs. Similar issues are raised by *Stretch-Out*, an attempt to dramatize the ways that bosses decreased labor forces and increased workload. The use of “dynamic pantomime” required the inclusion of complicated stage directions in the script. While *Stretch-Out* certainly reflected the agit-prop style of the Prolet-Buehne and the Workers' Laboratory Theater, it was a far cry from the practical orientation to dramatics espoused by the staff in their correspondence.

Look Ahead, Dixie treats the manner in which courts and local bosses regularly worked together to bust unionizing efforts. In this play, workers on a picket line are faced with permanent injunction proceedings by a judge who claims to be combating outside agitators. While the court does in fact serve the picket line with the permanent injunction, workers remain organized and eventually force their boss to flee the scene. Despite the simplicity of the action, the play contains several long speeches reminiscent of *Gumbo*. The ending to the play reflects the concerns of many of the staff, and seems forced and simplistic when compared to the subject presented.

North-South, on the other hand, seems to most accurately reflect the style of play the folk school hoped to produce. While the play is quite advanced technically, making use of inset scenes to demonstrate flashbacks to the audience, the script is simple and the action direct. The play depicts the ways that a southern boss and a northern boss collude

to prevent unionization efforts in their plants. The Northern boss tells his workers that the unorganized South is responsible for keeping wages low and forcing lay-offs. Meanwhile, the southern boss convinces his workers that unions merely funnel dues to the Northern states in order to enrich union officials. A contrived meeting between the two sets of workers leads them to recognize the way in which regional antagonisms are mobilized in order to combat the labor movement. The play ends abruptly, with the workers deciding to organize in the face of their bosses' conspiracy.

The final play in the collection, *Dues Blues*, uses a weak love story to explain the ways that union dues are divided and allocated. The plot involves a girlfriend complaining to her boyfriend that he spends all his time with the union, and not with her. In response, he describes the work that the union does, and the use that is made of union dues. The division of dues among such causes as the CIO newspaper, strike relief, and organizer salaries is depicted by a pie-chart covering the moon, which keeps the action of the play moving and helps the lead male explain his points. While the props jar somewhat with the minimalist approach advocated at Highlander, directions are included in the script for the inexpensive construction of sets. The simple dialogue, organized around the pie chart, likewise makes the play easy to learn and perform.

The scripts produced during Highlander's dramatics classes are noteworthy for several reasons. First, plays such as *North-South* and *Dues Blues* stand as evidence of the dynamic collaborative practices adopted by the folk school. Such composition methods are noteworthy not only for what Karyn Hollis calls their "heteroglossic" character, but also for their communicative potential; insofar as these plays were written by workers for

workers, and produced by amateurs in a fairly inexpensive fashion, they demonstrated to other union education programs the value to be found in drama education (Hollis 107).

The value of these scripts inhered not only in their simple didactic function. To the contrary, the forced endings and simplistic plots often detract from the plays' dramatic quality. But some of the more developed stage techniques, along with the use of humor (for example, when the villain of *Lolly-Pop Poppa* is mindful not to give workers red lolly-pops), add to the recreational qualities that the plays also possessed. It is this combination of collaborative production, didactic message, and recreational value that no doubt commended dramatic programs to Highlander staff and union educational departments alike.

From Stage to Screen: *People of the Cumberland* and the Highlander Film Center

Highlander's interest in workers' theater soon expanded to cover the organizing potential of film. As early as 1938, the folk school was involved in the production of feature films. The first film produced at the school, Frontier Films' *People of the Cumberland*, became an overnight success among progressive and radical audiences. The positive reviews and wide distribution of the film helped to establish the Highlander Film Center a decade later. While the films produced at the school were less collaborative than the dramatics classes, they nonetheless played an important role in the school's publicity efforts and educational programs.

People of the Cumberland, the school's first and most successful film, was produced by Frontier Films in 1938. The movie involved a remarkable cast and crew: directors Robert Stebbins and Eugene Hill; photographer Ralph Steiner; folk musicians

Earl Robinson and Alex North; and Frontier Films' and Group Theater member Elia Kazan. The commentary for the film was written by Erskine Caldwell, southern author of *Tobacco Road* and *You Have Seen Their Faces*. With names such as Kazan, Caldwell, and Robinson involved in the project, *People of the Cumberland* may well have been destined for critical success.

The movie depicts the lives of contemporary inhabitants of the Cumberland Mountains in Tennessee. The mood for the film is set by the first lines of Caldwell's commentary:

In the heart of America, in the wooded mountains of the Alleghenies, under the Tennessee sky, the blue edge of the mountains, the plateau of the Cumberlands, the forgotten Cumberlands, where the trees were slashed down, the forest destroyed, and the lumber mills were left to rot. (1)

The Cumberlands were "a bad land," populated by "ruined housed and ruined people" (1). Thus *People of the Cumberland* appears to have been one of the crucial elements in fostering the politically charged representations of Appalachia that have dominated the twentieth century (see Batteau).

Stebbins and Hill elaborated on the grim opening to the film by depicting many of the events associated with the early years of Highlander, including the plight of the Cumberland bugwood cutters and the Wilder coal strike. But against this depressed backdrop, the directors also set the stage for positive political change. The Highlander Folk School and the union movement arrive in the area, bringing with them the potential for a new democratic society. As Caldwell puts it: "Ten million voices. Get wise, organize" (4).

The transformation of a “ruined people” whose “future was dead” into the “people of tomorrow” is thus in the hands of the labor movement, and the very groups who seem most devoid of political potential. To make clear the potential for social change residing in the Cumberland, the film’s directors depict classes held at Highlander alongside a July 4 labor rally in LaFollette, Tennessee. Far from the struggling, polarized images offered at the start of the film, the Cumberlands we are left with are optimistic about the future. Such optimism could, according to Caldwell, be felt throughout the ranks of Southern Labor.

People of the Cumberland opened in New York to critical acclaim. The *CIO News* (May 28, 1938), the *Daily Worker* (June 6, 1938) and *The Fight* (June 1938) all hail the film as a pioneering depiction of the Southern Labor Movement (“Story”; “New Labor Film”). The *Daily Worker* declares that the film is “the first American trade union picture—a picture of the people in Tennessee and how they have fought and are fighting to better their conditions.” In the *Washington Daily News* for May 4, no less a figure than Eleanor Roosevelt describes *People* as “a war on our own economic conditions,” and claims to be so affected by the film that she was unable to concentrate for hours after seeing it (Roosevelt).

The *Daily Worker* returned to the film again on June 8, where a full-page review devoted as much space to the work of Highlander as it did to the value of *People* (“Outstanding Labor Film”). A third review—this one primarily photographic in form—appeared on June 25 (“Screen Stars”). But not all reviews were unreservedly glowing. The *Nation* (May 21, 1938) notes that the film could hardly stand up as a historical documentary, and the *New York Post* comments that “the radical lessons are so couched

that they will please most those who do not need them” (Van Doren 596; Winston). Even the *Daily Worker* felt that the commentary was distracting and poorly written (“Outstanding Labor Film”). But most reviewers agreed with the sentiments of *The Fight*, who said of Stebbins and Hill that “[c]ombining the best qualities of the American film, a fine sense of humor, vigor and dynamic action, with a healthy, progressive and realistic point of view they have made a film of which they can be very proud—of which every progressive film-maker can be proud.” (“Movies” 14).

Stebbins and Hill’s film also performed important publicity work for the school. Endorsements by the United Mine Workers and the Amalgamated Clothing Workers of America strengthened the picture of Highlander as a vanguard of Southern Labor (DW article). Positive reviews by Eleanor Roosevelt and several congressmen were included in flyers for the film by its distributor, Garrison Films (Garrison Films). *People of the Cumberland* was constantly in demand by unions and progressive groups, and Highlander routinely showed the film during fundraising events (Dombrowski to Kazan, 1).

Despite the success of *People of the Cumberland*, it would be ten years before Highlander returned to film production as an educational tool. This time, the school became interested in producing its own movies, and contracted with Emil Willimetz to establish the Highlander Film Center as a subsidiary unit of the Folk School. While the Film Center was, for the most part, a self-funding and practically independent enterprise, it nonetheless produced numerous films for use within workers’ education programs.

The film center’s first progress report, for the year 1949-1950, indicates that the film center made one film for the United Packinghouse Workers, initiated two movies (for the CIO and the Farmers Union), active in visual education programs, extension

work and contract work intended to raise funds (with Columbia College, Chicago) (“Yearly Progress Report” 1). Despite this last activity, funding was to prove problematic, as money was often diverted away from the folk school to the Film Center. This problem was compounded by the fact that Film Center staff, who were generally considered special staff and therefore separate from the folk school proper, often proved unable or unwilling to assist in the constant actions required to keep HFS afloat. In response to these conditions, the folk school instituted a system of required monthly payments from the Film Center to cover their operating budget. (“Proposal for Film Center Unit” 2-3).

Despite the need for Film Center staff to complete commercial work to raise funds, they remained incredibly active over the next three years. Their annual report for 1951-1952 (which was itself presented as a set of production notes) shows the importance that film center staff assigned to recording workers’ struggles, such as those of Delaware’s oyster shuckers, who were paid as little as \$1 per gallon (600-700 oysters) for their work (“FILMSTRIP” 1-2). During this period the Film Center also planned a feature film on Myles Horton’s 1937 organization activities in Lumberton, N.C., and participated in the Packinghouse Workers’ training school for educational staff (*Mill Town*). As the center proceeded with its work, it seems to have become Highlander’s media services agency.

From 1952-1955, the last year for which we have records, the Film Center focused on the production of film strips for use in union education programs. Catalogues for the year show that movies were produced on topics such as property taxation, public opinion and the factors influencing it, the Tennessee Valley Authority, community

relations, organizing discussion groups, and school reform (“Report on Films and Film Strips”). The center was also active in producing films on desegregation issues, eventually compiling nine films on the subject for rental to interested groups (Untitled Notes 1). An advertising release for the center indicates that films were distributed with a script, a discussion leader’s guide, background material, and a bibliography of material (Untitled Release 1). “Production, Distribution, Utilization” thus became the mission statement for the Center.

As discussion starters, the Film Center’s materials functioned in much the same way that role plays did—they energized discussion and provided concrete depictions of the issues being addressed. But rather than involving the groups concerned in producing their own dramatizations, the Film Center appears to have operated almost exclusively as a publicity and educational materials department for the school. The materials they produced demonstrated not only the political commitment that Highlander had to addressing the social problems encountered in the American South, but also the considerable sophistication that increasingly defined the school’s programs.

Drama as Rhetorical Education

In assessing the rhetorical potential of labor drama, it would seem that little needs to be said about the propaganda value of workers’ theatre. Jay Williams has asserted that only those who are entertained by stories such as Peter Pan would think that drama doesn’t have social and political functions. Sam Smiley has provided a comprehensive analysis of progressive drama in *The Drama of Attack*, in which he describes both the origins and deployment of a didactic dramatic function in depression-era theatre. Nor

should this commentary appear particularly surprising; in many ways, it was workers theatre and the political traditions it drew on that helped call attention to art's social function in the twentieth century.⁵

Nonetheless, theatre critic Eric Bentley has offered an important and persuasive criticism of progressive theatre's political aspirations. For Bentley, the distinction between art's aesthetic preoccupations and propaganda's rhetorical function couldn't be clearer: "When literature won't work, so to say, you may be forced to try propaganda" (126). But this isn't the thrust of his criticism. Rather, Bentley's claim is not that theatre isn't political, but rather that when it is assessed according to political goals, theatre isn't particularly effective:

Persuasion, we have seen, is seldom attempted and, when attempted, seldom succeeds. With pretended persuasion, we come to propaganda drama that is really addressed to those already convinced....The aim would be to fill with emotional content what may otherwise be a feebly 'intellectual' tenet. (135)

For Bentley, theatre's primary function is entertainment, as it is more able to please people who already agree with the politics of a given performance than it is to convince opponents to adopt a new position. As such plays aren't persuasive at all, and could be described at best as morally and politically comforting.

But in assessing theatre's rhetorical potential, we need to conceive of rhetoric as more than simple persuasion. As Bentley's contemporary Kenneth Burke has already pointed out, rhetoric just as often addresses itself to the formation and maintenance of particular social groups as it does to convincing people to change their minds. Read in terms of Marxist theory, such a distinction is particularly important. If theatre's primary

concern shifts from the representation of bourgeois culture to the production of a working-class ideology, then there is also a corollary shift in that theatre's function in relation to the working class. No longer a vehicle of alienation, theatre instead becomes a means of producing and circulating class consciousness. As Bentley suggests, such a theatre's function is not necessarily persuasive, but it nonetheless serves as a rhetorical agency for the development of workers' culture.

Highlander staff and students were clearly aware of the more prominent rhetorical functions performed by the folk school's drama and film productions. The most apparent of these was the publicity these productions garnered for the school, as filmstrips and play scripts were distributed across the country. Not only did these productions draw attention to Highlander and the role it played in the labor movement, they also drew attention to the issues facing that movement. In the case of Highlander's play scripts, these issues were often day-to-day problems facing southern organizers; these plays provided a means of quickly communicating and analyzing these concerns within union education programs. Highlander's filmstrips provided a ready-made tool for similar work. The materials distributed with each film allowed union educators to direct members of their locals to the most important aspects of the films they watched. By thus combining education with recreational media, Highlander's drama and film programs proved to be highly effective agencies for worker education.

Beyond teaching students the performance potential of workers' theater, Highlander's contribution to the development of workers' theater and labor dramatics within workers' education was the involvement of students as "spect-actors," a term coined more recently by Brazilian theater teacher and activist Augusto Boal (*Games for*

Actors... 226). For Boal, whose activist theater projects typically involve Brazilian peasants, the important element in drama education helping people realize their roles as actors in the world around them. As such, there are no simple spectators in Boal's theater; all participants—whether they are on the stage or sitting in the audience—must see themselves as spect-actors within an unfolding social drama.

While Highlander's programs were developed nearly thirty years before Boal started his work, the dramatics classes the folk school developed show a similar understanding of the role of drama in awakening an individual's capacities for political action. By involving students in a wide range of critical activities, Zilphia Horton and the other drama teachers developed in a practical manner the educational theater advocated by Brecht. But insofar as students were encouraged to develop their own drama programs, and act as leaders within their respective unions, Highlander went considerably beyond the critical function of Brechtian theater and encouraged workers, through drama, to see themselves as rhetorical agents.

For Boal, Brecht's epic theater is an important corrective for classical drama. Classical drama, anchored in the dynamic relationship between the individual and nature emphasizes catharsis as a means of correcting those excessive tendencies in human nature (37). Insofar as classical drama is therefore invested in maintaining order and balance in society, it is a medium of cultural coercion—a means of insisting on the sanctity of the status quo (39). By actively encouraging the identification of the audience with the tragic protagonist, classical playwrights encouraged the audience to embody and enact the coercive function of the theater.

Brechtian theater, on the other hand, shatters this process of identification, and instead attempts to engage the audience's reason. Audience members are invited to observe dramatic action unfold, and to ask themselves how to intervene in material conditions under discussion (103-4). But for Boal this process of intervention is undermined by the fact that audience members remain spectators, and only observe the drama. The essence of revolutionary theater lies in breaking down the wall between actor and audience, thereby encouraging all participants to see themselves as actors in their own fate (122).

While Highlander staff never articulated their own dramatic theories in these terms, they nonetheless used their dramatics course to help student realize their own capacities for meaningful political participation and action⁶. Insofar as all students participated in the creation and production of plays, they also took part in collaborative decision-making throughout the dramatics course. Students learned to value plays as collective enterprises, and proved receptive to praise and to criticism. This kind of collaboration was important not only for the productions it produced, but also for the very real experience that students received in democratic decision-making. The range of subjects discussed – from stagecraft to the behavior of bosses toward their workers – demonstrates the success of the program, and attests to the value student placed on such deliberations. As students were also encouraged to take these skills back to their own unions, and use them in establishing their own educational programs, the collaborative emphasis of Highlander's drama courses also provided rhetorical training in the kinds of decision-making necessary for a strong union movement.

Despite the similarity between Highlander's drama program and Boal's theories of theater, the rhetorical training that occurred at the folk school differs from Boal's work in an important way. Boal's dramatic pedagogy emphasizes the role of theater in helping people to recognize their own capacities for action in the world. That is, Boal's theater provides people with a forum in which to explore the problems that they face, and develop the various forms of action needed to address these problems. Acting, then, becomes a means of rhetorical rehearsal, allowing individuals to practice various forms of political and social intervention.

By comparison, Highlander's drama program focused more on the development of student directors who could in turn develop drama programs for their respective unions. While producing plays and improvisations no doubt gave students—actors and directors alike—new experiences with a range of union problems, the focus of Highlander's drama program appears to have been on crafting both educative and entertaining scenes and plays for union members. As mentioned earlier, many of the scripts and outlines found in the folk school's records do not propose solutions to the problems they depict, thereby avoiding the didactic quality that we might expect to find in these documents. Instead, these documents emphasize the importance of a strong directorial hand to the success of labor drama.

To suggest that Highlander's drama program did not provide the same kind of rhetorical rehearsal as Boal's forum theater is not to suggest that no rhetorical training occurred. The folk school's drama program, in keeping with the Highlander Idea was instrumental in helping students to develop their own rhetorical capabilities. As students worked together to produce plays and improvisations, and discussed the ways in which

they would dramatize union problems, they readily exchanged various opinions and strategies for approaching their union work. As John Dewey reminds us, all communication is educative, as it extends the knowledge and connections that attend individual experience; insofar as communication transforms the manner in which we approach the world around us, increasing the range of response we have to that world, it could be said to function rhetorically (Dewey, *Democracy* 217). As students debated and expanded the range of experiences present in the dramatics courses, they developed more flexible sets of responses to the issues they faced.

Highlander's dialogic approach to education has much in common with Dewey's theory of normal communication. Classes at Highlander centered on having students "mine the whole of the stuff in their experiences that are essential" (*Myles Horton Reader* 276). While such experience "doesn't necessarily have any social meaning," it nonetheless provides the basis upon which meaningful education is built. As students share their own experiences with their peers, they "extrapolate their experiences by combining and analyzing them, so that they themselves see far beyond where they saw when they came." From these interactions, students learn the significance of their experience both as the ground for their own education and as a means of participating in the shared concerns of a community. For Horton and other Highlander staff this was one of the central goals of adult education.

This process of communication also proved important to students' problem-solving abilities in two ways. First, many of the problems faced by students were communicative in nature: recruiting union membership; securing dues; maintaining morale; negotiating contracts and settling grievances. Students' experience in the

dramatics course therefore translated directly into resources with which they could face their work with the labor movement. Second, the wide range of opinions and experiences encountered by the students were essential to the reconstructive action that Dewey and other educators considered necessary for efficient problem-solving (*Democracy* 76-78). For progressive educators, the goal of education was to help individuals effectively recalibrate their past experiences in response to their immediate environment, thereby remaining open to new experiences.

As Frances Polletta has already noted, the critical communication that occurred in Highlander's drama classes also provided students with important experience in democratic deliberation. Collaboration on play writing and production was intended to show students the kinds of achievement made possible by collective action. In this way, Highlander staff used normal communication as a means of introducing students to the democratic community that they hoped to build. For Myles Horton, such communication demonstrated to people "that the things that have meaning to them have meaning to other people, and then you begin to have some knowledge coming out of that, and then new kinds of meaning can be built on that collective..."(*Myles Horton Reader* 276). Communication thus proved rhetorically and pedagogically significant: rhetorically, Highlander's classes were organically linked to the democratic ideal that staff hoped to achieve, and encouraged students to further identify with that ideal; pedagogically, the classes also provided students with direct experience in critical, democratic decision-making. While this was, according to Polletta, a feature of many of Highlander's classes, it is a particularly noteworthy feature of the dramatics program.⁷

The rhetorical education that took place in Highlander's dramatics classes was also noteworthy for the "learning by doing" approach used by the staff. This approach gave students the opportunity to develop their dramatic skills through constant rehearsal in a variety of different forums. Thus Highlander's dramatics classes focused on rhetorical education not as consciousness-raising through lectures, but instead the cumulative development of communicative capabilities through active performance. Students came to appreciate the rhetorical force of workers' theater not by learning its history or by attending productions, but rather by participating themselves in the creation of a dramatics that met the needs and reflected the experience of the working class.

Highlander's drama program thus represents an important contribution both to the Workers' Theater Movement and to the use of dramatics within labor education. Zilphia Horton used labor drama as a means of developing workers' problem-solving skills and their communicative capabilities. Dramatics classes provided students with a model space in which to practice collaborative decision-making, and to recognize the value of individual contributions within a framework of collective action. Students also developed their capacities to make such contributions by developing the rhetorical skills need for effective problem-solving and communication. The practical successes achieved by Highlander's drama courses could thus be seen to provide the model for many of the folk school's later programs.

NOTES

¹ The HREC archives contain several plays from each of these institutions, though there are few references to these plays being performed at Highlander. Thus it seems fair to conclude that Zilphia Horton and other staff members were studying what other institutions were doing, but remained invested teaching drama according to the experiential pedagogy of the folk school. For a complete listing of plays found in the HREC archives, see boxes 56 and 57 in the HREC Records.

² These documents can all be found in Box 58 of the HREC Records.

³ These outlines can be found in Box 58, Folder 3, of the HREC Records.

⁴ The archive date for *Labor Spy* is 1936, but Huberman's book wasn't published until 1937.

⁵ Obviously workers' theatre is not the only artistic expression of a progressive politics. John Reed Clubs had been in existence for just as long as workers' theatre troupes, while the League of American Writers would become active in 1935. The production of nonfiction works on pressing social conflicts by some of America's most esteemed writers—such as Harlan Miners Speak—speaks to the acknowledgment of art and the artist's political function in arenas other than the theatre.

⁶ Discussions of Brecht's theater and its critical-educational function were going on during the 1930s, as evidenced in Goldbeck's article. So it's reasonable to assume that Highlander staff would have been familiar with many of the arguments made by Boal in *Theater of the Oppressed*, and may have drawn upon similar assumptions while developing their own drama program.

⁷ That is, both students and staff reflect upon this interaction in evaluations of dramatics classes, suggesting that the collaborative and creative nature of the dramatics program highlighted the value of critical communication for all participants.

CHAPTER THREE: LABOR JOURNALISM, IDENTIFICATION, AND ORGANIZATION

Alongside its expanding cultural programs, Highlander also developed a range of practical classes aimed at developing union leadership. The central class in this regard was “Union Problems,” in which students discussed the daily problems facing union organizers. This class relied on the same normal communication that solidified the drama program; by raising and discussing problems as a group, students broaden their repertoires for responding to these problems. But at the same time, “Union Problems” provided much of the initial content for other courses, such as drama and labor journalism.

At first glance, the folk school’s labor journalism program seems to be consonant with the school’s drama program and its overall operational philosophy. Folk school staff helped students to produce and maintain small shop papers that embodied the concerns of workers and the union movement. Just as the school’s pedagogy emerged in response to the immediate needs of students, the labor journalism course centered on developing journalism that was owned and produced by the labor movement itself. Shop papers, then, were built around shop gossip columns and worker-written news articles, with particular attention given to reporting local union victories.

But unlike Highlander’s drama program, their labor journalism class relied less on an existing journalistic tradition and developed more from continual experiments by staff members. Thus while the school published shop papers continuously over the first fifteen years its operation, their approaches to labor journalism were determined largely by the staff member teaching it and their approach to the subject. But despite this diversity in

theoretical approaches to labor journalism, the folk school remained committed to teaching labor journalism as a means of organizing local union communities. By providing students with instruction in mimeographing and layout, and with practical discussions on how to organize editorial boards and reporting staff, Highlander continued to provide students with direct if limited practical experience in democratic decision-making,

The Foundations of Journalism at Highlander

Unlike Highlander's theater program, journalism classes at the school were not taught by staff members trained in any journalistic tradition. In fact, until the arrival of professional journalists Carl Haessler and Charles Wright Ferguson, journalism classes would be taught by staff members drawing on their own experiences with labor struggles and producing publicity material. As can be seen in evaluations of Highlander's journalism courses, this would lead at times to a focus on the mechanical skills involved in mimeographing and the organizational skills needed to initiate and run a labor paper. As a result, treatments of content and article composition sometimes appear to be of secondary importance.

But to say that Highlander staff did not draw on any training in journalism is not to say that they were unfamiliar with journalistic conventions. During the 1920s and 1930s, print journalism played an important part in Southern politics, and arguably in the rhetorical formation of the New South itself. So it could just as easily be argued that Highlander staff didn't overtly draw on a journalistic tradition because they didn't need

to; the role of newspapers and magazines in the promotion of progressive thinking and political action was, for them, self-evident.

Such a conclusion would certainly be borne out by what could only be described as an explosion in progressive journalism in the decade before Highlander opened. The *Daily Worker* and *New Masses*, two of the most influential newspapers within the labor movement, were founded in 1924 and 1926 respectively. Labor journalism expanded so quickly over the next ten years that Highlander boasted in one letter to the *Nashville Tennessean* that they had over 40 labor journals on hand at the school (Highlander, “Statement...” 2).

1924 was also the year that H.L. Mencken founded the *American Mercury*, which became a tremendously influential publication alongside other magazines such as the *Nation* and the *New Republic*. One-time Highlander teacher Charles Wright Ferguson credits Mencken as the man “who commercialized protest and gave the public its first notion that articles could be good merchandise and might have an art form of their own” (Ferguson to Leon Wilson 1). John Egerton credits Mencken with redefining the cultural terrain of the South, following the publication in 1917, and in expanded form in 1920, of his essay “The Sahara of the Bozart” (Egerton 59). While Mencken provoked negative responses from groups such as the Agrarian writers at Vanderbilt University, he also encouraged a host of progressive Southern authors to take up the work of repairing the South’s “social-cultural-political degradation” (59). His reporting on the Scopes trial in 1925 further extended the active role his journalism played in the cultural politics of the South.

Meanwhile, as *Mercury* writer W.J. Cash noted in his influential *Mind of the South*, progressive editors were increasingly running some of the South's most widely read newspapers (Cash). Egerton notes that in the 1920s editors for the Memphis *Commercial-Appeal*, the Norfolk *Virginian-Pilot*, the Montgomery *Advertiser*, and the Columbus (GA) *Enquirer-Sun*, all won Pulitzer prizes for their attacks on lynching and the Ku Klux Klan (135). These editors placed their newspapers alongside the work of African American authors James Weldon Johnson, Walter White and Arthur F. Raper, and paved the way for journalists such as W.J. Cash to launch their own criticisms of Southern culture (135-6). While Egerton is careful not to overstate the impact of literature and journalism on the South, he is nonetheless correct in his assessment that authors played an important cultural and political role in the development of the progressive South (134).

At the same time, socialists and labor organizers were acknowledging the educational role of the press within the labor movement. Richard Altenbaugh notes that in 1911, the Socialist party sent out five million pieces of literature, and sponsored over 300 daily, weekly, and monthly publications by 1912 (27). Presses founded by J.A. Wayland and Charles H. Kerr also made important contributions: from 1885 to 1922, Wayland published the *Appeal to Reason*, one of the first national socialist weeklies, and sponsored such work as Upton Sinclair's *The Jungle*; Kerr meanwhile produced the first English translation of Marx's *Capital*, a monthly series of "little red books" by American socialist authors, and founded the *International Socialist Review* in 1900 (27-29). Wayland and Kerr were joined in these efforts in 1924 by International Publishers, the official press of the American Communist Party, which continued to translate and publish

central Marxist works. Speaking specifically about Charles Kerr, Allen Ruff argues that these publishers “placed all [their] hope for a brighter future in the effectiveness of an informed, class conscious and politicized electorate,” and saw the labor press as central to realizing such an ideal (qtd. in Altenbaugh 29).

In an intellectual climate such as this, Highlander’s emphasis on the importance of journalism to the success of the labor movement seems only natural. It is worth noting that the school maintained correspondence with several influential authors and labor journalists during the 1930s and 1940s. The folk school developed a solid working relationship with the League of American Writers, and further asked labor journalist and *Monthly Review* founder Leo Huberman to talk to students during the 1939 summer residential session (Dombrowski to Huberman). Charles Wright Ferguson of the *Readers Digest* and Carl Haessler of the Federated Press would also play important roles in the development of journalism and writing classes at the school.

The school was also involved in publicity and journalism efforts of their own. One of Highlander’s earliest experiences in this regard was their management of publicity and press releases for the Wilder coal strike and the Grundy County bugwood strike. Staff produced a wide variety of materials for the Federated Press and local newspapers, and were even successful in breaking news of the state government’s acquiescence in the murder of Wilder strike leader Barney Graham. The school would continue to publicize regional labor disputes throughout the course of their involvement with the labor movement, and generated material on strikes in Daisy, TN; McColl, SC; Lumberton, NC; and Harriman, TN.

The school also produced two more local newspapers—the *Highlander Fling*, which was primarily devoted to folk school activities, and the *Summerfield News*, which was produced for the surrounding community. The *Highlander Fling*, which ran semi-regularly from 1933 to 1948, contained news about Highlander’s residential programs and extension work, as well as coverage of regional labor strikes and union activities. While it started out as a two-page mimeographed publication, it was published professionally after 1939. It was again expanded in 1942, this time to include annual reports in the first issue of every year. While Highlander staff attempted to produce the *Fling* monthly, it seldom ran more than three times a year, and appears to have stopped in 1948.

The *Summerfield News* was more broadly conceived as a community newspaper for residents of Summerfield and the area immediately surrounding the school. The paper appears to have been a success, running more or less continuously from 1938 to 1948. During that time, staff, students, and community members collaborated to produce the paper, with local children increasingly involved in the paper’s production. While the paper’s format remained more or less stable throughout its publication, the content was in many ways experimental and constantly changing. Aside from local and regional news, the paper carried at various times editorial columns, cartoons, children’s stories, comic features, letters to the editor, recipes, and gossip. Nor was this material necessarily reflective of the school and its politics—one letter, published on the front page, criticizes the *News* for wasting paper on a comic piece describing Zilphia Horton’s musical performance for the folk school’s animals, while another article condemns a local strike as injurious to the nation’s war efforts. But throughout its publication, the *Summerfield*

News continued to attend to local events and to provide residents with an accountable news agency.

These two papers are important to Highlander’s labor journalism classes for a few reasons. First, the layout of the papers—one double-side page containing a large banner and double column text—represent the model for the shop papers produced at the school during its first fifteen years. Second, both the *Highlander Fling* and the *Summerfield News* were at various times produced by students attending the folk school. The folk school therefore understood their journalism classes to be linked immediately to real community and publicity programs, rather than simply being practice for later projects.

Highlander’s various encounters with authors, journalists, and journalism remind us that, despite the absence of an identifiable tradition or theory of labor journalism at the school, staff had vested interests in the field and plenty of experience with it. While there is little doubt that the absence of a formally trained staff member to teach journalism classes produced somewhat uneven results from session to session, this is not to say that staff were not practically equipped or willing to learn. The development of journalism and other writing classes at the school attests to the innovation and consolidation of staff efforts in this field.

Early Classes in Labor Journalism

While shop papers weren’t produced at Highlander until 1934, “Union Problems” and workshop classes were on the books in 1933. The school expanded its curriculum to include a literature course and instruction in English grammar for the 1934 winter residential session (“Report on Winter Session” 1). These courses met with mixed

reviews: the report on the literature course concluded that it was “rather poorly conducted,” that “material was too heavy for the students” and a “large portion...was not available at the HFS library” (2). While there is little reference in the report to the grammar classes, available worksheets indicate that students were asked to compose sentences that were then corrected during class sessions (2). These disjointed early attempts at English instruction are far from surprising, as several classes taught during 1932 and 1933 started mechanically before evolving into more practical courses over the next few years. These English classes were folded into the Labor Journalism class for the summer session of 1934 (*Highlander Fling* No. 4, 1).

The first shop paper produced at the school was the *Fighting Eaglet*, which comprised five issues composed during the 1934 summer residential session. The Eaglet was named for the blue eagle that represented the National Recovery Act and Roosevelt’s New Deal. But the Fighting Eaglet is differentiated from the federal eagle in issue one, which notes that the Eaglet is “[n]ot recognized in the Eagle Social Register of the Nation or the progenitor of the line” (*Fighting Eaglet* No.1, 1). Rather, the *Eaglet* was “[c]hristened by the priests of the New Order of Society, and co-operatively sponsored.” The newspaper, then, followed the birth of the *Fighting Eaglet* with the commencement of the residential session in issue one, through its eventual growth and flight with the departure of the students in issue five.

The format for the *Eaglet* was likely drawn from the *Highlander Fling*. A large, hand-drawn banner was included at the top of the first issue, though the two-column format that came to dominate the folk school’s shop papers didn’t appear until the second issue. Other features common to shop papers similarly appeared over the next three

issues. A shop news (gossip) column titled “Huh?” appears in the *Eaglet*’s second issue, and makes use of pointed questions to reveal gossip from the residential session. Issues three and four include more articles on national and international events, with a noteworthy article on Russia included in issue four. While the newspaper was never published with a masthead, Boyd Whitson was finally listed as editor in issue five.

Boyd Whitson, a student from Harriman, Tennessee, also wrote a new release for the Federated Press describing the highlights of the residential session. While the release is long by industry standards, it offers comprehensive discussion of the school and demonstrates a familiarity with the conventions of journalistic writing. Whitson also uses similar language to that found in the student paper when he announces that “there arose today an ear-splitting victory from the Highlander Folk School’s, Fighting *Eaglet*, nemesis of Capitalism, heralding the completion of another step in the ladder of Workers Education” (Whitson 1). From this dramatic beginning, Whitson goes on to conclude that “we know that in the Class fight we will always be together if not in body, then in spirit” (2). While the claims are perhaps a little grand, Whitson’s language nonetheless reflects the faith in collective action that would prove a mainstay in Highlander-produced shop papers.

Despite the dramatic force given to the *Eaglet*, there is little discussion of the *Eaglet*’s development and publication in the records of the 1934 summer residential session. Nonetheless, the changing format of the paper may well suggest one of three things. One, the paper’s format may have shifted as students decided to add more features to it. Two, the staff were themselves learning about shop papers in the process of producing the *Eaglet*, and added sections to the paper as they helped students produce it.

Three, the format of the paper may have been of less concern (or indeed, may have commanded less time from students) than the practical aspects of stencil-cutting and mimeographing, which resulted in a less carefully developed paper. The linear nature in which the paper's format developed nonetheless indicates that all individuals involved in its production became increasingly familiar with the conventions of local shop papers.

The description of the summer session in the September, 1934 issue of the *Highlander Fling* indicates that "a workers council was set up for the self governance of the group," and the annual report for 1934 indicates that students were primarily responsible for writing articles for the paper (*Highlander Fling* 4, 2; "Summer School Report" 4). But staff nonetheless played a large part in producing the final issues. Staff members Malcolm Chisholm and Dorothy Thompson provided artwork and stenography. The Summer School Report further indicates that student writing "was revised and corrected by members of the staff" (2). The dramatic and sometime verbose language used in the *Eaglet* makes it difficult to determine where student contributions end and staff revisions begin.

The initial success of the *Fighting Eaglet* became the foundation for shop papers produced at subsequent residential sessions. Students attending the 1935 summer session printed three issues of *The Snag*. The first issue promises that "following the example of our predecessor, the "Eaglet," we shall try to give you an account of our activities up here on the mountain, as well as our views on important events in towns and cities near us" (*Snag* 1, 1). The papers certainly lived up to the second part of this promise, and included news flashes, discussions of local strikes, and a review of Leo Huberman's *We the People*. While all three issues of *The Snag* lacked a gossip column, they offer

detailed discussions of school events, sometimes with links to programs at other workers' education centers (such as the Summer School for Women Workers in Industry).

Our Verdict, the five-issue paper produced by students during the 1936 winter session, was named in response to the Supreme Court's 1935 ruling that the National Industry Recovery Act was unconstitutional. The National Industrial Recovery Act represented the most dramatic legislation passed as part of the New Deal. The act was offered as a solution to Alabama senator Hugo Black's proposal for a thirty-hour work week, and established codes of fair competitive practice for industry at the level of the federal government. While the fair practice codes were written by representatives of the government, management, and labor in each major industry, the act met with responses varying from welcome acceptance to combative dismissal. But despite the mixed sentiment surrounding the act's passage, it was responsible for a number of important reforms in the South, including the eradication of child labor, reductions in work hours to between thirty-five and forty hours a week, and improved working conditions. Furthermore, the NIRA's section 7(a) guaranteed labor the right to collective bargaining (Biles 59).

The broad-sweeping reforms contained in the NIRA were declared unconstitutional in 1935, in the Supreme Court's *United States v. A.L.A. Schechter Poultry Corporation* ruling. The unanimous ruling declared that much of the business covered under the act was not "interstate," and could not be regulated by Congress. Furthermore, the Court believed that the Act's concentration of legislative power in the hands of the executive was also unconstitutional (Biles 62). While the Wagner Act preserved many of the legislative advances accorded to labor, the demise of the NIRA

confirmed the impotence of the NRA in enforcing codes of fair practice. As evidenced by *Our Verdict*, the Supreme Court's decision cast an air of uncertainty over the legacy of the New Deal in the South.

Aside from its focus on contemporary political events, *Our Verdict* is also noteworthy for its increasingly professional production. The first issue contains the first clearly identified editorial, which offers an insightful commentary on a visit from a Japanese Christian labor leader. "Highlander Hits," the first sustained shop news column, appears in the second issue. Issue three contains a front page article discussing racial discrimination, along with the first editorial masthead. Nonetheless, *Our Verdict* didn't develop consistently: the fourth issue omitted an editorial, while the fifth issue omitted "Highlander Hits." Some of this probably resulted from changes in the editorial staff, as different groups of students were placed in charge of each issue.

The single-issue shop paper from the 1936 summer session, the *Lookout*, follows the format established with the *Fighting Eaglet* and more or less perfected with *Our Verdict*. The same format was followed in 1937 in the *Foghorn*. The first issue of the *Foghorn* also returns to a discussion of the paper's title, declaring that "there's a lot of fog clogging up the vision of the people during this trying times" (*Foghorn* No. 1, 2). Just as the title *Our Verdict* responded to the Supreme Court decisions on the National Recovery Act and similar issues by offering workers a verdict of their own, so the *Foghorn* provided a beacon around which workers could rally during the uncertainty of Recovery.

However, notes on one of the 1937 residential sessions suggest that students questioned the value of the school's journalism classes.¹ Students complained that

“Journalism was too much the mechanical job of mimeographing,” and “should be cut down as it wasn’t as important as Public Speaking and Parliamentary Law” (Highlander, “Untitled Evaluations...” 3). Moreover, the skills we might expect students to learn in a journalism class—determining content according to the audience and the main idea aimed at, outlining, opening and closing, using stories, facts and figures, and the need for brevity—seem to have been covered in the course on public speaking (“Public Speaking”).² While the focus on mimeographing in the journalism sessions may well reflect the time-consuming nature of physically producing shop papers, the sensitivity of staff to these criticisms suggests that they too recognized the mechanical emphasis that had developed in the class.

Between 1938 and 1942 the shop papers produced at Highlander became less consistent and contained fewer issues. No shop papers are on file for 1938, though the school produced a detailed account of the school’s programs and activities in the *Highlander Folk School Review*. The *Review* nonetheless indicates that journalism was taught during the session, as it contains a summary of the class by Ralph Tefferteller. The class focused on producing three issues of the *Highlander Fling* rather than a shop paper specific to the term, with attention given to “gathering the material, writing news stories, cutting stencils and mimeographing” (19). Tefferteller further describes the composition skills covered in the class, focusing on such topics as the development of “hot spots” within a story and the use of first sentences and direct quotations (19). But most significant in this article is the articulation of a philosophy of labor journalism, centered around the need for organized labor to represent its concerns publicly and accurately in

shop papers and in the daily press; “If labor does not see to this job,” Tefferteller asks, “who will?” (20).

In 1939 students produced three issues of the *H.F.S. Voice* and one issue of the *Highlander Jacket*. The former of these was more national and international in focus, though a shop news column was included. The latter contained a gossip column and discussion of plays performed at the school, but lacked a masthead and editorials. Nonetheless, students reported positively on journalism sessions, asserting that the course “has been one of the most beneficial courses given this term” (*We the Students* 9). Their description of the course indicates that they covered interviews, letters to the editor, slanting labor articles, and physically producing the papers (9). Meanwhile students compiled two yearbooks entitled *We the Students* and *It Happened to Us*, as well as a *Union Problems Note Book*, representing a broader shift toward larger, more durable texts that could be included in the school’s publication lists. After the publication of two single issue papers in 1940 (*Highlander Chatterbox* and *Highlander Folk School Students Speak*), the school began producing “wall newspapers” that provided brief descriptive stories on national and international issues; local news made up less than 20% of wall newspaper content, a marked reduction from earlier papers.³ By 1942, shop papers disappear from discussions of residential sessions altogether.

Shop Papers and Extension Programs

It wasn’t long before the journalism taught to students during residential sessions became a part of Highlander’s extension programs. While these extension programs often looked similar in design to Highlander’s residential sessions, they were normally

initiated at the request of a specific union or union local. As the name suggests, extension programs were geographically located in the communities they hoped to serve, and were tailored to meet those communities' most pressing needs. In the context of union education programs, these needs were normally increased participation from union membership, organization and development of the union's human resources, and increased publicity. Given these needs, shop papers provided a remarkably useful and versatile means of engaging and developing union membership.

The use of shop papers in extension programs was met to address the problem of "reaching more of our membership" (Lawrance 31). Noting that the CIO had been experimenting with producing papers "under the auspices of a city or state council," Highlander staff decided to maximize the benefits they saw here by producing shop papers. While city or state papers were "much like national union papers," and "read thoroughly only by a few," local newspapers were able to more directly capture and reflect the immediate conditions to be found within a specific union or local. In a conclusion that was commensurate with Highlander's organic pedagogical model, staff member Mary Lawrance concludes that "[i]t is this personal and local character which makes shop papers so much more successful" (31).

In some cases, Highlander's extension efforts focused less on education programs and more on assisting ongoing labor struggles. As noted in chapter one, the Wilder coal strike and Grundy County bugwood strike were two of Highlander's more successful extension efforts. But the 1938 campaigns by Grundy County residents to secure much needed Works Projects Administration relief presented an opportunity for Highlander to

further develop its labor journalism work in relation to its support role for local labor efforts.

Highlander began offering informal classes for WPA workers in 1935, most of which centered on the low wages and deplorable working conditions that defined WPA projects in Grundy County (Glen 48). The folk school expanded its program in 1936, with the primary goal of raising WPA wages in the area. They attempted to achieve this goal in two ways: first, by organizing WPA workers into effective unions; second, by having Grundy County reclassified as an industrial (rather than agricultural) county (49). As the WPA unions became more active, they increasingly struck and agitated for better wages and working conditions, finally achieving a measure of success in December 1937 (50).

Nevertheless, disputes between the WPA administration and workers continued into 1938 (59). With Highlander's help, local workers formed the Labor's Political Conference of Grundy County, with the goal of placing "labor's candidates" into local office during the 1938 general election (60). The result was probably better than could have been hoped for: the conference elected a sheriff, school superintendent, and three road commissioners, thereby securing important influence in the running of WPA road projects (60). These gains quickly met with resistance, however, as opponents of Labor's Political Conference reduced the sheriff's wages and mileage allowance and cut off the electricity to the county office in which he worked. In January of the following year, the WPA commissioner for the area threatened to remove funds from road projects unless the three union road commissioners resigned.

As part of its role in organizing unions and cementing support for Labor's Political Conference, Highlander produced a shop paper for those involved in the WPA demonstrations. The *WPA Worker*, first published on August 2, 1938, reported on rallies organized by Labor's Political Conference and further documented the broader support for WPA demonstrations by listing visits from larger organizations such as the AFL, the Railroad Brotherhood, the Industrial Council of Chattanooga, and the United Mine Workers (*WPA Worker* 1). The goal behind much of this publicity was to drum up support for Labor's Political Conference candidates at upcoming county elections. This publicity was in part responsible for the election of conference candidates to the office of sheriff and road commissioner.

When, in January 1939, state WPA administrators refused to provide county officials with WPA contracts, the unions responded with rallies and an occupation of the relief office in Tracy City (61). Highlander staff again provided strikers with publicity in the form of new shop paper, *We the People*. This paper fostered solidarity among the socially and economically desperate sit-in participants, by reporting the broader community support the sit-ins received and responding to critics such as the *Chattanooga Free Press*. The three issues in the school's files collect song lyrics and reports on the strikers' demands, up to the intervention of a federal WPA administrator on February 16. Unfortunately, the support of the school and the sense of community it had fostered proved ineffective in the face of state WPA interests. By the summer of 1939, it was clear that the unions had secured little by way of long-term gains (62).

While these shop papers helped sustain a sense of community among the WPA strikers, Highlander's more formally structured extension programs were also teaching

unions how to compose and distribute their own labor papers. One of the folk school's earliest formal extension programs, run during 1937 for the Shirt Workers' Union in LaFollette, TN, produced a three-issue shop paper entitled *Shirt Tale*. While the paper was, in many respects, similar to the shop papers produced in residential sessions, it did contain a few noteworthy features. One was its promotion of a local "union label fair," where give-aways of union-made goods were used to educate students on labor politics (*Shirt Tale* 2, 1). But more remarkable was an article from the paper's third issue, entitled "Shades of Gastonia." This article not only attempted to link extension work at LaFollette to broader labor struggles such as those in Lumberton, N.C., but also to link anti-union policies among employers by noting that superintendents involved in the Gastonia mill strikes of the 1920s were now working for Mansfield and Jennings mills in Lumberton (*Shirt Tale* 3, 2).

Evaluations of the 1937 extension program indicate that some of the problems faced in residential journalism classes were also found in extension sessions. In a report titled "Field Classes for Labor Unions: An Experiment in Workers' Education," staff members acknowledged that the *Shirt Tale* may not have been the success that they hoped it would be. Noting that "[t]he real test is what happens afterward," the report concludes that "[m]ore effort might be made to get girls themselves to assume responsibility for each activity with a view to their carrying on after the school is over" (6). In this regard, "it might have been better to have had only one issue of the *Shirt Tale*, instead of three, and have had all the writing, editing, and mimeographing done by the girls themselves."

By 1940, the school was regularly involved in extension programs across the South, many of which included labor journalism and shop papers. A 1940 program run by Mary Lawrance for Aluminum Workers in Maryville, TN, led to the production and distribution of the *AWA News*. But despite distributing over 5000 copies of the paper, Lawrance continued to experience problems in motivating workers to initiate and run their own programs. It took several weeks to “get together a group of 3 men who could be relied on to help and to do a fairly good job,” and difficulties with mimeograph quality and distribution continued to be issues (Report 1). In her 1945 book on workers’ education, *Education Unlimited: a Handbook on Union Education in the South*, Lawrance notes that despite promising gains in organization and distribution, “no one on the committee had enough perseverance to push the paper alone, and when I left Alcoa it soon folded up” (33).

Harry Lasker encountered similar problems when he attempted to start a shop paper among Memphis CIO locals in 1941. Lasker attempted to start the *Memphis-Labor CIO* by producing two pages for union members to look over at their meetings, but noted that no-one turned up to the first class he was scheduled to teach (Weekly Report). Nonetheless, he continued to organize different members from locals in the area, several of them African American, to collect and write stories for the paper. In a weekly report from November, 1941, Lasker states that “I am first going to teach them how to write a story and I will continue to cut the stencils etc. and then I shall gradually teach them the whole thing so that they can take over” (Weekly Report). How successful his efforts were are hard to gauge—there is only one issue of the *Memphis-Labor CIO* on file, but this may be because it was the only one that Lasker himself produced.

But despite these early difficulties, Highlander staff were able to launch successful shop papers during extension sessions. In *Education Unlimited*, Mary Lawrance notes that one of her earliest extension programs, run in Louisville, produced a successful shop paper that was still running four years later (33). Her extension work in Memphis during 1944 and 1945 also produced two very successful papers. The first went untitled until its fifth issue (incorrectly labeled issue 1.6), when a competition among UAW Local 988 members resulted in the name *Victory Bomber* (*Victory Bomber* 1.6, 1). The paper focused on fostering union participation, and made use of sports reports and familiar cultural icons (such as front page columnist Rosie the Riveter) to foster optimism and solidarity. This complimented lengthy discussions of legislation and union protocols, presumably aimed at educating the membership about both local and national labor campaigns. While Lawrance conceded that the paper was “[n]ever well established,” the paper nevertheless ran to fifteen issues under her stewardship and was taken up by the local upon her departure (Report).

The second paper, the *Tennessee State Industrial Union Council Educational Bulletin* ran for four issues during 1945. This paper was far more overtly an educational paper, with prolonged discussions of the Tennessee state government, labor laws, the Bretton-Woods agreement, and the Roosevelt administration’s stance on labor issues. The breadth of material covered in the *Educational Bulletin* more than fulfilled the purposes outline by Lawrance in correspondence with Highlander:

The purpose of this Education Bulletin is threefold: (1) to work up interest and mass support of the 60,000,000 job program, (2) to make Tennessee CIO members better acquainted with their own labor laws and the operation of their

own state legislature, and (3) to report on educational programs underway in the State and to suggest programs and materials which could be used. (Lawrance to Highlander 1)

While there is little discussion of the effects or the effectiveness of the *TSIUC Educational Bulletin*, the general quality of the publication, its issue length of four pages, and the production of four issues under Lawrance's stewardship, mark it as one of the more successful projects of its kind.

But perhaps the most informative shop paper project was produced in 1947, for United Chemical Workers Local 179 in New Orleans. While there is only one issue of the *Union Digest* on record in the Highlander files, we have a more or less complete discussion of how the paper was established and why. In two organizational meetings held in October, 1947, staff determined what elements to include in their new paper, and what purposes the paper needed to serve ("Summary"). While there is little surprising in the purposes they came up with—"education," "create interest in the union," and "public relations"—the detailed manner in which the paper was formatted is remarkable. The staff decided to give permanent space and editorial attention to grievance procedures, political action, personals, cartoons, sports, and shop news. The paper was eventually named by staff vote. The democratic means by which editorial meetings ran, and the manner in which the paper was composed and tasks delegated, suggests that staff were increasingly able to use papers to meet their goals of developing and galvanizing active union membership.

A particularly informative set of reflections on the use of shop papers with Highlander's extension programs can be found in *Education Unlimited*, Mary Lawrance's

guide to union education in the south. Following her extension experience in Maryville, Tennessee, Lawrance cautions would-be education directors that “[f]irst you must sell the union the idea” (31). Following this, educational directors should assemble an active staff prepared to learn about producing shop papers. While Lawrance is quick to advise “introduce the committee gradually to the work,” she is nonetheless adamant that “the committee must collect news from the plant for the first issue” (31). Not until the committee has demonstrated that they will be responsible for the bulk of production and distribution duties, should the education director think about expanding the paper beyond one double-sided page.

Lawrance’s advice is worthy of attention for two reasons. The first is the attention paid by Lawrance to helping educational directors develop knowledgeable, active newspaper staff. Her advice ranges from practical inventional questions (to be asked of staff that are having difficulties finding news) to advice on overseeing printing and distribution of the paper. The second feature of Lawrance’s advice is that it focuses less on prescribing the content needed in a shop paper, and more on the kinds of organizational tasks that will ensure a paper’s success. The attention to the development and organization of newspaper staff suggests that, within extension programs at least, shop papers were less exercises in composition and more exercises in practical union action. While we should probably read Lawrance’s comments on shop papers as reflections on her own extension efforts, rather than a pedagogical theory that drove extension work, they nonetheless reflect the concern of Highlander staff to prepare students for active union work by immersing them in it.

Highlander's Southern Writers Schools

While labor journalism became a staple of the curriculum during Highlander's first ten years, it certainly wasn't the only writing instruction conducted at the school in that period. Beginning in 1939, Highlander conducted summer writers' schools, with the idea of promoting and encouraging young southern writers. While these workshops were cancelled after only four years, they remain an important part of the folk school's early history. Through its writers' workshops, Highlander would develop resources that proved foundational to future labor journalism classes.

The first summer writer's school was held at Highlander in 1939, as a joint effort between the folk school and the League of American Writers. The League was the successor to the John Reed Clubs, literary organizations formed in 1929 under the loose auspices of the Communist Party (George et al 50). Following the rise of the German Nazi Party and Stalin's call for a popular front against fascism, the Communist Party decided to dissolve the John Reed Clubs and form an organization that was capable of garnering liberal and progressive support (Wald 77).

The official formation of the League came at the first American Writers' Congress in 1935. The call to found the organization came from one of the Communist Party's most active American members, Alexander Trachtenberg (Wald 76). Trachtenberg had himself been involved in the events leading up to the 1905 Russian revolution and had become an active member of the Communist Party following the 1917 revolution. While Trachtenberg's own literary reputation was marginal at best, he nonetheless played an important role in the development of a proletarian press; in 1924 he founded International Publishers with his colleague Abraham Heller. As the

Communist Party's American publishing house, International Publishers made available many popular translations of works by Marx, Engels, Lenin and other notable Marxist authors.

The 1935 American Writers' Congress, while an overall success, was nonetheless marked by difficulties that would plague the League throughout its lifespan. Both Communists and liberals participated actively in the Congress and agreed on the need for a popular front, but remained at odds about how best to achieve their goals. Communists expressed disdain for liberal calls to move beyond their focus on the proletariat, while liberals remained skeptical about just how inclusive the Congress really was. Despite these difficulties, the League of American Writers formed at the end of the Congress, and eventually attracted as members such authors as Claude McKay, Richard Wright, Langston Hughes, Malcolm Cowley, and Thomas Mann.

By the time the second American Writers' Congress was held in 1937, the League was arguably the most prominent literary organization in the country. Nonetheless, the internal difficulties between the League's communist and liberal factions would soon contribute to the organization's decline (Kutulas 73). While the Spanish Civil War had provided communists and liberals within the league with a common issue to rally around, the appointment of Franklin Folsom as League Executive Secretary marked an increased effort by Communist Party members to exert control over league affairs (74). Following the Moscow Trials and the Hitler-Stalin pact, liberals became increasingly disaffected with the League's Communist leadership and began to resign their memberships and withhold their dues (76). By the time the League held its third American Writers'

Congress in 1939—the same year the League ran its first Southern Writers' School at Highlander—it was a deeply divided organization.

Correspondence between Jim Dombrowski and League executive secretary Frank Folsom indicates that Highlander's writers' workshop initially represented a way for the league to increase its activities in the south (Folsom to Dombrowski 1). In return for this opportunity, the League agreed to help finance the workshop and find suitable staff. As it ran, the workshop comprised classes in poetry, fiction, and article writing, and was presided over by Lillian Barnard Gilkes, who also ran the League's New York writers' school. The workshop was considered a success by both the League and Highlander, and arrangements were made for another workshop in the summer of 1940. The format of the first school was retained, though the writers involved in teaching the various courses changed. Benjamin Appel taught fiction, Barry Stavis playwriting, James Dugan journalism, and Millen Brand consulted on poetry. Dugan's course also represents the first significant expansion of journalism at the school, as it covered "publicity, article writing and the technique of the photographic article" ("Writers Workshop").

Prior to the 1941 writers' school, the League of American Writers' decided to withdraw its funding, ostensibly to concentrate on similar schools of their own. However, the League at that point found itself battling financial difficulties and an increasingly tarnished reputation. By the end of 1940, many of League's top names—including Sam Grafton, Upton Sinclair, Malcolm Cowley, and Archibald MacLeish—had resigned in disgust over the top-down manner in which the league's communist leadership determined organizational policy and the perceived hypocrisy of the Hitler-Stalin pact (Kutulas 76-77). Of equal concern was the loss of dues and financial support

that resulted as non-communists left the league. This organizational crisis—one that would eventually lead to the League’s dissolution in 1942—no doubt played a large part in the cancellation of the League’s 1941 Southern Writers’ School.

Despite the change in sponsorship, Highlander staff decided to run the 1941 writers’ school under its own banner. The 1941 school was in many ways made possible by the arrival at Highlander of Leon Wilson, son of famous southern writer Harry Leon Wilson. Not content to trade on his father’s success, Leon had shortened his own name (from Harry Leon Wilson Jr.) and moved to Hollywood to work as a screenwriter (Griffith to Highlander). But after three years, he longed to move back to the south and concentrate on writing with fewer pecuniary interests attached. Following an introduction from a friend in 1940, Wilson joined the folk school staff later the same year.

He proved to be a capable director for the 1941 writers’ workshop and secured the involvement of fiction writer Mary Lapsley, playwright Lealon Jones, and associate editor for the *Reader’s Digest*, Charles Wright Ferguson. Lapsley was well-received, and had students submit stories for a publishers’ competition. Jones had the playwriting class produce a play, but was generally poorly received. But most notably, Ferguson used Highlander itself as the content for his journalism class. Despite his concerns about overemphasizing marketing and not assigning enough writing, Ferguson proved to be one of the most popular teachers on record (“Evaluation Notes” 1).

Ferguson’s class appears to be the first systematic class taught on journalism at the school. In a letter to Leon Wilson in the lead-up to the workshop, Ferguson described a course that would “give pointers on the whole field of non-fiction journalism”

(Ferguson to Wilson). Beginning with a discussion of “the growth of the article in recent years, dating perhaps from the rise of the American Mercury under Mencken,” Ferguson moved on to discuss such journalistic fields as newspaper journalism, magazines, and journals of opinion, and such genres as the feature story, the human interest story, fact and think pieces, and interviews. But Ferguson also introduced students to radio journalism and photographic essays, thereby maintaining and further developing James Dugan’s broader approach to the subject (Ferguson to Wilson).

The content for the course came from the folk school itself. Ferguson had students write about Highlander “in connection with a so-called public relations campaign,” with the hopes that students would produce work that would prove useful to the school’s future work (Ferguson to Wilson). Students were encouraged to write articles “some designed for *The Nation*, some for *The American*, some for Sunday papers, and so on.” The class was thus asked to “plan and actually work out a complete program, exploiting every conceivable possibility, so that if their deliberations were fruitful enough, we might really have something to turn over to the school in the way of ideas.” Ferguson’s pedagogical approach thus merged the practical aspects of publicity with the folk school’s own concern that class should begin with the knowledge and experiences that the students already had to hand.

Ferguson was unable to participate in the fourth writers workshop held in 1942. So Wilson instead turned to Al Sinks, publisher of *The Country Book*. Mary Lapsley returned to teach fiction, and Barry Stavis was again set to teach playwriting. But courses on publicity and “the meaning of meaning” were added to the schedule after Stavis proved unable to attend. While there is little information on what these new

classes covered, reports on the session indicate that the workshop was themed around writers' responsibility to the war effort, and that students wrote a total of twelve articles using a variety of media ("About the Writer's Workshop" 1; "Evaluation Meeting" 1).

But other events in 1942 would conspire to make this the last writers' workshop held at the school. Faced with being drafted, Leon Wilson resigned from the school before declaring himself a conscientious objector (Wilson to Highlander Staff). Despite Wilson's disagreement with Highlander's support of the war, and his greater concern still that his refusal to fight would reflect negatively on the school, Highlander staff did what they could to support him during this period. He formally resigned from the school's staff in September 1942, but remained at Highlander until his draft status was resolved (Unaddressed letter). He was finally arrested on March 18, 1943 and transferred to Monterey, California where he was sentenced to two years in jail. While he maintained contact with the school during his incarceration, and often told staff how much he missed the campus, he did not return to Highlander following his parole in 1944 (Summers to Rumbough).⁴

With Wilson absent, the 1943 writers' workshop soon faltered. While the lack of student interest appears to be the greatest factor in the cancellation of the workshop, it is reasonable to expect that Highlander staff were unable to reproduce the name recognition and community knowledge that Wilson had brought with him (Horton to Haessler 1). But the failure of the writers' workshop didn't mean the end of special sessions devoted to writing instruction at Highlander. Instead, staff agreed to extend the labor journalism component of the workshop, which was to be taught by Carl Haessler. This decision

would fundamentally shape the way that labor journalism was taught at the folk school over the next four years.

Labor Journalism during the War Years

Following the cancellation of the 1943 writers' workshop, Highlander staff decided to go ahead with a week-long labor journalism class in its place. This journalism class was an extended version of the journalism sessions taught in previous writers' workshops, and was taught by Carl Haessler, managing editor of the Federated Press, who was originally slated to teach in the larger workshop. Haessler would continue to teach summer labor journalism sessions from 1943-1946, for the most part using the syllabus he developed for the first course.

The syllabus is a noteworthy document, as it once again introduces a more formal theory and set of conventions to Highlander's labor journalism curriculum. Haessler's concept of labor journalism looks very similar to Zilphia Horton's theory of workers' theater, and emphasized that "labor papers are owned by the same class that reads them—the working class—while most other papers are owned by one class but read by another" (Haessler, "OUTLINE"). Following this theory, Haessler focused most of his attention during his Highlander workshops on shop papers, and producing copy for smaller, local presses.

"The heart of the labor paper," Haessler's syllabus continues, "is the shop news" ("OUTLINE"). In teaching students how to write plant gossip columns, Haessler taught students to be good-natured and pro-union, and to avoid humiliating or scandalous stories. This emphasis on shop news suggests that for Haessler the paper was a vehicle

not only for promoting the union, but also for fostering a sense of collective identity within factories and union locals. In extended notes for the 1944 labor journalism session, he concludes that “[i]f you can get a lively shop news column or page, with each department represented you will have a well read paper, without much competition” (“Suggestions” 1).

In addition to shop news, Haessler also emphasized the importance of “union leadership,” “sport and social events,” and “the union and the war” (“Suggestions” 1). Union leadership covered the need for “stories reporting what the union, local and/or international is doing for the membership, references to what it has done, and forecasts of what it is going to do, always with credit for good membership support.” Sport and social events, including announcements, ads, scores, and pictures, present the “easiest way to interest many union members in the union as their organization.” Finally, shop papers were to play an important part in American war efforts, by combining government material and participation in war drives with a concern for the local impact of conflict.

In addition to introducing students to broader themes and topics for shop papers, Haessler also taught them the conventions involved in composing articles and formatting shop papers (“OUTLINE”). Students were introduced to such genres as columns, announcements, editorials, features, and press statements, and taught how to compose lead sentences and headlines. Sessions on formatting covered the front pages, headlines, and the use of art, along with practical considerations such as paper and ink quality, distribution and postal regulations, and the issue of libel. Finally, students were also taught how to assemble and manage editorial boards and reporting staff. This included

not only how to delegate tasks, but also how to interact with the paper's readership and avoid involvement in potential in-fighting and leadership contests.

All of these issues were introduced to students via practical writing assignments. Haessler's 1943 syllabus links homework assignments for each session to his overall theory of writing:

The only way to pick up journalism is by writing. Therefore the regular assignment each time is to bring in a story, for which instructions will be given before the end of each session. Your story is your admission ticket to the next session. ("OUTLINE")

The first two assignments for the course asked students to compose a page of shop news and a story on a local Christmas party. The next three assignments had students format a front page, select artwork, and localize a more general labor story. The course thus had students practice focused revision as well as producing original copy. Haessler would then review the work handed in for each class, and return it to students with comments attached.⁵

Haessler's courses on labor journalism thus emphasized the shop paper as important means for developing the union movement in two specific ways. First, by focusing on local content such as local union happenings and shop news, shop papers became an agency for the development of solidarity and collective action. By attending to personal events and recreational activities, shop papers developed solidarity less as a form of class consciousness (though this was certainly one of the goals of more informational sections of the paper) and more as involvement in an active community. Second, the organizational aspects of assembling an editorial board, delegating tasks, and

having union members act as reporters, provided a means for the development of union leadership and more active participation from membership.

In addition to summer labor journalism sessions, Highlander continued to produce shop papers both for residential session and for war-time extension initiatives. In 1942, the school established a labor research department, with the intention of helping “organizers, local unions, extension workers and educators in the field” to negotiate wartime labor issues. To this end the labor research department “put out materials and pamphlets with interpretative information on labor legislation and government agencies,” and served as “a news exchange between different locals” (Press Release 1; Elkuss, 1942 1). The materials produced included pamphlets on the war labor board and issues such as contract negotiations and grievances, and a regular bulletin entitled *Labor News*.

This latter publication, which included seventeen issues between Jan 1942 and February 1943, kept organizers up-to-date on the War Labor Board while providing further news on national and international labor laws. While it necessarily lacked the local feel of a shop papers, its combination of news, information, and labor optimism nonetheless drew on the same conventions. The bulletin was generally well received, and research director Bill Elkuss was able to quote a Labor Representative on the War Production Board as saying “[y]our bulletins are excellent, because of their simplicity...” One regional CIO director concurred, claiming that “they (bulletins) are very good and can be used to good advantage by our local unions as well as field representatives...” (Elkuss 1943, 1).

The 1944 summer residential session, while not listing labor journalism in its course announcements, also furthered Highlander’s journalistic efforts in relation to the

war. While students continued to put together one and two-sheet wall newspapers, they also initiated *INFO*, a newspaper intended to provide labor news and discussion to servicemen. The lack of an editorial masthead makes it difficult to determine whether the paper was a student or staff initiative, and to what degree it was really responding to requests from servicemen for reliable news. Nevertheless, *INFO* long outlived the residential session, finally comprising twenty-five issues from September 1944 to September 1945. During that time, the paper reported on race issues in the military, labor legislation in the U.S. congress, the 1944 presidential election, CIO conventions and victories, and the implications for labor of the end of war. While containing much the same content and views that defined other Highlander shop papers, both the Research Department's *Labor News* and *INFO* are noteworthy for their longevity; aside from the *Highlander Fling* and the *Summerfield News*, these were the longest-running newspapers the folk school produced.

Highlander continued to produce shop papers for CIO residential terms, which were an annual fixture at the school from 1944 to 1953. During the 1945 term, students produced a shop paper subtitled *The Southern CIO School Monitor*. The actual title for the paper changed during the course of the session from *The Dopes* to *Smarties* to *Brilliant*s, presumably in reflection of students' growing knowledge on union issues. The paper totaled four issues, with students rotating through editorial positions, and covered shop news, editorials, sports, and summaries of classes.

But evaluations of the term indicate that, despite the apparent experience students received, staff considered it "a very poor education" ("Evaluation of CIO Term"). They considered the paper "only a scandal sheet, poorly written and poorly mimeographed,"

with the editorial staff involving only the “best gossip people.” Conclusions that papers should be produced “for a purpose, not practice” and that the journalism class should be “[p]urely voluntary” seems to echo the evaluations from 1936, while calls for more interviewing and better publicity surrounding the paper suggest that staff failed to structure the journalism course with the effectiveness they had in early residential sessions.

The CIO terms held from 1946-1953 saw focus shifting away from shop papers. In 1946, *Highlander Highlights* was published just once at the conclusion of the session. There were three papers published during the 1947 term: two issues of *The Highlander Flash* and one of *The Roundup*. *The CIO United* was published once during the 1948 session, though it had an unusual length at 7 pages. The next shop paper on file is the five-issue *News* from the 1952 term, a one-page production that paid little attention to the journalistic conventions stressed in previous sessions. *The Bulletin*, published for the 1953 term, contained more of the sections and features common to Highlander papers, but little by way of formatting or layout.

There seem to be three reasons for this shift in production and quality. The first is the trend toward wall newspapers, which gave students practice in mimeographing and writing without distracting them with larger problems of layout and editorial staff composition. The second is the dramatic shortening of the CIO’s residential sessions, which were reduced from a month in 1944 to a week in 1953. Under these time constraints, it seems that “yearbooks” became a preferred method of encouraging and collecting student writing. Nevertheless, the shift was to prove permanent; with

Highlander's shift in operational focus from the labor movement to the Civil Rights Movement, shop papers all but disappeared from the school's curriculum.

Residential Session Yearbooks and Autobiographical Writing

While the majority of publications produced in writing classes at Highlander were shop papers, the school also produced a number of other noteworthy, student-authored publications. The largest of these were the yearbooks produced during residential sessions, beginning in 1937. While these books varied both in length and in their contents, they all collected student writings on labor and the labor movement. These collections at once functioned as records of solidarity, while preserving the individual stories brought to Highlander by students from all over the South.

It isn't surprising that yearbooks were produced exclusively at residential sessions. These sessions were far more formally organized than extension programs, with definite durations and class schedules. Yearbooks would thus provide an excellent "bookend" for a successful residential session, and a record of the session for students involved. Highlander staff certainly understood the yearbooks in this way, as they often had students include class summaries and schedules from residential sessions in the yearbooks they produced. By including summaries of residential sessions alongside accounts of the students who attended them, Highlander staff also produced useful publicity materials for future residential sessions. In some cases, yearbooks were made available through Highlander's publication order forms ("Order Blank" 1).

There were twelve publications that could be classified as yearbooks produced in Highlander residential session between 1938 and 1947. While these books varied greatly

in length, and also in their content, they all had the same basic format. Material published in the books looked in many cases like standard college essays, with double-spaced lines and single column production. These materials were secured between heavier card covers, and secured with two or three staples. The covers and the contents of the yearbooks were composed, stenciled and mimeographed by students of the residential session in question.

The first yearbooks produced at the school were the *Highlander Folk School Review* and *Let Southern Labor Speak*, which were produced during the 1938 winter term. The *Highlander Folk School Review* was a summary of the classes students attended, and a general record of the over all session. *Let Southern Labor Speak*, which ran to 79 pages in length, collected “the speeches made by outstanding labor leaders at the Winter Term, 1938, of the Highlander Folk School, Monteagle, Tennessee, also the dramatic stories of labor experiences as told by the students gathered from southern states” (1). The speeches were collected in the first section of the book, but the bulk of the text was devoted to student stories about their own labor struggles. The stories collected were not necessarily didactic, and many didn’t contain overt lessons or morals. But they were, nonetheless, detailed and articulate records of local labor struggles from the period, including particularly engaging accounts from Tupelo and Hattiesburg, Mississippi. Insofar as many of these stories recounted the successes of collective action, they reflected the optimistic tone often found in the folk school’s shop papers.

In 1939, the school produced three more yearbooks – the *Students Union Problems Notebook* and *We the Students* during the winter session, and *It Has Happened to Us* during the summer session. The *Student Union Problems Notebook* was an

exception to the general format for HFS yearbooks, being “composed of ideas and conclusions arrived at in the Union Problems Class” (1). The book was then divided into two sections, the first containing notes from student discussions with guest speakers and the second containing practical measures devised by students to handle problems with union locals. *We the Students* combined the contents of the *Highlander Folk School Review* and *Let Southern Labor Speak*, collecting session summaries alongside student stories in the one volume. *It Has Happened to Us*, the shortest yearbook produced at the school, contained only student narratives. But noteworthy in both these latter publications is an increasing turn to autobiographical accounts, and the development of labor-unity themes in a many of the students’ writings.

The yearbooks published during the next two years would follow the trends that emerged in the yearbooks from 1939. The yearbooks produced in 1940—*I Know What It Means* and *Our Lives*—and 1941—*The South Tomorrow* and *We Know The Score*—were exclusively collections of student narratives, which were predominantly autobiographical pieces. But along with this narrowing of the yearbooks’ contents came improved writing and a much broader range of themes. *I Know What It Means* was named after the lead story in the book, which used the refrain “I know what it means” to introduce the shame and violence that attended the lives of the Southern poor. In the same book was a two-and-a-half page discussion of American racism, which concluded that democratic unions needed to extend their protections and benefits to African Americans. While there was still a high percentage of union “conversion narratives” and labor-unity calls, the use of autobiographical writing opened up a range of topics on which students chose to write.

Two narratives published in the yearbooks for 1941 further inform us about how students understood the education and the writing practices they were engaged in at Highlander. Joel Matthews, writing in *The South Tomorrow*, reflects on the residential session as practice in democratic living:

I came to Highlander to learn trade unionism. I have not only had the privilege of learning, but have had the privilege of enjoying the first requisite of successful unionism—cooperation and brotherhood in everyday life.

Jim Riggle of the American Newspaper Guild acknowledged the impact of labor journalism in his own story for *We Know The Score*, when he describes another student's suggestion that he name his story "The Way I Look At It": "He says it gives my slant and not what another person's might be" (18). We could thus cautiously venture that the autobiographical writing completed for these yearbooks at once affirmed the value of individual experience while at the same time emphasizing the shared interests that emerged from students' narratives.

While there are no yearbooks on file for the years 1942-1944, the 1945 Southern CIO School saw a return to this form of publication, and to the themes that had emerged from the yearbooks published in 1940 and 1941. Students at the CIO School produced a collection of autobiographical narrative that reflected on life as a worker, the benefits of unionism, the costs and benefits of union organizing, and the split between the AFL and the CIO. But of particular interest is the title of the book *60 Million Jobs: Autobiography of a Union Member*. While the lead title seems to be little more than an acknowledgement of President Roosevelt's plan for post-war employment, the subtitle speaks to the kind of work that students and staff saw the yearbook doing. The use of the

singular noun, “autobiography,” at once acknowledges the singular nature of students’ writings while nonetheless gesturing to the composite nature of the union movement. By collecting individual narratives on labor and union organizing, the yearbook provided a more accurate document of “the worker” at the heart of the labor cause.

Two more yearbooks were produced during the 1946 and 1947 Southern CIO Schools, though yearbook production seems to have stopped following this due to the shortening of CIO residential terms. *Tomorrow is Ours*, produced for the 1946 CIO School, follows a similar format to *60 Million Jobs*, and contains mainly autobiographical stories and labor-unity themes. 1947’s *We’re on the Freedom Trail*, however, sees a shift away from the autobiographical narrative toward more journalistic articles on the Taft-Hartley Bill, racial discrimination, and—for the first time in over five years—reports on sessions from the CIO term. But the personal accounts that are included in this document continue to reflect on the shared interests of the many unions attending the term. One student asserts that “all our problems are common problems, which exist in all local unions” acknowledging both the specificity of labor struggles and their unity in a larger movement. Another student, writing a farewell letter to the folk school and a rallying cry for unions across the country, states that “[w]e feel stronger now because we know we aren’t one union standing alone, but that we are all together, fighting for the same thing” (17). The construction of this broader movement, and the sessions completed by students during the CIO school “will mean a lot to our local unions in the future” (17).

The yearbooks produced at Highlander were, quite literally, records of the labor movement. By collecting the stories of students from all walks of life, these yearbooks made apparent the common violence and oppression that resulted from poverty and

exploitative labor practices. Students were given these books at the end of the residential sessions not simply as evidence of the common plight of labor in the South, but also of the solidarity that existed between the various struggles each student faced individually. In some yearbooks, such as *Let Southern Labor Speak*, students' own struggle were placed alongside the experiences and arguments of labor organizers and guest speakers: "Taken together it gives some indication of the fight that southern workers are making to build a labor movement to end exploitation and injustice" (1). But HFS yearbooks were not simply records of "class consciousness," though some student certainly understood them in this way. They were, quite literally, the products of labor organization and cooperation.

By suggesting that these documents represented more than simple "class consciousness," I hope to highlight the importance that HFS yearbooks accorded individual experience. By preserving individual accounts of poverty, exploitation, and labor struggle, these documents also preserved their specificity—even as they asserted the equality of workers and organizers within the union movement. Each student found a place for their own experience with organized labor, and further found these experiences placed in dialogue with other similar experiences. According to HFS yearbooks, the labor movement was more than the achieving of a common conscious, and could be found in the communication and collaboration between individuals struggling for the same things: job security, a living wage, food and shelter for their families. But it's precisely the pressing needs these students faced that provide the basis for collective action; as Bert Huddleston wrote in *We're on the Freedom Trail*, "I leave with a better understanding of what concerns other people, also concerns me" (22).

Writing, Identification and Organization

It is tempting to see the shop papers and the yearbooks produced in Highlander's labor journalism classes as successful examples of collaborative writing, and as agencies for fostering collective identities among workers and furthering the labor movement. The combination of shop news, articles composed with a local slant, and reports of union victories, create a picture of a thriving union community in which workers achieve the solidarity needed to win bigger labor battles. And for the most part, such an assessment would seem to be common sense—after all, what would the purpose of shop papers be, if not to foster solidarity among the members of a given union or union local?

But it would be a mistake to confuse the purpose assigned to these shop papers with discussion of how these papers were written, and the effects they actually had. Taken as records of Highlander's labor journalism classes, rather than as documents simply designed to persuade workers to collective action, these papers seem far less successful. Reports from the 1936 and 1945 residential sessions suggest that, far from being successful collaborations among students, shop papers were often produced in large part by Highlander staff, with student assisting primarily with mimeographing. The dissatisfaction expressed by staff over the unfulfilled potential of *the Southern CIO School Monitor* suggests that some of the folk school's shop papers represent little more than mechanical practice divorced from any sense of purpose or context.

In making such an assessment, however, we should acknowledge the pragmatic sense of focusing on mimeographing and stencil-cutting in labor journalism classes. While Highlander staff were familiar with the works of Erskine Caldwell, Leo

Huberman, and W.J. Cash, they had little reason to assume that students would also know these works. By starting with the practical side of newspaper production, Highlander staff avoided stifling students with discussions of journalistic traditions and potentially providing them with intimidating examples to follow. While the quality of work produced by students such as Boyd Whitson, and the success that Charles Ferguson had teaching journalism, suggests that such fears were to some degree unfounded, Highlander's folk school mission suggests that they would have occurred to staff at some point.

It should also be noted at the outset that the time available to Highlander staff probably forced them to compromise between a student-run, collaborative ideal and the production of a concrete paper to serve as an example of what was possible in union education programs. While residential sessions started out at more than a month in length, they had been reduced to a week—maybe two—by 1947. This no doubt affected how much students could actually do in their labor journalism sessions, particularly if we consider the additional workload of their other courses. Understood in this light, Highlander's shop papers appear to be fairly remarkable achievements.

Despite these limitations, it is worth noting the kinds of collaborative practices that were encouraged and produced during the composition of shop papers. But these practices need to be understood as a means of furthering union organization, which remained the constant goal of Highlander's early residential and extension programs. This focus on organization, while not always apparent in the form or the content of the shop papers themselves, was nonetheless an important issue during the production process. Students were taught how to organize editorial staff and how to recruit reporters

from union membership. By learning how to organize and run a successful shop paper, students also learned how to initiate and complete other successful educational projects within their locals. Students further received hands-on organizing experience, albeit limited, as they actually completed shop papers. This kind of direct experience was a central aspect of the Highlander Idea.

By focusing on the journalism classes rather than the writing they produced, I do not mean to suggest that the shop papers produced in those classes are unimportant documents. At the very least, these documents provide readers with an amazingly rich and varied portrait of labor and the labor movement in the South. But we might also conclude, following Karyn Hollis's work on the Bryn Mawr Summer School, that these documents are noteworthy examples of heteroglossic writing—writing that emphasizes the collective nature of the labor movement (Hollis 69). Students transformed their own personal experiences, combining them through the use of journalistic discourse to provide a collective account of labor struggle. The yearbooks produced during residential session emphasize this point even more clearly, as they collect in dialogic fashion the individual accounts provided by students.

It's also tempting to see in such heteroglossic composition the emergence of class consciousness or a collective will. But it seems more accurate to suggest that the shop papers and yearbooks produced at Highlander are material extensions of the labor movement itself; that is, far from producing class consciousness, these documents deploy a collective identity as a foundation for the actions of an already recognizable movement. Their rhetorical function, then, is not so much consciousness-raising as it is identification (Burke, *Rhetoric of Motives* 20-1). Shop papers, by providing union members with an

account of their local's activities and victories, allow these members to participate in these aspects of union life. By asserting that these victories are collective victories, shop papers helped students identify with the momentum essential to the success of the labor movement.

Highlander yearbook's present an even more complicated mechanism of identification, as it makes use of students' individual voices rather than constructing a collective voice like we find in shop papers (*Rhetoric* 21). Perhaps the most noteworthy aspect of the identification effected by HFS yearbooks is that, despite their availability through Highlander's publication lists, they seem directed primarily to the students who composed them. Insofar as students were encouraged to write for the yearbook, and place their stories alongside those of other students, they identified themselves with the collective experience of the labor movement. But insofar as their individual experiences were also preserved in the pages of the yearbook, students created what Kenneth Burke calls a consubstantial space—a space where students found their individual experience preserved within the network of a broader social movement (*Rhetoric* 21). The identification of individual experience with a broader social movement thereby cast students not as workers, but as active movement participants.

It is important not to make this identification seem more fantastic than it is. No shop paper or yearbook produced at Highlander ever won a strike or negotiated a union contract; that is, we should bear in mind that the labor movement was first and foremost a movement of people and their struggles. The process of identification to be found in shop papers and yearbooks is naturally limited in its social effects. But it was an important process, insofar as it further mobilized union members within the labor

movement. Highlander staff recognized community organization and the development of collective identities as central concerns for an emerging labor movement. Suffice to say, while this labor movement itself relied on the physical action and determination of participants, Highlander's writing classes nonetheless played an important rhetorical role in developing those participants.

Understood in terms of this rhetorical function, Highlander's writing classes were intimately linked to labor organization and the development of active union leadership. Both the practical shop paper experience offered to students and the identification produced through the act of composition were understood as rhetorical contributions to Southern Labor Movement. Hence Highlander staff understood writing instruction not as the rehearsal of written genres or the development of one's voice (though certainly some of this might have occurred); rather, writing was understood rhetorically and pedagogical as a means of organizing labor unions and developing collective identities among southern workers. The emphasis on writing as an agency of identification, and as an agency for organizing union membership, in turn extended Highlander's pedagogical goals of using education as an agency of democratic living.

NOTES

¹ The document containing the session evaluations carries the date "1936 Summer," written in pencil on the first page. However, the paper on which the evaluations were typed was recycled from other documents, and contains a letter dated to 1937. It seems unlikely that Highlander staff would copy the document a year or more after the date, and still retain the fragmentary prose of the original document. I therefore assume that the document was produced in 1937, and is more likely to refer to a residential session held in that year as well.

² The "Public Speaking" handout contained in Box 59, folder 9, of the HREC Records contains no date, and no internal markers by which to assume a date for its production. Nonetheless, I've taken it to be indicative of the range of topics covered by staff members during sessions on public speaking, as it would reflect the folk school's approach to the subject even if it is produced after the actual classes under discussion here. Nonetheless, we need to remember that the handout only outlines the range of topics covered in the class, and doesn't necessarily tell us which of these topics were actually covered.

³ The wall newspapers produced at Highlander during 1941 and 1944 can be found in Box 62, folders 4 and 6, in the HREC Records.

⁴ Wilson's fears about his relationship with Highlander proved correct, but governmental prejudice didn't flow in the direction he had initially anticipated. He was initially denied parole on the grounds that Highlander was a communist front school, and it wasn't until ACLU lawyers intervened that parole was granted (29/36).

⁵ Copies of student papers, complete with Haessler's comments, can be found in Box 61, folder 2, of the HREC Records.

CHAPTER FOUR: MUSIC EDUCATION AND COLLECTIVE ACTION

Highlander's residential sessions and extension programs were complemented throughout the school's history by an ambitious cultural program, built for the most part around folk music and singing. While the most notable contribution of this program was to the Civil Rights Movement, music was a part of the folk school from its first day of operation.

Don West was a folk musician as well as being a poet, and other staff members helped to organize piano lessons and community nights focused around square-dancing. With the arrival of Zilphia Horton, the most accomplished musician Highlander had seen at that time, the music program developed into a central element in the school's workers' education programs and residential workshops. While the program experienced decline following the death of Zilphia and Highlander's move away from labor unions, it was revitalized with the arrival of Guy Carawan at the school in 1959. Under his guidance, music education at the folk school became one of its central programs, and eventually contributed a number of freedom songs—most notably “We Shall Overcome”—to the Civil Rights Movement.

Given the long established links between folk music, the American Left, and social movements, Highlander's attention to music is hardly surprising. Nonetheless, the influence of Highlander's music program on the emerging Civil Rights Movement is remarkable, and speaks to the sophisticated rhetorical use the school made of its cultural programs. Recognizing early the necessity of music and indigenous culture to outreach efforts in Southern Appalachia, Highlander staff remained committed to Zilphia Horton's conviction that “music is the language of and to life” (Adams 76). Not only did this lead

them to embrace folk music, protest songs, spirituals, and freedom songs as organic expressions of collective identity, it also led them to recognize the organizational potential that music had with emergent social movements. Highlander staff considered music important not only because it communicated the political messages of the folk school's students, but also because music and mass singing were important agencies for the creation and maintenance of collective action. The commitment of staff to these principles, and the effectiveness with which they acted upon them, led Thomas Bledsoe to conclude that Highlander was "a place where it was right to sing, to dance, and to talk" (140).

Early Establishment of the Music Program

Highlander's music programs started the same year that the folk school opened. Myles Horton and Don West had recognized early the need to integrate the folk school into the life and rhythms of the Cumberland community. Music lessons offered a natural means for this integration, and Rupert Hampton reported that during the 1933-1934 year "[t]hirty-one students, whose ages range from 4 to 19, have taken piano lessons at the school" ("Summer School Report"). In addition, the folk school initiated community nights, where locals could gather and lay out their problems and their needs:

At Highlander we continued to set aside an evening each week for a community gathering. Usually the programs were informal, consisting of singing and dancing and occasional discussions of social, economic and political problems. There were forums on war, the importance of defending and extending democracy against fascism, race problems, the social teachings of the Bible, old and modern

Russia, social developments in Scandinavian countries, and the labor movement in the South. (*Long Haul* 75)

The community nights from which Highlander's musical program would emerge were at once cultural and pedagogical. But the primary function of community nights was to bring Cumberland residents together *as* a community.

To that end, Highlander staff encouraged the community to return to Appalachian forms of cultural expression, in particular folk music and dancing. These nights further created a way for locals to interact with residential students at the folk school, a process which is described in an anonymous folk school article entitled "Fiddlin' and Square-dancin'":

The mountain community, young and old, is carrying on in the old square dances as their fathers have done before them, with their grand-pappies and theirs in turn, a long line behind them through the generations of mountain life. Yet to-night a new element is merging itself with them, the sons and daughters of the Valley people, the city people, the youth who are now among them for the summer time, living as the mountain people live, new friends with them in work, and play and study. For the gathering is taking place in the large gathering room of the Highlander Folk School in the mountains of middle Tennessee. And the Wednesday evening square-dances belong to the community and are shared by the mountain people and the summer students together. (1-2)

Community nights thereby fostered lively and often educative discussion between the two groups, enabling students to learn more about the problems of southern labor and locals a means for developing their understanding of their material conditions. While

Highlander staff understood music as a recreational activity, its communal and educative aspects were also developed from the outset.

Staff members also recognized the value of music within field work and crisis education. During the folk school's involvement with the Wilder Strike, staff collected several songs written by locals about the battle faced by the miners. Perhaps the most noteworthy of these songs is "The Ballad of Barney Graham," written by 12-year-old Della Mae Graham after the murder of her father by company thugs:

April the thirtieth in nineteen thirty three,

Upon the streets of Wilder they shot him brave and free.

They shot my darling father, he fell upon the ground,

'Twas in the back they shot him, the blood came streaming down.

They took the pistol handles and beat him in the head

The hired gunmen beat him 'till he was cold and dead.

When he left home that morning I thought he'd never return,

But for my darling father my heart shall ever yearn.

We carried him to the graveyard and there we lay him down

To sleep in death for many a year in the cold and sodden ground.

Although he's left the union he tried so hard to build,

His blood was spilt for justice, and justice guides us still. (“Ballad”)

Highlander staff later distributed the song to *Peoples’ Songs*, who published it in November 1948 with a headnote by Woody Guthrie. After recounting for readers the story of Graham’s death, Guthrie predicted that “[a] time will come when Barney and Della Mae will be famous” (“Barney Graham” 4).

Staff members also taught protest songs on picket lines at nearby strikes. While this singing was in part intended to “liven up meetings and picket lines,” They learned of the danger involved in such instruction in 1935, when Highlander librarian Hilda Hubert was shot while assisting strikers in Daisy, Tennessee (Aimee Horton 117). Reflecting on the shooting, Zilphia Horton further describes the response of the strikers:

I looked around and the police had disappeared. There had been quite a few of them around, too. One was lying in a ditch. I said to him, “What are you doing there?” He said, “Well, lady, I’ve got a wife and three kids!” In about five minutes after the firing stopped, a few of us stood up at the mill gates and started singing “We Shall Not Be Moved.” And in about ten minutes, people began to come out from behind the barns and little stores around there, and we stood and sang “We Shall Not Be Moved.” That’s what won them recognition. And that’s what a song means in many places. That song is almost a labor hymn. (Adams 75)

In describing “We Shall Not Be Moved,” Zilphia was literally correct: the song had been adapted from a popular church hymn. But her remarks further indicate that Highlander staff recognized early the organizational power that labor songs had, particularly as a means of responding to the violence of bosses and local authorities. By teaching and

leading mass singing, Highlander staff further taught strikers to collectively respond to the struggles they faced.¹

In 1936, a Highlander staff member (presumably Ralph Tefferteller) further reported on the use of music during crisis education programs. His account shows the early recognition of the organizational potential of local Appalachian culture:

This may be confirmed all too easily by going into one of the strike torn areas of the South today with the staff and students of the Highlander Folk School in Tennessee and mingling with the strikers as they dance both the old and new forms. Here the folk dance is definitely a means of keeping the morale of the strikers at a high level as they struggle together in their fight for a more decent standard of living, and obviously at the same time, serving as a medium for obtaining social solidarity in a most exhilarating and enjoyable manner. (“Folk Dance Organizations” 1)

Folk dances provided strikers with a recreational activity that enacted the social bonds and equality for which they were campaigning, and boosted morale by demonstrating the potential for productive collective action. This tactic, of organizing a movement by literally getting people moving, remained a constant feature of the folk school’s musical programs.

The folk school’s use of “mountain music” also won the school recognition in northern cities and abroad. An article in the December 1, 1936 edition of the *New York Times* advertises “a program of American folk dances at the Little Red School House,” led by Ralph Tefferteller (“Mountain Folk Dancers” 27). The program was sponsored by seven experimental schools in the New York Area. On March 13, 1937, Highlander

gained international attention when it broadcast a folk music performance with the British Broadcasting Company. The broadcast included folk ballads, square dancing, tall stories, labor songs, and spirituals (Tefferteller to Greene 1). The Knoxville News-Sentinel carried a front-page story on the performance the following day, noting that the music performed was the “genuine article in Southern Highland music” (Henry 1). Highlander staff continued to do interviews and give radio performances throughout the 1940s. The folk school was thereby able to use folk music both to build links with the local Cumberland community, and to raise funds for the school in more wealthy areas of the country.

It was during these years, under the direction of Zilphia Horton and Ralph Tefferteller, that the music program really took off. Zilphia, who served as music director for the school from 1935 until her death in 1956, was widely acknowledged as the “singing heart” of Highlander (Carter 7; Dunson 28). Zilphia’s interest in “folk music and protest music and collecting oral history” led her to collect the 800 items now found in the Zilphia Horton Folk Music Collection found in the Tennessee State Library (Long Haul 77). These songs were periodically published in Highlander collections, and some were later collected – along with a host of other songs – by Guy and Candie Carawan in the volumes *We Shall Overcome* and *Freedom is a Constant Struggle* (jointly published as the single volume, *Sing for Freedom*).

The songs that Zilphia collected were also mimeographed and distributed on field trips to nearby labor conflicts. Evening song sessions also became a central part of residential activities. But both residential and extension music programs relied on Zilphia encouraging students “to share songs out of their backgrounds, to write songs, or

the words for songs, out of their experience and to lead the group in singing them” (Aimee Horton 120). Highlander’s staff thus made students’ own cultural heritage the foundation of its music program, much as students’ local knowledge was the foundation of residential workshops.

While Zilphia Horton didn’t commit as much of her thought to paper as her husband, her writings do provide a detailed account of her philosophy on music and music education. In an article for the March 1948 issue of the adult education journal, *Food for Thought*, she argues for the centrality of music to the lived experience of students:

The people can be made aware that many of the songs about their every day lives—songs about their work, hopes, their joys and sorrows—are songs of merit. This gives them a new sense of dignity and pride in their own cultural heritage. Their lives can be enriched by learning folk songs of other nationalities. They can have a new feeling of accomplishment at learning songs which they had previously considered much too difficult. (17)

This belief led Zilphia to conclude that “[t]here is no way to by-pass starting where people are—even in music. Where we go, once we’ve started and have a group enthusiastic about singing, is in great part determined and limited only by the ability, enthusiasm, and talent of the leader” (17). Music education was thus a way for individuals to develop within a group, and further find within themselves the resources necessary for social action. Far from being “trimming,” music is “the heart of things – of situations, beliefs, of struggle, of ideas, of life itself” (“Music isn’t Trimming”). Music,

then, had the potential both to “vitalize much of our ‘real’ program” and to communicate the ideas discussed during other phases of residential workshops.

Zilphia Horton also saw the educative value of the school’s singing programs, and made extensive notes about how to train song leaders in various aspects of music, such as rhythm and teaching the songs to unfamiliar audiences. In her notes on the 1944 CIO School, Zilphia noted that “[l]eading songs helps one to get accustomed to standing before a group” and that singing further “[g]ives group feeling among students during all the term” (Handwritten notes). While music was primarily billed as a recreational activity to residential students, Zilphia’s notes clearly indicate that music programs were also seen as a central agency for developing collective identity among workshop participants and for helping students realize leadership potential.

With Zilphia in charge of the program, music became a constant feature of workers’ education sessions at the school. Highlander’s records contain song sheets disseminated for nearly every union session run at the folk school during that period, while weekly programs for union residential sessions throughout the 1940s show that between 45 and 75 minutes were devoted daily to singing, usually immediately after dinner. These programs appear to have been particularly popular, and one member of the Amalgamated Clothing Workers even concluded that none of the school’s evening programs “would have been a success if it hadn’t been for our song leader, Zilphia Horton” (“After Supper Programs”). By 1946, CIO school participants believed song session were central to the residential session, and even called for lessons in song-leading during the session’s second week (“Evaluation of CIO Term” 6).

Glyn Thomas has suggested that much of Zilphia Horton's success derived from her use of "deliberate folk process," which involved performing "musical surgery" to adapt popular songs to local needs:

Relying heavily upon hymns, popular ditties, and traditional folk ballads, Mrs. Horton modified the words to fit the occasion. Often by the change of only a few lines, a song could become a powerful expression of protest for a particular crises or broader social change, and at the Highlander Folk School hundreds of songs were thus altered. (Thomas 39)

Carter records that songs such as "Old McDonald had a Farm" and "Dixie" were changed to "John L. Lewis had a Plan" and "Look Ahead, Working Men" (Carter 13). Zilphia's use of the "simple noise" of folk music and the improvisational tradition of labor songs underpinned a pedagogical approach to music that was both local and timely in its focus (Brand 10).

Music in Workers' Education

Folk music was, until the early 1930s, an underrepresented genre among the ranks of American organized labor. European labor songs such as the Internationale, while failing to win the interest of the American working class, remained popular among the predominantly foreign ranks of the Communist Party. Meanwhile, American workers turned to the songs of the Industrial Workers of the World, such as "Solidarity Forever," or songs built upon church hymns, such as "We Shall Not Be Moved." Traditional folk songs were seldom represented in the socialist songbooks produced prior to World War One.

R. Serge Denisoff has written at length of the religious roots of this early protest music. The “song of persuasion,” sometimes called the propaganda song, developed for the most part from Puritan hymns. Hymns contained explicit religious messages in its lyrics, and provided an explicit model for devotional music. John Wesley and the Methodist church later transformed devotional music by using “tunes of the songs best known in taverns to communicate [their] message” (*Sing a Song* 176). By using well-known tunes adapted to religious purposes, Methodist hymns functioned “to integrate religious dogma and serve a cohesive function by creating a ‘we’ feeling among a community of believers” (176). These hymns thus functioned rhetorically to establish an organic relationship between church and community; rather than replacing popular tunes with devotional hymns, Methodist hymns used such tunes as the basis for building a church community. In adapting popular tunes to the purposes of the church, “Methodism spawned many of the methods of protest singing used by left-wing social movements” (176).

The IWW, who conceived of “one big union” as one singing union, in many ways modeled their songs and their *Little Red Songbook* on this religious prototype. They further modeled their performances along similar lines to the Salvation Army’s marching bands, who frequently drowned out IWW organizers they encountered on the street. Fowkes and Glazer likewise comment that “workers quite naturally transferred their music and their feelings from the church to the union hall or picket line.” Union members were quick to rewrite lyrics such as “Jesus is my Captain, I shall not be moved,” rendering them as “Frank Keeney is my Captain, we shall not be moved.” For many union members, the promise offered by church hymns was similar to the promise

offered by union leaders: “The Lord will save us in church, but the union, the union leader Frank Keeney, will save us on the picket line.” (34).

The use of traditional folk music by the American Left grew markedly following World War One, and the violent strikes that occurred in Gastonia and Loray, North Carolina, and Harlan County, Kentucky. Much of the American Left’s interest in folk music stemmed from the American Communist Party’s valorization of folk consciousness, as expressed in folk music and proletarian art. The apparent success of the October 1917 revolution in Russia prompted many American communists to adopt the attitudes and organizing strategies of the Bolsheviks. One of these strategies was the use of traditional cultural forms to communicate proletarian consciousness. Only the adoption of such a “folk consciousness” would enable the working class to fulfill its revolutionary potential (Denisoff, *Great Day*).

This attitude toward folk consciousness was carried by union organizers from the North as they travelled south to organize in Gastonia and Harlan County. Here they encountered local musicians among the striking workers, including famous Gastonia martyr Ella May Wiggins. Her story, and her songs, were brought North by communist union organizers and singers such as Margaret Larkin. In Harlan County, organizers for the National Miners Union encountered performers such as Jim Garland, and songs such as Florence Reece’s “Which Side Are You On?” and Aunt Molly Jackson’s “I Am a Union Woman” (*Great Day* 24). Denisoff describes these songs as born from “the encounter of the Third Internationale with Cumberland culture” (24). These songs were also among the first to combine “social movement technique, ideology, and traditional folk material.”

Communist interest in folk culture developed further as the American Communist Party adopted nationalist tactics in an effort to win support among local workers. This led to the inclusion of national songs such as the Star Spangled Banner in songbooks, as the increasing use of appeals to workers as American Workers. This shift in organizing tactics further increased party interest in folk music, an increase reflected in worker newspapers during the period. In the October 27, 1938 issue of the *Daily Worker*, musician Earl Robinson elaborated on the need to adopt local folk music as the soundtrack for the labor movement. “The first thing to do,” Robinson argued, “is to push the Folk songs of the American people and the songs that we have in the progressive movement” (Tilkin). The article further acknowledges Earl Robinson as one of the reasons for the increasing popularity of folk music. The article notes Robinson’s use of American history within his songs to tell “the story of Joe Hill, as typified by Abraham Lincoln.” During the same period, the People’s Press regularly published labor songs written by the paper’s readership, and ran song contests to further encourage labor musicians (“Song Contest”).

This valorization of folk consciousness, and the commitment to music as an organizational tool, naturally extended beyond the communist party. The CIO also saw the necessity of music to the success of the labor movement, as evidenced by John L. Lewis foreword to the Highlander-published volume, *Labor Songs*:

A singing army is a winning army, and a singing labor movement cannot be defeated. Songs can express sorrow as well as triumph, but the fact that a man sings shows that his spirit is still free and searching, and such a spirit will not submit to servitude. When hundreds of men and women in a labor union sing

together, their individual longing for dignity and freedom are bound into an irrepressible force. Workers who hesitate are swept into the movement, and before all these determined marchers, united by their purpose and their singing, the citadels of oppression crumble and surrender. (*Labor Songs*, 4-5)

John Lewis had been at the helm of the United Mine Workers when they finally succeeded in organizing Harlan County. Thus, Lewis recognized early what Denisoff has called the “magnetic” function of labor music in recruiting and galvanizing members of the labor movement (*Sing a Song* 5). In this regard, Lewis believed music to be far more immediate and effective in its appeal, and far more capable of sustaining long-term activism, than speeches or other traditional organizing tools.

Roscigno and Danaher echo Lewis’s remarks, but further suggest that music and local cultural forms may have played an even more central role in the communication and fomentation of labor struggles in the South:

...unlike the assumption often embedded within social movement analysis that emergence of insurgency is dependent on the introduction of grievance frames and oppositional culture by a clear-cut social movement organization, we are suggesting that potential social movement actors may be just as likely to draw from their own histories and preexisting repertoires, particularly when little in the way of organizational resources, structures, and grievance frames is available.

(65)

Not only was Appalachian culture mobilized as a commentary on industrialization and its detrimental effects on southern communities, it also provided a form of cultural expression that served as a local response to the encroachments of capitalism. Music was

a central element in such expression, as it was readily known and available to southern workers. For Roscigno and Danaher, Lewis's singing movement was essential to labor activism as it was also an organic movement rooted in local responses to the broader problems facing the working class.

If Roscigno and Danaher's are correct about the effectiveness of music as a form of local labor activism, then Highlander's commitment to music as an organizing tool appears natural. Highlander staff produced eleven songbooks during the school's involvement with the labor movement: six during the 1930s, one of which was published by the Textile Workers Union of America; and five during the 1940s, though one of these was published for the fledgling farmers' movement. These texts reflect the eclectic history of American protest music, and further provide a compelling record of Highlander's own musical influences and development.

Highlander published three editions of *Workers Songs*, one annually from 1935 to 1937. These books were modest in length, containing no more than 13 songs in any edition. The songs in each edition included IWW songs such as "Casey Jones," "Solidarity," and "The Preacher and the Slave," hymn-based songs such as "We Are Building a Strong Union" and "We Shall Not Be Moved," and adaptations of such songs as "Rock-a-bye Baby." However, traditional folk music is not heavily represented, though each edition of *Workers Songs* contains at songs authored by Highlander students or collected by Highlander staff. The 1935 and 1936 editions contain the student tunes "Chiseler's Sorrow" and "The Union's Call." In 1937, "Roane County Strikers" (collected at a strike in Harriman) and "In the Union's Ranks" (authored by Don West) were added to the volume.

In 1938, *Workers Songs* was replaced by *Let's Sing*, a volume that contained 19 songs. The new songs found in the songbook included Joe Hill's "There is Power in a Union," Don West's parody of "America (My Country 'Tis of Thee)," adaptations of "My Bonnie Lies Over the Ocean" and "Put on Your Old Grey Bonnet," and the hymn-based "Somebody Knocking at Your Door" and "Stand Up! Ye Workers." While *Let's Sing* continued to include the Highlander songs found in earlier versions of *Workers' Songs*, there were no new folk tunes included in the collection.

1939 saw a dramatic increase in the size of the songbooks produced at Highlander, and the number of folksongs included in these books. 1939's *Songs for Workers* contained a total of 49 songs, many of which were traditional songs such as "Abraham Lincoln," "Sourwood Mountain," "Home on the Range" and "Down in the Valley." Adaptations of tunes such as "Dixie," "Mama's Little Baby (Loves Shorten'n Bread)" and a new version of "Put on Your Old Grey Bonnet" were also included. The TWUA-published *Labor Songs* further included the traditional "America," and sections labeled "Old Favorite Tunes" and "Spirituals." While containing older tunes, the first of these sections had a number of new improvisations upon them, including "If the Fascists Have Their Way" and "Tyrants on the Run." The section entitled "Spirituals" contained the more traditional "No More Mournin'" and "Somebody Knockin' at Your Door" alongside the more modern adaptations "Strange Things Happenin' in this Land" and "We are Building a Strong Union."

Songs of Field and Factory, published in 1940, was the first Highlander-published songbook to include a distinct section for "Folk Songs and Others." This section included previously published songs such as "Ain' Gwine Study War No More" and "Farmer

Comes to Town,” traditional labor songs such as “We Shall Not Be Moved” and “We Are Building a Strong Union,” and traditional songs such as “Crawdad Song,” “Home on the Range,” and “Sourwood Mountain.” This section was further expanded in *Songs About Labor* to include spirituals, rounds, and “songs we like to sing.” Highlander’s songbooks thus seem to reflect the growing interest within the labor movement in traditional folk music, though this interest doesn’t appear prominently in these songbooks until the advent of World War Two. While it is tempting to see a link between Highlander’s increased interest in folk music and the nationalism generated by World War Two and the rise of fascism in Europe, the appearance of this interest in Highlander songbooks also demonstrates the growth of the music program under Zilphia Horton’s leadership.

The influence of World War Two, and a growing international perspective among Highlander staff, can nonetheless be traced in Highlander’s song books. *Songs of Labor, Folk, War*, published in 1943, is the first Highlander songbook to include the Star Spangled Banner. The same book also includes a section on “topical songs,” a section that includes “Adolph, Dear” and “Children of Freedom.” But most the most noteworthy new inclusions in *Songs of Labor, Folk, War*, is the section entitled “United Nation Songs,” which contains songs from China, Germany, Russia and Australia, as well as the United Nations’ anthem itself.

Highlander’s songbooks provide a record of the changing shape of American protest songs, and the increasing role of folk music within the labor movement. These books also provide a catalog of the songs taught to the labor movement, and in some cases the origins of these songs as well. While it is difficult to know how many of these songs were standards on Southern picket lines, these song books nonetheless attest to the

role of music within the labor movement. The sheer number of songs produced indicates the importance of music to the labor movement, and the constant interest in music by movement participants (see Roscigno and Danaher; Adams 75). In their commitment to using folk music and union songs as a means of strengthening and extending the labor movement, Highlander staff remained committed to John L. Lewis vision of a “singing movement.”

Denisoff further contends that Highlander’s singing sessions not only taught labor songs to the ranks of southern labor, but also “made some contribution to the folk consciousness of the North” (*Great Day* 26). Zilphia Horton’s collection of folk music, and the songbooks produced by the folk school, disseminated traditional folk music and southern labor songs across America (34). Songs collected at the folk school were performed by such notable folk musicians as Pete Seeger and Woody Guthrie, and published in such journals as *People’s Songs*. Highlander thereby participated in the musical spread of the labor movement as a “halfway house,” much as it would later function in the Civil Rights Movement: songs were brought by students to the folk school, where they were collected and later taught to new students (Morris 139-140). But just as importantly, Highlander made a unique contribution to the spread of Southern folk music within the United States during the first half of the twentieth century.

The Music Program under Guy Carawan

Zilphia Horton didn’t live to see the impact of Highlander’s music program on the Civil Rights Movement. While working at the Highlander campus in 1956, she swallowed a small but ultimately fatal amount of carbon tetrachloride, a chemical used to

clean typewriters (Glen 164-5). Recognizing her mistake, Zilphia expelled as much of the liquid as she could. The accident, however, aggravated a previously undiagnosed kidney condition, which resulted in Zilphia's continued illness and ultimately a trip to the Sewanee hospital. She died of uremic poisoning shortly thereafter.²

Following Zilphia's death, Myles went into what he described as "a tailspin," one he only came out of after throwing himself headlong into his work (Adams 80). Under these conditions, Highlander's music program declined in importance. It is important to note, however, that Highlander's staff were also committed to working on the Johns Island citizenship school and to fending off repeated legislative attacks on the school. In the face of these increasing pressures, it is little wonder that the music programs languished until the arrival of Guy Carawan in 1959.

Carawan attests to impact of Zilphia's death on Highlander's programs. "I know that," Guy says, "for four years or so, there had been nobody there giving time and energy doing that cultural work, and there was a great lack in the school. Aside from her use of music, she just supplied a lot of warmth" (Lewis B2). Carawan set to work revitalizing the cultural programs, along with his new wife Candie. Candie Anderson had visited Highlander while spending a year at Fisk University. She and Guy married in the spring of 1961, after which they returned to Highlander. The Carawans then set about collecting and composing new songs to aid the emerging Civil Rights Movement.

Guy Carawan's first notable contribution to the Civil Rights Movement was his meeting with the North Carolina sit-in students who would become the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee. Many of these students had met at Highlander in April, 1960, and Carawan was then invited to sing at conferences in Nashville, Raleigh,

and Atlanta. It was at these meetings that Carawan introduced students to such songs as “We Shall Not Be Moved,” “Hold On,” “Keep Your Eyes on the Prize,” and most notably “We Shall Overcome.” This last song was enthusiastically adopted by students as a movement anthem, and there began its rise to international fame.

In many ways, Carawan’s pedagogy picked up where Zilphia Horton’s left off. Like his predecessor, he was an avid musician and folk music collector. And in similar fashion to Zilphia, he believed in anchoring Highlander’s music programs in the communities from which students came. In a 1965 summary of his work at Highlander, Carawan provides a useful account of his early encounters with the citizens of the Sea Islands and the Civil Rights Movement:

It didn’t take me long to survey the situation. People were beginning to meet and gather in the spirit of freedom. They were people who could really sing as a result of their church backgrounds, but they were not taking advantage of what their heritage had to offer. So many great old spirituals that express hatred of oppression and a longing for freedom were being left out of this growing freedom movement. (Carawan, Untitled Report 3)

Carawan further noted that “[i]t was an exceptional case when a Negro took a spiritual or gospel song...and substituted a word or two to make it applicable.” Drawing on his own experience with labor songs and the folk music of musicians such as Guthrie and Seeger, Carawan “began to see that there was something that I could do.”

Seeing “the potential for a great singing movement as part of the freedom struggle,” Carawan began performing for Citizenship Schools, where he also taught students to share and improvise traditional songs from the area. He also set about

organizing the first “Sing for Freedom” festival at the Folk School in 1960. This festival proved particularly popular, with students creating “new arrangements of old Hymns, Spirituals, and Folk Songs with new words of Freedom replacing the old words” (Robinson 1). Bernice Robinson further reports that participants explored the use of song “in Classroom, Church Schools, Mass Meeting, Sit-ins and Protest Marches.” This festival represented one of the watershed moments in the creation and dissemination of freedom songs.

The festival proved so popular that similar events were held in 1964 and 1965. The 1964 Sing, held on May 7-10 in the Old Gammon Theological Building in Atlanta, provides evidence of both a much more developed program and a far more sophisticated singing movement. Civil Rights leaders such as Doc Reese, Fannie Lou Hamer, Bernice Johnson Reagon and Cordell Reagon were in attendance, in many cases leading individual sessions. Josh Dunson, writing for *Broadside*, further notes that festival participants had a far more developed understanding of freedom music, and in one case engaged in a lively debate about the suitability of slavery-era spirituals for civil rights campaigners (“Slave Songs”). Musicians Len Chandler and Bessie Jones argued that these older spirituals were themselves responses to historical conditions, and provided a much longer tradition of protest and opposition on which freedom singers could draw. While not everyone in attendance was convinced by these arguments, Rev. Andrew Young seems to have settled the debate when he remarked, “[w]e all know you can’t trust a Negro on a negotiating committee who doesn’t like his people’s music” (Dunson, “Slave Songs” 2).

Despite the considerable contributions the Carawans made to Highlander's music program, Guy experienced difficulties when it came to teaching songs to freedom movement participants. In a fragment describing his work in the Sea Islands, he recounts the cultural and musical difficulties he encountered:

This I have learned: I can teach people in the adult program new songs and get them singing, but I cannot teach them to teach like I do because they don't play guitars and banjos. They need someone like Mrs. Flora Barr Miller to train them to be song leaders because she is used to working both acapello (without accompanying instruments) or with piano or organ music as accompaniment. She does it all with her hands. The traditional ways of church singing are acapello or singing with the piano and organ. There are many good people at this – ask in any church and you'll find out who they are. (Carawan, untitled fragment 2)

In addition to these cultural difficulties, Carawan also felt the need for Sea Island residents to learn a broader repertoire of songs than those they learned in church. "An adult citizenship school meeting is not the same as a church meeting," Carawan concluded, "though some elements are common to both." As a result, "part of the job is to get the natural song leaders in these communities to branch out and learn some new songs in addition to those they know." It was in the service of this last goal that Carawan introduced church congregations to the idea of improvising upon known tunes, and to newer songs he brought with him from Highlander.

In the same set of notes, Guy also expressed concern that his song workshops were not necessarily helping "to get these people used to taking song leading responsibility in the situations called for by the adult school program." He further

concluded that “actually what I should have been doing at adult schools was leading singing, not training song leaders – because most of the people could not be song leaders.” Carawan again remarks on the need to have singers and song leaders from within the community take responsibility for the training of new song leaders, to “make sure we are getting through.” Guy’s remarks not only demonstrate a sensitivity to the limits of his own ability as a teacher, and to the cultural differences he faced as a teacher on the Sea Islands, but a continued commitment to the role of music and singing in the training of leadership for emerging social movements (2).

In an article published in the Spring 1990 issue of *Black Music Research Bulletin*, the Carawans remind their readers of the rhetorical project of collecting and developing songs for the Civil Rights Movement:

Having witnessed the civil rights era, most of us take for granted the notion of adapting well-known songs to situations of protest, and we do not stop to question the emergence of a powerful singing movement. But from our personal experience in the South in the early 1960s, we know that some very specific work went into stimulating and nurturing the growth of the freedom repertoire.

(“Freedom in the Air” 1)

Guy goes on to describe the process by which Highlander’s staff helped groups to “adapt [folk songs] to the movement activity in their communities” (2). In many cases, this was the only catalyst needed for groups to begin adapting their own songs for use in protest situations. This process, in part, led to the development and circulation of the songs associated with some of the most public movements of the civil rights era.

It is tempting to see these remarks as a case of overstatement, particularly given the early adaptation and transformation of songs such as “We Shall Overcome” (which had reached a more or less stable form by 1950) and “No More Mourning” (which is more commonly known as the freedom song “Oh Freedom”). Nevertheless, it is certainly true that Carawan extended Highlander’s folk-based approach to the improvisation of traditional tunes and song texts to the spirituals he encountered during his travels throughout the South. Furthermore, the debates about the status of older spirituals at the 1964 Atlanta Sing would seem to suggest that many African Americans remained ambivalent about adapting church music to meet the needs of civil rights activism. Carawan’s goal was to help the communities he visited to see in these songs the cultural resources from which to develop a social movement.

Along with his wife Candie, Guy also helped to preserve and develop these resources through an ambitious publication and recording program. In addition to two volumes of freedom songs, *Freedom is a Constant Struggle* and *We Shall Overcome*, the Carawans also authored a collection of photos and music from the Sea Islands, *Ain’t You Got a Right to the Tree of Life?* These books were accompanied by a host of records and documentary films that aimed to preserve not only the music of southern African American communities, but also the musical history of the Civil Rights Movement.

“We Shall Overcome”

If the history of the Civil Rights Movement would be incomplete without an account of freedom songs, then Highlander’s history would remain incomplete without the story of “We Shall Overcome.” Arguably the most well-known song of the Civil

Rights Movement, “We Shall Overcome” provides an excellent example of the ways in which songs arrived at Highlander, and were further taken up, transformed, and disseminated through workshops and educational programs. While its popularity and wide-ranging appeal no doubt make it an exceptional case, the process by which the song evolved would nonetheless appear to be typical of many of the songs learned and taught at the folk school.

As has been previously noted, the process of improvising lyrics and altering traditional tunes to meet new conditions was nothing new. “No More Mourning,” an early favorite at Highlander, would eventually become “Oh Freedom” (with the original title preserved as a verse within the freedom song). Many of the labor songs taught and published at the school used traditional tunes such as “Battle Hymn of the Republic,” upon which union favorite “Solidarity Forever” and the CIO song “Come and Join the Union” were based. But “We Shall Overcome” remains exceptional, as it is one of the few songs published by Highlander staff for which we have an almost complete history.

“We Shall Overcome”, originally titled “We Will Overcome,” is commonly believed to be based on the spiritual “I’ll Overcome Some Day” (Smith, “The Making...”).³ Credited to C. Albert Tindley in 1901, the original expresses the endurance and faith common to many spirituals:

This world is one great battlefield,
With forces all arrayed;
If in my heart I do not yield,
I’ll overcome some day.

I'll overcome some day, (some day,)

I'll overcome some day;

If in my heart I do not yield,

I'll overcome some day.

Guy Carawan notes that the song was transformed by African American Food and Tobacco Workers during a 1945 strike in Charleston, S.C. While using the song to maintain morale, “they started to change the words,” arriving at such verses as “We will win our rights,” “We will win this fight,” and “We will overcome.” Robert Smith further notes that such improvisations were “typical and revealing,” indicating a shift of interest away from “the salvation of the individual soul” and toward “a collective unit wrestling with society” (“The Making...”).

It was this collectively-oriented iteration of the hymn that reached Highlander with Anna Lee Bonneau and Evelyn Risher, two of the strikers, in 1946.⁴ Zilphia Horton commented on the power of the song, claiming that “[i]ts strong emotional appeal and simple dignity never fail to hit people” (Fowke and Glazer 35). It certainly struck a chord with her, and she adopted the song as “the theme at Highlander” (Smith, “We Shall Overcome”). Song sheets for union institutes from 1947 on provide evidence that the song was taught more or less continuously after its arrival at the folk school.

Folk singer Pete Seeger, who was responsible for changing “We Will Overcome” to “We Shall Overcome,” provides further information on the song’s evolution in his headnote for the song in *Songs for Peace*:

Zilphia changed it a bit, added some new verses, and taught it to me in 1947. I added a few more verses and unconsciously changed a few words and notes, as

did Guy Carawan and Frank Hamilton a few years later. In 1960, Guy taught it to the students of the Greensboro Sit-In Movement. They and the Freedom Riders of 1961 carried it through the South where it was immediately picked up and further changed. (45)

According to Carawan, Seeger “began singing the song all over the country,” which no doubt increased the song’s audience and its influence. Writing in 1966, Seeger predicted that “the song will be sung around the world in many languages during our lifetime” (45). But by that time, his prediction was already a reality.

Nonetheless, the song itself didn’t really achieve popularity until it was introduced to civil rights activists in the 1950s and early 1960s. It is difficult to say why the song wasn’t more popular with union workers, though a few possible reasons may be suggested. One reason may be the marginal status of the hymn, whose popularity was not as great as “We Shall Not Be Moved” or “Go Down, Moses.” But it seems more likely that the spiritual structure of the song resonated more immediately with a movement in the process of creating “freedom songs” from earlier religious tunes.

The structure of the song further allowed African Americans to engage in call and response patterns, as the song was often “lined out” between a song leader and the rest of the group.⁵ This pattern further allowed singers to become song leaders and contribute new verses that spoke immediately to the conditions in which the song was being performed. The most dramatic example of this kind of improvisation occurred during the 1959 raids on Highlander. While police set about searching the property and arresting individuals, staff members and workshop participants sang “We Shall Overcome” as an act of defiance.

It was during this recital that a student – Mary Ethel Dozier – added the now famous verse “We Are Not Afraid” (Lewis B4).⁶ This call-and-response pattern also preserved one of the few direct contributions that Myles Horton made to Highlander’s music program. Recalling one of the singing sessions at Highlander, Horton remarked that students called upon him to provide a new line. “Well, to me,” Horton said, “the only thing that is going to bring freedom is the free expression of everyone’s ideas. So, I had the kids sing, ‘Truth will make us free’” (Smith, “We Shall Overcome”). That verse appeared, as did Dozier’s, later in published versions of the song.

In 1960, Guy Carawan, Pete Seeger, Frank Hamilton, and Myles Horton (acting as executor of Zilphia Horton’s estate) took out a copyright on the song (Brackman to Horton et al). All proceeds from commercial use and publication of the song were placed in a “freedom fund,” to be used to further the work of the Civil Rights Movement. But more importantly for the four copyright holders, their copyright prevented others from cashing in on the song and made the song permanently available for public performance.

Denisoff and Peterson consider “We Shall Overcome” a particularly important folk song, as “it brings together the entire protest song tradition in America: religion, workers’ songs, and, finally, civil rights” (59). Throughout its history, the song has meant many things to many people; nonetheless, its galvanizing quality has remained a constant feature of mass performances. It is this quality that has led Anne Braden to see in “We Shall Overcome” the very core of the Highlander Idea. “As it nurtured the music of brotherhood and democracy,” she asserts, “so Highlander has nurtured the spirit of brotherhood in the South and passed it on from one generation to the next” (31).

Music as Collective Action

The popularity of freedom songs, and the funds raised by performance groups such as the SNCC Freedom Singers, attests to the rhetorical importance they had to the broader Civil Rights Movement. These songs served to communicate the broader goals of the movement, and to further consolidate the masses of civil rights activists *into* a movement. That is, songs such as “We Shall Overcome” not only expressed the identity of the Civil Rights Movement, but in a very immediate sense were the movement.

In a *New York Times* article published July 23, 1963, SCLC Secretary Wyatt Tee Walker remarked on the prominent role of “We Shall Overcome” in the Civil Rights Movement (69/9):

One cannot describe the vitality and emotion this hymn evokes across the Southland. I have heard it sung in great mass meetings with a thousand voices singing as one. I’ve heard a half dozen sing it softly behind the bars of the Hinds County Prison in Mississippi.

I’ve heard old women singing it on the way to work in Albany, Georgia. I’ve heard the students singing it as they were being dragged away to jail. It generates power that is indescribable. It manifests a rich legacy of musical literature that serves to keep the body and soul together for that better day which it not far off.

Walker’s comments demonstrate not only the mobility of freedom songs, which no doubt derived from their origin in spirituals and church music, but also the manner in which singing itself became a means of collective political action.

R. Serge Denisoff has already studied the rhetorical function of folk music, with particular attention to the songs of labor unions and the American Left. Denisoff describes these songs as “songs of persuasion,” and further distinguishes between magnetic and rhetorical purposes within these songs. The magnetic song “appeals to the listener for the purposes of attracting the nonparticipant listener to a movement or ideology” (*Sing a Song* 5). The rhetorical song attempts “to identify and describe some social condition, but...offers no explicit ideological or organizational solutions, such as affiliation with an action or a movement” (6).

Both magnetic and rhetorical songs share a common set of functions, which primarily fall into six broad categories:

1. The song attempts to solicit and arouse outside support and sympathy for a social or political movement.
2. The song reinforces the value structure of individuals who are active supporters of the social movement or ideology.
3. The song creates and promotes cohesion, solidarity, and high morale in an organization or movement supporting its world view.
4. The song is an attempt to recruit individuals for a specific social movement.
5. The song invokes solutions to real or imagined social phenomena in terms of action to achieve a desired goal.
6. The song points to some problem or discontent in the society, usually in emotional terms.

The six goals identified by Denisoff attend primarily to the content of the songs, and the ideology of their authors and performers. Insofar as goals 5 and 6 ascribe to protest

songs the function of describing unrest, and goals 1-4 suggest that these songs are meant to excite potential movement members to action, Denisoff's analysis relies on a classical structural approach to social movement theory. This approach relies on the idea that structural strain within a society encourages emotional and psychological dissatisfaction within certain individuals, and that these individuals in turn address structural strain through an emergent social movement. Read through this analytic lens, protest songs identify structural strain and allow discontents to communicate with one another (McAdam).

The freedom songs of the Civil Rights Movement certainly perform many of the functions identified by Denisoff. The performances of Pete Seeger, Guy Carawan, and the SNCC Freedom Singers, and festivals such as the 1960 Atlanta "Sing for Freedom," were certainly attempts to garner broader support for the movement and to raise much needed funds. The lyrical content of the songs, and their reliance on simple and often traditional tunes, no doubt served to reinforce movement principles and recruit new members. In the case of songs such as "Move On Over," these songs also responded to the depoliticizing of more popular songs such as "We Shall Overcome." Insofar as they were improvised at mass meetings, workshops, and festivals, freedom songs also continued to identify and respond to oppressive and unjust conditions.

But these songs also had a far more immediate, and to my mind more important, rhetorical function. Speaking at the 1964 Atlanta "Sing," Rev Andrew Young remarked that "forming a local choir consisting of the best singers from the community's churches is a highly effective civil rights tactic" (Dunson 68). For Young, mass singing was a form of direct political action in its own right. Nor was this understanding of singing as

civil rights activism limited to Young. Stokely Carmichael comments in his autobiography on the power that singing provided to Freedom Riders imprisoned in Mississippi's notorious Parchman prison, and the lengths to which guards would go to prevent this singing (*Ready for Revolution* 205-8). And as early as 1956, the March 3 issue of *The Afro-American* published a story on the adoption of a "battle hymn" by those arrested for the Montgomery bus demonstrations. The song, improvised to the tune of "Old Time Religion," was titled "We Are Moving On To Victory."

Josh Dunson further provides a useful description of how these songs functioned as direct action:

The most important central element in freedom songs is that they are functional and that they grow spontaneously, quickly fitting into the different needs of different local areas. When police clubs, snarling dogs and hoses start to attack the line of the march, praying to one's self gives some courage, but when hundreds sing their hopes together the songs provide the shield and identification necessary to withstand even the fury of a hostile mob. (66)

The improvisational structures of freedom songs, then, made them particularly appropriate for mass singing in a variety of different situations. Moreover, protestors used the spontaneous improvisation of freedom songs to well-known tunes to effect the identification of civil rights activists with one another as a movement. Typically using a call-and-response pattern, song leaders provided mass meetings with lyrics that all participants felt they could sing.

Insofar as freedom songs encouraged equal participation by all movement participants, they differed from the traditional leader-led union songs. It was also this

model of equal participation—which encouraged everyone present to sing, and even provide new lyrics if so moved—that was central in transforming a mass of people into a physical social movement. Freedom songs provided a fabric by which individuals became a collective body that was capable of enduring humiliation and violence; the repetition of movement anthems, and the feedback created by hundreds of people singing in unison, provided individuals under attack a larger body of strength on which to draw. This effectiveness of his tactic prompted Dunson to conclude that “[e]very marcher has become a freedom singer, and it is they, rather than the outstanding individuals, important as they were, who have made the movement rock with song” (71).

Freedom songs also provided a means for communicating movement history between individuals, and for constructing usable movement history. The very structure of the songs, relying on tunes from spirituals and union songs, linked the Civil Rights Movement to early campaigns against oppression and exploitation. Improvised lyrics further preserved the force of watershed movement events, and created a transmittable record of these events for other movement participants. But just as importantly, these songs also carried with them the histories of their composition; these histories, such as the history of the creation of “We Shall Overcome,” and the events that led to the addition of new verses to the song, helped preserve the broader history of the movement as a whole.

These songs also became a means of responding to arguments within social movements about decisions and directions taken. In the early years of the Labor movement, Joe Hill had composed the now famous parody of “Casey Jones,” which accused Jones of scabbing for the South Pacific railroad line. While Hill’s parody

follows traditional folk composition processes—selection of a well-known song, and transformation of the lyrics to suit contemporary social conditions—the song can also be seen as a direct challenge to the values of the original song. Similarly, union songs and freedom songs alike promise the realization of Christian values through movement participation and campaigning for economic and social justice. Finally, songs such as Len Chandler’s “Move On Over” respond directly to perceived weaknesses within the Civil Rights Movement, and call upon campaigners to examine their sense of purpose and their commitment to direct action. Carter notes that, for Myles Horton, “maintaining or rediscovering musical heritage increased the sense of community, raised awareness, and actually contributed to Freire’s process of ‘conscientization’” (18).

The mobilizing, communicative effect of freedom songs was also recognized by oppressive regimes in the United States, and in other countries where these songs were also being taken up. A 1965 article entitled “South Africans Curb Rights Song” tells of the reaction by the South African authorities to John Harris, an anti-apartheid activist convicted of bombing a train station, singing “We Shall Overcome” as he awaited his execution:

Soon after the execution, a number of Johannesburg’s leading record shops were visited by men identifying themselves as agents of the Special Branch, the South African security police. They were especially interested in one version of “We Shall Overcome” that had been recorded by the American folk singer Pete Seeger.

It contains a verse with the words “We shall all be free,” which, according to reports was one of those sung by Harris. (Lelyveld)

Following these visits, Pete Seeger's recording of the song was removed from record shops and many folk singers decided against performing the song in public. No doubt South African authorities, faced with enforcing apartheid and squashing resistance to racist policies, recognized the mobilizing effect that the song could have. The attempt to remove the song from circulation (although it was never officially banned, and the Special Branch later denied the raids) was also an attempt to localize Harris's crime as an individual act of terrorism, by removing anything that would allow for its communication by a larger social movement.⁷ Harris' choice of song, and the quick steps the South African government to silence it, both attest to the rhetorical force that freedom songs had acquired during the civil rights era.

The widespread appeal of freedom songs stands them in stark contrast to the workers' songs that Highlander's musical program began with. But despite the differences between these two musical traditions and the appeal they came to exert, they nonetheless represented an important rhetorical agency by which oppressed communities could respond to wider material conditions. Insofar as music facilitated the formation of an active community, and also provided a galvanizing means of resisting violence and hardship, it proved to be a central aspect of Highlander's cultural programs. The success with which both genres of music were deployed, but in particular African American spirituals and protest songs, attests to the rhetorical sensibility that Highlander staff had developed during thirty years of involvement with emerging social movements.

Highlander's music program also encourages us to recognize the importance of rhetorical action as a form of collective action. That is, far from simply being persuasive in an Aristotelian sense, rhetorical action should also be defined as the collective use of

cultural or symbolic agencies to respond to oppressive social conditions. Insofar as local music traditions provided Highlander staff with an already recognized set of cultural practices—practices that preserved both history and communication—they also became essential vehicles for rhetorical action. Zilphia Horton, Ralph Tefferteller, and later Guy and Candie Carawan all recognized that music education was an important means of organizing and galvanizing a community’s cultural resources.

In its role as a movement halfway house, then, Highlander played an important but potentially overlooked role. By mobilizing the cultural resources, that is the musical traditions, indigenous to the communities they were working with, Highlander staff helped those communities to develop their own means of response and action. Because the music more often than not came from their own cultural repertoire, students were also encouraged to adopt leadership roles and take responsibility for teaching and leading songs that they knew. Folk music and African American spirituals were thereby transformed from aesthetic to organic expressions of students’ political and social commitments. Understood as agencies of rhetorical action in their own right, these songs not only served Appalachian and African American communities as important cultural traditions, but more often than not provided the southern labor and Civil Rights Movements with the standards they needed to rally and march.

NOTES

¹ There are two important caveats to be made at this point. The first is that Highlander staff were not necessarily teaching songs that were unknown to strikers. Roscigno and Danaher have demonstrated that music and local musical performances were quite common throughout the South in the 1920s and 1930s. Rather, the folk school staff may have helped strikers to adapt songs to meet their immediate needs, and probably led them in singing when moral was faltering.

The second caveat to be made is that my use of the phrase collective action, or collective response, is not meant to suggest that these songs provided a collective or class consciousness that was not otherwise

there. Instead, I mean that group singing literally created a larger body among the strikers that was better able to weather the violence directed against them. Rather than facing bosses and police as individuals, who could be individually targeted, threatened, and injured, singing strikers faced bosses and police as a mass or a crowd. This allowed them to more effectively oppose the sort of violence, notably the assassination of charismatic leaders, that was responsible for the failure of the Wilder strike.

² There is some debate about the circumstances surrounding the circumstances of Zilphia Horton's death. Some claim that Zilphia was in the habit of drinking moonshine, often as a digestive after meals. Mistaking the cleaner for moonshine, she unwittingly poisoned herself. Others claim that she was looking for a drink of water on what was a particularly hot day. The question ultimately raised about how she mistook typewriter cleaner either for water or moonshine is yet to be satisfactorily resolved.

³ "I'll Overcome Some Day" was also transformed into the spiritual, "I'll be alright some day." This second song also seems to have played a part in the evolution of "We Shall Overcome," supplying the now-famous verse structure for the song:

I'll be alright, I'll be alright
I'll be alright someday
Deep in my heart, I do believe, that I'll be alright someday
When trouble comes, I'll pay no mind
I'll be alright someday

Guy Carawan, in an interview with Robert E. Smith, cites "I'll be alright some day" as the hymn upon which the civil rights anthem is based (Smith, 1). The improvisations that he claims were made by strikers are certainly based on the structure of the later blues song.

⁴ Risher and Bonneau are the only two members of the Charleston, S.C., Food and Tobacco Workers' Union listed on the 1946 workshop roll, though their names are nowhere given in any accounts of the song's origins.

⁵ Bernice Johnson Reagon has argued in *Black Music Research Bulletin* that the lined hymn is particularly effective as a song of freedom, precisely as a result of its multi-faceted production of harmony. Lined hymns are sung according to meter, rather than tune, so that "any song text that is compatible with a particular meter can be sung to any of that meter's tune" (6). This creates numerous melodic lines that result in complex systems of harmony, and what Reagon describes as a feeling of "swooning." Tunes and meters are learned orally through practice, typically within African American church congregations. While lined hymns were not as easy to teach and spread as more simple freedom songs (such as "Dog, Dog"), they produced an intensely emotional effect among participants that could seldom be rivaled. See Reagon, "The Lined Hymn as a Song of Freedom," for a more detailed account of the structure of lined hymns and accounts of lined hymn performances within Civil Rights Movement meetings.

⁶ While all accounts of "We Shall Overcome" agree on the basic story of the song's development, Maggie Lewis is the only author whose account names Mary Ethel Dozier as the author of the verse "We Are Not Afraid."

⁷ I'm sensitive here to the difference between the non-violent tactics of Civil Rights activists and the extreme action undertaken by Harris. No doubt, many civil rights leaders and activists in the U.S. would have been troubled by the association of freedom songs with such a violent act. Nonetheless, Harris' decision to sing the song on the gallows speaks to his understanding of the similarity between the goals of the Civil Rights Movement in the United States and anti-apartheid campaigners in South Africa. This similarity in purpose would hardly have been lost on activists in the U.S.

CHAPTER FIVE: LITERACY, COMMUNITY ORGANIZATION, AND THE CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT

By 1953, Highlander had officially severed its ties with the CIO, and staff had grown increasingly pessimistic about the role the school might play in furthering the cause of Southern labor. As a result, staff determined to work on issues of racism, particularly public school integration. Highlander staff cited the endemic racism found in the South as the biggest contributing factor in their decision to shift the school's focus from labor to race relations. John Glen, however, cites broader shifts in the concerns and policies of Highlander and the CIO: "as the HFS staff gave greater attention to civil rights, political action, and the potential of a farmer-labor coalition, CIO leaders cast off much of their earlier militancy and concentrated upon securing wage increases and fringe benefits" (106). There is truth to both explanations, but what Glen alludes to is the chain of events, spanning nearly a decade from 1945 to 1953, that led to the dissolution of Highlander's relationship with the CIO.

The first sign of strain between the CIO and the folk school occurred at the 1945 Summer School, which increasingly reflected the policies and concern of the CIO rather than Highlander's broader conception of workers' education. Prior to the school, the discriminatory policies of certain unions within the CIO had already caused Highlander to rethink its commitment to running union schools on the CIO's behalf ("Staff Meeting, April 6, 1945"). These difficulties became more apparent during the 1946 Summer School, where course were not only narrowly focused and poorly organized, but also closed to African American workers at the request of Southern CIO organizers. Despite

the success of interracial sessions held throughout the rest of the year, CIO officials continued to demand greater control over the courses held at Highlander. As Glen describes it, officials “became more interested in using the folk school for training sessions on union policy than in allowing the HFS faculty to hold classes on a broad array of economic, political, and social issues” (125).

Some of the CIO’s decision to attend to organizing and securing benefits for its membership can be attributed to the negative response of the American public to unionism following World War Two. Anti-communist sentiment, combined with the public sentiment that organized labor was responsible for inflation and other economic problems, placed the CIO on the defensive (119). Their decision to further endorse Democratic Presidential candidate Harry Truman over Progressive candidate Henry Wallace further reflected a shift away from their previous militancy. This decision also placed allied organizations such as Highlander in the position of adopting CIO policies or finding themselves increasingly frozen from participation in union organizing and education efforts.

Highlander’s desire to remain an independent educational institution led staff in 1948 to seek out new directions for the school. While they maintained cordial if strained relations with the CIO, staff instead focused on working with the National Farmers’ Union on creating a farm-labor alliance capable of grass roots reform in the South. The Farmers’ Union initially seemed a likely ally for the folk school, as it encouraged interracial cooperation, civil rights activism, alliance with organized labor, and the use of adult education as an organizing agency (Glen 129). But despite early gains and promising programs, Highlander’s work with the union faltered following financial

disputes and declining membership. Southern racism further limited the abilities of the FU to organize in the region. The departure of FU organizers from the South in 1951 (to pursue work in the Midwest) all but put an end to Highlander's efforts at creating a farm-labor alliance.

Meanwhile, financial contributions from organized labor had declined from \$6,600 in 1946 to less than \$800 by 1951, further straining relations between Highlander and the CIO. Along with the decrease in financial support, Highlander was increasingly excluded from Southern organizing drives. The expulsion of "communist" unions from the CIO in 1949, along with an increased concentration "on gaining concessions for a more disciplined rank and file," signaled the Congress's turn away from extended work with outside groups. Highlander was not the only organization adversely affected by this shift in policy; the Southern Conference for Human Welfare, the Georgia Workers Education School, and the Southern School for workers all closed for lack of union support.

The CIO's demand in 1949 that Highlander disavow itself publicly from any Communist agenda seemed to spell the end the two groups' work together. Following Horton's refusal to make such a statement, the CIO cancelled its Rubber Workers' session, owing to charges of communism at the school. Horton demanded the right to face his accusers, but only later learned that the school interracial policies had earned it the enmity of three Southern CIO directors. Despite the stand-off over the CIO's need for a public statement against communism, the school once again gained the policy support of the Congress in 1950.

While several CIO sessions ran at the school between 1950 and 1953, Horton turned most of his attention to establishing a program for the United Packing Workers Association. Beginning in 1951, Highlander attempted to establish a sustainable educational program for UPWA locals and shop stewards. Once again, staff ran into two major difficulties: union officials' desire for greater control over the content and direction of courses, and racism as a major obstacle to interracial organizing drives. Following a disastrous residential session in March of 1953, in which union officials ran sessions in an arbitrary and narrow fashion, Horton resigned from the UPWA and Highlander staff decided to discontinue work with the union.

Ironically, it was this same 1953 residential session that finally saw the CIO formally dissolve its relationship with the folk school. The Congress removed Highlander from its list of approved organizations in August of 1953, only later explaining that Highlander had been mistakenly confused with the "communist" UPWA session. While CIO officials "had a big laugh" over the confusion, Highlander was never placed back on the approved organizations list. Horton later learned that Southern CIO official, criticized by the school for his racism and use of Ku Klux Klan organizers, had initiated the charges against the school.

Horton and other Highlander staff reflected that throughout their work with organized labor, racism had reared its head as an institutional obstacle to almost all organizing efforts. As such, they determined to work instead on "a program to unite black and white people in a struggle for common goals" (153). It is hardly surprising that the staff, as teachers who traditionally served underrepresented and oppressed communities, fixed their attention of the impending *Brown v. Board of Education*

decision and the issue of public school desegregation. Thus began Highlander's work with the emerging Civil Rights Movement, and one of the most successful periods in the school's history.

Highlander as Movement Halfway House

Despite Highlander's longstanding commitment to interracial education, the school's early years saw staff struggle to pursue this goal. Nonetheless, the experience of staff members had convinced them early that racial equality was essential to democratic social reform. Myles Horton experienced Southern racism first-hand during his time as a secretary for the YMCA, as he attempted to collaborate with minority members on events (Adams 7-8). He had also lectured on African Americans and the problems of race in America during his travels in Denmark (Glen 18). As a result, Highlander ran as an integrated school throughout its operational history, and welcomed its first African American guest speakers—including Fisk Professor Charles Johnson—in 1934 (Horton, *Highlander* 195). While the school did not announce its official non-discrimination policy until 1940, staff used mechanisms such as a single dining room for students to maintain Highlander's integrated status.

By 1941, James Dombrowski had become insistent that the folk school needed to confront the issue of racism directly, but found little support from other staff members. This dispute was partially responsible for his resignation in 1942, after which he became executive secretary of the Southern Conference for Human Welfare. That same year, the folk school made two important moves toward solidifying racial equality as a concrete educational goal. First, Fisk Sociologist Lewis Jones became the first African American

to serve on the HFS executive council. Second, the staff announced in August that residential sessions at the school would be interracial. The school's first interracial conference was held in 1943, the same year that the school first offered race relations programs ("Staff Meeting, July 12, 1943"). Myles Horton headed one of the most successful of these programs at the Rohm-Hass Plexiglas factory in Knoxville, where he personally oversaw the easing of tensions among union leaders of both races through personal counseling and discussion.

But staff continued to encounter difficulties in their attempts to address racism within the ranks of Southern labor. Despite the school's non-discrimination policies, their policy of admitting only union-endorsed students to residential workshops ensured that most of these sessions remained white. In 1946, four years after the school's announcement of interracial workshops, staff members still expressed anxiety over dividing the labor movement and often conducted interracial work outside of their union sessions ("Staff Meeting, March 31, 1946"). For similar reasons, Myles Horton had decided against integrating the 1945 Southern CIO School, a decision that both compromised the school's commitment to interracial education and convinced staff of the limits they faced when working with Southern unions. Following the CIO's 1953 blacklisting of Highlander, the folk school turned its attention almost exclusively toward the Civil Rights Movement, and concentrated on educational programs that would assist African Americans in their demands for social, political and economic equality.

According to social movement theorist Aldon Morris, Highlander served the Civil Rights Movement as a halfway house. For Morris, halfway houses are organizations that are "only partially integrated into the larger society because [their] participants are

actively involved in efforts to bring about a desired change in society” (139). Despite their inability to affect wide-scale change on their own, movement halfway houses nonetheless “develop a battery of social change resources such as skilled activists, tactical knowledge, media contacts, workshops, knowledge of past movements, and a vision of a future society” (140). Emerging social movements provide these halfway houses with a wide audience, who in turn profit from the resources that halfway houses make available.

Francesca Polletta argues that halfway houses are important to social movements not only for the resources that they provide, but also for the experience that they provide movement participants in collective decision-making and democratic living (64-5). These organizations thereby serve as active examples of the sorts of communities that social movements hope to build. Polletta also emphasizes the links between labor colleges and union education programs in the 1930s, and the organizational strategies of the Civil Rights Movement (28). Not only were the pedagogies used by early union education programs and civil rights organizations similar in many ways; in many cases organizers trained in union programs were active leaders within the Civil Rights Movement.

But movement halfway houses, beyond supplying resources and models for democratic community-building, also play an important rhetorical role in the emergence of social movements. This role consists not only in managing more familiar rhetorical enterprises, such as publicity and media response, but also in developing the rhetorical agencies through which movements make their claims. That is, movement halfway houses are instrumental in helping emerging social movements to recognize and develop

the symbolic resources necessary for sustaining political action. Morris has argued that these strategies are essential if movements are to appropriately deploy indigenous resources—cultural, economic, and political stocks already available within local communities—and thereby attract wider support (282-3).

Morris and Polletta further emphasize the important of local leadership and resources in the development of these strategies. Morris argues that, in the emergent phase of social movements, indigenous resources are crucial to movement success. In the absence of widespread awareness of, or support for, a given movement, local participants need to develop their own resources and leadership (282). Polletta's model rightly identifies these resources as the basis for democratic decision-making, and we might therefore conclude that indigenous rhetorical resources are also central to communication and organization within emergent social movements.

Highlander had operated as a halfway house for the Southern Labor Movement during the 1930s and 1940s, providing instruction for the large student body generated by CIO and other Southern organizing drives. Furthermore, the folk school's "percolator" education theory had always emphasized the importance of indigenous resources to successful organization. When Highlander staff turned their attention to racial equality and the Civil Rights Movement, they had already developed an adaptable pedagogy capable of responding to the needs of Southern African Americans.

In this regard, the 1950s were a decade of successes for the folk school. Upon assessing the organizational opportunities afforded by the emerging Civil Rights Movement, staff members agreed to coordinate their efforts around the issue of public school desegregation. The imminent *Brown v. Board of Education* decision was, in the

minds of Highlander staff, the event that most afforded the folk school publicity and access to civil rights campaigners. Workshops held from 1953 to 1955 created pamphlets, films, reports and a great deal of energy in support of public school desegregation. Sessions following *Brown II* focused on generating maps and strategies to help communities desegregate school facilities (Glen 161).

The 1955 summer workshop on public segregation was the first time that Rosa Parks, at the insistence of friend and activist Virginia Durr, attended Highlander. The two week institute followed hot on the heels of the Supreme Court's May 1955 *Brown II* decision. Participants reported on desegregation efforts in their own communities, after which they broke into groups and worked on implementation strategies. Parks remained skeptical about the success of desegregation efforts in Montgomery, as she didn't believe that African Americans would rally around the issue. Nonetheless, the workshop made an impact on Rosa Parks, who remembers the attendance of the Oak Ridge High School principal as well as the optimism and comfort that existed in the interracial session (Wigginton).

Grace Jordan McFadden argues that it was during this 1955 workshop that Parks "gained knowledge of civil disobedience and, as a consequence, sparked the Montgomery bus boycott" (89). However, testimony from both Parks and Septima Clark would seem to suggest that Highlander's influence was more indirect. In an interview with Eliot Wigginton, Parks notes that she had been working with Montgomery's NAACP youth council prior to her visit to Highlander. The council had, under her leadership, challenged segregation in Montgomery's public library, confirming Parks' participation in direct action campaigns prior to the 1955 workshop (230). Clark contends that Parks

answered questions on how she mobilized youth to visit the Freedom Train, further suggesting that Parks was an active rather than passive workshop participant. While the topic of Montgomery's bus boycott was discussed at the workshop, Parks was "doing some work" with Claudette Colvin's March 1955 arrest for a similar bus violation, again suggesting that she came to Highlander with much of the knowledge she would need for her own act of civil disobedience.

What Parks does appear to have gained from Highlander was the emotional conviction she needed to mount her own personal challenge to segregation. While discussing the workshop with Paulo Freire, Myles Horton noted that Parks "doesn't say a thing about anything *factually* that she learned" (Horton and Freire 153). Rather, "[s]he says the reason Highlander meant something to her and emboldened her to act as she did was that at Highlander she found *respect* as a black person and found white people she could *trust*." Parks herself commented that the workshop was a place where she "could enjoy the relaxing atmosphere without having to have color lines drawn anywhere" (Wigginton 231). Virginia Durr offers a possible explanation for how this feeling of respect and trust may have been the final push Parks needed to act: "When she came back she was so happy and felt so liberated and then as time went on she said the discrimination got worse and worse to bear" (Glen 162).

In fact, it may be more accurate to suggest that Highlander found as much or more inspiration in Parks' refusal to stand as she had found in the desegregation workshop. John Glen has argued that it was the Montgomery bus boycott that pushed Highlander staff to move "beyond the issue of public school desegregation to the entire range of problems involved in attaining a racially integrated society" (164). The school was only

indirectly involved in the Montgomery campaign, providing Parks with financial assistance and an offer of employment immediately following her arrest. Nonetheless, the impact that Parks—alongside Esau Jenkins and Septima Clark—had on the folk school pushed staff further into the arena of civil rights work. In the years following the bus boycott, folk school staff would develop their most successful organizing program to date.

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. also visited the school for its 25th Anniversary celebrations in 1957. Held over the Labor Day weekend, the anniversary workshop focused on the Civil Rights Movement, developments in the struggle for integration, and the history of Highlander. King gave a speech before 180 participants that offered an optimistic view of civil rights struggles, and further emboldened the folk school in its work. The relationship between Highlander and King would prove essential to the survival of the Citizenship School program. Only later would Highlander staff learn that it was their 25th Anniversary workshop that allowed Georgia state employee Edwin Friend to collect evidence of Highlander’s “communist” affiliations with figures like King and white integrationist Aubrey Williams.

But Highlander’s greatest contribution to the Civil Rights Movement would be its Citizenship School program. The concept of citizenship schools—institutions designed to help African Americans secure the vote through reading and writing instruction—was first brought to Highlander in 1954 by South Carolinians Septima Clark and Esau Jenkins. Neither Clark nor Jenkins nor the Highlander staff could have guessed that the program they would develop would extend across every Southern state and would eventually contribute to the registration of over 2,000,000 African Americans. In many

ways, the program developed at Highlander over the following three years is exemplary of the work done by movement halfway houses, as it focused a long tradition of community organizing around education into a potent program for social change.

The African American Struggle for Educational Access

In a 2006 article in *College Composition and Communication*, Susan Kates asserts that the landmark *Brown v. Board of Education* decision provided the initial impetus for organization of citizenship schools (486). This decision, Kates argues, “proved to be a triggering event that offered grass roots African American educators the legal precedent and constitutional affirmation they needed to combat social injustice elsewhere, primarily in the voting system” (481). While she is correct that public school desegregation provided Highlander staff with an issue around which to base their work with the African American community, the claim that *Brown* was a “triggering event” in the development of the citizenship schools ignores the longer history of African American educational activism *prior* to the *Brown* decision. In ignoring this prior history, Kates risks obscuring the long history of community organization that attended African American educational activism.

There is no doubt that the *Brown v. Board* decision was a watershed event in the Civil Rights Movement. The decision effected an “intellectual and rhetorical reconceptualization” of “the full status of African Americans as persons and citizens” (Bell 135). By declaring that separate school facilities are “inherently unequal,” the Supreme Court effectively overturned *Plessy v. Ferguson* and the legal basis for many Jim Crow laws. For many people, this argument seemed to provide the foundation for

challenging segregation not just in public schools, but in all areas of Southern life. But despite the importance of the Supreme Court ruling, many African Americans remained ambivalent about its effectiveness in redressing educational inequalities.

Even prior to the *Brown* decision, African Americans were far from unanimous in their appraisal of public school desegregation. Carter G. Woodson concluded in 1930 that schools not suited to the needs of students' communities did more harm than no schools at all (Woodson 29). Despite his earlier criticism of black schools, W.E.B. Du Bois likewise concluded in 1935 that separate schools for African Americans may in fact be the only way of securing the kind of education that they needed (Du Bois, "Does the Negro Need Separate Schools?" 329; Bell 119).¹ These sentiments were often shared by those African American communities who, in the 1950s, showed concern over the plight of African American schools following the *Brown* decision. Derrick Bell, reflecting on his work as an NAACP Legal Defense Fund lawyer, recalls the anxiety that communities such as Harmony, Mississippi felt about the fate of schools that had traditionally served students with considerable success (Bell 100-101).

Following the decision, commentators as varied as Hannah Arendt, Malcolm X, and Stokely Carmichael continued to criticize the decision for failing to address the political issue of white supremacy and African American citizenship. Hannah Arendt, in an infamous 1959 article in *Dissent*, argued that casting the question of political citizenship as an issue of education access profoundly confused the issue, and risked reinforcing the very prejudice and discrimination that *Brown v Board* was ostensibly meant to combat ("Reflections on Little Rock"). Malcolm X concluded that integrated schools still owned principally by the white communities could hardly be considered

integrated at all (*By Any Means Necessary*, 38-9). Carmichael expressed skepticism about educational access for two reasons: first, following Woodson and Malcolm X, Carmichael argued that the education being offered to African Americans was unsuited to the needs of African American communities; second, there simply weren't enough educational resources to go around (*Stokely Speaks*). Therefore, it was highly unlikely that desegregated schools would be able to dramatically affect the political status of African Americans.

These debates over public school desegregation, despite the varying political and intellectual commitments of participants, touch on two important points. Firstly, as Derrick Bell points out, challenging separate schools doesn't necessarily guarantee equal education. Securing educational access for African American students did not necessarily mean securing for them the same education that white students received. Secondly, educational access and political access are not necessarily the same thing, and the latter does not automatically follow from the former. While Arendt states the case too strongly when she denies that schools are political as well as social institutions, she nonetheless accurately predicted that public school desegregation was no guarantee that African Americans would be granted political rights equal to those of whites.

More recently, scholars such as Derrick Bell and Catherine Prendergast have continued to offer critical and somewhat pessimistic assessments of *Brown v. Board*. Following the rollbacks of civil rights legislation in court decisions such as *Washington v. Davis* and *Board of Regents v. Bakke*, scholars have questioned the real changes achieved through the Brown decision. Derrick Bell concludes that *Brown v. Board* was never simply about securing African American civil rights, and that the Supreme Court was

motivated by “interest-convergence” that aligned African American rights with issues such as America’s international image (Bell 52; Dudziak 13). Catherine Prendergast argues that the decision reinforced the idea of education and literacy as white property, insofar as the NAACP and the Supreme Court failed to challenge the real problem at work—white supremacy (Prendergast 40). The failure of the decision to secure educational and political participation for African Americans, and the erosion of the gains made with the *Brown II* decision, left racist power structures in place and made possible the rollbacks of the 1970s and 1980s (Marable 200).

Aldon Morris has further suggested that Southern African American communities harbored doubts about the organizational effectiveness of the *Brown v. Board* decision. For direct-action leaders in the Civil Rights Movement, *Brown v. Board* represented the “legal approach” to protest; as Wyatt Tee Walker describes it, “You file one court case, you get one litigant, it takes from three to five years to get into the Supreme Court, and you spend a least a thousand dollars on the one case” (quoted in Morris, 36). Morris argues that legal victories thus “required the expenditure of a great deal of energy and time for the sake of little relief [for the black community] from the yoke of domination” (37). As such, many African American leaders in the south expressed impatience with this legal approach, and organized their own local organizations dedicated to direct action and mass mobilization.

Morris is the first to concede that *Brown v. Board* played an important part in the development of these “local movement centers” (40). The court decision proved that social change was not only possible but in the process of happening, thus providing civil rights activists with renewed energy and commitment. Attacks on Southern NAACP

chapters following *Brown v. Board*, including its eventual outlawing in Alabama, also convinced local leaders of the need to combat white supremacy in new ways and with new organizations. Such sentiments may well explain Rosa Parks' skepticism about the effectiveness of organizing around the *Brown* decision, and her eventual decision to push for direct action through a more local target: the public transport system.

It would seem sensible then to locate the development of first citizenship schools within this history, and to understand them as institutions organized locally in the wake of the *Brown* decision. But there is a longer extant history of educational organization within Southern African American communities that influenced Clark and Jenkins in their advocacy of citizenship schools. In fact, the development of unofficial educational programs within African American communities can be traced back well into the 18th century (Cornelius). Thus it could be said that the *Brown* decision and the citizenship schools actually represent two extensions of a much longer tradition of community organization around literacy and educational access. But we nonetheless need to look at the history of more direct African American efforts at literacy education if we are to effectively understand the history of citizenship schools.

In his 1990 essay, "'Knowledge as Power': The Black Struggle for Literacy," Thomas Holt notes that African Americans have, since before 1865, been as active in the promotion of educational equality as they have in the promotion of political and civic equality. Tracing this investment from 1865 to the 1960s, Holt concludes that "through the cruelties of slavery, through the disappointments of reconstruction, through the brutal repressions of the years after reconstruction...black people have held on to the belief that literacy is one of the keys that will unlock the door" (101). Holt's article is instructive, in

turning our attention not only to the “great fund of enthusiasm for education in the black community,” but also to the culturally specific literacy struggles that formed a part of the African American freedom movement. It is impossible to adequately define the importance of literacy education within the Civil Rights Movement without further reference to the longer-running battle over literacy in ante-bellum America.

In *Slavery and Social Death*, Orlando Patterson notes that literacy and illiteracy play an important role in establishing and maintaining institutions of slavery. Patterson describes slavery as a practice of “natal alienation,” through which enslaved individuals are “denied all claims on, and obligations to, his parents and living blood relations” and “all such claims on his more remote ancestors and on his descendants” (5). The denial of all ties between ascending and descending generations divorced slaves from their families, from any inheritance rights, and from the cultural and political memories necessary for citizenship in the master society. Central to natal alienation is “the control of symbolic instruments,” by which the enslaved are “[a]lienated from all ‘rights’ or claims of birth” (5). The control of literacy was one such means of controlling the symbolic instruments available to, and associated with, enslaved African Americans. While it should be noted that slavery was maintained with many other tools as well—most notably fear and brute force—the control of literacy was an important management strategy.

Aside from producing a “socially excommunicated” class among enslaved African Americans, slave owners’ control of literacy had several practical motivations. As David Walker’s *Appeal* demonstrated in the nineteenth century, writing was a potent means of communicating beyond the watchful eye of slaveholders. Writing allowed

enslaved individuals to forge the checks and passes necessary to achieve freedom. By restricting access to literacy among enslaved communities, slave owners attempted to channel communication through networks they controlled. They thereby hoped to limit slave insurrections and escapes, and further cement the dependency of those they held in bondage to them.

Naturally, the control that slave owners were actually able and willing to exercise over African American literacy was far from total. While historian C. Vann Woodward has cautioned us about reading American history through American laws, it is worth noting that, during the nineteenth century, only four southern states went so far as to outlaw the teaching of reading and writing to African Americans.² The influence of Presbyterian, Methodist, and Baptist theologies—with their emphasis on individual literacy as a means of comprehending God—further convinced some slave owners of the need to teach reading to enslaved populations. Finally, the control exerted by slave owners over literacy, and the clear relationship between reading, writing, and citizenship convinced many African Americans of the political worth of these skills. As a result, many African American communities made use of their more educated members and religious leaders to gain access to literacy (Cornelius). From this we could conclude that, faced with legal barriers to education and literacy, African Americans made literacy a communal enterprise.

The political work of 18th- and 19th century African American writers attests to the audiences and arguments made available via literacy. Olaudah Equiano and Phillis Wheatley, two of the earliest recognized African American writers, both used their writings as a means of appealing to white audiences on behalf of the abolitionist cause.

David Walker's *Appeal* attempted to rally African Americans to overthrow slavery, and was distributed widely and often secretly owing to its written form. Writing in the mid-19th century, Frederick Douglass describes the ways in which enslaved African Americans learned to read and write, and the role that literacy played in their attempts to win freedom. And at the turn of the twentieth century, Ida B. Wells Barnett used her ownership of the *Memphis Free Speech and Headlight* to bring public attention to the atrocities of lynching and the contemptible morality of Southern whites. These authors were not only able to "plead their humanity" by mastering letters, but also to engage in important political action through their writings.

The history of African American engagements with literacy and education confirm the conclusions of Edward Stevens who, in a detailed study of illiteracy and its political, economic, and legal effects in American society, argues that literacy cannot be separated from the question of social justice (Stevens). African Americans continued to recognize literacy as a political technology—one that determined access to legal and commercial citizenship—in the twentieth century. Both the NAACP Legal Defense Fund and African American critics of desegregation continued to organize and advocate for African American educational access. Malcolm X and Stokely Carmichael, activists who also expressed doubts about the kinds of education that African Americans would receive in integrated schools, nonetheless insisted on the necessity of education as an agency for the full realization of political consciousness. Education, then, represented a trope around which various African American communities could rally and organize, and an agency that continued to hold out the promise of political freedom. It was this

understanding of education that brought Septima Clark and Esau Jenkins to Highlander in 1954.

The Sea Island Citizenship Schools

Septima Clark was born in 1898 in Charleston. Clark worked as a public school teacher from 1916 to 1956, when she was fired on account of her membership in the NAACP. Clark spent most of this time in the Charleston region, and several years on Johns Island – one of the many Sea Islands that are scattered along South Carolina’s coast. Her work as a teacher, combined with her commitment to broader work within the Charleston community, led her to recognize early the political force of literacy education. Her first teaching appointment, as an elementary and middle school teacher on Johns Island, soon led to her second: within a few months of arrival, Clark was also helping adults in the community learn to read and write.

In 1919, Clark took a position teaching at her former high school in Charleston. She remained in the job for only one year, but it was nonetheless an important period in her life. During that year, Clark joined the NAACP and assisted with a campaign to hire African American teachers in Charleston schools. In 1920, the same year that Clark returned to Johns Island, Charleston schools hired their first African American teachers; a year later saw the appointment of the city’s first African American principal (Brown 99-100). Between 1920 and 1947, Clark taught in several towns and cities in South Carolina, completing in that period both her bachelor and her masters degrees (from Benedict College and Hampton Institute respectively) (Brown 117).

In 1947, Clark returned to teaching on Johns Island, and quickly returned to her work in the community as well. With a donation secured from her sorority, Clark worked to establish a health program on the island, with a major focus on diphtheria inoculation for children (*Echo* 110). As she worked to establish this program, she discovered that many of the people she was working with did not know their birth dates or those of their children, and were also unable to vote, or complete mail and money orders (138). Recognizing the role that illiteracy was playing in the depressing conditions of life on the Sea Islands, Clark saw “combating adult illiteracy” as one of the most pressing tasks before her (52).

Esau Jenkins, born 1910, was similarly engaged in community literacy education. In a 1961 letter to the South Carolina Council on Human Relations, Septima Clark described Jenkins as “a formally unlettered man with a degree mind working as the Moses of his people” (Clark to Spearman). Jenkins’ own formal schooling ended early in his childhood, but he managed to learn to read and write by continuing his education when and where he could. He made his living as a farmer and as the proprietor of an integrated bus line that carried workers to and from their jobs in Charleston. It was this contact with local community that convinced him of the need for educational – and more specifically literacy – campaigns on the Sea Islands. Noting the superstition and lack of commercial acumen that resulted from the inability to read and write, Jenkins concluded that he needed to “help the people to be better citizens, give them a chance to get a better education, and know how to reason and look out for themselves, and take more part in political action” (Carawan and Carawan, *Ain’t You Got a Right...* 146).

It was on one of the morning bus trips to Charleston that Alice Wine, a Johns Island local, first encouraged Jenkins to direct his efforts directly toward literacy education. Wine had approached Jenkins about learning to read and write that she might register to vote. Jenkins responded by holding informal literacy education classes on the bus.

I would start for Charleston about 6.45 or 7.00 A.M. and arrive 7.30 to 7.45 A.M. for those going to work at 8.00. Those starting work at 9.00 A.M. would stay on the bus. While driving, I would talk about definitions of words in the constitution of South Carolina, procedures relating to voting and voter registration. After arrival, we would hold class. Before registration days, we would do this two or three days per week.

(Tjerandsen 151-152)

But Jenkins found himself limited to teaching people to memorize the state constitution, rather than teaching them to read. While this method allowed people to register to vote, it proved limited in helping them to further engage in other literate activities.

Jenkins had further committed himself to organizing his local community, and improving conditions on Johns Island. Zilphia Horton noted the centrality of Jenkins to their organizing efforts on Johns Island in 1954, describing the many positions that Jenkins held within the community: “President of the John’s Island P.T.A., Superintendent of the Baptist Sunday School, Assistant pastor of his church, President of the Citizen’s Club of 200 members (purpose, to encourage people to register), Chairman of the Progressive Club (purpose, to ‘help people out when they get arrested and need money for legal aid’), and member of the Executive Board of the NAACP of Charleston” (Untitled notes). A separate field trip report from the same year commented that “Jenkins

probably has enough prestige to enable him to provide leadership beyond John's Island" and referenced a citation he had received from the Omega Psi Phi fraternity for political action in November, 1952 ("Field Trip Report").

It was in the hopes of addressing the problems associated with community literacy education that Clark, and at her suggestion Jenkins, attended a workshop at Highlander in August, 1954. This workshop, entitled "World Problems, the United Nations, and You," proved to be a central event in the history of community literacy education in the United States.³ The 1954 workshop was made possible by a 1953 grant for \$44,100 from the Emil Schwarzhaupt Foundation, for the purposes of "promoting rural citizenship" (Tjerandsen 142). The workshop program emphasized the relationship between the economic and social problems of the South and the broader work of the UN, with the hopes of using examples of discrimination from elsewhere in the world as a means of educating white and African American participants about the effects of racism in the US. Jenkins, however, wanted Highlander staff and workshop participants to focus on the more immediate concerns facing African American communities in the south, particularly "illiteracy as a barrier to voter registration" (Glen 185).

Voter registration laws in South Carolina—like most southern states—required that applicants pass a complicated literacy test before they could be registered. Applicants were required to write down their name, birth date and location, address, township or parish, county, and nearest voting location. Applicants were then required to read, write and interpret a section from the South Carolina state constitution. The literacy test could be avoided by applicants who owned \$300 in property in South Carolina, and had paid all taxes due on that property; of course this exemption required on being able to

read the laws and produce documentation in support of the claim. These laws made it exceedingly difficult for African Americans to register to vote, particularly when they were further denied access to properly funded schools. Literacy education was therefore an urgent need within the Sea Island communities, and also a potential agency for organizing broader Civil Rights activism.

Highlander's commitment to developing literacy education programs on the Sea Islands was not, however, automatic. Horton, while firmly committed to the cause of desegregation and equality, hoped to achieve immediate results via direct political action. It was only after considerable debate that Clark convinced Horton that literacy class were a more pressing idea. Clark describes in *Ready from Within* her early disagreements with Horton on how best to proceed with voter registration:

Myles thought I could go right into the community and get a large group of people, talk to them, and then bring them up to the registration booth and get them registered. You can do that now, because the laws have changed, but then black people had to read. From the office of Highlander we sent to all of those states for election laws. Myles hadn't read them. He was just making a guess of what you could do. But when we looked through those election laws, we knew what we had to do with those people. We had to get them trained to read those laws and answer those questions. (Brown 53)

Glen further notes that Horton believed that a program on school desegregation would increase political activity on Johns Island, and that this activity was necessary for the successful implementation of literacy classes (Glen 192). But this approach failed to

recognize that the Johns Island community itself believed that literacy was the necessary condition for improving their lot.

What Clark and Jenkins immediately recognized was the role literacy and literacy education played in the lives of Johns Island citizens. Formal education had been directly deployed as a means of discrimination (Prendergast 5). Schools were strictly segregated, leaving African American schools underfunded and underattended. The facilities were particularly unsuited to adult learners, who “did not want to go to a public school, stuff themselves uncomfortably behind children’s desks, and use the same reading materials ordinarily used by first graders” (Glen 193). This in turn became the mechanism by which African Americans were excluded from voting, from commercial activities such as banking, and thus from first-class citizenship. These conditions no doubt impressed on the citizens of Johns Island the necessity of literacy and education.

Despite their recognition of the stakes of literacy education, African Americans’ shame over their illiteracy often exacerbated the hegemonic effects of educational discrimination. Clark notes that African Americans she visited while establishing citizenship schools were reluctant to admit to strangers that they could neither read nor write. The humiliation felt by African Americans over the material conditions surrounding education served to further demobilize community action. The segregation effected by formal education thus worked legally, materially and psychologically to disrupt African American political organization in the South.

It was in response to these conditions that Clark and Jenkins, and Horton and Highlander soon after, planned the first Citizenship School on Johns Island. An old

school building became the site for the school, its purchase initially funded by Highlander. According to Clark, the purchase of the school was no small feat:

Mr. Esau Jenkins found out about these buildings and decided that that would be a wonderful thing for us to do, buy an old school house so the adult school could have its own building. At first, he tried to bid for it from the superintendent and found out that a white man had gotten in a bigger bid than he. Well, he felt that he couldn't raise that much money so he asked an undertaker in Charleston to lend him some money to buy the building. The undertaker said that he couldn't. He turned his attention then to Highlander and with our help he was able to get the building. (Horton "Discussion")

The building was then divided into a grocery store and two classrooms. Clark remarks that "[w]e planned the grocery store to fool white people. We didn't want them to know that we had a school back there" (Clark 47). Jenkins comments that the co-operative store was also essential to repaying the loan on the school ("Discussion"). But just as importantly, the shopfront helped to organize the Sea Islands community *economically*: the revenue generated by the grocery store, along with contributions from individuals, allowed the Johns Island Community to repay Highlander the \$1500 purchase price for the school in less than 18 months.

The first class was taught in the new school in 1957 by Bernice Robinson, a former beautician and a cousin of Clark. While Robinson had had no formal training as a teacher, Horton and Clark believed this to be an advantage rather than a hindrance in a community that already distrusted educators (Tjerandsen 161). While she initially

brought grade school reading materials to teach from, she quickly assessed that the needs of her students were considerably advanced from those of grade school students:

I knew that I would have to build a curriculum that would meet their expressed needs. I secured an original money order and traced it on onion skin paper, then on to chart board, making enough copies for all students to practice upon. I used order blanks from catalogs to teach and meet that specified need. Esau had an original copy of the application for voter registration, but the printing was so fine, I had Highlander to reproduce it in larger type by stencil cutting and mimeographing. Later I hand-printed the application on chart board and tacked it on the classroom wall. (161).

Instruction dealt with all facets of literacy, from instruction in holding a pencil and the signing of a cursive signature, to the transcription of personal narratives, to the interpretation of complex tracts from the South Carolina constitution (Brown 50). But at all points functional instruction in writing and reading was wed to what students identified as their needs as citizens.

The results from the Johns Island school were far from negligible. All 26 students who attended the first school were registered to vote. The number of African Americans able to vote had grown to 600 by 1958, when all voters were required to reregister. Approximately 800 had registered by 1963, representing 30% of eligible adults. But just as important to note is that voter participation among registered African Americans on Johns Island during that period was nearly 100% (Tjerandsen 163-4).

The success of the Johns Island school allowed Highlander, through the work of Clark, Jenkins and Robinson, to establish other citizenship schools throughout the Sea

Islands. Clark and Robinson visited other islands in the area, inviting citizens to establish citizenship schools in their communities. Schools were established in 1958 on Wadmalaw Island, Edisto Island and in North Charleston (Tjerandsen 167). St. Helena and Daufuskie Island schools were established in 1959 (Glen 197). These schools further led to the development of the leadership and organization necessary for maintaining African American political activity in South Carolina.

The growth and success of the Citizenship School program during this period stood in stark contrast to the Highlander Folk School's struggle for survival. The school had long been the target for state governments and southern racists, owing to its openly acknowledged integrated status, and had endured legislative, journalistic, and outright violent attacks since the 1930s. The 1950s saw no change in this trend: officials from Mississippi, Arkansas, Georgia, and Tennessee all denounced Highlander as a communist organization responsible for stirring up racial strife in the South.

One of the most famous attacks on the school was initiated in 1954, when Georgia Governor Marvin Griffin founded the Georgia Commission on Education for the express purpose of investigating and shutting down organizations like Highlander (Glen 216). While the commission had to wait until 1957 for an opportunity to cause real strife, this delay was more than made up for by the publicity the Commission generated. Upon hearing of the folk school's twenty-fifth birthday celebration—set to happen on the Labor Day weekend—the Commission dispatched photographer Edwin Friend to investigate the festivities.

Friend arrived at the school with his wife, claiming to be a freelance photographer and employee of the state water department. Another guest, Abner Berry, likewise

registered as a freelance journalist, hiding his affiliation with the Communist Party's *Daily Worker*. The connection between Friend and Berry remains a mystery, though the two were seen talking at various points during the workshop. While Myles Horton paid little attention to the two men, he grew somewhat suspicious when Berry made his way into each of Friend's pictures, particularly one of Horton, Martin Luther King, Jr., Rosa Parks, and Aubrey Williams (which Horton himself had requested Friend take) (217).

While Horton refused to pay for the picture on account of Berry's intrusion, he had no idea how famous that picture would become in the years following the Labor Day gathering. Friend returned to the Georgia Commission on Education, which in turn cited the photographs and Berry's attendance of the event as proof of communist activity at the school (218). The photo requested by Horton—which now depicted Horton, King, Williams, and Berry as the “four horsemen of racial agitation”—soon found its way onto postcards and billboards across the South, bearing the caption “King at Communist Training School” (219).

On July 31, 1959, Tennessee District Attorney Albert Sloan led county and state law officers on a raid of the Highlander property. The group was ostensibly looking for liquor, which they eventually found during an illegal search of the nearby Hortons' property. Four staff members, including the tee totaling Clark and Guy Carawan, were arrested for possession of alcohol, public drunkenness, interfering with officers, and resisting arrest (Glen 232). While all four staff members were released on bail later that night, the raid represented both the culmination of racist attacks upon the folk school and the beginning of legal proceedings that would eventually lead to Highlander's closure.

The state of Tennessee had initiated an investigation of Highlander earlier that year, on January 26 (222). The hearings, which ran from February 21 to March 5, centered on complications with Highlander's charter, the school's open integration of classes, the transfer of school property to Myles Horton, and regular cries of communism and subversion (224-227). Following the July raid, investigations resumed with the arraignment of the four staff members arrested at the school. In hearings that commenced in September, the sale of liquor was linked to earlier charges of running the school for profit and immorality (234). In a February 16, 1960 decision, Circuit Court Judge Chester Chattin determined that Highlander's charter should be revoked on the grounds that the school had been operated for Horton's benefit, had sold liquor without a license, and had openly practiced racial integration (243).

Staff members attempted several times to appeal Chattin's decision. When these appeals finally reached the Tennessee Supreme Court, a hostile judiciary dealt the school's fight for survival a more serious blow. After determining that the school had in fact been run for profit and had sold liquor, the court deemed it unnecessary to rule on the racial integration charge (245). This in turn removed any constitutional issue from the ruling that might allow the school to further appeal to the U.S. Supreme Court. The U.S. Supreme Court refused to review the school's appeal on October 9, 1961, effectively closing the school. The school's property was auctioned off in December, and the buildings themselves mysteriously burned to the ground shortly thereafter (Adams).

After the school's main building was first padlocked—following the July 1959 raid by Sloan—Myles Horton made the famous statement that “You can padlock a building. But you can't padlock an idea. Highlander is an idea. You can't kill it and you

can't close it" (Adams 133). In the case of Highlander's civil rights work this statement would prove prophetic. Fearful for the future of the folk school, Horton and Clark had by 1961 arranged to transfer the Citizenship Schools to the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, under the banner of the Citizenship Education Program (Branch, *Parting* 382). While the Conference had raised similar objections to those originally raised by Horton, the effectiveness of the program was undeniable (Tjerandsen 181). Clark joined the SCLC as director of workshops in July of 1961, two months before the Tennessee Supreme Court ordered Highlander's doors closed.

Horton himself asserts that Highlander's decision to transfer the Citizenship Schools to the SCLC was consistent with Highlander's policy of teaching communities to organize themselves:

We didn't want to spend time on operating a successful program. Anybody can do that. We'd try to experiment and develop something else. We decided we wanted to spin off the Citizenship Schools. It was well enough established and somebody else could do it. At that time we brought Andrew Young, who was later U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations and is now the mayor of Atlanta, to Highlander to coordinate the spread of this program. Before he got here, Martin Luther King asked if we would work out a program for Southern Christian Leadership Conference. Septima kept telling him about the Citizenship School program. At first I didn't think that it would necessarily be the best program for them, but later on King got interested in that program, and I got to thinking maybe after all it was the best program for them, and it would certainly solve our problem, getting it off our hands. (*We Make the Road* 75)

But there were also clear logistical issues that motivated the shift in program administration. By 1961, the program was increasing in size and in cost to the point where Highlander staff were concerned about the drain on resources. Furthermore, a \$26,500 grant from the Marshall Field Foundation, which was to provide the operating budget for the Citizenship Schools in 1961, was withheld due to the ongoing legal battles that Highlander faced (Glen 204). The SCLC was solicited to administer the funds and the program, though the grant was again withheld on account of SCLC not being a tax-exempt organization. The American Missionary Association was eventually given the grant, and administered the funds to SCLC for the Citizenship School program.

During the eight years that Highlander committed to issues of desegregation and citizenship education, an estimated 5,340 participants were enrolled in citizenship workshops (Tjerandsen 183). By 1964, the SCLC Citizenship Education program had registered 25,962 people, and by 1967 registration numbers had again increased by 272,000 (Tjerandsen 196).⁴ Septima Clark estimates the total number of people registered in the period from 1962-1970 at over 1,700,000 (Brown 70). These numbers attest to the success of the citizenship schools in providing both the sites and the programs required for the development of an African American political community in the South.

The Ceiling and the Floor in Literacy Education

In assessing the pedagogy of the Citizenship Schools, Susan Kates argues that the pedagogies used share many of the key assumptions of modern theories of critical pedagogy.⁵ On one level, she is correct; by focusing on the ways that education is

instrumental in the development of active citizenship, citizenship schools emphasized democratic educational ideals similar to those found in the work of such scholars as Paulo Freire, Henry Giroux, and Ira Shor. However, in emphasizing these similarities, Kates ignores the educational theories that were contemporary to the organization of the citizenship school program, and that informed the understanding that Jenkins, Clark, and Robinson had of the work they were performing. Historically, the Sea Island Citizenship Schools have a closer relationship to the functional literacy campaigns developed by UNESCO than they do to theories of critical pedagogy.

Paulo Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* is typically considered the foundation for contemporary critical pedagogy. It is here that Freire makes the now famous distinction between traditional "banking" models of education – in which teachers deposit knowledge in students – and "problem-posing" education. Problem-posing education, for Freire, involves students in a dialectical relationship between self and world, in which "people develop their power to perceive critically the way they exist in the world with which and in which they find themselves" (83). The world that emerges from such an education, then, is "not as a static reality, but...a reality in process, in transformation" (83).

One can see in Freire's theory of "reality in process" Marxist theories of history, which is made by men, though not in conditions of their own choosing (*Eighteenth Brumaire*). The most important goal for Freire, then, is to involve students in an active struggle to transform their own history, to "confront reality critically, simultaneously objectifying and acting upon that reality" (52). Central to this goal is the active communication made possible by the classroom. Freire argues that it is "only through

communication can human life hold meaning,” as it is only in communication that humans co-intentionally create the world in which they exist (77). This dialogue is itself the expression of the dialectical relationship between individuals and their world, and “imposes itself as the way by which they achieve significance as human beings” (88). Freire thus defines dialogue as an “existential necessity,” as a medium that connects individuals creatively with history.

Literacy is for Freire another means of communicating the relationship between the individual and the world. Insofar as the word names the world, reading and writing become potentially transformative acts. But such acts are not innocent of their social and political contexts, and should be understood as “cultural expressions” that are determined (if not entirely) by the historical conditions they emerge from (*Literacy* 51). It is this recognition of the situated nature of all literate acts that leads Freire to conclude that “I always saw teaching adults to read and write as a political act, an act of knowledge and therefore a creative act” (34). It is also an act that is central to the struggles of oppressed people to reclaim and reconstruct their histories.

Thus it is important to note that literacy is for Freire always a dialectical practice, one in which people learn to name and respond to the world around them – that is, to write as they learn to read:

...reading the word is not preceded merely by reading the world, but by a certain form of writing or rewriting it, that is, of transforming it by means of a conscious, practical work. For me, this dynamic process is central to the literacy process.

(35)

Literacy is thus linked to consciousness, and becomes the vehicle by which critical consciousness – conscientizacao – emerges. Such consciousness enables reflection upon, and reconstruction of, the material conditions that determine individuals' lives. By learning to name these conditions, and thus identify their oppressive structures, individuals find the means to transform them. Critical consciousness thus becomes a revolutionary means of accessing and realizing the potentials of the human spirit.

Henry Giroux offers an insightful summary of Freire's theories of literacy in his introduction to *Literacy: Reading the Word and the World*, a summary that also makes apparent the similarities between Freirean pedagogy and Highlander's citizenship schools. For Freire, "the issue of literacy and power does not begin and end with the process of learning how to read and write critically; instead, it begins with the fact of one's existence as part of a historically constructed practice within specific relations of power" (7). Literacy education, then, is "inherently a political project," one that helps students "to reconstitute their relationship with the wider society." Freire himself makes the connections between this theory of literacy and the Citizenship School Program in *We Make the Road by Walking*, a book co-authored with Horton in 1980s. Read in this light, Myles Horton's claim that Highlander never taught the "three R's" – reading, writing and arithmetic – indicates that he understood the literacy campaigns the school engaged in first and foremost as political campaigns. The teaching of reading and writing was – for Horton, and for Septima Clark, Esau Jenkins, and Bernice Robinson – the teaching of citizenship.

But despite the similarities between Highlander's citizenship education programs and Freirean critical pedagogy, it is important to note that historically Citizenship

Schools develop alongside functional literacy programs such as those developed by the Office of Education and UNESCO. While functional literacy programs grew in response to various historical exigencies, they are normally associated with the need to teach reading and writing to would-be soldiers during the Second World War. During this period, when manpower was in high demand and low supply, functional illiteracy – that which prevented people from executing the basic functions necessary for gainful employment – became an urgent problem.

For educators, however, functional illiteracy was not only a vocational problem, but also a social and ethical dilemma. In one of the first recorded uses of the term, in the introduction to the October 1946 issue of *The Elementary School Journal*, Francis Chase focuses on the moral problem of “functional illiteracy among negro adults” (69). While outlining programs aimed to alleviate this problem, Chase remarks that “the project will bring a degree of belated educational opportunity to many thousands of adults” (69). These adults are later described as “victims of educational neglect,” and Chase charges America as a nation with “assuming responsibility for the prevention of such neglect in the future” (70).

The moral charge thus accorded functional literacy programs was further picked up by UNESCO later that decade. Functional literacy campaigns were planned and initiated across the globe, under the broader banner of “fundamental education.” Fundamental education is most clearly defined in William Gray’s 1956 monograph, *The Teaching of Reading and Writing*:

Fundamental education is that kind of minimum and general education which aims to help children and adults who do not have the advantages of formal

education to understand the problems of their immediate environment and their rights and duties as citizens and individuals, and to participate more effectively in the economic and social progress of their community. (16-17)

Gray further defines the specific aims of fundamental education as “to help people understand their immediate problems and to provide them with the knowledge and skills to solve them through their own effort” and thereby address problems of social, economic and political organization (16).

Gray’s definition of functional literacy follows naturally from his description of fundamental education:

As implied in the foregoing discussion, a person is functionally literate when he has the acquired the knowledge and skills in reading and writing which enable him to engage effectively in all those activities in which literacy is normally assumed in his culture or group. (24, emphasis in original)

While not explicitly stated, it is thus fair to say that functional literacy was, for Gray and for UNESCO, intimately linked to citizenship and community development. Functional literacy was defined not by the ability to cross t’s and dot i’s, or to determine split infinitives and comma splices, but rather by competence in the symbolic skills required to conduct civic and commercial transactions that might improve living conditions for individuals and their respective communities.

Functional literacy further depends on two important principles: first, “that the nature and duration of the training given should be adapted to the needs of the specific groups served” (21); second, “that the training given should be based on compelling

motives for learning to read and write” (22). These two principles support what can only be described as the rhetorical goals that underpin functional literacy instruction:

The reader must not only master the mechanics of reading, but he must grow in his awareness of “the social context” of what he reads and of “the forces operating in his environment.” Only by this means can he understand and evaluate what he reads, make wise decisions and sense the direction of desirable social changes and governmental policies. (22)

By identifying “desirable social changes” and “governmental policies,” Gray makes clear that he understands functional literacy to involve many of the critical civic skills identified by Freire. The goal of fundamental education, then, is to provide individuals with the means by which to function as critical members of their communities.

The Sea Island Citizenship Schools clearly follow a program similar to that outlined by Gray. While it is tempting to suggest that these similarities result from Highlander’s familiarity with the United Nations and its educational programs, it is just as likely that they result from the school’s commitment to fostering organic pedagogies intimately linked to the communities they serve. After all, the Citizenship School program emerged directly in response to needs identified by the students themselves; its pedagogy was likewise determined by members of the Sea Island communities. Insofar as Highlander built a program receptive community goals and needs, they were able to meet the motivational and social criteria established by Gray for functional literacy programs.

However it is important to note where Highlander staff saw their work differing from functional literacy education. In a 1960 document entitled “Highlander’s Concept

of Education for Social Action,” Anne Lockwood comments that the Citizenship School program “uses fundamental education content, but departs immediately from the traditional understanding of the term” (1). For Lockwood, functional literacy is all too often “concerned with learning a skill, regardless of what use may be made of the skill in the future.” The Citizenship Schools, by contrast, are “concerned only with how the skill will be used.” This description not only indicates the familiarity of Highlander staff with fundamental education theories, but also preempts the criticisms of these theories that would be made in the 1980s and 1990s.

Kenneth Levine’s article in the August 1982 issue of the *Harvard Educational Review*, “Functional Literacy: Fond Illusions and False Economies,” provides a comprehensive account of these criticisms. Levine notes that functional literacy proved popular owing to its “extreme elasticity in meaning,” with the result that programs based on functional targets often licensed just about any pedagogical approach (249). Despite the intentions of Gray and other UNESCO authors, this results in functional literacy being equated with “literacy for work,” as evidenced by the adoption of functionality in literacy initiatives within the United States and England in the late 1960s and early 1970s (256). Such a shift, Levine argues, results in too much optimism about “literacy as an agent of progress” (251).

Many of these problems result, in Levine’s opinion, from the inability of functional literacy theorists to define acceptable standards for literacy campaigns. Some of this no doubt results from the deliberately nebulous approach to standards offered by Gray; by providing relative criteria for standards, Gray may well have made program administration particularly difficult. The net result historically seems to have been the

cancellation of UNESCO's World Literacy Campaign in 1964, and increasingly vocational definitions of functional literacy in developed countries (253).

The Sea Island Citizenship Schools, however, had little difficulty in defining the kind of literacy they taught, or the standards by which this literacy would be measured. In the first instance, literacy education was driven by the structure of the South Carolina voter registration test and the interpretative skills needed to pass it. In the second instance, literacy was defined in terms of the goals brought to the Citizenship Schools by the students themselves. Finally, as argued below, citizenship schools teachers introduced political and social information to students through the workbooks used in the classes. Thus the targets these educators aimed at were not measured by grade level (one of the most common measures for functional literacy), but rather by the local, day-to-day practices of citizenship. The attention paid by Citizenship School educators to local goals and histories acknowledged literacy as a contextual and political practice, determined by the issues of political and educational access facing students in their communities.

The need to anchor literacy campaigns in the communities they served was not, however, unique to the Sea Island Citizenship Schools. The Southern Regional Council and the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee were both operating successful voter registration campaigns at the same time that Septima Clark and Esau Jenkins were establishing the Sea Island schools. Robert Moses, who worked on the freedom school program that was later adopted by SNCC, clearly highlights the context for citizenship school programs: "the issue was the right to vote, and the question was political access" (4). This was the context that drove the freedom schools, and drove the pedagogical choices made there. Literacy came to be defined according to local targets (embodied in

voter registration tests), as a floor for first-class citizenship in African American communities.

Moses has further elaborated upon this “floor methodology” in his discussion of the Algebra Project, a math program designed to help disadvantaged students pass college preparation tests in arithmetic. Moses’s description of the Algebra Project is explicitly linked to the pedagogical lessons he learnt during voter registration campaigns. Central to Moses’s pedagogy is the idea of establishing a “floor” for student achievement, that is, “an acceptable goal or standard for the mathematics component of math-science literacy at the middle school level” (15). Moses is emphatic in maintaining that he is concerned with “the floor, not the ceiling” and with helping students to meet the moving targets represented by various college preparation math curricula (15). These targets, then, are derived from the curricula in place in local school districts, and in turn represent the initial goals to which Algebra Project classes are directed.

Gray articulates a similar floor methodology for functional literacy campaigns. In the early stages of development, “each fundamental education programme should attend to the most pressing needs,” though “there is scarcely any limit to its ultimate scope” (18). Once these initial concerns have been addressed, “the foundation has been laid for continuous development.” Far from seeing functional literacy as the final target of successful literacy campaigns, Gray sees functional literacy as the foundation upon which traditional disadvantaged groups might exercise citizenship. While fundamental education programs have achieved their goals “[o]nce a community has discovered its own needs and the possibility of meeting them,” Gray further advocates follow-up

programs, a philosophy shared by Highlander, in order to further revise and address what citizenship means as communities advocate for change (18).

Insofar as his pedagogy aims at establishing a floor for achievement based on local goals, Moses could be said to preserve the most important features of both critical and functional literacy approaches. But the real thrust of Moses' pedagogical approach centers around achieving access, be it political access in 1960s Mississippi or economic access in 21st-century urban school districts. By linking literacy to the question of access, Moses is able to mobilize education as an organizing tool. Such an approach emphasizes that the real effects of any educational program can be measured by the relationship between that program and the community. For Moses, it is the educator's ability to function as an organic intellectual, or at least to found organic classrooms, that will determine the critical success of their pedagogy.

The Citizenship Schools initiated by Highlander and run by Clark, Jenkins and later the SCLC, understood literacy in much the same way. Their approach took political access to be the measure of their success, and literacy to be the floor for first-class citizenship. But just as important as the approach taken in citizenship school classrooms, was the organizing work done by Highlander staff and citizenship educators in the Sea Islands community. By organizing these schools in community buildings, and training locals as teachers, Highlander staff were able "to locate the vast resources in communities that seemed impoverished and paralyzed at first glance" (Moses 21). Thus the Sea Island Citizenship Schools used literacy as tool for community organization in two key ways: first, as a means of securing political access by meeting the demands of voter registration

tests; second, as a means of helping citizens to recognize and mobilize the resources they already had available to them.

Reading, Writing, and Citizenship

The combination of functional literacy education and democratic goals is made apparent in the classroom materials developed by Septima Clark and Bernice Robinson. As the Sea Island Citizenship Schools developed, the two teachers extended the range of reading materials, and compiled an instructional text entitled *My Reading Booklet*. This booklet appears to be a combination of those documents and blanks that Bernice Robinson used in the first John's Island class, and political information contained in the annual political directory issued by the League of Women Voters in Charleston County.⁶ Clark reports that this booklet "is a very good example of the 'learning by doing' method of teaching," that "helps the student learn by doing something of real practical value to him" (Echo 201). *My Reading Booklet* appears to have first been used in 1958-1959, was revised in 1959-1960, before undergoing considerable revision for the SCLC Citizenship School Program after 1961.

The 1958-1959 version of *My Reading Booklet* contained 13 pages of instructional material. The cover contained room for class participants to fill in their name, address, city, state, occupation, and the location of the adult school they were attending—information that, for the most part, would presumably reappear on the voter registration forms. Pages 1-3 contain a brief history of the Highlander Folk School, and along with the school's official statement of policy. The official statement opens with the sentence: "We reaffirm our faith in democracy as a goal that will bring dignity and

freedom to all; in democracy as an expanding concept encompassing human relations from the smallest community organization to international structure; and permeating all economic, social and political activities” (2). The rest of the statement describes Highlander’s organizational structure and a brief description of the Highlander Idea. This information linked reading and writing classes directly to the democratic ends that they served, while at the same time encouraging class participants to organize more broadly in the community.

Pages 4-6 contain a duplicate of the voter registration forms, which participants used to practice their reading and writing. Page 7 contains a discussion of South Carolina’s political parties, page 8 a description of Charleston County’s taxes, page 9 a description of social security cards and their importance, and page 10 a list of health services available in Charleston County along with their locations. By selecting materials that helped participants become familiar with the rights of first-class citizenship, Citizenship School teachers helped these participants to immediately improve their material living conditions.

The final three pages contain information on how to address officials, and duplicates of mail order and money order blanks. Highlander’s earlier work with the labor movement suggests that students were probably encouraged to write to local politicians and offices to practice their writing skills, as well as to fill out both order blanks and complete basic commercial transactions. Literacy was thus understood broadly, and was linked at all points to the social functions that reading and writing performed.

Only one change was made in *My Reading Booklet* between 1958-1959 and 1959-1960: two pages were added after the description of Highlander and its policy statement, entitled "Our America." The first page (page 4) contains a map of the United States, into which has been inset a map of the Sea Islands, and pictures of the Capitol Building and the Supreme Court. The text that follows the map is noteworthy for the number of ideas introduced in the space of one page:

This is a map of the United States of America. It is the home of a great American Nation. We are 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 oceans of hate. Some day that concrete will build a foundation that will support a bridge to span the channel and open lines of communication to all peoples.

Our hearts are filled with that spirit of brotherhood and our hands move forward defying all acts of violence.

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 addition to *My Reading Booklet* continues to build upon the civic goals that Citizenship School teachers were to emphasize. However, it also adds information about non-violent direct action, and a commitment to American citizenship. By emphasizing that students are working for nothing more than the American citizenship to which they are entitled, the revised version of *My Reading Booklet* attempts to link literacy education directly to the demands and the activism of the Civil Rights Movement.

When the Citizenship School program was taken over by SCLC, *My Reading Booklet* was overhauled and adapted for registration campaigns in other states. Arguably the most important change to the booklet was its renaming, from *My Reading Booklet* to *Southern Christian Leadership Conference Citizenship Workbook*. SCLC thereby made explicit the links between literacy and citizenship, and cast their own literacy program not in terms of traditional educational goals but rather as a means of community organization.

There are several noteworthy additions made to the *Citizenship Workbook*. Following the forward, by Martin Luther King, Jr., and the description of SCLC and the Citizenship Schools, there is a new section titled “The Bible and Ballot.” This section links the campaign for voter registration to the “first words of Jesus’ public ministry,” arguing that SCLC’s civil rights work is nothing more than God’s will being done on earth as it is in heaven (4). In addition to this, there are sections on segregation, writing as an act of citizenship, and instructions on writing letters and observing good manners.

The section “Our America” is duplicated with only minor changes, but is augmented with sections entitled “The Power of Non-Violence,” “One Hundred Years

from Slavery,” and “Heroes of the Past.” These sections introduce students to the non-violent campaign of Mahatma Ghandi and its adoption by Martin Luther King, the institution of slavery and the constant spiritual dignity of the enslaved, and such figures from African American history as Crispus Attucks, Sojourner Truth, Benjamin Banneker, Harriet Tubman, and Mary McLeod Bethune. This information provides participants with a history of the Civil Rights Movement that is linked not only to the African American struggle for freedom, but also to global campaigns against oppression and the social gospel. Reading and writing thereby become not just a material means of access to voting and commerce, but also to broader traditions and communities of African Americans in the South.

The instructional methods used in the Citizenship Workbook were also expanded, covering vocabulary-building, anagrammatization, narrative composition, letter writing, and basic and advanced arithmetic. Students are provided with sound charts, stencils on which to practice cursive writing, and mail order and money order blanks. Clark notes that the words and vocabularies used in the workbook always reflected the theme of citizenship, and thereby reinforced the link between literacy education and “the business of becoming and continuing to be discerning and participating citizens of a Southern state” (*Echo* 205).

The remaining pages make apparent the role of the *Citizenship Workbook* as a tool for community organization. Citizenship school participants were encouraged to become community organizers themselves by workbook sections on planning voter registration campaigns and registration block parties. A canvassing sheet is also provided for individuals to record who in their neighborhood is registered, and the steps that others

are taking towards becoming registered. The last two pages of the book contain “Freedom Songs to Read and Sing,” providing the lyrics to songs such as “We Shall Overcome,” “Oh Freedom,” and “Keep Your Eyes on the Prize.” While these sections were no doubt also used to practice reading and writing, they also emphasize community action and maintain the civic focus that lay at the heart of the Citizenship School idea.

Literacy Education and Community Organization

Aside from being highly successful—and portable—sites for literacy education, the Sea Island Citizenship Schools also functioned as sites of collective rhetorical action. That Highlander staff understood this function of the Citizenship Schools is evident not only in their emphasis on organization, but also in the approach taken by Highlander staff to literacy education. Horton, Clark, Robinson, and Jenkins understood literacy as a situated set of practices that emerge from and respond to specific historical conditions. Literacy in South Carolina in the 1950s cut across lines of race and class, and partially determined African American communities’ socio-economic and political fortunes. For Septima Clark and Esau Jenkins, literacy further represented an agency for responding to these conditions, and potentially transforming them. In concrete terms, literacy allowed people to vote, to access banking, and to better understand their world. Reading and writing, defined in this way, were taught as agencies for rhetorical action.

The Sea Island citizenship schools also served as sites of community organization in their own right. By providing locations of assembly, and spaces where community needs could be addressed, citizenship schools functioned to bring people together as a community. The lessons learned at these schools provided the grounds for people to

engage in further political action beyond the walls of the citizenship classroom. Insofar as citizenship education programs contributed to the registration of 2,000,000 African American voters from 1957 to 1970, the formation of the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party, and the passage of the Voting Rights Act of 1965, they served a political function that - while not as public as some of the more recognizable speeches and protests of the Civil Rights era - had just as profound an effect on the lives of those who attended them.⁷

The broader reaching effects of the citizenship school program can be seen in the development of political programs based on the success of voter registration efforts. Bernice Robinson helped the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee coordinate voter registration drives in Mississippi, a program that paved the way to the casting of freedom ballots in 1963.⁸ In this campaign, 85,000 African Americans cast mock election ballots, refuting the claim that African Americans, even if enfranchised, did not value the vote (Branch, *Pillar* 158). This was followed in August of 1964 by the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party's challenge to the seating of an all-white Mississippi delegation at the Democratic National Convention (Carson 123). But perhaps the most significant response to these voter registration campaigns was the passing of the Voting Rights Act in 1965, an act that finally put an end to discriminatory voter registration laws in Southern states (Branch, *Pillar* 606).⁹

Certainly, these outcomes cannot be traced to the influence of citizenship schools alone. It is important to note that the Voting Rights Act, much like the *Brown* decision, was as much a response to negative international opinion surrounding the United States' handling of the civil rights issue. The Voting Rights Act passed after the violence

surrounding the 1965 voter registration campaign in Selma, Alabama, became international news (Dudziak). During the 1950s and 1960s, the negative press surrounding incidents such as the Selma march often fuelled fears among U.S. governments that African nations would increasingly become skeptical about the ability of the U.S. to deal with other races, which would in turn allow the Soviet Union to win important alliances with these countries. For the U.S. government, then, the successful management of the civil rights issue was essential to the successful prosecution of the Cold War. Thus the Voting Rights Act, like the Brown decision and the Civil Rights Act of 1964, could be seen as efforts to diffuse rather than address the Civil Rights Movement.

But the Citizenship Schools nonetheless played an important part in building political communities capable of applying the domestic pressure that received international coverage. By teaching African Americans to read, write, and thereby to vote, Citizenship School teachers also served as community organizers. Insofar as citizenship schools were located in community centers, and funded by the communities in which they operated, they also served as direct evidence of the successes made possible by community organizing efforts. Finally, as citizenship school programs began to demonstrate their effectiveness and their portability, these schools served rhetorically as beacons for other communities. By bringing communities together and demonstrating the resources that these communities could mobilize, citizenship schools were important models for further political action.

The African American political community that emerged from the Citizenship Education Program further assisted in the 1972 election of Andrew Young to the U.S.

Congress. Young himself had been instrumental in the development of the Citizenship Schools Program as a member of the SCLC in the 1960s (Branch, *Parting* 576-577).

John Lewis, an office bearer with SNCC, was also elected to Congress in 1987, while Rosa Parks became a congressional assistant in Detroit. While we might suggest that the representative gains of this political action remain alarmingly small, the dramatic trajectory of the program remains an important moment in the history of critical progressive education and more broadly in the history of the United States. The Sea Islands Citizenship Schools reasserted the link between education and community organization, and further transformed the political role of literacy in the South.

NOTES

¹ Du Bois's article appeared in a 1935 special issue of the *Journal of Negro Education* entitled "The Courts and the Negro Separate School." Ralph Bunche and Du Bois both argued for the value of African American separate schools—Bunche on the grounds that litigation was being offered as a substitute for the ballot, and Du Bois on account of the problems facing African American children in integrated schools—while Howard Hale Long offered a more damning portrait of the psychological effects of racism that made segregated schooling appear a minor concern in the face of ingrained discrimination and oppression. Charles Thompson, the Journal's editor, offered a somewhat more optimistic assessment. For more on this issue of the Journal, and its relationship to the history of the Brown decision, see Richard Kluger's *Simple Justice*, 168-172.

² Woodward's point is made in the context of assessing Jim Crow laws in the South. He continues his cautionary argument by noting that "it may be assumed...that there is more Jim Crowism practiced in the South than there are Jim Crow laws on the books (87). In the case of literacy prohibitions, these were more commonly enforced by slaveholders—typically through the use of violence—than they were by lawmakers. However, the common practice of cutting of the thumbs of African Americans caught writing attests to lengths to which some slaveholders would resort in order to keep enslaved workforces illiterate.

³ Highlander's decision to organize conferences on the relationship between civil rights and the United Nations was one that indicates a knowledge of African American efforts to secure civil rights. In 1951, Civil Rights Congress chairman William Patterson filed a petition with the United Nations arguing that the United States had committed genocide against African Americans. While the U.N. took no action on the petition, the document did receive national attention and brought pressure to bear on the U.S. government (Dudziak 63-66). As the workshop demonstrates, Highlander staff did not necessarily stick to this theme rigidly; when presented with the forceful arguments of Clark and Jenkins on the need for community organization, they redirected their energies to that end.

⁴ These numbers are Clark's estimates for the states of South Carolina and Alabama. During that time the SCLC also ran citizenship schools in Georgia, Mississippi, North Carolina, Louisiana, Virginia, Tennessee, Florida and Kentucky.

⁵ Barbara Ransby has also outlined the similarities between civil rights educators and leaders (in this case Ella Baker) and the work of Paulo Freire. See *Ella Baker and the Black Freedom Movement*, 357-374.

⁶ The League of Women Voters of Charleston County's 1952 political directory can be found in Highlander's Sea Island files in the Wisconsin State Historical Society (Box 67, folder 6). The directory was most likely used by Clark, Robinson and Jenkins to compile the information needed to teach class participants about politics in Charleston County. But the directory also seems to have served as an obvious model for *My Reading Booklet*, and contains sections on voter registration laws, political parties, taxes, addressing officials and on the League itself. These sections were reproduced in the citizenship school booklet, sometimes with very little revision.

⁷ These numbers might look at first glance unreasonably high. However, Vernon Jordan of the Southern Regional Council noted that African American voter registration in eleven Southern States had increased from 250,000 to 3,200,000 by 1970 (Tjerandsen). The claim here is not that 2,000,000 African Americans sat in Citizenship Schools run by Highlander, but rather that citizenship education programs encouraged and fortified a movement that made it possible for these numbers of African Americans to register. The contributions of SRC and SNCC citizenship and freedom schools also demand recognition when looking at the remarkable successes of the citizenship education movement.

⁸ It is important to note here that Highlander again played a facilitating role, and was not directly responsible for the emergence of SNCC, or of the Freedom Summer campaign in Mississippi. As with the Sea Islands program, Highlander was able to assist local leadership and civil rights workers in developing their own programs in response to local needs.

⁹ I do not mean that this put an end to discrimination or the obstruction of African Americans attempting to register to vote. The Voting Rights Act was the legal recognition of African American voting rights, and ostensibly put an end to legislative support for discriminatory voting practices.

**CONCLUSION:
RHETORICAL EDUCATION AND SOCIAL CHANGE IN THE TWENTY-
FIRST CENTURY**

While the Highlander's buildings eventually succumbed to the hostility of the school's enemies, the Highlander Idea proved much more resilient. Before the original school was finally closed in 1961, Myles Horton and the rest of the staff secured a new charter for the Highlander Research and Education Center. When asked what the new center would be doing, Horton replied: "Same thing we've always been doing" (Bledsoe 130). Originally located in Knoxville, the Highlander Research and Education Center is now located in the nearby town of New Market, where it continues to serve Appalachian Tennessee to this day.

Just as importantly, the Highlander Idea survived in both the programs the school maintained, and in the large network of support the school had mobilized. The citizenship school program had been adopted by the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, where it continued to play a major role in the Civil Rights Movement. Highlander's alumni list included Rosa Parks, John Lewis of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, Septima Clark and Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. The school's supporters comprised even more distinguished figures: Reinhold Niebuhr, John Dewey, A.J. Muste, Paul Robeson, Harry Belafonte, and Eleanor Roosevelt. Following the 1959 investigations of the school, more and more public figures—A. Philip Randolph, Ralph Bunche, Thurgood Marshall, even Jackie Robinson—signed on to the school's cause. While the Tennessee State legislature had succeeded in closing the physical school, they nonetheless provided the Highlander Idea with more publicity than it had ever had.

Nonetheless, we might wonder about the relevance or impact of the Highlander Idea in contemporary society. And just as importantly, we might question the importance of Highlander's programs to rhetorical education, particularly when much of this education occurs in university classrooms and formal educational settings. With these questions in mind, reading Highlander's history through the lens of rhetoric performs two important functions. First, it continues to expand the ways in which we talk about rhetoric and rhetorical education. While Highlander staff never used the term rhetoric to describe their own work, their mobilization of cultural media to effect social change demonstrates a rhetorical understanding of the programs they developed. The language by which staff understood their work—influenced by progressive education, Christian socialism, and the various communities and social movements they worked with—also expands the vocabularies by which we understand rhetorical education. By placing the educational tradition from which Highlander emerged in dialogue with the various rhetorical traditions scholars have already studied, we gain a more complete picture of rhetorical pedagogies in twentieth-century America.

Second, a study of rhetorical education at Highlander suggests ways in which we might reconstruct our approach to rhetorical instruction. In saying this, I don't mean to offer the Highlander Idea as a model for contemporary composition or communication classrooms. It is unlikely that an organic pedagogy such as the Highlander Idea could be successfully implemented in university classrooms containing different student populations and institutional regulations and assessment models; nor is it coincidence that the Highlander Idea emerged in a non-formal educational space. Nonetheless, the

pedagogy developed by folk school staff can help contemporary teachers of rhetoric develop new avenues for their own work.

It should be noted at the outset that the Highlander Idea confirms and complicates the “civic” mission of rhetorical education. The folk school’s programs in music, drama, journalism, and literacy education confirm the positive impact of education oriented towards developing individuals’ capacity for civic engagement. At the same time, these programs suggest that for rhetorical education to fulfill its civic mission they must be centered on students’ needs, and developed directly from them. Such a conclusion might lead us to skepticism about the effectiveness of such civic work in university classrooms, in which pedagogical approaches are informed as much or more by institutional constraints and allegiances.

This skepticism is compounded by the fact that Highlander’s focus on community organization and collective action suggests the necessity of literally locating these educational efforts within both the geographical and political boundaries of the communities we intend to work with. Highlander’s students were in many cases brought together by shared social and political concerns; by way of contrast, traditional classrooms tend to bring together students from varied political backgrounds. As a result, it may prove pedagogically suspect for university instructors to focus on collective identity formation as a central part of their education practice. Furthermore, Highlander’s classrooms often played host to emerging counterpublics and social movements, which in turn enabled the organic nature of the Highlander Idea. Thus it could be argued that, by articulating programs with emerging social movements, Highlander staff loaded the dice:

by selecting students from similar social and political backgrounds, they virtually guaranteed themselves a measure of enthusiasm if not success.

The Highlander Idea thus serves as an important reminder of the limitations faced by progressive instructors within formal instructional environments. Structurally, these environments are constrained by the demands of assessment and grading policies, institutional practices and traditions, and the social expectations that attend higher education. In some cases, the students themselves serve as a limitation, either through open resistance to more critical approaches to language, or through their already sophisticated understanding of the issues at play in the classroom. These limitations are certainly not arguments against addressing the political nature of the classroom in our teaching; indeed, they may make it a more urgent concern than ever. But we nonetheless need to recognize the social and institutional forces at work in university classrooms, and the ways in which they complicate our efforts at more politically engaged instruction.

This is not to underestimate the necessity for critical, responsive pedagogies in university rhetoric classes. Keith Gilyard has stressed the need for composition classes to address “the critical moment,” and intervene in pressing social issues. Rosa Eberly has likewise argued for the need to see these classrooms as proto-public spheres, spaces where students practice the kinds of democratic deliberation we hope to defend elsewhere. Such pedagogies should, in the face of current conservative encroachments on academic freedom and democratic deliberation, be encouraged and defended. But the history of Highlander reminds us that these efforts will necessarily be articulated in institutional terms, and complicated by the more traditional nature of university education. Put another way, the Highlander Idea reminds us that education needs to

move from curricular reform to community organization if we hope to effect social change.

In this regard, the Highlander Folk School might prompt educators to participate in the many forms of rhetorical education taking place outside of traditional classrooms. As the case of Highlander makes clear, many community organizations have a vested interest in developing educational programs for their constituents. Some of these organizations, such as the Algebra Project and literacy councils, make educational programs their primary means of social intervention. But even those groups we might not readily associate with educational activism nonetheless face similar issues of recruitment, outreach, awareness-raising and publicity. Teachers of rhetoric are well positioned to work with these organizations, both on the development of members' rhetorical capacities and interactions with external audiences.

This work needn't wait for a social movement or political campaign to emerge. As Gramsci made clear counter-hegemonic institutions needed to be organized prior to the emergence of a social movement if we hope to see a changing of the guard. In Myles Horton's words, the goal of these institutions is "to get...into a position—by working with organizations that deal with structural change—to be on the inside of that movement when it comes, instead of on the outside trying to get accepted" (*Long Haul* 114). Institutions like Highlander don't simply depend on movements for the success of their educational programs; they also circulate the very values and organizational strategies from which movements emerge. Community organization, and particularly what we might be tempted to call counterpublic education, is thus central if we hope to effect enduring democratic social change.

Rhet/comp scholars have not been blind to the need for community-based education programs. Ellen Cushman has called upon the field to “empower people in our communities, establish networks of reciprocity with them, and create solidarity with them” (7). Cushman sees in this community work the ability to strengthen community-university partnerships, the provocation to rethink our positions as academics and intellectuals, and the foundation for “sustainable” service-learning programs. We see one particularly insightful example of this kind of work in Eli Goldblatt’s description of his work with the Open Doors initiative in Philadelphia. Goldblatt’s account of how he and Steve Parks were able to help community organizers develop locally run educational programs gestures to the kind of partnership that Cushman envisions. Furthermore, both Cushman and Goldblatt confirm that organic pedagogy starts with community organizations.

Central to working successfully with these groups is the recognition that these communities are already capable agents of social change. Many bring with them highly articulate understandings of their role in the broader community, and the needs that the community faces most urgently. As Highlander demonstrated, successful community education in many cases centers on mobilizing pre-existing knowledge and discourse; educators work with this knowledge in order to develop it as a “power resource,” as a resource for rhetorical action. Naturally an important aspect of this work is the adoption of what Myles Horton called a “percolator theory” of education, which recognizes indigenous resources as the foundation for community-centered education. Such an approach demands that educators reconstruct their own pedagogical assumptions in response to the knowledge students already have.

As Aldon Morris has already reminded us, students' understanding of social conditions is in many cases found in a wide variety of cultural media—music, drama, film, and increasingly new media and blog spaces. These cultural agencies can be drawn upon, as a means of mobilizing knowledge and as rhetorical forms capable of producing social change. Teachers of rhetoric therefore need to utilize the broad rhetorical output of those communities they work with. To some degree, this is already occurring in more broadly-conceived composition classes, as instructors turn more and more to visual rhetoric, new media, and online composition as vehicles for rhetorical action. However, engaging these media as community practices requires that teachers approach them as students approach them, and build upon indigenous theoretical and practical understandings. This not only makes cultural practices available as agencies for rhetorical action, but also reconstructs our understandings of rhetorical practice.

It should be noted that the argument for beginning first and foremost with student understandings of rhetoric is not an argument for the displacement of the teacher. Teachers are understood here, in the context of community education and organization, to be the sorts of activists that Morris believed essential to the formation of social movements. They are often required to help students recognize their own rhetorical capacities, develop them as forms of action, and build the traditions upon which activism can occur. But within this context, it is important that teachers understand the organic, or functionary, nature of their position. Rather than transmitting knowledge against which students are assessed, community educators instead need to engage students in critical analysis of their own rhetorical resources. Through this analysis, students are further able

to engage in what Freire has called praxis: an essentially creative relationship between individuals and the histories in which they participate.

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“Usable Pedagogies: Usability, Rhetoric and Sociocultural Pedagogy in the Technical Writing Classroom.” *Technical Communication Quarterly* 14.4 (Autumn 2005).

“Teaching 9-11: Towards an Inadequate Pedagogy.” *Politics and Culture: An International Review of Books*, (2000, Issue 4).

Scholarships and Awards

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- Ben Euema Award (Dissertation Scholarship), 2005-2006
- Wilma Ebbitt Award (Rhetoric and Composition Fellowship), 2002-2003
- English Graduate Organization Excellence in Teaching Award, 2003

Academic Employment

- Graduate Teaching Assistant, Pennsylvania State University, 2001-2007
- Research Assistant to Dr Keith Gilyard, Pennsylvania State University, 2006-2007
- Graduate Assistant for English 602, Pennsylvania State University, 2004-2005

Professional Service

- Judge, African American Read-In Writing Competition, 2004, 2005, 2006
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