Literacy, A First Step Toward Liberation:

The Adult Literacy Campaign of the Civil Right Movement

by

Rhea Estelle Lathan

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Know Who You Are Before they have to Tell You.

This work is dedicated to:
Carla Denise Lathan
Cordale Anthony Rowe

My Grandmothers who asked in faith that their grandchildren would rise up and achieve noble things.

Odessa Johnson MadLock
Elvira Oranell Jackson Morris
Elouise Estwick
Estelle Lathan

My Parents, with gratitude, who taught me to look beyond the dark days of defeat and discouragement and realize my full potential and genius

Norma Jean Lathan
Raymond Lee Lathan Jr.

My Advisors who taught me that luck is when preparation meets opportunity

Nellie McKay
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Doretha Mbalia

My spiritual Playmate, who revealed the miracle

Hope

An to the fellowship without whom none of this would be possible

Contents

Introduction

Those involved in planning current adult learning programs can benefit from analyzing mass literacy movements of the past. Examining operations where large numbers of people learned to read and write is useful because understanding the processes that worked in the past can assist educators in gaining insight into the context, means and motivations of literacy learning. Scholars have shown how literacy campaigns in Cuba and Brazil have succeeded for adults engaging in learning practices based on political, social and/or economic incentives (Resnick 129). Recently, researchers have shown that similar programs can work in the African American community, especially in the South. Janet Cornelius's "When I Can Read My Title Clear": Literacy, Slavery, and Religion in the Antebellum South and Sandra Oldendorf's dissertation "Highlander Folk School and The South Carolina Sea Island Citizenship Schools: Implications for the Social Studies" examine the historical context of the struggle for literacy learning within the African American community. Both emphasize that learning to read and write had practical as well as spiritual meanings.

Cornelius, focusing on the Antebellum South, suggests that one of the most important reasons enslaved African Americans learned to read was to pursue the promise of freedom: release from the oppressive conditions forced upon them. According to Cornelius, enslaved African Americans believed learning to read and write would make them autonomous and provide them

knowledge that was kept from them by their oppressors. Comparing their narratives with the abstract desire for knowledge she states: "[t]heir goals were more specific: slaves who learned to read and write could use literacy to gain advantages for themselves and mediate for their fellow slaves"(4). Oldendorf writes about adult educational activity on the South Carolina Sea Islands in the 1950s and 1960s. She details motivations for adult learning, pointing specifically to the promise of political equality and power. The political struggle intensified during the Civil Rights Movement. She writes that "the goal of literacy evolved into a more far-reaching aim, that of first-class citizenship."(Literacy 191) Both after the end of the Civil War and the start of the Civil Rights Movement, African Americans believed that learning to read and write, something that their oppressors denied them for hundreds of years, would lead to economic, political and social equality. The desire for literacy learning was based on the belief that it was a tool to establish an identity that would allow African Americans to survive and overcome in an oppressive society.

The adult literacy campaign of the Civil Rights Movement has received surprisingly little attention in studies about literacy learning. Yet increasing literacy among African American adults was a major emphasis just before and during this movement. Exploring this literacy campaign justifies an investigation into the implications of teaching reading and writing as a means of increasing economic, political and social freedom. This investigation can answer several questions not yet fully addressed by other scholars of African American adult

literacy or the Civil Rights Movement. Who were the sponsors of these campaigns? What was the context under which learning was taking place? Who were the participants? What were the methods of teaching and learning? What were the incentives for learning to read and write under the oppressive conditions of this time? What were the results of this campaign on the larger Civil Rights Movement?

Existing scholarship regarding African American adult literacy campaigns during the Civil Rights Movement usually focuses on the organizers and teachers. Many texts, articles and essays have been written regarding the highly visible instructors involved in the movement. The actual participants have written many of these. Septima Clark's Echo in My Soul, and personal narrative Ready from Within details her involvement in the Civil Rights literacy campaign as a teacher. In her essay "Literacy and Liberation," written for Freedomways Quarterly Review in 1964, she describes the motivations of the teachers and what they sought to pass on to the learners. She writes:

> For a five day course, those three words [citizenship, constitution and amendment] became the basis of a new education in citizenship for the Negroes and whites who attended the training session. Each participant left with a burning desire to start their own Citizenship Education schools among their own communities (Freedomways 113)

In Unearthing the Seeds of Fire, Frank Adams and Myles Horton offer a valuable historical account of the Civil Rights Movement's literacy campaign. They document the Highlander Freedom School's involvement in this campaign. Adams and Horton were participants and have extensive data on the means and

motivations of the teachers and programs. Adams explains, that Horton "insisted that students at Highlander establish their own modes of existence and share them with the collectivity, 'Peer teaching' was one such [successful] method" (518). Presenting valuable details on how Highlander provided the resources for the teachers to be trained, Adams and Horton report that "in 1953, Highlander received a three-year grant from the Schwartzhaupt Foundation 'to increase participation in local and national affairs, in stimulating interest in community problems, and in changing attitudes which limit democracy'" (511).

The Highlander Citizenship Schools were formed in1956 for the purpose of teaching African American adults to read and write in order to pass voting literacy tests. According to Horton, at its inception in 1956 only 30 people on the Islands had passed the test. By December 1960, 700 voters in the Sea Island communities passed the literacy examination and registered to vote. Citizenship School organizers Septima Clark, Myles Horton and Esau Jenkins "found that adults reacted well to swiftness and sufficient performance." They wrote that when adults wanted to learn to read and write in order to qualify as voters, their rate of learning was stimulated to a degree beyond an individual's "normal" capacity. [1]

These are important studies. However, none examines the campaign from the perspective of the learners, which my work does. Focusing on adult learners

[1] A Proposal for the Citizenship School Training Program by Myles Horton, Septima Clark and Bernice Robinson. December 1960, WHS: B 38 F2

of this period helps us to understand the pedagogical practices and their long-range impact on the participants. A student-centered approach also demonstrates how reading and writing empowered the learners in their struggle against an oppressive environment. Limiting a study to the teachers confines us to the methods of teaching; by exploring the learners we gain a more complete view of the educational process. We can consider the effects of the context, means and methods of the teaching that took place within this campaign. Looking carefully at the learners allows us to investigate, in-depth, the learning process of these adults and consider how that knowledge can be used by teachers today. We are able to establish who learned to read and write, the context of their learning, what they learned, and the results the learning had for their lives and the lives of their families.

The purpose of this project will be to recognize the adult literacy campaign of the Civil Rights Movement as a valuable development in adult African American literacy practices and a significant literacy campaign of the twentieth century. The primary focus is on the learners' desire for literacy and their belief that meeting this desire would lead to autonomy and /or equality for previously illiterate African American people. This thesis pays special attention to the practical and spiritual influence for learners, focusing on how this major literacy movement was formed around political, social and economic motivators.

In addition, this project compares the meaning of literacy for nineteenth century African American learners with those who participated in the literacy

campaign of the Civil Rights Movement. In this comparison I analyze oral histories and memoirs of the learners, study the different contextual conditions in which literacy was acquired, and explore how these conditions affected the learners' understanding of literacy's role in liberation. Knowledge of the difficult process of learning to read and write under oppressive conditions can be obtained by examining the histories of these learners.

This project uses a methodology similar to that used by Janet Cornelius in "When I Can Read My Title Clear". Cornelius analyzes the literacy learning of enslaved African Americans of the antebellum South as well as their drive for acquiring reading and writing proficiency immediately following the Civil War. She draws on oral histories and public narratives, tracking means, methods and motivations for learning. Like Cornelius's, my work is based largely on the words of the learners themselves: memoirs, interviews, letters, and oral histories. The interviews I conducted were with people associated with the Highlander Citizenship School of the Sea Islands in South Carolina. They were asked about their reasons for attending the Citizenship Schools and how that motivation helped in their learning process. Participants were identified through a search in several places including the Highlander archives located at the State Historical Society of Wisconsin and New Market Tennessee, and the Avery Research Center collection located on the campus of the College of Charleston. These archives contain information that is important in tracing the history of this campaign including guidelines, mission statements and lesson plans for the

schools. There are letters and other testimony from learners that show how lessons were translated into personal outcomes at the level of the individual. The primary oral history data of this project is derived from interviews with Anderson Mack, an adult learner and participant of the Citizenship School in South Carolina, and Guy Carawan, a musician who served as a chauffer to Septima Clark, director of education for Highlander.

The parallel this work makes to Cornelius's research is significant because she suggests that one of the most important reasons enslaved African Americans learned to read and write was to pursue the promise of, or belief in, freedom. According to her, enslaved African Americans believed learning to read and write would give them access to the world of their oppressors and increase their autonomy. She stresses several aspects of the desire to learn to read and write: freedom, survival, and identity/self-worth. A close examination into the literacy campaign of the Civil Rights Movement suggests comparable reasons were present.

The first chapter evaluates the implicit definition of freedom as an incentive for literacy learning. After defining meanings of freedom for adult African Americans and identifying the parallels between the nineteenth and twentieth century contexts, I focus on how freedom signifies physical access to autonomy. For adult learners, freedom represented access to the rights of citizenship. The second chapter expands the focus beyond the individual, analyzing literacy in relation to the communal interest of the adult learners.

Cornelius points out that the learners expressed survival as a path to communal as well as individual freedom. As William Andrews shows in To Tell a Free Story, the adults who learned to read and write in the nineteenth century served as the voice and a bridge between the literate and illiterate members of their societies. The use of literacy as a survival means was more visible because people were literally writing their own and their people's way to freedom. Similar communal and personal concerns were present among the learners of the Civil Rights Movement's literacy campaign. Participants relate the efforts by those who could read and write to direct and teach those who could not. The archival letters as well as the oral interviews demonstrate similar survival incentives existed within the literacy campaign. This chapter concludes with an analysis of how learning to read and write was a community effort dedicated to collective survival.

The final chapter investigates how learners developed feelings of identity and self worth by emphasizing the search and struggle for identity as a basis of true citizenship. Enfranchisement, including participation in the governance of society, was a direct result of acquiring identity as a United States citizen. Cornelius shows that for enslaved people, acquiring reading and writing skills helped establish at least a semi-autonomous space within an oppressive society. They witnessed the value of reading and writing and realized how tools, such as ownership papers were used to separate families, moving them from place to place. They understood that writing played a role in determining where they

lived, how they were treated and, crucially, what they were called. Having access to this tool meant being able to share their identity. Adult learners of the Civil Rights Movement placed similar value on the acquisition of literacy skills. They expressed the sense of pride gained from being able to sign their names to a bill of sale. These learners took pride in their abilities to read and order from a catalogue and to fill out a money order. An analysis of the tools for literacy learning used by the Citizenship Schools show they were also used to motivate self worth through citizenship and voter registration.

Chapter One:

"Oh, Freedom": Representations of Freedom through the Acquisition of Literacy

From the time the first African was kidnapped, forced into bondage and brought through the middle passage, freedom has been a sacred anthem for the African American community. It was a mantra for political, social and economic struggles, in particular during the Civil Rights Movement of the 1950s and 1960s. During these campaigns, many organizations directly invoked the word freedom in their descriptions or names: the Freedom Democratic Party, the Freedom House in Lowndes County Alabama, Freedom Summer of 1964, and the Freedom Rides of 1961.

Long before the movement, among adult African Americans, the desire for freedom was directly connected to learning to read and write. Janet Cornelius, an antebellum historian, writes: "[w]hen African-Americans fought to gain literacy, they expressed a desire for freedom and self-determination which had deep roots in modern culture." She goes on to support this theory through citing contemporary scholars, "the majority [of whom] still agree that the basic result of literacy has been and is one of liberation"(2). This chapter evaluates the desire for freedom as an incentive for literacy learning. It defines the meanings of freedom as understood by adult African Americans who sought literacy and identifies the historical importance of learning to read and write. For most, freedom represented access to the rights of citizenship and physical access to

autonomy. Orlando Patterson, in Freedom in the Making of Western Culture, states that personal freedom, "at its most elementary, gives a person the sense that one, on the one hand, is not being coerced or restrained by another person in doing something desired and, on the other hand, the conviction that one can do as one pleases within the limits of other persons' desire to do the same"(3).

This chapter addresses several questions related to freedom and literacy during the Freedom Movement of the 1960s. First, how did adult African American learners, with the support of the Highlander Citizenship Education Program, define freedom? Second, how did their ideas relate to the historical value of freedom and literacy? Third, how was learning to read and write used as an incentive toward social, political and/or economic freedom? Finally, after the acquisition of literacy, how were these tools actually used within the context of the Civil Rights Movement?

In order to answer these questions, I establish a definition of freedom. The *Oxford Dictionary and Thesaurus* defines it as follows:

> the condition of being free or unrestricted, full or honorary participation in (membership, privileges, etc), unrestricted use of (facilities etc.), freeness, liberty; release, deliverance, liberation, emancipation, independence, self-government, self determination, self-direction, autonomy, and manumission.(584)

Patterson explains the specific sense of freedom as understood within the African American community. "Freedom was generated from the experience of slavery," he writes. "People came to value freedom, to construct it as a powerful shared vision of life, as a result of their experience of, and response to, slavery or

its recombinant form, serfdom, in their roles as masters, slaves, and nonslaves"(xiii). Patterson presents and defines three types of freedom: personal, sovereignal and civic. Each of these terms bears individual and communal characteristics. In what follows I will examine, these values as the basis of the idea of freedom as viewed by adult African Americans during the Civil Rights Movement.

The desire for the first of Patterson's types, individual freedom, is present among both nineteenth and twentieth century African Americans. The connection between personal freedom and literacy resonates within the narratives of nineteenth and twentieth century examples of adult African American learners. In his book From Behind the Veil, Robert Stepto emphasizes that; "the quest for freedom and literacy" is the foundation, of and resonates in African American narratives. Describing the "narrative of ascent" which lies at the root of black writing from the slave narratives through Invisible Man, he states that the "questing figure must read in order to be both increasingly literate and increasingly free" (167). Focusing on Frederick Douglass' autobiography, Janet Cornelius examines specific cases that communicate just such a connection of personal freedom and literacy.

Douglass, a highly visible nineteenth century abolitionist figure and one of the most well known antebellum self-liberated African Americans, gained his personal freedom by literally reading and writing his way out of bondage. Douglass came to understand the connection between literacy and liberation in

part because of the dramatic way in which his master, Mr. Auld, resisted his desire to read and write. Ironically, Auld's resistance radically increased Douglass's awareness of the value of literacy. Discovering that his wife Mrs. Auld was teaching young Douglas to read and write, Auld objected, stating:

> [a] nigger should know nothing but to obey his master--to do as he is told to do. Learning would spoil the best nigger in the world. Now, he said, if you teach that nigger (speaking of myself) how to read, there would be no keeping him. It would forever unfit him to be a slave. He would at once become unmanageable, and of no value to his master. As to himself, it could do him no good, but a great deal of harm. It would make him discontented and unhappy.(Douglass 57)

It is easy to connect Douglass's acquisition of literacy with his personal awareness of liberation. Douglas writes of how he sensed the power of literacy as a weapon in his quest for autonomy:

> [I]t was a new and special revelation, explaining dark and mysterious things, with which my youthful understanding had struggled, but struggled in vain. I now understood what had been to me a most perplexing difficulty--to wit, the white man's power to enslave the black man. It was a grand achievement, and I prized it highly. From that moment, I understood the pathway from slavery to freedom. (Douglass 57-58)

In his definition of personal freedom, Patterson presents key words connected to the acquisition of literacy, notably "sense" and "conviction." Sharing just such a conviction, Douglass believed learning to read and write would make him autonomous. Being literate gave him the feeling of being unrestrained, thus illustrating a clear track between knowledge and a "pathway to freedom." Douglass explains how this knowledge changed his thinking about his condition of enslavement and convinced him that reading and writing were tools to secure

his personal freedom, declaring, "from that moment, I understood the pathway from slavery to freedom"(58). Douglass's narrative clearly supports Stepto's theory that the ascent narrative ends with, "the questing figure [Douglass] situated in the least oppressive social structure afforded by the world of the narrative, [is] free in the sense that he [. . .] has gained sufficient literacy to assume the mantle of an articulate survivor"(167).

In When I Can Read My Way Clear, Cornelius further examines the literacy practices of nineteenth century enslaved African Americans reemphasizing the ways in which they gained personal freedom by learning to read and write. While Douglass's master unknowingly informed him of the liberatory power of reading and writing, Cornelius observes that the value of literacy was also being passed on directly through generations of African Americans. She examines the narrative of Thomas Johnson, a liberated African American who gained his knowledge of freedom and literacy directly from his family rather than indirectly from his master. Cornelius writes:

> [a]s soon as he was old enough to understand, his mother had explained to him what it meant to be a slave and the difference between the condition of black people and white people, but told him that if he would learn to read and write then some day he might be able to get his freedom. (60)

Cornelius emphasizes Johnson's mother's desire for him to free himself from bondage by attaining literacy. This desire was further nurtured after Johnson learned of a friend, Anthony Burns, who was jailed in Richmond, Virginia, as a result of writing himself a pass to freedom. She goes on to explain that Johnson's

story illustrates that learning to read and write gave some slaves the "satisfaction of tricking the white man out of something which was supposed to be withheld from the slave"(61). This reinforces Douglass's perception that if whites are that afraid of Africans gaining literacy it must be good.

The desire for personal freedom among illiterate African Americans in the era of the Civil Rights Movement in the twentieth century parallels the paradigms established in the nineteenth century. The adults who attended Citizenship Schools sought to gain personal autonomy by learning to write. Anderson Mack, who attended a Highlander Citizenship Education Program Citizenship School in 1955, used literacy to maintain employment and get promotions working in the county public safety department, a job he kept for 30 years. As a result of his steady income he was able to pay his property taxes, allowing him to maintain land ownership, which greatly increased his autonomy in his living space. The importance of land ownership, to Mack and other adult African Americans, resonates in his description of how he acquired his land. Speaking of his grandparents, he stated: "[t]hen my grand die. They die when I was 16 years old. But this spot of ground that they leave me which they order me to take care of. And I tell them I would work on the farm. And I keep everything they leave for me. They had cows. I keep"(Mack)[1]

Mack continued to explain the value of the freedom he experienced as a landowner. This freedom had been jeopardized when he was informed, in the

[1] Anderson Mack interviewed by author on Wadmalaw Island, S.C. November 19, 2001

early 1950s, that as a landowner he was required to sign his name on the deed for his property. The customary "X" would no longer be acceptable. This knowledge sparked his desire to learn in order to maintain his personal freedom. Learning to read and write, he realized, was necessary for keeping his land. He stressed his commitment to maintain this land for his family, ordering his children never to sell it.[2] Sandra Oldendorf, in her essay, "Literacy Voting: The story of the South Carolina Sea Island Citizenship School" writes that, during the 1950s, "the economic situation was grim. Black farmers had to go through middlemen to sell their produce. Since many of the farmers were illiterate, they were often cheated"(36). Though he spoke in less abstract terms, Mack stressed a sense of freedom that paralleled Patterson's definition of "not being coerced or restrained by another person in doing something" and having "the conviction that one can do as one pleases" (3). Mack states that because of his personal freedom he was able to grow and sell crops as he pleased:

> [a]At the time when I start raisin a family working on my farm I was making 20 dollars a week. We was growing vegetables, beans corn and potatoes. [working for public safety] I do roadwork. I work with them they was paying 60 cents a hour and I still do my little farmin and take my own stuff to market. . . . Going to market I make more money than I make the whole week [in public works] in just one day. One thing I'll never forget. We plant a 50-pound bag of beans and things were cheep and the market was good. I made $750 dollars on a 50-pound bag of beans in harvest. These are things that help us to be where we are today.(Mack)[3]

Mack illustrates the connection between personal freedom and the literacy, which allowed him to hold on to his economic base. He confirms the primary reason he

[2] Ibid.
[3] Ibid.

was able to farm his own land and maintain employment was directly connected to his participation in literacy learning.

Other participants of the Citizenship Schools make similar connections between their personal freedom and literacy learning. It is well documented that during the Jim Crow era, African Americans suffered great humiliation in public places. Tim Tyson in his text, Radio Free Dixie[4], illustrates the exact nature of Jim Crow. He writes:

> The power of white skin in the Jim Crow South was both stark and subtle. White supremacy permeated daily life so deeply that most people could no more ponder it than a fish might discuss the wetness of water. Racial etiquette was at once bizarre, arbitrary and nearly inviolable in what W.E.B. Du Boise termed "the cake of custom." A white man who would never shake hands with a black man would refuse to permit anyone but a black man to shave his face, cut his hair, or give him a shampoo. A white man might share his bed with a black woman but never his table. Black breasts could suckle white babies, black hands would pat out biscuit dough for white mouths, but black heads must not try on a hat in a department store, least it be rendered unfit for sale to white people. Black maids washed the bodies of the aged and infirm, but the uniforms that they were required to wear could never be laundered in the same washing machines that white people used. While it was permissible to call a favored black man "Uncle" or "Professor"—a mixture of affection and mockery—he must never hear the words "mister" or "sir." Black women were "girls" until they were old enough to be called "auntie," but they could never hear a white person, regardless of age, address them as "Mrs." or "Miss." Whites regarded black people as inherently lazy and shiftless, but when a white man said he had "worked like a nigger," he meant that he had engaged in dirty, back-breaking labor to the point of collapse. (20-21)

Restaurants and clothing stores were common public spaces where African Americans were required to show deference to white people. For learners confronting these conditions, acquiring literacy skills led to personal freedom that

[4] This is the biography of black activist, Robert Williams.

allowed them to exercise economic choice and avoid degrading situations. For example, being able to sew and order from a catalog assisted people in avoiding the humiliation of being required to purchase ill-fitting garments from retail stores where African American people were not permitted try on or return clothing.

Different learners emphasized different benefits of literacy. Mrs. Janie Owens, of St. Johns Island, South Carolina writes of her pride in the work she could do as a result of gaining her literacy: "I learn so much by going to it [citizenship schools] learn me how to read and pronounce my spelling and how to crochet tell I can make any thing I won't." This value of freedom passed down generation to generation in the twentieth century just as it had been in Thomas Johnson's family. Laura Johnson wrote how she benefited from the Citizenship school: "I am a member of the adult school of Wadamlaw Island and a mother of 10 children befor I cam a member of the adult school I washing an wonent [wanted] to lom [learn] how to read and figer & sow, since I became a member of the adult school I can make my children close [clothes] and also read and figer much better." These adult learners clearly express their gratitude at being able to make decisions free from coercion and restraint.[5]

The second dimension of Patterson's definition of freedom, sovereignal, is defined as "the power to act as one pleases, regardless of the wishes of others, as distinct from personal freedom, which is the capacity to do as one pleases, *insofar as one can*" (3-4). Both nineteenth and twentieth century learners

[5] Letters from citizenship school students to HFS, 1959, WHS: B67, F 5&9

expressed their belief that learning to read and write would afford them the ultimate authority over themselves. The power to determine their destiny was directly linked to learning to read and write. William Andrews, in To Tell a Free Story, summarizes the connections between the value of literacy, strength of mind and self determination: "[t]he acquisition of literacy, the power to read books and discover one's place in the scheme of things, is treated in many slave narratives as a matter equal in importance to the achievement of physical freedom"(13).

Cornelius writes about slaves who gained mobility as a result of acquiring literacy skills showing how, "mobility could result from writing ability"(73). She gives the details of a slave named Stephen Jordan "who wrote passes for himself so he could see his wife on another Louisiana plantation"(73). Having the power to move about within the system of slavery simulated a sense of freedom, and increased the desire for real liberation. Cornelius presents examples of literate slaves given the opportunity to travel with their masters for insurance purposes. If something, "happened to him [the master] they [the slave] could write back home"(73). In many cases, literate slaves used their writing skills to forge passes that could be used for themselves and others while escaping bondage.

The African American adults who participated in the Citizenship Education Program and learned to read and write were presented with similar opportunities to gain sovereignty. Anderson Mack, Alice Wine, Janie Owens and others who attended the schools acknowledged they related the acquisition of literacy

learning to freedom in governing their lives. Mack expressed the ways in which he used the limited literacy skills he acquired to protect his independence and the power he had as a result of owning land. This value of freedom resonated within his personal and professional life. Appointed to a supervisory position on his job increased Mack's independent power in the work place. He stated he began employment for the Charleston county public works as a laborer doing road work and because of the confidence and self respect he gained from learning to write his name, he was promoted to "operate machines and then to an assistant operator." Mack believed the tutelage and encouragement he received from Bernice Robinson and Ethel Grumble, Citizenship teachers, built his confidence while at the same time giving him a belief that he had absolute power, aside from God, over his life. [6]

Other Citizenship learners connected learning to read and write to the sovereignal freedom they gained. Mrs. Janie Owens wrote in a letter supporting the continuation of the schools that "most of all it learn me now to read." She stresses the personal supremacy that learning to read and write gave her over her life and how it affected her by stating, "it meant so much to me." She says this several times in her letter to Myles Horton, the director of Highlander, emphasizing her extreme gratitude for the "lessons" [7] she learned.

The third dimension of Patterson's idea of freedom is civic freedom, which he defines as

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[6] Mack Interview
[7] Letters from citizenship school students

> the capacity of adult members of a community to participate in its life and governance. A person feels free, in this sense, to the degree that he or she belongs to the community of birth, has a recognized place in it, and is involved in some way in the way it is governed. The existence of civic freedom implies a political community of some sort, with clearly defined rights and obligations for every citizen." (4)

The acquisition of civic freedom was difficult for enslaved African Americans, most of whom saw individual physical autonomy as a primary goal. However, as Cornelius documents, they also understood the value of civic freedom as a motivation for literacy learning. She writes that "for enslaved African-Americans, literacy was more than a path to individual freedom--it was a communal act, a political demonstration of resistance to oppression and of self-determination for the black community"(3). Andrews supports this theory by defining the value of literacy to nineteenth century African Americans stating, "autobiography became a very public way of declaring oneself free, or redefining freedom and then assigning it to oneself in defiance of one's bonds to the past or the social, political and sometimes even the moral exigencies of the present"(xi). Most enslaved African Americans were able to observe the political power of those who could read and write. They were aware of their disenfranchisement and believed that becoming literate in the language of the oppressors would give them the opportunity to have governance over themselves. This belief would be passed down thru generations and became a primary focus of the twentieth century literacy campaign.

Civic freedom was in fact the central value of the Movement's literacy campaign. Septima Clark, educational director of Highlander and a primary

figure in the Civil Rights Movement, wrote in her proposal for the schools: "[t]he Citizenship School is an adult school, for people who need to learn the basic skills and information which will help them in voter registration and voting."[8] She went on to explain that the schools would be open to "all people of a community who face problems related to first-class citizenship and who want to do something about it."[9] She opened up an invitation for oppressed people in a community to gain civic freedom through literacy learning.

Several learners directly connected literacy learning to the desire for civic freedom. Ms. Alice Wine, Esau Jenkins and Anderson Mack each express gratitude at being able to participate in governing their communities. Solomon Brown, a resident of Johns Island wrote:

> I wish to express my appreciation for the adult school on Edisto Island. It was a great benefit to my people and me. We are very much interested in what the School is doing and stands for. We learned much of what Democracy means that we did not know before. We had some to register and many who are going to register. We learned what many words meant and a better way of expressing ourself. We were inspired to help others toward first class citizenship.[10]

Mrs. C.L. Vanderhorst of Charleston Heights wrote, "I can read better I also registered and vote it help me to be a better citizen." Rosalee Washington stated, "I wish you [Myles Horton] were running for President I would sure cast my ballot

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[8] A Proposal for the Citizenship School Training Program by Myles Horton, Septima Clark and Bernice Robinson.
[9] Ibid.
[10] Letters from citizenship school students

for you."[11] African American people were disenfranchised; as a result voter registration was stressed in the schools.

Anderson Mack's experience also illustrates how civic freedom could be acquired through literacy learning. Mack used his new-found freedom not only to register to vote but to become an active and respected community leader. He helped to start the first childcare center on Wadmalaw Island and worked with others to create a community center for the island. This project required that he assist in purchasing several acres of land. Mr. Mack's passion for civic accountability was passed to his son who now directs a housing rehabilitation program called the Sea Island Rural Missions Community agency.

Bernice Robinson, the first teacher of the Citizenship Schools, reflects on the goals of the schools:

> [t]he goals of these classes was to create an awareness of the political structure in the local community, across the state, as well as national, who controlled funds for education, housing, employments etc. Blacks could not only be knowledgeable as to whom they should contact to eliminate problems, but they could become candidates for these offices as well. Securing positions on boards and agencies that dealt with the problems, form the precinct level, as executive committeemen on up to state and national positions. The learning process that began in the citizenship classes were continued thru community organizations that held monthly meetings, informing the citizenship problems existing in the public schools and in the community[12]. (Robinson)

Robinson summarizes the process of the literacy campaign along with her convictions and confidence in the mission and results of her teaching. She echoed the voice of the communities of Highlander as well as the learners.

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[11] Ibid.

[12] Unpublished speech found in Bernice Robinson Box Avery Research Center Charleston S.C.

In conclusion, freedom was a primary motivator for individual literacy learning. The dimensions of freedom were clearly marked on multiple levels and became a tool for communal survival. It was an anthem for the national voices of the Civil Rights Movement as well as the modest gatherings of learners on the Sea Islands of South Carolina.

Chapter Two:

Am I My Brothers Keeper?[1]: Literacy's Libratory Prowess as a Principal Mechanism for Survival

Responsibility for the survival of nineteenth century African American communities rested heavily on the members who could read and write and similar situations faced the learners of the Civil Rights literacy campaign. Literate individuals contributed directly to advancing and protecting their communities. In addition they assured their own role as leaders passing their knowledge on one by one.

This chapter examines literacy's parallel to the communal interest of adult learners. Illustrating literacy as a means for survival. This chapter also presents the importance of individual participants whose environment's threatened their individual survival and that of their communities. It argues that citizenship became their only solution for continued existence.

Cornelius states that "for enslaved African-Americans, literacy was more than a path to individual freedom it was a communal act, a political demonstration of resistance to oppression and of self-determination for the black community"(3). She cites the work of influential literacy scholars, Harvey Graff and Jack Goody who have "charted the impact a few literate people can make on a culture of illiterates; they serve as mediators and translators into a wider world of those who do not read"(3). Within the slave community there are several examples of abolitionist literature being read to societies of illiterate enslaved people. For example, "the writings of Frederick Douglas, and [a notice of] John Brown's execution quickly spread through the slave quarters because they were

[1] A Biblical quote and the question Esau Jenkins asked himself and others to justify participating in the movement.

passed on by those who could read"(3). Cornelius also highlights Thomas Johnson, a liberated African American in Richmond, Virginia, who stated that during the Civil War he "could read well enough to understand the newspapers"(60). As a result he informed slaves about the progress of the war while explaining how the results of the war would determine the freedom for the enslaved African American community.

Enslaved African Americans understood reading and writing as an important tool for survival in a destructive environment. Similarly, the adult learners of the Civil Rights Movement also placed a high value on literacy as a mechanism for survival. The most common use of literacy was the ability to decode the Jim Crow signage used to maintain segregation and ensure African American people did not cross the line. Anderson Mack, relates that doing so could result in physical harm not excluding death.

Esau Jenkins is an example of a literate twentieth century learner who took responsibility for teaching the illiterate in his own community. Jenkins, a community leader from Johns Island, South Carolina, and co-founder of the Sea Island Citizenship Schools, used his transportation service, a bus, as a classroom to teach people to read the voting literacy test. He did this while driving them to across bridges to work in Charleston. The Sea Islands were an ideal location for the Citizenship Schools because their "geographical theme was isolation. It has affected the course of the islands' history, the way people live and the quality of life on the islands" (Oldendorf, Literacy 192). Isolation

contributed to the success of the schools because few whites were present to oppose the literacy learning that took place. Oldendorf describes the islands as follows:

> [t]he majority of the population on the Sea Islands are descendants of former slaves who worked on huge rice and cotton plantations. After the Civil War many obtained their own small farms on one to twenty-five acres, and raised vegetables and cotton. As a result of years of isolation, the Gullah language, composed of standard and archaic English, corruptions of English words, and African words, can still be heard. (192)

She continues to explain that Johns Island, the site of the first school and the home of Esau Jenkins, was physically located 16 miles south of Charleston. However, because it was an isolated community, it "affected the course of the island's history, the way people live[d] and the quality of life on the islands"(Oldendorf, Highlander 23). The isolation was increased by the fact that no roads or bridges, until 1950, connected the islands to Charleston and the mainland.

As a result of this separation from the larger society, the living conditions were primitive. The cultural isolation remained, even after the bridges were built. George Kearney, a sociologist and Highlander staff member, visited the Sea Islands in 1955 and reported seeing

> social problems, health problems and discrimination. Venereal disease was epidemic. There were many unwed young mothers, most of whom knew nothing about childcare. Poor sanitation and health habits led to almost constant cases of hookworm and skin rashes among black residents. The economic situation was grim. Black farmers had to go through middle men to sell their produce. Since many of the farmers were

> illiterate, they were often cheated. It was impossible for blacks to get loans on the islands. (Oldendorf Literacy 36)

Esau Jenkins, lived in this environment. He states that in 1948 he "saw the conditions of the people who had been working the plantations for many years. And I knew that we were not able to do the things that would need to be done unless we could get people registered citizens"(Carawan 149)[2]. He was aware that the survival of the community depended on getting African American people registered and voting. This strategy required that they pass a voting literacy test. These exams were the result of the failure of Reconstruction in 1895, giving rise to literacy test that were specifically designed and implemented for the disenfranchisement of African American people. There was no uniformity to them, the test were often designed and administered at the will of the voting registrar on duty at any given time. On Johns Island the test was usually the ability to read and interpret, a section of the South Carolina constitution.[3] Jenkins's awareness of the solution was evident in his motto, "standing for the right has always been education, for his children (he has sent seven to college), and for his people."(National Geographic March 1971)

Jenkins, born on Johns Island in 1910, is an example of a citizenship learner as well as a teacher. When he began his personal voting rights campaign he was educationally equal to the adults he taught. Constantly improving his 4th

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[2] In 1966, Guy and Candie Carawan used their position as Highlander staff to collect voices from Johns Island, S.C. Aint You got a right to the tree of life? documents the words and songs of the island from 1953 - 1966.

[3] Only African Americans were required to take and pass the test. Similar test were not given to white residents Other voting laws included grandfather clauses, white primaries and poll taxes.

grade education, he used his limited reading and writing abilities to teach others. Discussing his education, Jenkins states:

> I haven't gotten any further than the fourth grade in grammar school here. I had to work, and because of that I had to leave school. And then too, the school we had here wasn't encouraging to go to. We had around fifty children and one teacher with a one-door school"(Carawan 142).

He explains the main reason he quit school was because he was a black child and was required to attend a school that was painted black, which he said was done so "that we could be identified as who go to the school. It discouraged me when I got some pride. I went to Charleston and started working on a boat"(Carawan 142). After he married Jenkins realized that he had a major responsibility and made the decision to continue his education. Jenkins worked days and went to night school as he taught other members of his community to read and write for the purpose of voter registration.

Jenkins recognized that his personal survival depended on being literate. He stated that after his marriage, at the age of seventeen, he knew making fifty cents per day in the potato fields was not "any kind of money to support a family with"(Carawan 143). He made the decision to work for himself and started farming cotton. He quickly understood the importance of being able to calculate the value of his product after becoming aware that the white buyer was cheating him and other black farmers.

Jenkins's desire and understanding of the value of education resonates in his desire to become literate in Greek. He stated that he noticed the Greek

merchants in Charleston "buying all kinds of vegetables. So I thought the best thing for me to do then is to try to learn the Greeks' language." He studied Greek and in two years was buying and trading with them. He states, "I was able to understand the Greek language in everyday speaking in business"(Carawan 145). He credits this desire and knowledge with helping to educate his children. Education, he said,

> help me to transact my own business, and now I'm happy to say that I was able to have my children educated. One son is a captain in the Army, one a navigator in the Air Force, two daughters are teaching, one son is a professor of music (Carawan 142-143).

He credits this passion for literacy with the survival and growth of the community stating, "And now there are other folks on this island being encouraged to send their children to get a higher education. We know that some day in the near future Johns Island will be a better place to live"(Carawan 143)

As a result of learning to read and write, Jenkins and his family "became economically successful." However, "he remained concerned about the poor housing, poor health conditions, and the low educational level under which most of his fellow islanders lived." The difficulty in obtaining a high school education was magnified by the reality that the school for the black children on the island was separate and unequal. He states, "the white kids were riding in school buses and the buses were warm" while the black children had to walk five to ten miles (Carawan 153).[4] They were also required to wait out in the snow or rain for

[4] Anderson Mack identified this as a primary reason for not beginning his schooling until the age of 11

the teacher, who may or may not come from Charleston. When the teacher arrived the children were required to collect firewood to warm the schoolhouse. Jenkins was concerned about the ability of the children to concentrate under these circumstances. The school for the black children had one teacher for forty to fifty children "to carry 'em from scratch to seventh grade"(Carawan 154). These conditions piqued Jenkins's campaign for communal survival. In 1945, he organized other residents to work to remedy the educational problems by purchasing a bus to transport his and other children to high school in Charleston. Jenkins also, in 1953, facilitated the campaign to open Haut Gap High School on Johns Island. (Oldendorf, Highlander 59)

Jenkins's commitment to the survival of the community accelerated as a result of two incidents. Each involved a personal reassessment of the relationship between the value of the life of a black man and a dog. He states, "two evil things that happened motivated me to get involved in my work on Johns Island" (Carawan 145). Jenkins explains that a black driver accidentally ran over and killed a white man's dog. The white man, who was not from the island, chased the black man, forcing him to his knees. While the black man begged for his life the white man shot him. The second incident involved Sammy Grant, a young black boy, who was shot by Mr. Malone, a white man from Mississippi, in a dispute over a barking dog. In both cases the families attempted to use the legal system for justice. Both families hired lawyers believing justice could be found in the courts. As result of these incidents, Jenkins realized that the survival of the

community depended on political and legal solutions (Oldendorf, Highlander 59). He states:

> [t]hese are the things then, that motivated me to organize in 1949 a progressive movement, that we could help the people to be better citizens, give them a chance to get a better education, and know how to reason and look out for themselves, and take more part in political action (Carawan 145).

After the high school was built, Jenkins used his buses to transport adults from the island to jobs in Charleston. During the trips to Charleston he took the opportunity to teach people to read and write the portion of the South Carolina Constitution that he knew needed to be read before people could register to vote. Jenkins's bus was the foundation for the Citizenship Schools on Johns Island. One of his first students and the first to successfully register as a result of his efforts was Alice Wine. She states:

> I came around to get registering through Mr. Esau Jenkins. He started to help me read and when I get to them hard words I feel jump it. My tongue so heavy until I couldn't pronounce the words, you know. But he said to me, "No the hard words is the things for you to learn." Then he take me to the registration board on Society Street and we get in line (Carawan 149)

Wine revealed that she did not learn by decoding and comprehension. Rather she memorized the reading by oral repetition enabling her to pass the test.

As a result of Jenkins's efforts and commitment to the community, in 1954, Septima Clark encouraged him to attend a community organizing workshop at the Highlander Folk School in Monteagle Tennessee. On the last day of the sessions, each participant was asked to describe the immediate problem in his or

her community. Jenkins replied "adult education." He seized the opportunity to ask Myles Horton, Highlander's director, to sponsor night schools for "these people to help them become better citizens" (Adams 113). Jenkins requested that Myles Horton and his wife Zeilphia, director of Highlander Music Education program, visit Johns Island and encouraged Highlander to invest in supporting the literacy teaching he had already started on Johns Island. Jenkins's desire for communal survival resonates in his passion for facilitating in Highlander's creation of a citizenship school on Johns Island. Jenkins's request led to the first school that was established on Johns Island. Their success in getting people registered to vote was discovered by people on Wadmalaw and Edisto Islands. They soon asked Jenkins to help them to get an adult school (Carawan150).

The primary purpose of the Highlander Folk School was to provide a space to organize, encourage and train community leaders in community organizing, as well as to do literacy education. Communal survival was a primary motivator in the activities of literacy learning within the Civil Rights Movement. Septima Clark and Bernice Robinson used their pedagogical skills to instruct community leaders how to teach for the purpose of returning to their communities and teaching others.

In 1956, The Highlander Citizenship School began teaching adult African American to read and write in order to pass voting literacy. Highlander's involvement in the issue of human rights, specifically segregation, intensified during the 1950's and 1960's. Highlander was founded in 1932 in the

Cumberland Mountains near Monteagle Tennessee. Myles Horton and Don West established the school primarily to focus on the labor movement in the Appalachians. [5] As a result of Highlander's involvement in the Civil Rights Movement, which included facilitating community-organizing workshops, the state of Tennessee revoked its charter and confiscated its property.[6] Horton, in anticipation of this action, secured another charter in a different name, Highlander Research and Education Center, moving the school to Knoxville, Tennessee, in 1961. Moving to its location in the mountains in New Market, Tennessee, in 1971, the focus of Highlander shifted back to the Appalachian people.

Horton's mentor Reinhold Niebuhr, whose work had a strong impact on Martin Luther King Jr. as well, was a socialist Christian who influenced Horton's commitment for human rights activism. According the Frank Adams in Unearthing the Seeds of Fire, "[h]e [Niebuhr] used Marxism to criticize liberal social Christianity declaring himself a socialist, or socialist Christian Marxist. Niebuhr identified capitalism as "an expression of a dying civilization and declared business oligarchies were "chief examples of social stupidity."" He continues to explain Horton's attraction was based on "his [Niebuhr's] defense of working people" and "his theology"(12).

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[5] Don West left Highlander in 1933

[6] Tennessee had strict segregation laws and, according to Frank Adams and Myles Horton, the harassment was due to Highlander providing space for integrated workshops. They were accused of "tear[ing] down the forces that were trying to keep the races separate in the South. [. . .] bring[ing] about a condition of chaos and turmoil and strife among people, [providing] a breeding ground for Communist.

In 1953 Highlander received a $44,000 grant from the Schwartzhaupt Foundation for the purpose of developing programs for the training of local community leaders.[7] Both African American and white communities were included in this project; one of its greatest successes was realized in the Sea Islands of South Carolina. Esau Jenkins, Bernice Robinson and Septima Clark facilitated this program, which was Highlander's primary focus between 1958 and 1965. The program was given to the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) in 1961, because of a temporary injunction to close Monteagle center. When the doors were padlocked by the states attorney general, Horton "told newsmen during a workshop in makeshift quarters, "[y]ou can padlock a building. But you can't padlock an idea. Highlander is an idea. You can't kill it and you can't close it in. This workshop is part of the idea. It will grow wherever people take it" (Adams 133).

When Highlander gave the Citizenship Schools to the SCLC the program changed from primarily focusing on literacy to a first class citizenship and voter registration program. Although literacy classes continued, for the SCLC, first class citizenship imagery was its primary purpose. They broadened the scope of the endeavor from a few hundred disenfranchised people on the Sea Islands of South Carolina to several thousand people all over the Deep South. Many more people were registered to vote, however, while the personalized spirit of the

[7] Emil Schwarzhaupt was a German who immigrated to the U.S. in 1910 making millions in the liquor business (Tjerandsen).

program dimmed. For example the name changed several times from Highlander Citizenship Schools to the Citizenship Education Program or Freedom Schools. Shifting from the Highlander concept, SCLC required that teachers complete application forms including experience and references.[8] The SCLC flyers read,

> The Citizenship Schools are for adults. Their immediate program is teaching reading and writing. They help students to pass literacy test for voting. But they also give an all-around education in community development which includes housing, recreation, health, and improved home life. Specific subjects include filing income tax forms, understanding of tax-supported resources such as water testing for wells, aid to handicapped children, public health facilities, how government is run, social security, etc. (Avery).

They attracted many popular activists to participate" including Andrew Jackson, Dorothy Cotton, Fannie Lou Hammer and Julian Bond (Clark, Ready 62-63).

According to the Wisconsin State Historical Society's records, "This program was responsible for the enrollment of more that 50,000 registered voters. Meanwhile Highlander continued civil rights educational activities and worked closely with such groups as the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee and the Council of Federated Organizations" (Highlander Collection).

The preservation of communal survival continued to be a primary focus for Esau Jenkins on Johns Island. In 1954, his success and popularity spread to the other islands and as a result his daughter Ethel Grimball became a teacher on

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[8] There were several versions of citizenships schools during the Civil Rights Movement. For example during Freedom Summer 1964, many were set up to teach everything from reading and writing to African American History. Many of the Historically Black Colleges, i.e. Rusk and Togaloo were clearing houses for and distributed the educational material.

Wadmalaw Island. Anderson Mack was one her first students. He recalls how attending the schools and learning to read virtually guaranteed not only his personal autonomy but helped him to survive in an environment that was inundated with signage directing him to his "proper place" (Mack).

The ability to show deference was imperative for Mack, therefore it was important to be able to read something as common as a bathroom sign. Entering the wrong door in an African American establishment was awkward. He states,

> [t]he embarrassing thing in my life. Where is the ladies bathroom and where is the men's bathroom? I don't know which one was. And that's embarrassing. I thank God I can read that. The door sign is there you still have to go and ask someone which door to go in"(Mack).

However, making a similar mistake in a white establishment would place him in physical jeopardy.

He explained that some signs were just too difficult to read such as "we serve colored carry out only" or "colored seated in the rear" Mack suggested that simply being able to identify the word "colored" or "white" was not sufficient. His primary fear was not limited to drinking fountains; elders early in his life made these messages clear. The signs that read, "colored not allowed" were difficult to recognize, and presented the largest challenge. To further complicate things some signs were misspelled.[9] He stated that postings were not always easy to read such as "Wadmalaw white residents only." In most cases children were told at an early age what places they could enter in their own communities. However,

[9] Illiteracy also existed among whites on the island (Mack)

Mack observed that, in traveling to other communities, one's physical survival rested on being able to, at the very least, read segregated signage. It has been well documented that during the Jim Crow era, if a colored man entered the wrong space, he was guaranteed to be "taught a lesson". The most common punishment was to be beaten or to become a participant in the customary past time of white people, lynching black men.

The survival of many African American communities resulted from literacy acquisition. Both ninetieth and twentieth century African American adults sought and valued literacy as a mechanism for continued existence of themselves and their community. The learners in the literacy campaign of the twentieth century used their skills to endure and overcome an oppressive society, building their community into a space they could identify as their own.

Chapter Three:

I AM A MAN: Literacy, Identity, and Citizenship

The most damaging and long-term results of American slavery included the systematic elimination of the identity of the enslaved African. The effects can still be seen in the African American community. The most common is the many racial-defining names that the group has had over the years: Negro, Colored, Afro-American, Black, and African American. This uncertainty reflects a continuing struggle in the search for identity. During the Civil Rights Movement of the 1050s and 1960s, marchers often wore signs declaring, their identity; "I AM A MAN." They decided no longer to participate in the system of oppression and demanded to be recognized as first class citizens.[1]

This chapter emphasizes the way citizenship and identity was realized through the acquisition of literacy. It closely examines the pedagogical practices of the Highlander Citizenship Schools, illustrating how they were set up with a clear goal of promoting identity and self worth. Bernice Robinson and Guy Carawan, a beautician and a musician, developed a special empowering teaching strategy that accomplished this objective.

As noted earlier, Janet Cornelius writes that enslaved African Americans saw the value of reading and writing and understood how these tools was used to undermine their identity. The characters written on a piece of paper determined their names in a world where false names—racial slurs—were used to deny citizenship. Learning to write allowed people to reject these labels and name themselves as citizens of the United States. Adult learners in the Civil

[1] During a lecture by Diane Nash, a Civil Rights activist, she stated her motivation came from her decision to no longer participate in the system of oppression.

Rights Movement made strong connections between the acquisition of literacy, identity and citizenship. They expressed pride in being able to have power over their finances as well as being able to choose whether to order merchandise independently from a catalogue rather than shop in segregated stores. The ability to read the ballot was also a very important literacy value. Taking part in the voting process determined who governed them. Acquiring literacy made them active agents of great value to their communities. A primary incentive for literacy was the belief that learning to read and write led to becoming a registered voter, identifying adult African Americans as first class United States citizens.

Cornelius sets the foundation for the strong connection between the acquisition of literacy and identity as a basis for citizenship. She confirms that an awareness of literacy's value to establish identity was recognized among nineteenth century African American learners as well. Building on James Olney's work on the politics of literacy, she writes:

> [l]iteracy was a mechanism for forming identity, the freedom to become a person, according to James Olney. Olney finds significance in Douglass' conclusion to his narrative, which ended with the words, "I subscribe myself . . . Frederick Douglass." According to Olney, "in that lettered utterance is assertion of identity and in identity is freedom—freedom from slavery, freedom for ignorance, freedom from non-being, freedom from time (2).

She continues to emphasize the value of literacy as a means to identity and self worth for enslaved African Americans:

> [l]iteracy also reinforced an image of self-worth: Lucius Hosley, who tried desperately to learn to read while an enslaved houseboy, "felt that constitutionally he was created the equal of any person here on earth

> and that, given a chance he could rise to the height of any man," and that books were the path to proving himself as a human being. (2)

Several learners of the adult literacy campaign echo this sentiment recalling that their sense of self worth was greatly increased through literacy learning. Anderson Mack, Esau Jenkins and Alice Wine agreed that this was a valuable incentive to learning to read and write.

Mack relates how being illiterate lowered his self-esteem. The acquisition of literacy presented many challenges. He states that when he was a small boy, he was not able to begin school until the age of 12: "at that time they really didn't have no decent road to walk. We have a lot of rain in the low country. They had something like a warf in the low areas where you could travel across". He was not big enough to cross the swamp and walk the planks until age 12. Then his father removed him from school for a year or so after he got into trouble arguing over pecans with a neighbor's daughter. The return to education for many proved to be very difficult. Mack remembered how devastating it was for him:

> [a]nd I just get blank. I got blank. My head got blank. I was out of school for about a year before they send me back. I just couldn't function. The brain couldn't function. I don't know what happened. It just wouldn't function. When I come to the school [Citizenship School] I couldn't sign my name. That was the bad part about it.

Mack explained that his association with the Citizenship school helped him in several ways. He became a pioneer and community leader as a result of attending the first school on Wadmalaw Island. For him the first step was claiming control over his name, "A lot of people back at that time couldn't read.

Plenty of people. But who had the pride in themselves to go to the school. That really help cause that help me they teach me how to write my name".

Reclaiming his identity was closely connected to his ability to cope with the world around him:

> On my job I started at .60 cents per hour and though I didn't have any education. But there is one thing in life, self-respect yourself. Know how to treat people. You have to have an education. You have to have self-respect. You have to be willing to work. If you have the chance to make it you have to have self-respect.

He connects his self-respect to his willingness to learn to write which also helped him gain control of his economic life.

> I work and I show you how things can happen. I started as a laborer on my job. And I was willing to work and self respect [meaning he had respect for himself]. Moved me from a laborer to operate machine and to an assistant operator. I didn't have any education, but what I get at the adult school.

For Mack learning to write led to his promotion to a supervisory position on his job. This was a clear source of pride for him.

Several other learners articulated their gratitude over the acquisition of self-worth, pride and/or identity through literacy learning. Solomon Brown of Edisto Island expresses a common theme among adult learners. For Brown, learning to read and write facilitated his ability to identify himself as a citizen: "we learned what many words meant and a better way of expressing ourself. We

were inspired to help others toward first class citizenship."[2] In a letter to Myles Horton, Ms. Janie Owens of Johns Island echoes these themes:

> [m]y Dear teacher this to let you here from me this leave us all well and hope you are the same. I am writing this letter to let you know how much we mist you and I wont to thank you very much for helping me with my lesson because the high lander school mean so much to me and I learn so much by going two it learn me how to read and pronounce my spelling and how to crochet tell I can make any thing I wont and most of all it learn me how to read and I get my Registration Certificate now I can vote and it mean so much to me. Miss Robinson I cant thanks the high lander folks enough for what they had done for me through you.[3]

Owens clearly expresses her gratitude at being able to claim her identity as a U.S. citizen and as an active agent who produces clothing for her family.

Similarly, Mamie B. Bligen of Wadmalaw Island expresses her gratitude for the schools in a letter to Septima Clark and Myles Horton. Bligen wrote: "[t]he highlander folks school meant a great deal to this community. Words cannot express our appreciation for what Mr. Myles Harten has done for the Better Advancement off the Negro race."[4] Several learners emphasized the heightened self-esteem that came with their knowledge of power in citizenship. Rosalee Washington of Charleston Heights, S.C., wrote: "[w]e enjoyed the way Miss Robinson teach us, she is concerned, well thank God that I got my registration Certificate, I which you were running for President I would sure cast my ballot for you."[5] Many learners clearly recognized the control that accompanied voting.

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[2] Letters from citizenship school students to Highlander Folk School, 1959, WHS B 67, F 5&9
[3] Ibid.
[4] Ibid.
[5] Ibid.

I have identified the primary purpose of the Citizenship Schools as assisting adult African Americans to pass the literacy requirements for voter registration. The schools philosophy was to help people to help themselves, facilitating an increase in self-esteem and empowerment. The results combined liberatory empowerment, survival through citizenship education, and the establishment of identity.

The pedagogical practice of Highlander focused on promoting identity and self-will. Bernice Robinson, a former beautician and cousin of Septima Clark, developed her own set of teaching practices for citizenship education. Her approach was strongly similar to that of Paulo Freire in his book, Pedagogy of the Oppressed. Freire's classic was not published in the United States until 1970, but it reflects approaches developed by Myles Horton and Cuba's' Fidel Castro who shared certain methods for educating the masses. Shortly after coming to power in 1959, Castro announced a national literacy campaign declaring that one million Cuban's would be literate in a year. In an essay titled, "A New Look at the Literacy Campaign in Cuba" Jonathan Kozol reports,

> [o]n September 26, 1960, Fidel Castro stood before the General Assembly of the United Nations to present his first significant address.
>
> In the coming year," said Dr. Castro, "our people intend to fight the great battle of illiteracy, with the ambitious goal of teaching every single inhabitant of the country to read and write in one year, and with that end in mind, organizations of teachers, students, and workers, are preparing themselves, for and intensive campaign.... Cuba will be the first country of America, which, after a few months, will be able to say it does not have one person who remains illiterate" (342)

Castro sent out a call for all literate people, including children, to organize. His campaign consisted of non-traditional teachers. In some cases children were teaching adults. The Cuban approach to pedagogy resembled those of Highlander and Freire. It is clear that all three faced intense political opposition.

The philosophical connections between Freire, Highlander and the Schools are clear. Freire, analyzes the role of "conscientizacao, a term referring to learning to perceive social, political, and economic contradictions, and to take action against the oppressive elements of reality" (35). He draws attention to the consciousness of the oppressed, seeking a pedagogy that forces them to see the contradictions within their society. Freire believed such an approach promoted, nurtured and encouraged resistance to oppression. He discussed the "fear of freedom," something Anderson Mack said he witnessed in trying to persuade others to attend the schools. Mack explained thatin spite of the successes of the Highlander project, most people in his community who could have benefited from the schools did not because they claimed to be happy with their station in life. On the contrary some were afraid of the consequences of participating in the literacy program. He believed that they were convinced there was no value in learning to read and more importantly no value in exercising their right to vote. Mack went as far as to suggest that most adults in his community had been "brainwashed." Responding to similar experiences, Freire suggests that oppressed people become so fearful of what being able to think and act on their own might entail that they hesitate to take steps to overcome their oppression.

Freire's understanding of the connection between education and the value of identity is found within his examination of "dehumanization." He states that this marks both people whose humanity has been stolen, and those who have stolen it. Dehumanization is "a distortion of the vocation of becoming more fully human"(44). He describes the struggle of becoming "dehumanized" through concrete historical efforts, such as enslavement or Jim Crow legislation. An example of this is the systematic process of counting people as property, as done during slavery, or the placement of the life of a dog over that of a black man as witnessed by Esau Jenkins. Freire states: "it is not a given destiny but the result of an unjust order that engenders violence in the oppressors which in turn dehumanizes the oppressed"(44).

Freire's most influential theory, one that resonates in the pedagogy of Bernice Robinson and Highlander, is what he defines as the "banking concept of education." In The Mis-Edcuation of the Negro, Carter G. Woodson, an African American Historian and educator, presents a similar theory:

> [w]hen you control a man's thinking you do not have to worry about his actions. You do not have to tell him not to stand here or go yonder. He will find his "proper place" and will stay in it. You do not need to send him to the back door. He will go without being told. In fact, if there is no back door, he will cut one for his special benefit. His education makes it necessary.
>
> The same educational process which inspires and stimulates the oppressor with the thought that he is everything and has accomplished everything worth while, depresses and crushed at the same time the spark of genius in the Negro by making him feel that his race does not amount to much and never will measure up to the standards of other peoples. The Negro thus educated is a hopeless liability of the race (xiii)

Freire's "banking concept" declares a similar philosophy. Defining the student-teacher relationship, he explains that in traditional pedagogy the student is a "container" which the teacher fills with information decided upon by the teacher, consisting of what the teacher believes the student needs to be taught. This becomes a depositing system similar to that used in capitalist economic systems. With the teacher as the narrator, the student must listen to what is being narrated and be able to regurgitate the information, discouraging any thought process on the part of the student. Freire states that "banking education" maintains and even stimulates the following attitudes and practices which mirror an oppressive society as a whole:

(a) The teacher teaches and the students are taught;
(b) The teacher knows everything the student knows nothing;
(c) The teacher thinks and the students are thought about;
(d) The teacher talks and the students listen—meekly;
(e) The teacher disciplines and the students are disciplined
(f) The teacher chooses and enforces his choice, and the students comply;
(g) The teacher acts and the students have the illusion of acting through the action of the teacher;
(h) The teacher chooses the program content, and the students (who were not consulted) adapt to it;
(i) The teacher confuses the authority of knowledge with his or her own professional authority, which she and he sets in opposition to the freedom of the students;
(j) The teacher is the Subject of the learning process, while the pupils are mere objects (73).

These practices clearly ignore the desires and needs of the student. Within a system of oppression, banking education continues to nurture oppressing the oppressed.

Freire's solution is "education as the practice of freedom—as opposed to education as the practice of domination" (81). He developed the idea of "problem posing education" (79-81). Similar to Highlander's philosophy, he believed that

> those truly committed to liberation must reject the banking concept in its entirety, adopting instead a concept of women and men as conscious beings [. . .] They must abandon the educational goal of deposit-making and replace it with the posing of the problems of human beings in their relations with the world. "Problem-posing" education, responding to the essence of consciousness"(79).

Highlander projected this attitude as evidenced in Horton's willingness to ask Esau Jenkins, rather than telling him, what his community needed. Horton stated: "we have proceeded on the premise that there is need for each local community to work out processes whereby people can do things for themselves, where they can develop their own leadership to meet their own problem's. Bernice Robinson explained:

> The development of a curriculum for the Citizenship Program was based on the needs expressed by the people who came to the first Citizenship Class on Johns Island in January 1957. I knew I would have to build a curriculum that would meet their expressed needs.[6]

Having this philosophy, Robinson became an ideal Highlander teacher. Myles Horton and Septima Clark based their decision to hire Robinson, and subsequent future teachers, on a calculated formula. The solicitation for Highlander teachers contained knowledge of

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[6] Unpublished letter in Avery archives, Box of Bernice Robinson material

> What Makes a First Class Citizen? 1. The ability to read. 2. Understanding the responsibilities of voting, 3. Taking part in community affairs. 4. Elementary knowledge of local, state and federal government. 5. Knowledge of the rights and privileges of the individual before the law.[7]

"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," wrote Clark (Clark, Ready 48). Highlander sought teachers who clearly knew that the students were the center of their process. It was important to select instructors who would not degrade adults or antagonize an already potential awkward situation. According to Anderson Mack, it was very embarrassing being illiterate. Robinson, in approaching the learners, was consciously working to help them build their sense of self worth. She possessed "the most important quality, the ability to listen to people"(Clark Ready 49). The learners appreciated this approach. Julia Dear of Charleston wrote, "I have enjand [enjoyed] attending the subdivision of the Highlander Folk School under your direction [Robinson] and teaching it is such a wonderful thing when someone is willing to share that, that he or she have with someone who is less fortunate than they are."[8]

Robinson's first night teaching demonstrated to the adults that she was there as a learner who wanted to work with them, not as primary-grade students but as fellow adults. Clark wrote: "Bernice realized right away that the grade school material was too juvenile. She told them that she was not really their teacher, but they were going to learn together" (Clark, Ready 49). Describing

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[7] SCLC flyer designed by Dorothy Cotton and Septima Clark
[8] Letters from citizenship school students

her initiation into teaching, Robinson writes: "I entered that class on the first night armed only with materials I had secured from two of my sister-in-laws who were teaching in the Public Schools, grades 1 thru 3, which I found out immediately was too elementary to present to Adults."[9] The students explained what they needed to learn, helping her to realize they knew more about the process than she. Robinson continued to dissolve the "banking concept of education" by explaining they could also teach her some things. Responding to their needs, she formulated the following pedagogy:

> I secured an original money order and traced it on onion skin paper, then on to chart board, making enough copies for all students to practice upon. I used order blanks from catalogs to teach and meet that specified need. Esau had an original copy of the application for voter-registration but the printing was so fine, I had Highlander to reproduce it in larger type by stencil cutting and mimeographing.[10]

The tools Robinson used to teach reading and writing promoted the identity of the learners in ways directly connected to their goal: acquiring U.S. Citizenship. For many learners, being able to identify their names was a major step toward this objective. Oldendorf writes:

> Robinson used the kinesthetic method, learning by tracing, and had students trace their names over and over on cardboard cut outs she had made. Just the act of holding a pencil was a new challenge for some students. Many of the men broke their pencils while learning to hold them with the right amount of pressure. Robinson (1986) relates how moved she was when one of her students, a 65-year-old woman, recognized her name for the first time:

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[9] Avery's Bernice Robinson Box
[10] Ibid.

> And I never will forget the emotion I felt when she got up, took the ruler out of my hand, went up to the board and said, "There is my name, A-n-n-a, Anna. There's my last name, Vastine, V-a-s-t-l-n-e.' Goose pimples came out all over me. [11](Oldendorf, Highlander 72)

For adult learners, reading and writing their names was a major step toward securing identity. In most cases this was a very important and serious process. However, Septima Clark wrote about several "humorous incidents" occurring in teaching adults using this same method. Mr. Jones was told to trace his name and after seeing it, declared, "sternly" that was not his name. "He pointed to an X he had made. "That's my name. I've' been writing it like this all these years, and I don't mean to change it now!" (Clark, Echo 154-155). Another adult learner believed that by not signing his name with an X he would be "in trouble with the government. I ain't going to change my name (Oldendorf, Highlander 72).

Anderson Mack relates his experience in transforming his identity from an X to standard written letters: "[w]What she [Ethel Grimball] do is spell my name on something first then I could start to print it. You know, A-n-d-e-r-s-o-n. Then she come to my last name. M-a-c-k. Then she type it up for me. Then after I print it she take my hand and try to join it".[12] He continued to describe how he learned to connect the letters of his name. From the identification and pronunciation of the letters in his name he was able to decode other words.

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[11] Oldendorf taped interview with Robinson
[12] Interview with author

Mack also explained a primary benefit of his instruction was learning how to use "proper English". He stated that he was taught basic things, for example the difference between "he" and "she." Prior to attending the schools he called everyone he. For Mack, being able to make this distinction was a great source of pride.[13]

Clark supports Mack's declaration, emphasizing the value of literacy as a tool for building self-esteem. She writes about Alice Wine, Esau Jerkin's first student, who, as a result of learning to read and write, received a better paying job, "she gets much pleasure in being able to read during her leisure time. And one day she told me what a great satisfaction it was for her to be able to write a simple letter to her brother, with whom for many years she had been unable to correspond" (Clark, Echo 154). Clark continues,

> [o]ne will never be able, I maintain, to measure or even approximate the good that this work among the adult illiterates on this one island has accomplished. How can anybody estimate the worth of pride achieved, hope accomplished, faith affirmed, citizenship won? These are intangible things but real nevertheless, solid and inestimable value (154).

Citizenship was the primary goal for instruction and learners recalled that learning to read and write opened up a world to which the doors had been closed to them for a long time.

The book used to teach adult literacy offers compelling evidence of the connection between identity and citizenship. It was called "My Citizenship

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[13] Ibid.

Booklet;" the title gave the holder ownership through the use of the term "my". It contained sections (1) a definition of citizenship; (2) Requirements for registration and voting; (3) Your Social Security Number; (4) how to write my name and address on a mail order blank; (5) writing a friendly letter; (6) beginners and advanced arithmetic; (7) Good manners; (8) How to fill out a money order Blank.[14] Lula B. Bligen of Edisto Island wrote, "Thorough the Adult School seven (7) persons were able to register, and they are very proud of it. The Reading booklet you gave us is full of informations. We enjoyed reading it. What we didn't understand was explained very plainly by Mrs. Brewer."[15]

Words connected with obtaining citizenship were located in the section teaching decoding and comprehension. The words included: attorney amendments, congressional, federal, government habeas corpus, imprisonment, judicial labor magistrate national, opportunity, privilege, representatives, senator, and zone. Many of these words appeared on the test and presented the most common problem for would be voters. Therefore the ability to identify these words assisted the learner in passing the voting test. Also being aware of the meaning of these words was helpful in understanding many of the incidents and directions of the Civil Rights Movement.

In another section, which taught comprehension, the following story was used as an example of word usage to help in comprehension;

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[14] My Citizenship booklet, 1961-1962, Highlander Center Archives, New Market, TN., B 2 F 25
[15] Letter from citizenships student

> Etta and Rita met ten students at the train station. For ten minutes the rain came down in torrents. It made great holes in the roads. It splashed off the tar roofs and flowed into drains on the side of the curb. It looked as if a ton of rotten leaves was being carried into strange openings made by the water.
>
> Suddenly the rain stopped, the sun came out and we went with the students to register. It was such a treat to look into the eyes of each stranger and see the satisfaction each had as the testing period ended. The great strain was over. Now they could wear a tag, which reads, "I have registered, have you?" [16]

Using passages similar to this addressed the individual needs of the learners by teaching them to read. It also helped to reinforce a purpose of the schools, which was to promote and encourage citizenship. Learning to read was a primary goal but encouraging people to use their literacy skills to become voting members of their communities also was stressed.

The section on social security stressed the importance of the number as identifying a person as a citizen. The math word problems continued as the theme of practical learning, "James helped his father haul cotton. They hauled 235 bales of cottons on Monday, 262 bales on Tuesday, 287 bales on Wednesday, and 320 bales on Thursday. They hauled _____ bales of cotton in four days."[17]

A primary method of teaching that encouraged both Robinson and Clark utilized African American folk songs and spirituals. Guy Carawan, a musician, was assigned to chauffer Clark. According to Carawan, they made their discovery of the value of music as a tool to teach reading and writing by accident.

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[16] My Citizenship Booklet
[17] Ibid.

He explained that he would go to the citizenship schools "armed" with his guitar and listen to the songs being sung during the devotional part of class. He would take the music back to his living quarters and write it down. Upon his return, he said, the learners would be happy to see him because he would have the music along with lyrics written. Because most knew the words of the songs, they could follow along, reading as they sung. Carawan played the music and the learners identified the words they had sung for centuries.[18] Writing about the primary anthem of the movement, "We Shall Overcome" Carawan states

> [t]his modern adaptation of the old Negro church Song, I'll Overcome Someday, has become the unofficial theme song for the freedom struggle in the South. The Negro Food and Tobacco Union adapted the song in Charleston, South Carolina, adapted the song for picket line use during their first strike in 1945.

He explained that he listened to the song being sung in the schools and wrote down the words. He was encouraged by how pleased the students were to see this and through the encouragement of Septima Clark and Bernice Robinson he continued this practice.

The use of music as a mechanism for learning to read and write validated learners in several ways. The music had passed orally through African American culture, but very few of the songs had ever been written down. Writing the words confirmed the message of what Frederick Douglas described as "lettered utterance" and its "assertion of identity" (Cornelius 2). Learners were able to identity the words but most importantly they were identifying their heritage.

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[18] Interviewed by author November 15, 2000 at Highlander Research Center, New Market, Tennessee

In conclusion, literacy learning accomplished many goals. As Clark states:

> [p]erhaps the single greatest thing it [literacy] accomplishes is the enabling of a man to raise his head a little higher; knowing how to sign their names, many of those men and women told me after they had learned, made them feel different. Suddenly they had become a part of the community; they were on their way toward first-class citizenship (Clark Echo 149).

Conclusion

In 1961 Highlander relinquished control of the Citizenship Schools to the SCLC. While under the direction of Myles Horton, Septima Clark and Esau Jenkins, the primary purpose of the education program was to teach adults to teach themselves. Highlander then also worked to discover what individual communities wanted and to educate them on how to get it. However, while the SCLC maintained a partial focus on education, the program changed from concentrating on basic reading and writing classes to include instruction on African American history, governmental policies and law. Many of the teachers recruited by the SCLC were required to have previous teaching experience, a change from what was required from Bernice Robinson. However the Citizenship Schools project grew beyond the local Sea Island communities in South Carolina to include major portions of the South including Mississippi, Georgia, Alabama, Tennessee and Louisiana. The goal remained in place: first class citizenship. The program reached its height in the mid-1960s and then began to gradually disappear. The Field Foundation that largely supported it for Highlander began to reduce their funding when the program shifted to the SCLC. With this change, for awhile, the program struggled to survive before completely disappearing in the late 1960s following the success of the voting rights Act of 1965 and the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King. Jr. The provisions provided by the 1965 voting rights Act made literacy requirements a minimal obstacle to that civic act although there was still some resistance in some southern

communities. In the larger picture, the changes rendered the need for citizenship education unnecessary and motivation to promote it diminished.

The purpose of this thesis has been to identify the adult literacy campaign of the Civil Rights Movement as a valuable development in adult African American literacy practices. I ague that the learners' desired reading and writing skills believing that it would lead to autonomy and/or equality within a society that was oppressive for African American people. I show that educators can gain knowledge of the difficult process of learning to read and write under oppressive conditions by examining the histories of these learners. My comparison and analysis of the learning that took place under challenging contextual conditions supports the claims of the value of literacy for nineteenth and twentieth century learners. The methodology of tracking the means, methods and motivations for learning, through the histories of the learners and archival information, demonstrates how these groups gained freedom, survival and identity through learning to read and write.

There are still questions to be considered in the area of literacy learning for adult African Americans. Contemporary adult literacy studies could benefit from further investigation into the implications of teaching reading and writing for purposes of economic, political and social freedom. A larger project than this one could explore how the sponsorship of literacy learning in this context compares with different kinds of past studies. Such questions as what were the results of this campaign on the larger scale of the Civil Rights Movement? How did the learners of literacy use their acquisition of reading and writing for rhetorical effects or the political goals of the movement? What is

the relationship between the literacy work and the movement's work from the learners' perspective? Would provide useful information for those with interest in literacy learning for adults. There is also work to be done on the idea that mass literacy among African Americans was coming together just before and with the Adult Literacy Campaign of the Civil Rights Movement.

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Citizenship Education Program Collection, SCLC Archives, Martin Luther King, Jr. Center for Non-Violent Change, Atlanta, Georgia

Septima Clark collection, College of Charleston, Charleston, South Carolina

Highlander Library, Highlander Research and Education Center, New Market, Tennessee

Highlander Research and Education Center Collection, State Historical Society of Wisconsin, Madison, Wisconsin

Esau Jenkins Collection, Avery Research Center for African-American History and Culture, Charleston, South Carolina

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Approved by:

Title: Nellie McKay

Prof. Nellie McKay, Department of Afro-American Studies

Date: 8/21/01