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POPULAR EDUCATION IN THE CIVIL RIGHTS
MOVEMENT: BRIDGING DEPTH AND SCALE

by

AMANDA T. ALTMAN

A master's thesis submitted to the Graduate Faculty in Liberal Studies in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts, The City University of New York

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This manuscript has been read and accepted for the Graduate Faculty in Liberal Studies in satisfaction of the thesis requirement for the degree of Master of Arts.

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ABSTRACT

Popular Education in the Civil Rights Movement: Bridging Depth and
Scale

by

Amanda T. Altman

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This thesis looks at the question of how the direct actions of the civil rights movement worked synergistically with grassroots educational projects like the Citizenship Schools. This thesis makes the case that the lesser-known history of the popular education work of the civil rights movement provides important clues as to why activists were able to organize mass mobilizations and formulate increasingly transformative strategies for change, like the rise of the Freedom Democratic Party. I look at the popular education work of the civil rights movement through an in-depth case study of the Citizenship Schools. The Citizenship Schools were a network of hundreds of classes that were organized primarily by Black women who had often been activists in their communities. At the project's height, there were hundreds of Citizenship Schools run by and for the Black community throughout the South in which people learned to read in order to register to vote. The Citizenship Schools were instrumental in bringing new leaders into the civil rights movement and fostering the emergence of new discourses of participatory democracy. I argue that the Citizenship Schools exemplify how the popular education work of the civil rights movement laid essential groundwork for political action. By

focusing on a vision for democratized economic and political systems, participants in the schools were able to find a diversity of solutions to the multi-faceted ways their lives had been impacted by racial capitalism.

An ongoing challenge for community organizers working with scarce financial resources is how to achieve the kind of “people power” that was mobilized during the civil rights movement. The example of the Citizenship Schools is poignant for today because it challenges the prevalent mindset in many unions and nonprofits that there is a dichotomy between organizing in-depth and organizing “at scale.” The Citizenship Schools began with intensive leadership development work on John’s Island off the coast of Charleston and grew into a decentralized national coalition that was able to support the autonomy of hundreds of local classes that coordinated together to mobilize thousands of people to take action for political change.

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I would also like to thank my mother, Roberta Altman, who was a magical and inspiring teacher. My mother was my creative movement teacher as a child, and I saw how she could turn a book into a whole world in her music class through the way she would weave together stories, games and music. My mother introduced me to the Highlander Center, and she was incredibly supportive of my Masters research. My mother saw the same potential in education that Myles Horton and Septima Clark did. She taught me how educational spaces can be opportunities for us to create new social realities based on the values that are important to us.

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Introduction

In 1963, civil rights activists organized the “Freedom Ballot” in which African Americans voted in a mock-election for a progressive multi-racial group of candidates from the Freedom Democratic Party. SNCC, SCLC and other major civil rights organizations organized the “Freedom Ballot” to demonstrate that racist claims that Black voter turnout was low because of disinterest in the electoral process intentionally masked the systemic nature of the disenfranchisement African American communities experienced. People cast their ballots in homes, neighborhood stores, and community centers, and at the end of three days 80,000 people voted (Gillespie). Mobilization for the “Freedom Ballot” relied on the participation of teachers and students who were part of the Citizenship Schools, a popular education project run by and for the Black community in which people learned to read in order to register to vote. The Citizenship Schools formed the base out of which a massive volunteer effort was mobilized to bring thousands of people to the ballot box to demonstrate to the country that Black people were being systematically disenfranchised from the political process and to force the federal government to act to protect their right to vote. The collaboration between the activists organizing the “Freedom Ballot” and the Citizenship Schools exemplifies the synergistic relationship between the collective action and the grassroots educational work of the civil rights movement.

While the mass mobilization of the civil rights movement like the Montgomery Bus Boycott and the March on Washington loom large in historical narratives, few of us learn about the behind-the-scenes in-depth educational work like the Citizenship Schools that was done primarily by Black women. Septima Clark, Fannie Lou Hamer and Bernice Robinson were a few of the women responsible for the Citizenship Schools. In an article “‘First-Class’ Citizenship

Education in the Mississippi Delta, 1961-1965,” Deanna M. Gillespie explains that the Citizenship Schools were a blending of “historical traditions of black women's leadership in education and emerging theories of participatory democracy.” Looking closely at the history of the Citizenship Schools provides a model of a feminist approach to social change that refuses to sacrifice depth for scale. While Gillespie focuses on the Citizenship Schools once it was being run as the Citizenship Education Project (CEP) by the Southern Christian Leadership Council (SCLC), my thesis will focus on how the Citizenship Schools were initially developed through a partnership between the Highlander Research and Education Center and Johns Island. My exploration of the early days of the Citizenship Schools is aimed at understanding how the project was shaped by an over-arching vision of the importance of building the power of grassroots communities to directly govern economic, political and social systems.

An ongoing challenge for community organizers working with scarce financial resources is how to achieve the kind of “people power” that was mobilized during the civil rights movement. The example of the Citizenship Schools is poignant for today because it challenges the prevalent mindset in many unions and nonprofits that there is a dichotomy between organizing in-depth and organizing “at scale.” The Citizenship School example tells the story of how grassroots leaders organized for change in their own communities by starting schools that supported people to claim “first-class citizenship” and that were networked together to form broad-based power that could pull off mass actions like the “Freedom Ballot.” The Citizenship Schools show that civil rights activists achieved this amazing scale through understanding the dialectical relationship between breadth and depth. In this thesis, I argue that the Citizenship Schools were organized around a holistic approach to change that differed from issue-based campaigns because it prioritized people claiming the all-encompassing power of “first-class

citizenship.” The orientation towards developing people’s “sense of their own significance” as a catalyst for political action allowed the project to expand exponentially with very little paid staff.

My thesis is organized into two chapters. In the first chapter, I’ll introduce the Highlander Center and the Citizenship Schools, and I’ll define the concept of “first-class citizenship” as it related to activists’ overall vision of direct democracy. In the second chapter, I’ll look at three stages of the Citizenship Schools: the first Citizenship School, the residential workshops, and the Citizenship Education Project (CEP). I will demonstrate that the goal of helping people become “first-class citizens” shaped how the program developed and was essential in its ability to span depth and scale. By focusing on a humanist approach that fostered local leadership, the Citizenship Schools were able to connect broader movement resources from the Highlander Center and the CEP to deeply rooted traditions of resistance that Cedric Robinson calls the “Black Radical Tradition.” Because the first Citizenship School on Johns Island were successful in creating ideologies of “first-class citizenship” that led people to take action to challenge segregation and sharecropping, activists learned the “ingredients” that empowered hundreds of other communities experiencing similar conditions to start their own schools. When the CEP took over organizing the Citizenship Schools, with the Highlander Center remaining involved in an advisory capacity, the project continued the broad goal of helping people claim “first-class citizenship” on an ever-growing scale.

The Citizenship Schools contrast with the approach taken during the Freedom Summer that relied primarily on volunteer labor from outside directly impacted communities. During the Freedom Summer, which was a short-term high intensity issue-oriented campaign, literacy classes took a more practical approach rather than being non-hierarchical settings to discuss broader concepts of change like “first-class citizenship” (Gillespie). The Freedom Summer’s

narrowed focus on literacy points to the difficulty of creating ideological change through high-intensity campaigns run primarily by volunteers from outside directly impacted communities. Gillespie said that the Freedom Summer “pointed to the challenges in sustaining a locally driven community organizing strategy in the midst of a short-term, high-intensity strategy.” The research I’ve done on the Citizenship Schools is aimed at contributing to the work that looks at the radical history of popular education as a political theory of social change that grew out of directly impacted communities and centers direct democratic participation in contrast to an Alinsky model of social change which centers issue-based campaigns.

While this thesis does not critique the concept of “first-class citizenship” in-depth, the phrase relies on terminology that has historically been used by nation-states to exclude undocumented people. This thesis will focus more heavily on underlying theories of direct democracy and political economy that impacted the conceptualization of “first-class citizenship.” Further research could be done on the factors that led to the choice of the term “first-class” and “citizen,” the connotation those words had for that time period and both past and contemporary critiques of the term “citizenship” in reference to social justice goals.

Chapter One: Introducing the Citizenship Schools

In this thesis, I argue that the story of the Citizenship School demonstrates that grassroots educational work was central to the civil rights movement's ability to mobilize thousands of grassroots communities into action and make transformative changes to the political economy of the day. The Citizenship Schools, a project led by Black communities to teach people to read in order to register to vote, are an example of the ways in which civil rights movement activists linked in-depth educational experiences to broad-based collective action. Through the Citizenship Schools, people came to see themselves as "first-class citizens" who were responsible for supporting others to learn to read and register to vote.

In this thesis, I employ theories that analyze direct democracy and racial capitalism to understand the concept of "first-class citizenship." My claims about why the Citizenship Schools were able to organize "in-depth" and "at scale" are informed by frameworks based in a Marxist-inspired understanding of political economy and theories around democracy that grow out of the work of W.E.B. Du Bois. Looking at the Citizenship Schools through these frames, I see the Highlander Center's work to help people become "first-class citizens" as a means to negate racial capitalism through direct democracy. To build "all-encompassing" democratized governance systems, Highlander educators and civil rights activists worked to create a culture shift in which people came to understand themselves in ways that delegitimized the existing psychology associated with the existing oppressive political economy.

In this chapter, I will introduce the Highlander Center, their mission and broader work, and I tell a brief story of the Citizenship Schools. I will break down the concept of "first-class citizenship" by defining direct democracy and looking at the literature on political economy as a frame to analyze economic, political and social systems. I'll look at how the "first-class

citizenship” approach to education was influenced by Black intellectuals like W.E.B. Du Bois who theorized that direct democracy could only be achieved by social movements that are led by communities experiencing both race and class oppression. Finally, I’ll look at how the literature on direct democracy sheds light on the underlying ideology of the Citizenship Schools and the concept of “first-class citizenship.” This chapter is intended to provide a theoretical framework through which to understand how the “first-class citizenship” approach to education provided a powerful antidote to the political economy of segregation.

The Highlander Research and Education Center

The Highlander Center is a popular education and folk school that began in the 1930s in Appalachia. For the past 85 years, the Highlander Center has been a school for social movements. The Highlander Center is a formative space that built democratic grassroots leadership during the labor movement of the 1930s, the civil rights movement, the environmental justice movement of the 1970s and movements for racial and economic justice today. The Highlander Center takes an approach to change in which the focus of their work is developing people’s ability to analyze their problems and develop their own solutions. Highlander has historically taken a behind-the-scenes support role in order to respect the self-determination of communities most impacted by oppression.

The Citizenship Schools provides one example of Highlander’s overall approach to social change. Septima Clark and Myles Horton were the main Highlander Center staff that supported the residents of Johns Island off the coast of Charleston to form the first Citizenship School. Clark began working as a teacher on Johns Island many years prior because at the time her hometown, Charleston, SC, would not allow black people to become teachers. She worked on Johns Island from 1916-1919 using a philosophy of teaching that was the precursor to the

Citizenship School approach. Clark recalls teaching elementary school children on Johns Island in *Ready from Within* when she said, “To teach reading I wrote their stories on the dry cleaner’s bags, stories of their country right around them, where they walked to come to school, the things that grew around them, what they could see in the skies. They told them to me, and I wrote them on dry cleaner’s bags and tacked them on the wall” (Clark 106). Her approach was one of conveying value, respect and care to her students through emphasizing the importance of the knowledge they gained from their everyday lives.

Clark played a pivotal role at every stage of the Citizenship School’s development. She connected the Highlander Center to Johns Island, she acted as the main field staff during the development of the first Citizenship School and she trained thousands of volunteer teachers as the main staff on the CEP. In reflecting on her influence on the project, she recalled that she had to fight for her ideas. Clark said, “People thought I had new-fangled ideas. Myles thought I had new-fangled ideas. But my new-fangled ideas worked out” (Clark 53). Clark’s “new fangled” ideas are examples of many of the most important interventions that defined how the Citizenship Schools took shape. She built trust between Johns Island residents and the Highlander Center through extensive time on the island hearing people’s stories. She recruited the first teacher, her cousin Bernice Robinson, who was a hairdresser, because of her “ability to listen” (Clark 49). She ensured that as the project expanded, local Citizenship Schools were using state literacy tests during classes rather than textbooks (Clark 69-70).

Myles Horton was one of the founders of the Highlander Center. He grew up in Appalachia and had a deep-seated commitment to people in his region taking charge of the fate of their communities. He considered himself an educator rather than an organizer because he prioritized the development of people over issue-based goals (Freire and Horton 96). Myles was

the director of Highlander during the Citizenship Schools and made many visits to Johns Island, helping to shape the trajectory of the schools.

The Citizenship Schools

In the summer of 1954, the Highlander Center hosted a workshop called “World Problems, the United Nations and You.” The workshop took place right after the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision and just before the Montgomery bus boycott. Highlander educators like Horton and Clark were figuring out what the folk school could do to support the burgeoning civil rights movement. During this workshop a participant named Esau Jenkins from Johns Island brought up the literacy requirements that were disenfranchising his community. He explained that many Black people in his community could not vote because they couldn’t read. Jenkins was born and raised on Johns Island and had a long history of working to meet people’s needs in his community. Prior to the Citizenship Schools, he had already started the Progressive Club on Johns Island to support community development. A woman he drove to work every morning, Alice Wine, had made an interesting proposition to him. She told him if he would teach Black folks to read she thought they would go out and vote for him. Jenkins had previously run for the school board and lost and was intrigued by the proposition (Clark 45). He began teaching people to read on the bus rides (Horton 99). He asked for Highlander to work with him to develop this project further and to set up a literacy school for adults on Johns Island. The intention was that Black residents on the Island would build solidarity with one another through this school to face white supremacist threats of violence and gain the practical skills needed to go register to vote. Wanting to support the decision-making power of Black communities at the grassroots level, the Highlander Center decided to make the Citizenship Schools a central focus of their work in the civil rights movement. Jenkins, Clark, Horton and others spent almost two years developing the

first school in an effort to create the type of educational experience in which the residents of Johns Island would feel respected and valued as “first-class citizens.” In 1957, the first class began, and the students themselves named it the Citizenship School. At the class’ completion, 80 percent of students went to register to vote together (Horton 103).

Residents of neighboring islands were inspired by the first Citizenship School on Johns Island and decided to organize their own schools. The Citizenship Schools spread rapidly throughout the rural South. Classes were held in people’s kitchens, barber shops, and cooperative stores. Anyone from the Black community who read and treated students with respect could be a teacher. They received training from the Highlander Center and the CEP along with the state literacy tests that people would learn to read in classes. During the CEP, teachers also received a workbook with short readings for class about non-violence and the continuous resistance of Black communities to racial capitalism since slavery. About 700,000 Black people registered to vote because of the Citizenship Schools and, according to some estimates, nearly 10,000 people volunteered to teach (“Highlander Center- Training Generations of Change Makers”).

The Citizenship Schools sparked conversation in communities across the South about what it meant to be a “first-class citizen.” Because the project was rooted in people taking leadership in their own communities, the approach built off of powerful traditions of resistance Black women had historically led. Gillespie writes:

Since the late nineteenth century, teaching was one of the few professions open to African American women. And, as Stephanie J. Shaw has written, ‘regardless of the type of school, and particularly in the South, teachers did not anticipate the luxury of merely teaching. Nor did they define their work that way.’ Across the region, teachers expanded their activities beyond the classroom, linking social institutions and establishing

traditions of black women's leadership and activism. The CEP drew on these traditions to mobilize black women in local civil rights efforts.

Many credit the Citizenship Schools for developing a grassroots leadership base that was responsible for the major achievements of the civil rights movement, from the growth of the Freedom Schools to the development of the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party (Gillespie, Clark 70).

Direct Democracy

In this section, I'll look at the literature on direct democracy and its influences on the underlying ideology of the Citizenship Schools. In order to understand the significance of the concept of "first-class citizenship," I will look at the ways in which Highlander educators conceptualized of democracy as much more than people voting in elections. Inspired by Marxist theory on political economy, Horton and Clark understood the inequality of racial capitalism to be a web of interrelated of social, political and economic forces, such as the feedback loop between political disenfranchisement, sharecropping and educational inequality in the Jim Crow South. Pem Davidson Buck elaborates upon Marx's ideas on political economy in *Worked to the Bone*. In her book she calls the interlocking forces of racial capitalism a "drainage system" that is constantly in flux. She speaks to how white supremacy, patriarchy and other forms of oppression take different shapes at each historical moment to get people in line with the shifting economic order that benefits the white economic elites. For example after the Civil War, the federal government made a political decision to support the rise of the economic system of sharecropping when they returned land to former plantation owners rather than to redistribute it to formerly enslaved communities (Du Bois). The system of sharecropping was reinforced by the divide-and-conquer strategy of segregation. Segregation codified white supremacy into daily life

and rewarded white people with a feeling of superiority and often protection against the most violent manifestations of racial capitalism in exchange, however tacitly, for not uniting with Black workers to overturn the economic system.

Looking at the Citizenship Schools through a Marxist lens, Clark and Horton worked to create a vision for change that would encompass a fully democratized political economy. W.E.B. Du Bois, Clark's teacher at Atlanta University, had a far-reaching understanding of democracy. His theories on democracy shed light on the new political economy Highlander educators worked towards and the significance of the term "first-class citizen." Du Bois speaks to the need, in the face of the multi-faceted oppression of racial capitalism, to create a system of full democracy "in the interest of the mass of the nation- that is, of the laboring poor" (Du Bois 480). Du Bois and Highlander educators following in his legacy believed that to end the inequality of racial capitalism direct democracy was necessary, which they defined as a system in which ordinary people have day- to- day governing power over political, economic and educational systems. In explaining their purpose, the Highlander Center's official statement of its policy from the 1950s shows that activists believed "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" (Highlander, "Official Statement of Policy"). We can see this commitment to a substantially different form of governance that democratized political, economic and social systems in the diversity of action people were supported to take as a result of their involvement in the Citizenship Schools from setting up worker cooperatives to registering to vote to running for office.

Viewed through the theories of Marx and Du Bois, the emphasis Clark and Horton put on building equality between people as “first-class citizens” reflects an underlying belief that in order to uproot of the oppression of racial capitalism a revolution in human relations is necessary. Marx wrote to the highly social nature of the political economy when he said that even though capitalism is able to reproduce itself without the constant overt force of the factory owner, capitalists accumulate wealth because of their domination over workers. He says, "The alien being, to whom labor and the produce of labor belongs, in whose service labor is done, and for whose benefit the produce of labor is provided, can only be people themselves" (Marx 79). For Marx, the “invisible chains” of the production system that masked the domination of one group of people over another were ideologies of the status quo. These ideologies were intended to give rise to senses of self which reinforced the social relations of oppression, normalizing for example that workers labor for wages and factory owners receive profits. Marx observed that the senses of self that influence people’s day-to-day actions were not personal. They were aligned with an economic and political context rooted in human relations. The revolutionary leader from Guinea Bissau, Amilcar Cabral, similarly argued that because a society’s norms and values were a manifestation of its production system, new ideologies were needed in order to create more equal material conditions. He said, “We see therefore that, if imperialist domination has the vital need to practice cultural oppression, national liberation is necessarily an act of culture” (qtd in Borges 173-174). Stanley Aronowitz echoes the connection between social and political revolution when he talks about how for Paulo Freire:

The oppressed are situated within an economic and social structure and tied to it not only by their labor but also by the conditions of their psychological being. The task of his pedagogy is to encourage the emergence of a specific kind of discourse that presupposes

a project for the formation of subjectivities that is increasing separate from that of the structure. (Aronowitz 17-18)

Marxist theorists argue that because the oppression of racial capitalism is founded on the domination of certain groups over others, direct democracy necessitates a social revolution through which the human relations of the old system are overturned. Clark and Horton believed that to achieve a system of direct democracy it would require time and resources going towards work that built up “formations of subjectivities” that broke with the ideological messages of segregation. “First-class citizenship” was an ideology through which people came to understand themselves as vital participants in creating a democratic political economy based on socialist values of economic, political and social equality.

In the first part of this section, I’ve looked at the concept of “first-class citizenship” through the theories of Marx’s political economy and Du Bois’ understanding of democracy. I’ve made the case that “first-class citizenship” encompassed a concept of democracy much broader than electoral participation. “First-class citizenship” was an ideology associated with social equality that worked dialectically with democratized economic and political systems. I’ll now turn to look at the theories of Black intellectuals who influenced Clark and Horton’s decision to prioritize working with Johns Island and other communities most targeted by economic and racial oppression in their broader vision of how to achieve direct democracy. Du Bois believed that historically movements led by communities most directly impacted by racism and class oppression had gotten closest to this type of social revolution that would realize direct democracy. He wrote extensively on the promise of a substantially different political economy emerging in the United States during Reconstruction as a result of the social movement led by formerly enslaved communities. In his analysis of the radical potential of Reconstruction, Du

Bois says, “Emancipating one class of laborers emancipated all and was to the credit of abolition. Nevertheless, the free black laborer was the main constituent labor force in the South and as such, largely responsible for results” (Du Bois 482). Building on the work of Du Bois, Cedric Robinson writes about why Black communities were in the best position to fight for direct democracy for all because in “negating their negation” they would fight both racial oppression and class exploitation. Robinson said, “It was the materials constructed from a shared philosophy developed in the African past and transmitted as culture, from which revolutionary consciousness was realized and ideology of struggle formed” (Robinson 309). He continued, “The oppositions that had struck most deeply at capitalism domination and imperialism had been those formed outside of the logic of bourgeois hegemony” (Robinson 240). Robinson observed the Black Radical Tradition represented a continuous and holistic challenge to racial capitalism.

Highlander Center educators supported the Black Radical Tradition as the catalyzing force that could achieve direct democracy. In explaining the Citizenship Schools Horton says: “The most important contribution Highlander can make in 1959 is to strengthen Negro leadership concerned with integration and citizenship. The development of civic democracy in the South will be determined by the degree to which Negroes consistently and effectively insist of full citizenship” (Highlander, “One Southerner to Another”). The Citizenship Schools stand out as educational work that originated from residents of Johns Island at a formative historical moment when the civil rights movement had begun to gain momentum, but its course was still highly open. The Citizenship Schools was a project that harnessed movement resources, such as the time of paid Highlander staff and connections with other communities and activists, towards the vision of grassroots leaders in Black communities. It was this accountability to communities who by “negating their negation” worked towards full democracy for all that defined the

Citizenship School approach. As I'll show later in this thesis, the fact that external resources were directly tied to traditions of resistance in Black communities, "oppositions...formed outside of the logic bourgeois hegemony" (Robinson 240), gave rise to an educational model that deeply relied on grassroots leaders over paid staff. This reliance on local leadership allowed the project to expand over a few short years. Trusted community leaders who respected the adults they worked with were empowered to start their own schools, and across the South in one school at a time participants expanded the ideology of "first-class citizenship" and took varying forms of action towards achieving a fuller democracy.

In this section, I've shown that theorists such as W.E.B. Du Bois were influenced by a Marxist method of inquiry that analyzes how material conditions are shaped by economic, political and social forces. I've shown that supporters of direct democracy have understood inequality to stem from human relations of domination and believe that in order to meaningfully transform the political economy of racial capitalism, a social revolution is necessary in which people develop new ideologies of self. Finally, I've looked at the writing on the Black Radical Tradition which makes the case that communities most directly impacted by racial capitalism have historically fought for the most genuine forms of direct democracy both because of their interest in negating racial and economic exploitation and because their method of organizing is rooted in cultural norms and values outside the culture of racial capitalism. All of this was highly relevant to the Citizenship Schools, which was a project working for direct democracy through centering the needs and organizing strategies of communities that were most directly impacted by both racial and class oppression. The Citizenship School project sought to build direct democracy by prioritizing an approach to education that built up new ideologies associated with the concept of "first-class citizenship." Highlander educators and civil rights activists worked to

help people to become “first-class citizens” who had various levels of decision-making power from charting the course of the future of their communities to the way in which resources would be used during the civil rights movement. By prioritizing an approach to change that centered grassroots leadership, the Citizenship Schools built off of the Black Radical Tradition to create a powerful model of social change that spanned depth and scale and worked for a full direct democracy for all.

First-class citizenship

In the previous section I showed that direct democracy that “negates” racial capitalism necessitates a culture shift in which people come to understand themselves in ways that delegitimizes the existing psychology associated with an oppressive political economy. In this section, I’ll look at the notions of worth that leaders like Clark and Horton held about people that were directly linked to the new type of political economy they worked to build in which communities held direct governing power over political, economic and educational systems. I’ll then demonstrate that it was these values of human worth associated with direct democracy that guided the overall approach the Highlander Center and Johns Island residents took in developing the Citizenship Schools.

In this section, I’ll break down the notion of worth associated with “first-class citizenship” into two components. I’ll look at the concrete power “first-class citizens” were intended to have within the broader society. I’ll also look at “first-class citizenship” based on the sentiments about human dignity the educators and community associated with this term and the type of power “first-class citizens” held within the Citizenship School programs. Finally, I’ll look at the Highlander archives that show that the notion of “first-class citizenship” worth guided

their overall approach to building the Citizenship Schools in the short-term and direct democracy in the long run.

As I showed above, the Highlander educators believed that “first-class citizens” should be able to govern day-to-day matters in varying ways that encompassed the full lives of community residents. Highlander’s official policy speaks to the power “ordinary” people hold as “first-class citizens” when they say, “We hold that democracy is inactive unless workers are given a full voice in industry through unions; or farmers are given a voice in the market place through cooperatives.... there must be diversity of approach but each step must be in conformity with the goal, which is dishonored by each undemocratic act” (Highlander, “Official Statement of Policy”). Gillespie echoed the complex role of “first-class citizens” when she said, “For CEP students, political empowerment was an important marker of citizenship, but on a more fundamental level, citizenship meant the ability to exercise power and authority in a variety of contexts.” The Progressive Club, an organization started by Jenkins to help meet the needs of the community on Johns Island, hosted the first Citizenship School in 1957. The evolving role of the Progressive Club exemplifies the multi-faceted forms of power “first-class citizens” had. During the years of the Citizenship Schools, the Progressive Club supported people to register to vote, ran a cooperative store, hosted trainings for civil rights activists among other activities. As I’ll get into in more depth later, the expanding leadership roles Citizenship School teachers, students and supporters took on as the project grew is another example of the diversity of rights and responsibilities “first-class citizens” had.

Interwoven into the conceptions of the material power “first-class citizens” held was a notion of human worth. Highlander educators describe their love for “common people” in the communities in which they lived and worked. In an interview with Bill Moyers in 1981, Myles

Horton said, “You can’t be a revolutionary if you don’t love people, there’s no point in it” (“Radical Hillbilly” 00:14:49). Both Horton and Clark were influenced by the Bible’s emphasis on interdependence, mutual respect and care. Clark’s deep-seated commitment for people comes through in a report on her work on Johns Island for Highlander. She says, “Out of Common Clay I was made, I want to live and die for the Common man. I hope Highlander will never scorn these people and cater only to men in gray Flannel Suits” (Highlander, “Recapitulation, Explanation and Recommendation”). Clark’s quote emphasized that her commitment to the communities she worked in superseded her commitment to Highlander as an institution. Her work at Highlander appears to be contingent on the collective commitment to ethos to “live and die for the Common man.”

The Highlander educators took great care to reflect back to people the love and respect they held for the “Common man.” One way they did this was by staying in people’s homes on Johns Island when they made visits to help develop the Citizenship School. At the time, white people and Black people rarely entered each other’s homes. Septima Clark recalls her mother being unable to eat because of fear of white supremacist reprisal when she invited a white friend to her house who fought with her for Black people to be able to vote in primaries. Clark elaborated that even as a Black woman, Johns Island residents were initially suspicious about her motivations because she was more middle class. She described the fear people held that someone would judge them and be all “high falutun.”

Both Black and white Highlander educators stayed in Jenkins’ home and the homes of other residents of John’s Island in order to convey the respect they held for the community and to build trust as an essential component of developing the Citizenship School program. Clark regarded these relationships and watching people connect to their sense of dignity as the most

important part of the work. She said, “Can you ask for a greater rewards than this one? Seeing Mr. Hamilton a man of 75 years of age demonstrating his ability to read the newspaper and the Bible as well as holding a registration certificate to vote” (Highlander, “Recapitulation, Explanation and Recommendation”).

The concept of “first-class citizenship” conveyed this love for and belief in ordinary people. The love of the “common man” was not relegated to individual notions of worth. Horton explained the symbiotic nature between individual and collective worth when he said, “Individuality is enhanced by being part of a group” (“Radical Hillbilly” 00:12:39). “First-class citizens” held a responsibility to the community and the community held responsibility to the individual. It was the responsibility to build up that sense of worth in others because individual fate was interconnected with community fate.

Myles Horton spoke to how his love for people translated into a faith in their creative potential when he said, “We believe in people.... The Old Testament is about creation. God was a creator. If you’re going to be people born in God’s image you have to be creators” (“Radical Hillbilly” 00:11:00 and 00:14:49). Clark talked about her experiences as a teacher on Johns Island before the Citizenship Schools and the way she would base her lessons on helping develop people’s creativity. She said:

“You can’t say, ‘Get a book and open it.’ You have to do all of that introduction. You have to say, ‘Look at this picture. Does it look like people are living here?’ If it’s a house with smoke coming out of the chimney, then they know that some people are living there or smoke wouldn’t be coming out of the chimney. This is the way you build up your story’ that’s the way I do. I think the young teachers today, because they have so much material, rely so much on the material that they don’t use their own creative ability. Your

creative ability is the thing that you need to pull out of these children their creative ability, make their eyes see what is in that picture” (Clark 107).

People’s sense of themselves as being someone who had the ability to impact the world was of utmost importance to Highlander educators. “First-class citizenship” brought together the values of human dignity with tangible forms of material power into one holistic concept. Highlander educators worked to build a direct democracy through catalyzing a process in which the people would create a more equal society themselves. They believed that the motivation that came from ownership over the process of change was the catalyst for a social movement for “first-class citizenship.”

Highlander’s pedagogy was aimed at making interventions that would realize the form of “first-class citizenship power” they were working to build in the broader society in the social space of the educational programs. In describing their work, Myles Horton says, “We assumed people could be citizens and begin treating them as if they were.... It has to be continually in our minds as a reality we assume and then we’ve already got a different kind of teaching- not in terms of mechanics and specific abilities but in terms of philosophy” (Highlander, “Myles Horton Talks”). In a training of trainers Myles elaborated, saying “You yourselves as teachers and leaders incorporate in every small thing you teach your students to do the values that lead people to look toward the ought to be. I think that’s the genius of our program” (Highlander, “Myles Horton Talks”). The Citizenship Schools catalyzed structural change by working to create a social reality in which people felt respected because of the values around human dignity and love for what Clark termed the “Common man.”

In this section, I’ve looked more deeply into the concept of “first-class citizenship” in order to better understand the values and material forms of power that were associated with this

term. I've shown that "first-class citizens" had varying rights and responsibilities which manifested in the holistic set of strategies that emerged from the Citizenship Schools, from worker cooperatives to the "Freedom Ballot," and leadership roles, from Citizenship School teacher to elected official. I've shown that values related to human dignity and love for "common" people were interwoven into the concept of "first-class citizenship." The care Highlander educators displayed for the communities they worked in translated into an approach to change in which people were viewed as creators who lived interdependent lives with other "first-class citizens" in their communities. This section has been aimed at layering onto the concept of direct democracy the more personal values Horton and Clark brought to the conceptualization of "first-class citizenship." As I'll show in Chapter Two, the personal care Horton and Clark brought to this work was an essential component to their ability to implement their more theoretical commitments to direct democracy.

Chapter Two: The Citizenship Schools in Action

In this thesis, I look at how the grassroots educational work of the civil rights movement done primarily by Black women linked in-depth programs to broad-based collective action. I decided to focus on the Citizenship Schools because I felt this lesser-known story from the civil rights movement had valuable lessons to teach contemporary organizers and educators about how to build to scale by focusing on depth. I wanted to understand how, with very little paid staff, the Citizenship Schools helped people transcend fear of white supremacist retaliation and supported people to claim “first-class citizenship” on the local level (through voter registration drives, for example) and national level (through for example the creation of the Freedom Democratic Party).

In Chapter One, I began to build the case that the Citizenship Schools are an example of a method of education that emerged from communities most directly impacted by oppression and provide an alternative to the prevalent Alinsky model that relies on issue-based campaigns to politicize people. I argue that Citizenship School educators, such as Septima Clark and Bernice Robinson, were able to achieve both local and broad-based transformations because they prioritized the growth of people in the communities they worked in and the development of ideologies of subject hood associated with a new political economy of direct democracy. The Citizenship Schools were not merely literacy or civic engagement program. They were programs aimed at supporting people to become “first-class citizens” who had power over the economic, political and social life of their communities.

In this chapter, I’ll tell the stories of three stages of the Citizenship Schools’ development to illustrate how the project challenged the hegemonic ideology of segregation through the contrasting concept of “first-class citizenship.” I’ll begin with a narrative about the first

Citizenship School, the model and foundation upon which the entire project was built. Then I'll tell the story of the integrated residential workshops at the Highlander Center that supported the growth of new Citizenship Schools by connecting grassroots leaders to one another and to resources to build local schools. Finally, I'll look at how the project grew to support the development of thousands of Citizenship Schools through the non-hierarchical Citizenship Education Project (CEP). In each of these instances, I'll look at how the "first-class citizenship" approach to education allowed the program to organize in deep and broad ways, recruiting new leaders, supporting people to take political action and expanding to more communities.

The conditions on Johns Island

In order to understand why the "first-class citizenship" approach to education was able to transform communities and build power in holistic ways, I'll begin with looking at the conditions that existed on John's Island and throughout the South prior to the project's growth. The political economy on Johns Island in the 1950s was held in place through the dialectic between unequal schooling, political disenfranchisement, economic exploitation and segregation. Gillespie says, "lawmakers had maintained a complex web of political, economic, and educational restrictions for African Americans, with each strand of the web entangling and reinforcing the other strands." In this section, I'll analyze the political economy of the 1950s in Johns Island, organized around sharecropping, in order to understand how the "first-class citizenship" approach to education provided a powerful antidote to the status quo. This section is aimed at showing the breadth of the impact of racial capitalism on people's lives on Johns Island.

As previously stated, the development of sharecropping and segregation that was prevalent on John's Island in the 1950s was not inevitable. While formerly enslaved people fought for a genuinely democratized economic and political system in the aftermath of slavery

(Du Bois), they were abandoned by majorities of potential white allies. The breakdown of this coalition across race and class contributed to the ultimate withdrawal of Northern troops from the South and federal policy that returned land to former plantation owners, giving rise to sharecropping. Du Bois looked at the early propaganda that contributed to the ideology of segregation. These narratives were aimed at delegitimizing the revolutionary potential of Reconstruction and demonizing Black communities as the main agent of change during that period. He explained:

THE SOUTH FINALLY, WITH ALMOST COMPLETE UNITY, NAMED THE NEGRO AS THE MAIN CAUSE OF SOUTHERN CORRUPTION. THEY SAID, AND REITERATED THIS CHARGE UNTIL IT BECAME HISTORY: THAT THE CAUSE OF DISHONESTY DURING RECONSTRUCTION WAS THE FACT THAT 4,000,000 DISENFRANCHISED BLACK LABORERS AFTER 250 YEARS OF EXPLOITATION HAD BEEN GIVEN A LEGAL RIGHT TO HAVE SOME VOICE IN THEIR OWN GOVERNMENT, IN THE KINDS OF GOODS THEY WOULD MAKE AND THE SORT OF WORK THEY WOULD DO, AND IN THE DISTRIBUTION OF WEALTH THEY CREATED. (478)

The myth that Reconstruction was a failure because of the “corruption” of Black communities legitimized government policy that ended the revolutionary potential of Reconstruction by seizing land away from communes created by formerly enslaved people and returning land to former plantation owners. These landowners forced the system of sharecropping onto poor Black and white communities.

Under sharecropping, agricultural worker's housing and food security was contractually tied to their labor, creating a system in which multiple aspects of people's lives were defined by their employment. The rise of segregation went hand in hand with the development of sharecropping. Pem Davidson Buck makes the case in *Worked to the Bone* that sharecropping needed segregation to maintain itself because white people gained psychological privileges that incentivized them not to unite with Black workers. As we move forward with looking at daily life on Johns Island prior to the Citizenship Schools, Buck and Du Bois tell us of the broad context of struggle that defined the political economy of the 1950s. As Du Bois shows, day-to-day life on Johns Island had been shaped by the tension between Black-led social movements fighting for a more equal system, what Robinson calls the "Black Radical Tradition," and the coalition of forces that promoted capitalism through the heightened racial oppression of segregation.

In the rest of this section, I will focus on the stories from the residents of Johns Island about the oppression they faced economically, socially and in the schooling system in order to paint a picture of the all-encompassing impact the system of racial capitalism had done people's lives. These stories provide examples of how people had been grappling with the prevalent ideologies associated with segregation prior to the Citizenship Schools through developing strategies to survive while also continuing to build a vision for a different world, through spirituals and sustained local organizing for example. The Citizenship Schools, as we'll see later in this section, provided people with more options about how to confront the ideologies of segregation and tapped into local, grassroots forms of resistance.

Inequality in the education system reinforced the political economy of sharecropping as a whole. Gillespie spoke to this when she discussed how the unequal system of education was

weaponized against people to curtail their ability to participate in the political process. She argued that the “one dimensional” economy relied on a continuous supply of low-wage labor. Disfranchising Black communities through literacy exams and threats of violence allowed the white power structure to make decisions that benefited wealthy, white landowners (Gillespie). Citizenship School students reported deeply negative experiences about their formal schooling on the island, which gives us insight into why the Citizenship Schools were so impactful at changing how people thought of themselves in contrast to previous schooling experiences. These narratives demonstrate how interconnected the political, economic, educational and social systems were and why the Citizenship Schools, by creating new educational experiences, were able to have far-reaching impacts on the life of the community as a whole.

When Esau Jenkins, a community activist from Johns Island, first went to Highlander in the 1950s, many of the Black elders in his community couldn't read. As children, these elders had been treated as if their primary value was as a low-wage labor force, and their educational opportunities were always contingent on what the system of racial capitalism needed from them economically. Septima Clark described the unstable nature of education for Black children on the island:

On rainy days when no work could be done in the fields was always a well attended school day. If the sun came out by noon the plantation overseers would ride up to the school house and call for the tenants' children because the father had signed a contract with the planter binding his whole family to work for living quarters and staple food that he could not grow in his garden plot. (Highlander, “Island Lore”)

At an early age, Black children were forced out of school entirely because of the economic pressures of sharecropping. Esau Jenkins recounts,

My reason why I didn't go any farther than the 4th grade here, I had to work. And because of that, I had to leave school. And then, too, the schools we had here, it wasn't encouraging to go; we had around 50 children with one teacher and a one-door school; and besides that, they painted it black, that we could be identified as to who goes to the school. This discouraged me when I got some pride; so after I left. (Highlander, "Assortment of Talks by Esau Jenkins")

Inside the classroom teachers like Septima Clark had been employing popular education pedagogies to support students to feel pride and dignity in who they were. However, Jenkins's quote demonstrated how the formal segregated schooling system was set up in a way by the white power structure that controlled the schooling administration at the time in an effort to attempt to impose ideologies of inferiority on Black children. As I previously showed, the ways in which segregation and sharecropping undermined the educational opportunities of Black youth was then used to disenfranchise adults who were required to take a literacy test in order to register to vote.

White supremacy defined the social relations between white and Black communities on Johns Island. Esau Jenkins spoke on the suspicion Black folks first felt about the white staff from Highlander:

Years ago, the Negroes on this island were skeptical; when they showed as if they wanted a friendship with them, or help them, because the only thing they'd know about white folks is go out and work for them, and they treat them as animals, and that's all. That's the kind of relationship they called 'good,' to go out and do what they want done, and then go home ("Assortment of Talks by Esau Jenkins").

As Jenkins' quote showed, the system of racial capitalism was reinforced dialectically through a feedback loop between the political, economic and educational system, and Black people on the Island were treated by most white people as expendable labor. There was a threat of white supremacist violence if Black and white people entered each other's homes, and as Jenkins recounted the experience of Black people on the Island, "Years ago, they have never seen a white person come around them.... they couldn't even let you come in the white folks' house, regardless of how much they worked" (Highlander, "Assortment of Talks by Esau Jenkins"). As we'll see later, Clark and Horton emphasized trust building with the Black community on Johns Island as the essential first step in creating the first Citizenship School. One of the key ways they worked to demonstrate their respect for the community was by staying in people's homes across race and class.

Jenkins recalled how the people in his life found various ways to survive in the context of segregation. During the time when he was organizing the Citizenship Schools, Jenkins told community residents a story that illustrated the options he believed his father felt he had. He said: "My father believed in whatever the white folks said; he didn't want to hurt their feelings.... One day we went to carry some cotton to sell and the white man who figured what the cotton came to, he gave us a certain price, I started to figure mine; he told me 'Don't do that. The white folks will never like that, son.'" Jenkins found that the white man had been underpaying his father; he explained to his father that this white man had been cheating them. He remembered telling his father, "'Can't you see it's good to do your own figuring?' And of course I convinced him at that time, but he would never do it (Highlander, "Assortment of Talks by Esau Jenkins").

In telling his father's story, Jenkins was giving voice to the ways people had found to survive within the dominant power structure. Because this story was told in the context of the Citizenship School, we can imagine that he was using this example to illustrate that people had access to more choices and that by joining the civil rights movement people could build a different system together. Citizenship School educators knew their work was successful when they started to see how the ideology of "first-class citizenship" led people to act in ways that challenged the system of ideas associated with white supremacy. Septima Clark, for example, recalls when the KKK first learned about the Citizenship Schools. She went from island to island to see how people were doing, and she saw that they were not afraid anymore. One man told her, "Oh, anytime that white people think that we are getting something done, they're going to be against us. We're going ahead without school and do this thing" (Clark 51). Just a few years before this, Esau Jenkins and Septima Clark had barely been able to find a space for the first school because people were too scared to rent to them.

The Citizenship Schools self-consciously built upon the powerful history of resistance that existed on the island and throughout the South. In the face of oppression from slavery to sharecropping, the community of Johns Island had locally rooted forms of resistance, which became one of the psychological and spiritual bases upon which the Citizenship Schools were built. In 1739, enslaved people on Johns Island organized the Stono rebellion, the largest uprising against slavery in the British mainland colonies. Jenkins captured the culture of resistance to white supremacy that continued on Johns Island into the 1950s when he described the experience Black folks had at church. On Christmas Eve, the community would gather to sing together through the night. He recalled:

These songs are the ones that have made them happy, made them go through these hard days, the days when they didn't have a place to live of their own; didn't have a piece of land of their own; living on the plantation. These people are hard-pressed people, and they are optimistic enough to believe that their better days are coming.... They feel it within. These people are trying to satisfy themselves, satisfy their souls....If you could come and see them, how they look, while they're singing and shouting, you can see they are singing for a better day, shouting for a better day. (Highlander, "Assortment of Talks by Esau Jenkins")

Jenkins' story illustrated the daily ways in which the community of Johns Island created resistance narratives through songs like We Shall Overcome and Keep Your Eyes on the Prize that later became important civil rights anthems. The hope for a world organized around the values of respect, dignity, and interdependence was infused into these songs and demonstrated the ways in which prior to the Citizenship Schools, residents of Johns Island were rooting their resistance to racial capitalism in a proactive vision for a different way of life.

This section has been aimed at showing the breadth of the impact of racial capitalism on people's lives on Johns Island. Economic, political, educational and social systems were intertwined with one another to create the conditions of oppression Black communities' faced at work, in school, and in social life on the island. There was both a physical threat of violence and psychological barriers to Black communities challenging this political order. In the face of these forms of oppression, Black people on Johns Island had engaged in local forms of resistance to build up a collective sense of optimism, dignity and hope. This section has been aimed at building the context for understanding why the "first-class citizenship" as a concept that related

to a fully new political economy of direct democracy was a compelling vision that countered the multi-faceted nature of oppression people experience under racial capitalism.

Citizenship Schools in Action

In Chapter One, I showed that the Citizenship Schools were influenced by social movements for direct democracy that worked for equality in material conditions and human relations. The Highlander Center described democracy as “all encompassing.” Their broadest vision for change was encapsulated in the concept of “first-class citizenship” in which people claimed participatory power over the political, economic and education systems from local to global levels. This section illustrates how the Citizenship Schools were shaped around the goal of helping people claim “first-class citizenship.” I use a set of stories to illustrate how the development of the Citizenship Schools worked dialectically to encompass social and political transformation. In addition to demonstrating that the Citizenship Schools were shaped by the broad goal of building “first-class citizenship” power, I’ll analyze why in the context of the political economy of its day this approach was so effective at breaking through hegemonic ideologies that were intended to limit the forms of action people took.

In this chapter, I tell the story of three stages of the Citizenship Schools development. Beginning with the first Citizenship School, I’ll look at how people created ideologies of “first-class citizenship” and experienced power in the “classroom” that led them to take political action. I’ll look at how the lessons learned during the first Citizenship School were systematized to support the development of more local schools and to build regional power. In integrated residential workshops at the Highlander Center communities from across the South learned about the example of Johns Island and how to set up their own Citizenship Schools. The project eventually grew into the Citizenship Education Project (CEP) through which tens of thousands of

people registered to vote. During the CEP, the local schools retained local autonomy, and the focus of the schools continued to be supporting people to take action in their communities. The local work was then linked to national organizing through a broad network of other schools and civil rights projects. The participants in the CEP were able to make impacts on the national and global political landscape, getting leaders into elected office, forming a new political party and shifting the economic terrain through boycotts (Gillespie). From the first Citizenship School to the residential workshops to the Citizenship Education Project, I'll look at how the goal of supporting people to become "first-class citizens" led to deep and broad transformation. Both in the "classroom" and in the method of expansion, the program employed a holistic approach that linked the "first-class citizenship" experienced in the schools to political action on ever-expanding levels.

The Highlander Center educators' field notes show that in assessing John's Island as a location for their work, they were thinking about the project's ability to expand. They chose to work in Johns Island in part because the conditions there were shared by neighboring islands and many other rural Black communities. In a Highlander report about his trips to neighboring islands as they were beginning their work with Johns Island, Myles Horton noted that, "After interviewing a few people, I decided that the chain of Sea Islands running down to Savannah, Georgia had problems similar to Johns Island, which would give our project value as a pilot plant" (Highlander, "Index of Developments on Johns Island"). Myles Horton's quote shows that he understood that in order for the work on Johns Island to expand, the issues that the school there dealt with would have to be relevant and visceral to communities on a broader scale.

Field notes about another early trip to Johns Island made by Zilphia Horton who did the cultural organizing at the Highlander Center similarly reflects this dual perspective of seeing the

work on Johns Island as both local and as a potential catalyst for regional and national organizing. The Highlander Center records explain:

The purpose of the trip was... to learn more about John's Island as a potential demonstration community and to establish friendly contacts.... On Zilphia's return it was decided by the staff that John's Island had good possibilities as a demonstration community and that by working with Esau and Septima Clark, who had formerly taught on the Island, we might develop an increasing number of volunteers on the Island.

(Highlander, "Summary of Community Leadership Training Activities")

The horizontal method of expansion of the Citizenship Schools is reflected in how Highlander educators and Johns Island residents talked about the project during residential workshops. As new schools emerged, Jenkins told the Johns Island community members that they should be proud of how their experience had influenced other communities to start their own Citizenship Schools (Highlander, "Assortment of Talks by Esau Jenkins"). Myles Horton echoed this sentiment when he said, "You people on the Sea Islands have made a contribution. You are offering a new educational concept to people. The first stage is over" (Highlander, "Myles Horton Talks"). He elaborated that, "Having become established, the local citizenship school is ready to feed back its findings into the residential workshops at Highlander, and to find and encourage more leaders over more areas to go to Highlander to receive the inspiration and the practical training to set up new citizenship schools" (Highlander, "Proposed Citizenship School Training Program"). Looking at the development of the Citizenship Schools overall shows how both the programming and the method of expansion was aimed at building all-encompassing "first-class citizenship" power. The local Citizenship Schools were the building blocks of broad-based regional and global power seen in the CEP.

The First Citizenship School

Septima Clark and Myles Horton worked closely with Esau Jenkins and others on Johns Island from 1954-1957 to set up the first Citizenship School. The vision of “first-class citizenship” that guided the Highlander Center’s approach to social change encompassed the dynamic between the folk school and the communities it worked with. The Highlander educators believed that the power dynamics within the project itself, between “teacher” and “student” and staff and community members, needed to model the “first-class citizenship” the project was working to build on a broader scale. For example, the Highlander Center didn’t initiate programs but worked to support programs that grassroots community leaders identified as meeting important needs. Alice Wine, a resident of Johns Island, first had the idea for a literacy program that would help Black residents register to vote. Esau Jenkins had brought this idea to the Highlander Center when he participated in a workshop there about how to challenge segregation at the invitation of Septima Clark. The commitment to a program in which adults were treated as “first-class citizens” meant that the Citizenship School curriculum was both directed towards helping people take political action and very open to incorporate the ideas that were generated by the class itself (Gillespie).

In order for people to experience themselves as “first-class citizens” during the program, Septima Clark, Myles Horton and Esau Jenkins focused on building trust between Highlander staff and Johns Island residents as the first step. Septima Clark describes how when the Highlander Center first came with Jenkins to Johns Island many people were concerned about being looked down upon and worried that the middle-class staff would be “high falutun” (Clark 66). In developing the first Citizenship School, the group sought to challenge the power dynamics around race, class and gender that held the political economy of segregation in place.

They built trust across lines of historic privilege and oppression through spending extensive time in the community, staying in people's homes, engaging in daily activities and attending important events.

In the first six months of working together, Myles Horton and Septima Clark spent at least 30 days on the island (Highlander, "Index of Developments on Johns Island"). Septima Clark was the main field staff that spent extended time in the community. Myles Horton explained that during his trips he would spend lots of unstructured time with people in order to establish that the Highlander staff valued the daily life and experiences of Johns Island residents. He said, "I went down to Johns Island and was in and out for almost a year trying to figure out how to help Jenkins. I'd get acquainted by going fishing with the people. I'd spend the night with them, work with them on their farms and play with their children" (Horton 100). The decision to stay in homes together across race and class was significant in building trust because it demonstrated that the relationships between civil rights activists from Highlander and residents of Johns Island were important enough to risk white supremacist reprisal. Recalling the humanist values embedded in the concept of "first-class citizenship" these early days helped establish that the priority of the work was the Johns Island residents themselves and their growth, vision and wellbeing.

Highlander educators made choices based on the values they brought that were associated with the overall conception of direct democracy. Through the extensive time spent on the island to build trust, Myles Horton and Septima Clark gained valuable information about local conditions that informed the choices they made with Esau Jenkins and other community leaders about how to set up the school in order to make the adults feel respected. Horton and Clark learned that literacy programs on the Island had previously failed because they had been

condescending to adults. Horton remembers the story of these schools being held in elementary schools and that adults were called “daddy longlegs” because they were forced to sit in desks made for children (Horton 101). State and federal money for literacy training had gone unused because these schools had not been structured in a way in which adults felt taken seriously. Horton, Clark and Jenkins decided that through the choice of the teacher they could convey to students that they were being respected. Septima Clark said, “We wanted to find a person who was not a licensed teacher, one who would not be considered high falutin, who would not act condescending to adults” (Clark 48). Clark decided to ask her cousin, Bernice Robinson, to teach the first class. Bernice was a beautician who had previously done organizing work with the NAACP. Myles Horton explained that Black beauticians were incredibly important because their work was entirely reliant on the Black community, and they held one of the few jobs where they didn’t have a white boss (Horton 102). Clark recalled her early conversations with Bernice about being the teacher: “Bernice say, ‘I’m a beautician. I don’t know anything about teaching.’ But Horton and I believed she could do it. We knew that she had the most important quality, the ability to listen to people” (Clark 49). Selecting a teacher because of how Horton and Clark anticipated she would make adults feel is another exemplification of how the project was shaped by the goal of creating a particular social reality in which students would be treated as “first-class citizens.” As the program grew, the teachers continued to be from the Black community and were often residents in the communities in which they taught. Gillespie writes, “Most important, classes started where the students were, as teachers intentionally created an environment where personal achievement laid the foundation for more public demonstrations of citizenship.” As I’ll go into further in depth in subsequent sections, the fact that Citizenship School teachers were

mostly selected from the community hosting the school and because they respected prospective students was a core reason why the project was able to span both breadth and scale.

Choosing the location for the school and creating the curriculum were two other core ways in which the team planning the first Citizenship School attempted to create conditions in which adults would claim “first-class citizenship.” Clark, Jenkins and Horton put great care into finding locations for the schools that would make adults feel taken seriously. Highlander helped the Progressive Club, which was started by Jenkins to work for community improvement, purchase a building where they could hold classes. The front of the building became a cooperative store run by the Progressive Club and in the back, where white people could not see what they were doing, they held the first class (Clark 47). As the schools expanded, they continued to be held in settings people moved through in their everyday lives. These sites were important because many of the official spaces in communities, such as schools, were more entrenched in the political economy of their time and would not host the Citizenship School because of a fear of reprisal (firings, losing state funding, etc...). Gillespie elaborates how important it was to the growth of the project that people held classes in their homes, as time and again churches and other institutions would buckle under pressure and decline to provide space for schools.

The curriculum used in the classes was another important component that defined the first Citizenship School. Bernice recalled telling students that she wasn’t a teacher and was there to learn with them (Horton 103). The class curriculum was open and fluid. Robinson explained that students told their life stories, she wrote them down and then she would ask the students to read back the stories they had told her. The materials they used included the U.S. Constitution and other materials relevant to registering to vote. She also brought a sewing machine when

students asked to learn how to sew. The combination of curriculum that ranged from preparing people to register to vote to the most localized needs and desires of participants (such as learning to sew) was characteristic of the Citizenship Schools. The open yet direct curriculum highlights how the concept of “first-class citizenship” encompassed the various kinds of participation people felt was important and gave an outlet for meeting both local and global needs from learning to sew to registering to vote.

The experience of “first-class citizenship” people had in the “classroom” led them to take political action. Horton recalled that after the first class in which there were fourteen people participating, 80 percent of the class registered to vote (Horton 103). Clark remembered that:

The next year the class met in December, January and February. By then people were really registering well and fast, because the ones in the class were influencing others who could already read and write to go in to register. We started another class on the next island, Wadmaw, taught by Jenkins’s daughter. Soon we had five schools going on the islands, and Bernice was supervising them all. (Clark 51)

The choices made about who would teach classes, where they would be held and how the curriculum would take shape were the blueprint that guided how the project expanded into more communities. In the next section, I’ll show that as the project began to spread the components of the first school that proved effective at inspiring students to take political action were systematized. The choice of teachers from local communities, the neighborhood locations in which schools were hosted and the open yet directed curriculum that paved the way for conversations about “first-class citizenship” were maintained in subsequent schools. In this way, even as the project grew and was able to feed people into larger scale political actions, the focus

on creating a school environment in which students were treated as “first-class citizens” remained the same.

Residential Workshops

Once the initial Citizenship Schools had taken off, Highlander started running residential workshops for people to be trained to start Citizenship Schools in their own community. In these workshops people lived and learned together on Highlander’s land. In this section, I’ll look at how Highlander Center educators opened opportunities to deepen and broaden the power that was being built on Johns Island through residential workshops. The Highlander Center was the only desegregated school in the South; residential workshops were therefore also an opportunity for people to experience the values of equality embedded in the concept of “first-class citizenship.” Clark recalls that by 1961, “eighty-two teachers who had received training at Highlander were holding classes in Alabama, Georgia, South Carolina and Tennessee” (Clark 60). Through the residential workshops, the power of the first Citizenship School began to coalesce into broader regional power.

The residential workshop curriculum demonstrated that the Citizenship School project expanded without losing the depth of local organizing seen in the first school. To expand the project while continuing to support the type of in-depth educational experiences present in the first Citizenship Schools, the residential workshops drew heavily upon the example of Johns Island. At these workshops, the lessons learned from the first school were systematized into an approach to create a school environment where students would be treated as “first-class citizens” and supported to take political action. Housewives, beauticians, farmers and others who could read in the Black community were recruited to become teachers and often trained by Bernice Robinson. Robinson and other past teachers spoke to new recruits about the student-centered

approach they had taken to teaching people to read. They encouraged people to set up schools in community spaces such as barber shops, community organizations, churches, homes. People were given the curriculum used in the first classes that linked literacy to building “first-class citizenship.” Workshops included discussions about the purpose of the Citizenship Schools in leading to “first-class citizenship” and demonstration classes (Highlander, “Training Citizenship School Teachers”).

In understanding how residential workshops worked to bridge and catalyze “first-class citizenship,” it’s important to highlight the Highlander Center’s decision to become the first desegregated school in the South at the time in an act of civil disobedience. Myles Horton described the potential of residential workshops when he said, “Residential adult education means to me not only a physical arrangement and setting, but a clear and simple purpose as well. To bring out the best in people, their imagination must be stretched” (Highlander, “One Southerner to Another”). Much like the Citizenship Schools were structured in a way so that people would be treated as “first-class citizens,” Highlander educators focused on the social reality of the residential workshops. Myles Horton explained, “Because Highlander is integrated in terms of its policy-making body, staff and participants, it is a demonstration of the democratic way of life for which it is educating leaders” (Highlander, “One Southerner to Another”). They understood that being in a desegregated space could open people up to imagine a new way of life. In the method of building a desegregated space, we see the care for “common people” that Clark and Horton put into their early work on Johns Island. Clark and Horton introduced new norms in which white and Black people would eat, live and learn together. Clark recalls that some of the workshop participants from Johns Island brought food with them and ate it in their room the first few days. Memories of being harassed by the police for looking at a white person

were fresh in their minds. Horton and Clark didn't push them to come to the dining hall, and after a few days they ran out of food and decided to eat with the rest of the group. Clark recalled that the decision on the part of Highlander to engage in civil disobedience by desegregating their facilities meant that workshop participants had a social freedom they had not experienced in their home communities. She remembers how during this early residential workshop the meals became a time when participants "sat and talked with each other; it was a real experience for them"(Clark 43-44). The program enhanced the power of the discussion on "first-class citizenship" by enacting the values associated with direct democracy in everyday ways. The way in which the program left room for people to warm up to new norms on their own terms exemplifies how this approach to change prioritized the needs of participants over a more abstracted focus on issues.

Civil rights activists expanded the Citizenship School program through residential workshops that were aimed at supporting more people to start schools by spreading the lessons learned on Johns Island. People learned the ingredients that had made the first Citizenship Schools empowering for Johns Island residents. Much like the Citizenship Schools, the residential workshops focused on creating a social reality that would reflect back to people the values associated with the ideology of direct democracy. The experience of learning about the example of Johns Island in an integrated workshop helped build momentum and motivation across communities in the South to begin their own Citizenship Schools.

The Citizenship Education Project (CEP)

The Citizenship School project eventually expanded into the CEP that was led by the SCLC in coordination with SNCC and other major civil rights organizations. As I previously showed, the example of the first Citizenship School created a roadmap for how to create a school

that was effective at supporting local communities to claim “first-class citizenship.” As the project began to expand, the components from the first class remained the same, such as the choice of local residents as teachers who listened to the needs and vision of students, a community-based site for the class and curriculum that linked literacy to claiming “first-class citizenship.” In this section, I’ll look at how the goal of supporting people to become “first-class citizens” with holistic power over local to global structures meant that the program expanded in a unique way in which the depth of educational experiences was retained even as the project grew to scale. I’ll show how the Citizenship School example breaks down false dichotomies between depth and scale; the project created a process through which local, regional and national power grew synergistically.

By 1961, the Citizenship Schools had grown to a scale that the Highlander Center felt that a larger organization was needed to support the large number of communities that wanted to start schools. The Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) took over the Citizenship Schools, while still consulting with Highlander, and ran the program with a coalition of groups as the Citizenship Education Project (CEP). Septima Clark explained that, “all the civil rights groups could use our kind of approach, because by then we knew it worked” (Clark 70). Gillespie notes, “The collaboration resulted in the unique blend of Highlander's group-centered leadership development approach with practical literacy lessons that became the hallmark of CEP classes.” Septima Clark, the main staff of SCLC responsible for the CEP, intended to use the project to lay "the foundation for a Southwide movement" (qtd in Gillespie).

The CEP was structured for civil rights organizations to work collaboratively together to build very localized grassroots leadership that linked to large-scale collective action. In the

SNCC Digital Gateway, they the organization describes the essential role of the CEP in building the power of the civil rights movement across organizations. They explain:

Citizenship schools provided an essential educational component for the emerging voter registration campaign in the Delta. They transcended organizational affiliations with NAACP members working closely with field secretaries from SNCC, CORE, and SCLC.... Citizenship schools became important politicization centers for community adults, as well as institutionalized grassroots leadership development. (SNCC Digital Gateway)

The CEP curriculum workbooks show that the program remained committed to the overall vision of literacy classes working as a step towards people claiming “first-class citizenship” (Congress on Racial Equality, “CORE--Education Materials”). For example, in the CEP workbook given to teacher to read with students in class, there is a section called “One Hundred Years from Slavery.” The workbook honors the everyday forms of resistance, such as spirituals, and framed the fight for “first-class citizenship” as a continuation of the struggle for freedom led by Black people since slavery. On their website, SNCC described that, “Through these classes, students learned more than literacy; they began to craft their own understandings of first-class citizenship” (SNCC Digital Gateway).

Septima Clark, the main staff running the CEP, recalls how they remained committed to recruiting community-based leaders as teachers. She said:

Once a month, for five days, we'd work with people we had recruited, some of whom were just off the farms.... We went into various communities and found people who could read well aloud and write legibly. They didn't have to have a certificate of any kind. I sat down and wrote out a flyer saying that the teachers we need in a Citizenship

School should be people who are respected by the members of the community, who can read well aloud, and who can write their names in cursive writing.... We were trying to make teachers out of these people who could barely read and write. But they could teach (Clark 63-64).

Clark's quote demonstrates how when the project had grown to massive scale where hundreds of schools were running at once, the program did not sacrifice its focus on the experience students had in the "classroom." The fact that what governed the choice of teachers was if they were respected by members of the community paved the way for both a transformative learning environment and a decentralized infrastructure unfettered by institutional power dynamics and bureaucracy.

As was previously mentioned, finding a space for Citizenship Schools was a politically charged endeavor. Gillespie highlights the harassment people endured for hosting Citizenship Schools, lifting up the example of one woman whose landlord stopped making repairs when she decided to start a school in her home and who was shot at multiple times. The CEP continued the practice of organizing schools in whatever community space teachers and local supporters could find. Septima Clark said, "They were in people's kitchens, in beauty parlors, and under trees in the summertime.... I went all over the South, sometimes visiting three Citizenship Schools in one day, checking to be sure they weren't using textbooks, but were teaching people to read those election laws and to write their names in cursive writing" (Clark 69-70). In the continued use of people's homes and other neighborhood settings for classes we can see how the approach of blending humanist values with strategies for material change continued as the CEP supported this work at scale. The use of these types of spaces for classes had the dual impact of creating a

learning environment in which people felt respected and allowing the movement to gain momentum even as more formal institutions refused to host schools.

Through the CEP, leaders who came into the movement from local schools were linked into a massive network of activists. There were 897 Citizenship Schools going from 1957-1970 and in 1964 there were 195 going at one time. Clark recalled that:

One time I heard Andy Young say that the Citizenship Schools were the base on which the whole civil rights movement was built. And that's probably very much true.... The Citizenship School classes formed the grassroot basis of new statewide political organizations in South Carolina, Georgia, and Mississippi. From one end of the South to the other, if you look at the black elected officials and the political leaders, you find people who had their first involvement in the training program of the Citizenship School.

(Clark 70)

Gillepsie attributes the rise of the Freedom Schools and Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party to the CEP grassroots leadership base. As shown in Chapter One, the Citizenship Schools were shaped by the theory that people's ability to govern fully was central to democratizing economic and political systems. The local schools were the building blocks of broad-based people power. The CEP's impact on state and national political formations stemmed from grassroots leaders claiming power in increasingly bold ways starting in their local communities.

Conclusion

The goal of supporting people to become “first-class citizens” guided the Citizenship School project’s development on the micro and macro levels. Schools were developed around values of direct democracy in which “citizenship” was seen as an active role that encompassed individual and collective responsibilities and rights to participate in shaping economic, political and educational systems. Hundreds of thousands of Black people registered to vote because of the social transformation that occurred in the Citizenship School classes. The local schools formed the building blocks of broader power formations that continued to support social transformation linked to political action on the local level while bridging new activists together in national organizations and coalitions.

The “first-class citizenship” approach was effective at challenging the political economy of the time for a number of reasons. The Citizenship Schools were based on all-encompassing vision of change that contrasted with the ideologies and social norms associated with the political economy of segregation. As I showed in the section on the conditions on Johns Island, racial capitalism had impacted people’s lives in multi-faceted ways. The vision for change encompassed in what it meant to become a “first-class citizen” was a challenge to the intertwined systems and social relations of racial capitalism. The focus on a vision for individual and collective change that was holistic allowed people to bring many facets of their life into the educational process and motivated people to act. Myles Horton said, “Highlander has learned from four years’ experience with Citizenship Schools that both speed and effective action depend upon motivation; and that when the motivation is desire for first-class citizenship, both learning and effective action are accelerated to a degree beyond the individual’s normal capacity”

(Highlander, “Proposed Citizenship School Training Program”). Horton’s quote shows he felt that the overarching vision they brought to the project was central to their ability to catalyze political action.

The approach to change encompassed a vision of equality in the broader society and in the relationship between the Highlander Center and the communities it worked with. The intention to create practices and norms in the educational programming based on the values of the direct democracy, created social realities that contrasted with people’s daily experiences. The vision for a new political economy combined with the experience of being in a desegregated space had a deep impact on movement leaders like Bernice Robinson, Septima Clark and Rosa Parks. Parks said, for example, explained that one of her favorite parts about the residential workshop she attended at Highlander, “the smell of bacon frying and coffee brewing and know[ing] that white folks were doing the preparing instead of me” (qtd. in Theoharis). She elaborate that she found “for the first time in my adult life that this could be a unified society, that there was such a thing as people of all races and backgrounds meeting and having workshops and living together in peace and harmony” (qtd. in Theoharis). The goal of creating a direct democracy along with the altered social relations experienced in the Citizenship Schools and residential workshops at Highlander politicized people and motivated them to take greater leadership in the movement. Bernice Robinson, for example, decided to step into that leadership role after attending an integrated workshop at the Highlander Center. Septima Clark says: “I decided that I was going to try to take Bernice with me up to Highlander, which I did. When she went up there and found the type of people that we had, southern whites and northern whites, southern blacks and northern blacks, all living and working together, she decided that she should try to do something herself” (Clark 49). Another example of the new leadership that emerged

from residential workshops was George Bellinger, who owned a rival bus company to Esau Jenkins. After attending a workshop at Highlander, he decided to work with Jenkins to support the Citizenship Schools. The alliance between Jenkins and Bellinger was an important step in overcoming past economic competition in favor of the shared goal of helping people become “first-class citizens.” Bellinger’s decision to support the Citizenship Schools demonstrates how people’s experiences of social relations grounded in the values of direct democracy during the residential workshops resulted in growing organizing power.

The commitment of the Highlander Center to support the self-determination of communities most impacted by the oppression of racial capitalism connected broader movement resources to local forms of resistance. The Citizenship School project was an idea that grew out of the needs of Johns Island residents and then tapped into existing activism through engaging local residents as teachers, holding classes in community-based spaces and creating an open forum for pressing community needs. This approach built off the role that Black women had historically played in communities as educators in both formal and informal spaces who worked to build up community resilience to face the oppression of racial capitalism. Septima Clark’s early work as a teacher on Johns Island who veered off from text-book learning in order to connect classroom learning to the children’s daily lives is a good example of the type of activism that was already occurring on the Sea Islands before the Citizenship Schools. Gillepsie emphasizes the role Black women played during the Citizenship School project. She says, “Between 1961 and 1965, community leaders, primarily black women, responded to the SCLC’s invitation and taught CEP classes in the Mississippi Delta and across the South, blending historical traditions of black women’s leadership in education and emerging theories of

participatory democracy to build grassroots support for civil rights action.” On the SNCC Digital Gateway the organization echoes the role that women played in the Citizenship Schools, saying:

Citizenship schools existed in every major area of movement activity, typically taught by local women who could use their established reputations, economic resources, and considerable community contacts to support local movement activity. CEP provided a vehicle for local women of varying backgrounds to become leaders within the Mississippi Movement, in charge of instilling within local people the confidence to attempt to register to vote.

Because the project tapped into the historic resistance efforts of local communities, the program relied on resources that were rarely tied to bureaucratic organizations. Having classes in people’s homes and selecting teachers from the community allowed the Citizenship Schools to grow even when the organizers faced resistance from formal institutions. The grassroots leadership made the project come to fruition in a very hostile climate through tapping into resources that were not bound to the political economy of the day. The project was able to grow because of its emphasis on grassroots leadership that in turn translated in material political victories, such as the passage of the Voting Rights Act of 1965.

The ability of the CEP to carry forward a project on a massive scale was similarly based in the project’s commitment to organize itself around the values of direct democracy. The groups that were part of the CEP put aside organizational tensions in favor of empowering local communities around a broad vision for change. Gillespie emphasizes that, “Shifting attention to the CEP in the Delta reveals that, on the ground in real time, ideological differences blurred as SCLC staff members provided crucial resources and collaborated with SNCC leaders and local activists to support grassroots community leadership development.” Because the CEP

organizations were committed to retaining the focus on local empowerment the project expanded through a “catalyst” effect. People were able to step into leadership in their communities without navigating centralized bureaucracy and power interests. Bernice Robinson, for example, became a teacher for the first Citizenship School in 1957; not long after she was supervising five schools on the Sea Islands.

The “first-class citizenship” approach to education was able to transform conditions in deep and broad ways by posing a holistic challenge to the political economy of the 1950s. Horton’s words to a room full of potential volunteer teachers shows how he felt that the program’s development was shaped by the overarching goal of helping people become “first-class citizens.” He said:

Even the best method will take you round and round in a circle, if you don’t have a goal, and that goal must be in your minds from the beginning. The goal---- and I think it brotherhood, democracy, a kind of worth, in which we need to live--- must be constantly in view--- and when this is so then we really have a different kind of teaching, not in terms of mechanics, but in terms of philosophy, which means a different kind of program.... That is it. And to me it is worth all the years of experimenting, refining and observing to discover and define it.” (“Myles Horton’s Talks”)

The model of education seen in the Citizenship Schools linked global power building to local engagement. The infrastructure of the CEP that allowed for this catalyst effect was only possible because what bound the organization together was an overarching vision for change that understood power to stem from engaged local communities networked together. The CEP, as a network of schools that took action together, is a model of how a national coalition can grow synergistically with local community organizing.

Implications for today

Today, educators and organizers still grapple with the question of how to bridge scale with depth. Labor unions under attack by Right to Work legislation are forced to answer the question of how they will keep union density when people have to opt into membership. National coalitions, like the National Alliance of Domestic Workers, have engaged in struggles about how to build a national network of domestic worker organizations that remains accountable to its local affiliates. Yet even the question of how to bridge depth and scale remain as live today as they were in the 1950s, the non-profit industrial complex (NPIC) has made it more difficult for organizations to come together around an all-encompassing conceptualization of change as seen in the theories of direct democracy that influenced the Citizenship Schools. The NPIC has grown it to a scale in the intervening years where the neoliberal state, foundations and private corporate interests have worked together to create norms, infrastructure and strategy that ultimately permeated many aspects of social movement organization. The *Revolution Will Not Be Funded* shows how non-profits have been incentivized to become more focused on short-term deliverables related to a specific area of work that was grant funded. The book's introduction states:

Progressive funders generally give money to specific issue-oriented campaigns, whereas right-wing foundations see the need to fund the intellectual projects that enable the Right to develop a comprehensive framework for presenting its issues to the public. These think tanks, research projects, journals, etcetera, may not have had an immediate short-term impact, but, in the long run, they altered the public consciousness. This kind of investment by the Right in public policy has paid off handsomely. Its long-term support

of conservative public scholars enables them to develop and promote numerous ‘new Ideas.’ (6)

Community organizing has increasingly been done through the non-profit structure over the last thirty years. Non-profits have largely framed their goals in issue-based terms, for example as housing or environmental justice organizations. There is little consensus across nonprofits about an overarching strategy like there was amongst the five organization’s leading the CEP’s work to help people become “first-class citizens.” In the context of the non-profit industrial complex, popular education’s roots as a philosophy of social change have been difficult to practice. Consequently, there has been growing confusion about what defines popular education projects like the Citizenship Schools. Stanley Aronowitz speaks to this shift in the understanding of popular education when he talks about the interpretations of Freire’s work. He writes, “The term he employs to summarize his approach to education, ‘pedagogy’, is often interpreted as a ‘teaching’ method rather than a philosophy or a social theory” (8). Stanley Aronowitz speaks to the difficulties organizations face in attempting to practice popular education when the dominant ideologies have constrained the imagination of social movements as a whole.

An opportunity is opening for broader visions of change and there is growing potential for approaches to education like that seen in the Citizenship School example that spans depth and scale. In 2018-2019, New York State’s political landscape changed more than it had in decades. The state had the most progressive state government since 1912 (Mahoney), and many of the new people who had been elected grew out of grassroots organizing struggles. In the summer of 2019, Jews for Racial and Economic Justice (JFREJ) members got together to take stock of this political moment. JFREJ member Dania Rajendra told an engaged room of long time organizers: “There is all this new space that we have helped to create and other people have helped to

create.... Instead of talking about body cameras on cops, now we are talking about reparations....There's a huge quantum space that has opened up." In his article "Goodbye Cold War" Aziz Rana says: "Bernie Sanders and Donald Trump marked the return of the repressed.... Socialism was no longer anathema, as memories of the Soviet Union faded, but neither was white nationalism in all its terror and intensity. For good and for bad, a door had been unlocked. Today, the country is more ideologically open than it has been since the 1940s." Like groups across NYS, JFREJ is recognizing that a space to imagine new ideologies is opening up and both the left and right have a chance to define how the political economy will transform as the neoliberal hegemony falters.

Municipalism is a contemporary movement that is gaining traction that works for many of the same tenets of direct democracy seen in the Citizenship School example. Municipalist activists similarly work to engage people in decision-making processes in their local communities through massive neighborhood assemblies and other participatory governance projects. Municipalist movements have sprung up all over the world as people continue to grapple with the question of how to create social, political and economic equality on the local to global scale. For example, in Rojava Kurdish communities have created a municipalist experiment in which for every leadership position a man and a women who share power. There are neighborhood "communes" in which people come together to discuss local governance issues, from health to economics to defense. In Barcelona, municipalist movements waged a movement to stop evictions block by block after the 2008 financial crisis. The movement that began by people occupying empty apartments and protesting local evictions grew to such a size that they were able to get an activist mayor who stood behind a municipalist platform. In the United States, municipalism has been growing as a movement as progressive and leftwing

activists grappled with how to engage more people in the wake of racist, xenophobic and sexist attacks that escalated after the 2017 elections. Municipalism takes an all-encompassing view of change, much like the theories of direct democracy that existed in the broader movement during the years of the Citizenship Schools. Municipalism grapples with how to not only bridge materialist and social aspects of change but also how to bridge and connect local and global forms of change.

The rise in municipalism shows how live the questions of scale and depth and the role of social change in structural revolution are for this contemporary moment. Clark, Horton and Jenkins developed the Citizenship School on Johns Island by working to create the conditions in which people would claim “first-class citizenship.” By lifting up models of education like the Citizenship Schools that are organized around people claiming a holistic form power such as “first-class citizenship,” our contemporary movements can break through many of the false dichotomies that limit how we approach social change. The Citizenship Schools show how effective it was that the civil rights movement developed a guiding conception of the kind of governance power people would have in the new system they were working towards. In our contemporary moment with so much at stake, the Citizenship Schools provide an important example of how to build towards an all-encompassing form of democracy one block at a time.

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