The Developmental Leadership of Septima Clark, 1954–1967

Stephen L. Preskill

Leadership, for many people, has negative connotations. It is frequently associated with top-down organizations, with "power-over" styles of authority. Leaders, according to this view, dominate discussion and offer little or no room for their subordinates to deliberate or make decisions. Leaders accordingly squelch participation, because dialogue is a waste of time. They already know what course is best. They are furthermore reluctant to promote change, as it is rarely in their interests to do so.

Understanding Developmental Leadership

In this essay the assumptions about leadership are quite different. Leadership is a relational process in which collaboration and shared understanding are the bases for getting things done and exercising influence. Septima Clark stood out as a leader in this sense, as someone who practiced democratic, collaborative, relational leadership. Additionally she was a lifelong learner who not only exemplified in her own thought and action the principles of adult learning, but also led by virtue of her ability to furnish the conditions necessary for others to grow and to learn.

The view of leadership favored here has been influenced by and is drawn from the concept and practice of developmental leadership as explored and expounded by Charles Payne and by Mary Belenky, Lynne A. Bond, and Jacqueline S. Weinstock.[1] This particular leadership practice is based in the experience of mothers and other female nurturers and focuses on quietly and self-effacingly developing the leadership potential in others. It is a form of leadership that seeks to target the silenced and overlooked members of communities, to help them find their voice, and to support them taking a more active role in shaping their individual and collective destinies. Leaders in this developmental tradition care deeply about nurturing each person's individual growth while also building

communities of people where each member feels strong ties to some larger whole. They want to know each person as an individual and to help them articulate values and goals that they can hold in common with others. They emphasize each person's special abilities while also building on cultural traditions that provide a foundation for strengthening the whole community. Belenky and her coauthors also found that such leaders "ask good questions and draw out people's thinking. They listen with care. To better understand what they are hearing they try to step into the people's shoes and see the world through their eyes. Then they look for ways to mirror what they have seen, giving people a chance to take a new look at themselves and see the strengths that have not been well recognized or articulated. Because these leaders open themselves so fully to others, we think of them as connected leaders. We also talk about them as midwife leaders because they enable the community to give birth to fledgling ideas and nurture the ideas along until they have become powerful ways of knowing."[2]

Charles Payne, whose work precedes that of the authors of *A Tradition That Has No Name,* introduces the notion of developmental leadership in his book about the Mississippi freedom struggle, *I've Got the Light of Freedom.* He puts special emphasis on the contributions of Ella Baker, Septima Clark, and Myles Horton. He says that all three "espoused a non-bureaucratic style of work, focusing on local problems, sensitive to the social structure of local communities, appreciative of the culture of those communities."[3] Intent on showing that it was a relational, collaborative style of leadership that animated the civil rights movement, Payne writes that the approach Baker, Clark, and Horton took was developmental in that they sought to instill "efficacy in those most affected by a problem." That is, they believed, above all, that local community members fighting for change must "see themselves as having the right and the capacity to have some say-so in their own lives."[4] Developmental leaders thus reject the category of the "other." There are no outsiders or inferior beings. Everyone is included, and each is supported as a learner and as a person capable of unending growth. Each as well is viewed as a potential contributor to improving and enhancing the community at large.

Developmental leaders assume that new knowledge and deepened understanding are constructed most effectively and lastingly in collaborative groups. Developmental leaders are skilled facilitators of group processes and work tirelessly to make groups as inclusive and as fully participatory as possible. As Payne has noted with respect to the leadership exercised at the Highlander Folk School, Horton, Clark, and their allies were "guided by the belief that the oppressed themselves, collectively, already have much of the knowledge needed to produce change."[5] Payne also quotes Clark to the same effect. She concurred that "creative leadership is present in any community and only awaits discovery and development."[6]

Open to the ideas and perspectives of others, especially those who have been repeatedly silenced, developmental leaders are disciplined learners, eager to re-examine old assumptions and to reconsider ingrained practices. They take the lead in questioning, reevaluating, and trying to see things from new vantage points, and they work tirelessly "to get others to do the same. They are such good listeners, because they see themselves learning from everyone, no matter how young, inexperienced or silenced a person might be."[7]

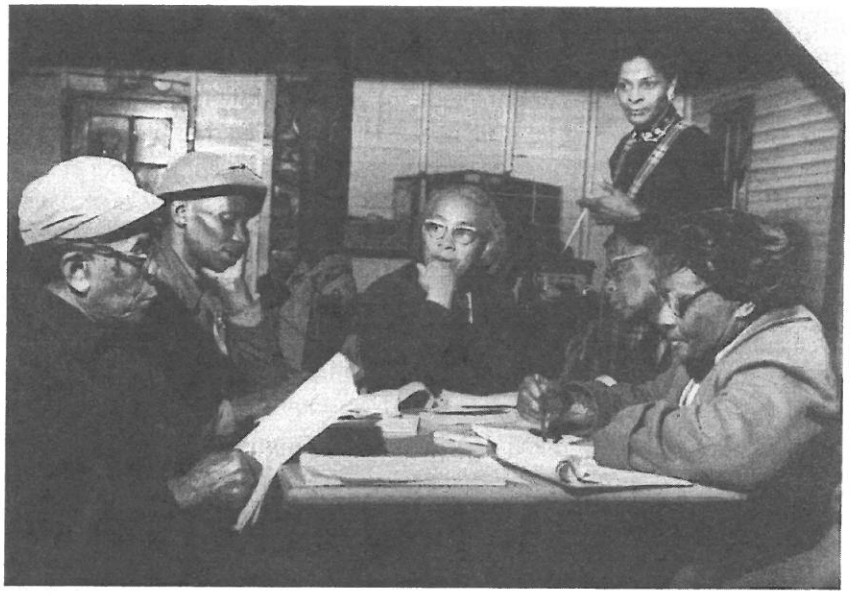
Payne adds another important dimension to the view of developmental leadership that emerges from his study of the Mississippi freedom struggle organizing tradition. He says of Septima Clark, as well as Ella Baker and Myles Horton, that she was a radical democrat by virtue of her insistence on the right of "people to have a voice in the decisions affecting their lives," her confidence in "the capacity of ordinary men and women to develop" a strong and meaningful voice, and her rejection of hierarchically structured organizations in which attention-starved leaders too often held sway. Furthermore, like other leaders, Clark held strong beliefs and took strong stands, but remained surprisingly "open to learning from new experiences" and from the wisdom of those both older and younger than she. She was a leader who constantly learned and who led effectively because of her complete commitment to her own learning and to creating those conditions necessary to support everyone's continuous growth.[8]

Getting Fired

In 1956, just two years after the United States Supreme Court declared segregated schools unconstitutional under its 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education* decision, the Charleston, South Carolina, Board of Education retaliated by firing those local teachers who had been strong advocates for integration. One of the most prominent of these was Septima Clark, widely known for being an outstanding teacher and for devoting her entire forty-year career to South Carolina's schools. From her first years as a teacher, when she was a teenager on the South Carolina Sea Islands, she had developed a reputation for creative, even ingenious instruction. She grew especially effective with those students who rarely succeeded in school and most needed her attention and support. Over time she taught in many places, including long stints in Columbia and Charleston, as her renown for aiding the most resistant learners continued to spread. As a black woman teaching in the Deep South, however, she suffered from one particularly glaring handicap. She was a disciplined and tireless laborer for racial justice who allied herself again and again with the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) in the fight against racism. This connection to the NAACP came to haunt her in 1956 when state governments all over the South cracked down on the association for sponsoring the lawsuits that had culminated two years earlier in the *Brown* decision. In South Carolina the hostile state legislature passed a law that allowed school districts

to remove teachers who belonged to the NAACP. Clark, a teacher widely recognized for instructional excellence, was deprived of her livelihood because of her lifelong NAACP membership.[9]

After the *Brown* decision, which declared segregated schools inherently unequal and thus unconstitutional, school districts all over South Carolina distributed questionnaires requiring teachers to list their organizational affiliations. Many teachers omitted their memberships in the NAACP, knowing that declaring this connection could end their careers. Clark knew this as well, but she was too proud of her involvement with the NAACP to exclude it. It probably did not help her cause that she was already working closely with Myles and Zilphia Horton of the Highlander Folk School. Highlander had been founded in 1932 in a rural section of Tennessee to help the least privileged members of society work more effectively to battle economic and social oppression and to secure their constitutionally guaranteed rights. Clark had stayed at Highlander a number of times and was playing an increasingly large role in facilitating some of their workshops. The Hortons, who were white, also journeyed to Charleston and immediately challenged a standard taboo by lodging with Clark in her home. The Hortons' stay in Charleston had further repercussions. At one of the workshops that they and Clark staged together, pamphlets about Highlander and the NAACP were distributed, and school desegregation was strongly and unapologetically



***16.** Septima Clark (center) teaching at a "citizenship school" on Johns Island, South Carolina, 1956. Photograph courtesy of the Avery Research Center for African American History and Culture at the College of Charleston*

promoted. Clark, in particular, spoke frankly and honestly about the importance of desegregation. She knew even then that such outspokenness could jeopardize her teaching career, but she was trying, as she had throughout her life, "to contribute something to the advancement of our southern community by helping elevate the lives of a large segment of it."[10]

The publicity sparked by her association with the Hortons and her continuing involvement with the NAACP induced whites to brand Clark derisively as "a champion of integration." Not long afterward and with no explanation, Clark received a letter from the Charleston Board of Education that her teaching contract would not be renewed. Proud of the work she had done to promote integration and unwilling to accept the board's decision without a fight, Clark gathered together local and state officials of the NAACP to plan a strategy to get the school board to reverse its decision. Despite their efforts, the board took no further action, and Clark's dismissal remained in effect. To add insult to injury, Clark also lost all of the retirement funds that the state had invested on her behalf. For the next twenty years she tirelessly petitioned the state retirement system until this portion of her pension was restored.[11] Someone asked her why she didn't resign when it became clear that her days were numbered. Clark explained that she remained on principle. She knew the school board was in the wrong, and she would not make their work easier by resigning. Also, she believed that by forcing the board to dismiss her she would be in a stronger position "to fight back."[12]

Unfortunately Clark never again taught as a teacher in the South Carolina schools. She remained proud, however, that she had refused to let the Charleston school board intimidate her. She took the principled stand and lost, but she stayed true to her ideals and in some larger sense prevailed over her less principled adversaries. She never forgot the importance of this searing lesson. Furthermore, her dismissal led directly to her greatest triumphs as an educator. Upon hearing of her misfortune, Myles Horton immediately appointed her the director of workshops at the Highlander Folk School, an appointment that soon led to the creation of the Citizenship Education Project and one of the civil rights movement's most memorable achievements.

Highlander and the Citizenship Schools

When Clark joined Highlander as director of workshops in 1956, she was already familiar with the school's educational philosophy and its method for helping workshop participants to learn from their experience. From the start she had found Highlander's philosophy to be highly congenial and a good fit with her own efforts to organize and empower the black community. But her experiences at Highlander also stretched her thinking and gave her a more expansive view of what could be accomplished in the South, despite the persistence of white supremacy.

As Horton has said, Highlander provided opportunities for participants to analyze their experience and to begin to make sense of real problems that existed back home in their own communities. It was this "mining of the experience that the students bring with them" that was the key to Highlander's success.[13] Horton was a true constructivist who believed that no one other than those actually confronted with a problem can solve it, and that the knowledge needed to address that problem must be created in the process of struggling with it. Horton therefore had a great deal of faith in the ability of people to solve their own problems and was convinced that people have much more knowledge about how to solve these problems than they realize. He also knew that when people toiled with others to search out viable solutions to their social predicaments these solutions not only had more meaning for them, they also became an integral part of their mindset and their practice as activists. "Highlander gives them a chance," Horton claimed, "to explore what they know and what some people we bring in as resources can share with them. Then they have to go back home and test what they learn in action. If they have learned anything useful they can teach others because it is now part of their knowledge, not something merely handed to them."[14]

Highlander's open, adaptable approach, which can be summed up as helping "people learn to solve their own problems in their own way," was governed by one inviolable principle: respect for persons.[15] This meant in practice that minority rights were protected with great vigilance and that social equality and freedom of speech were scrupulously preserved. Horton interpreted this to mean that no decisions could be reached before all disagreements and objections were allowed to surface. This furthermore entailed the responsibility of making decisions that would apply equally to everyone. No discrimination on the basis of race, class, or religion was permitted. Highlander gained notoriety in the thirties and forties for practicing what it espoused. It was one of the few places in the entire South where blacks and whites could meet freely to talk, work, and solve problems together.[16]

Finally Horton believed that Highlander must also be a place that stretched the minds of its guests. For him this meant vigorously practicing his "two-eye" theory of education. With one eye he observed how people view themselves and what they think is currently most needed in their communities. He used the information he gathered with this eye to begin the process of guiding the sharing and analyzing of experience. With the other eye, however, Horton saw not what is but what could be, and even what ought to be. He envisioned goals for participants that they themselves had not yet conceived, but which could eventually help them to take their leadership and activism to a new level. He focused on their present level of experience and understanding but also challenged them to aim for something bolder. It was in carrying out this two-eye

theory that Horton believed he had the largest role to play in helping workshop participants to grow.[17]

There were many things that Clark learned from Horton as she proceeded with her work at Highlander, but the two-eye theory of education may have been the most important. It is also true that Clark had never been complacent about what she had accomplished with learners and was always looking to extend their thinking to help them grow and to benefit the larger community. In many ways she had as much to teach Horton as Horton had to teach her—which, after all, explains why he was so delighted when she agreed to become Highlander's director of workshops and launch the Citizen Education Project. When Clark arrived at Highlander, Horton had only a vague sense of how to initiate a literacy program. Clark had accumulated many years of experience assisting illiterate children and adults and possessed a deep understanding of the theory and practice of enhancing literacy. She personally knew and understood the most oppressed and least privileged of African Americans. She appreciated the complexities of their culture and was familiar with the intellectual and cultural resources within this community that would help learners succeed. She was also a dogged learner herself, who had great faith in ordinary people's abilities. When she encountered obstacles or difficulties, she refused to give in. Somehow, though, she also practiced a serene forbearance that served her well when progress was slow. She kept right on teaching and encouraging, but she carried out these duties with a light touch that belied her sense of urgency about the educational and political crisis then overshadowing the South. Horton, who shared little of this knowledge or experience, greatly admired Clark's unique constellation of qualities and talents. It is thus probably accurate to say that they both learned a great deal from each other, and that together they led.[18]

This was never truer than when they carried out their plan for developing community leadership on Johns Island. This transforming chain of events began when Clark invited Esau Jenkins, one of the pillars of the Johns Island community, to a Highlander workshop. Although only modestly educated, Jenkins was a gifted, hard-working entrepreneur who became a successful businessman on the island and assumed a major leadership role in local politics. He felt overwhelmed, however, by the burdens he and his neighbors faced in challenging racism and in overcoming their lack of education to become active citizens. One day, a longtime Johns Island resident, Alice Wine, asked for his help in learning to read and write so that she could pass the South Carolina literacy test required for voter registration. He was delighted to be of assistance but wanted to do more. Quickly realizing that he lacked the background to turn this simple request for tutoring into a mass campaign to promote literacy, he sought help through Highlander. When he attended his first Highlander workshop he painted a powerful picture of the need for effective adult education on Johns Island and wanted to know how to achieve this goal. Highlander provided some

financing and technical assistance but most importantly gave Clark, an old friend, the job of working directly with Jenkins.[19]

With financial help from Highlander, Clark and Jenkins purchased a small building where a school for illiterate adults could be launched. At the front part of the building a small grocery was set up to deceive whites into thinking that this was nothing more than a modest commercial establishment. Even in the mid-fifties southern whites resisted these attempts by African American adults to educate themselves. They viewed such efforts as "uppity" and dangerously radical. (As it turned out, the grocery made a small profit that helped finance additional schools.) Clark also made arrangements for selecting a teacher. She and Horton sought someone who was respected and had leadership potential but was not a professional teacher. They wanted an instructor who would be open to new methods and strategies, who would not be constrained by old, ingrained habits, and who would not act condescendingly toward her inexperienced students. Bernice Robinson, a beautician and dressmaker, was their choice. She had a high school education, was active in the Charleston NAACP, and understood Highlander's approach to adult education. At first Robinson declined the offer, citing her lack of teaching experience. But Clark persisted and convinced her that she possessed the capacity to inspire the trust of the islanders and had, above all, "the ability to listen to people."[20]

On January 7, 1957, fourteen Johns Island adults showed up outside a building that appeared to be nothing more than a grocery store. Robinson conducted them into the grocery's back rooms and commenced instruction in reading and writing. The first citizenship school had quietly and unceremoniously begun. Robinson brought with her a variety of materials geared toward elementary students, but she realized on the spot that these would be inappropriate for her adult students. She turned to them and asked them what they wanted to learn. As John Glen described in his history of the Highlander Folk School, "It was an inspired question, for the subsequent success of Highlander's Citizenship School program stemmed from its ability to respond to the expressed needs of its students."[21] What the islanders most wanted was to be able to write their names. They sought next to gain the skills needed to read the newspaper and the Bible, and those portions of the South Carolina constitution that must be decoded to qualify for voter registration. They also asked to learn how to fill out mail-order catalog forms and money orders. A few of the men requested instruction in arithmetic. Finally Robinson herself proposed, perhaps with the two-eye theory of education in mind, that by the end of their two months together the students be able to read and understand the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights that she had tacked up on the wall of their classroom.[22]

Clark worked closely with Robinson in planning and evolving the curriculum for this first citizenship school, although, as Aimee Horton has noted in her history of Highlander, it "came about almost entirely from its fourteen

adult students."[23] Robinson began, with Clark's support and advice, by writing the names of the students in large letters on pieces of cardboard. They also recorded the occupations of the islanders in the same way. Additionally they prepared oversized examples of money order forms and invited the students to fill in the blanks. The most intense activity, at least at first, entailed learning to write their signatures. At Clark's suggestion, Robinson had them do this kinesthetically—tracing prepared signatures again and again until they could write their names in cursive without a prompt.[24] Using many of the ideas that Clark had developed forty years earlier during her first years on Johns Island, Robinson also had the islanders write stories about their daily routines that they then read aloud to the whole group. The words that caused difficulty were set aside for further practice and were also used to teach spelling.[25] Robinson on her own initiative also found newspaper advertisements that could be used to supplement reading instruction and teach simple arithmetic.

Clark was responsible for one of the most enduring innovations. She prepared a special workbook that "discussed such subjects as the South Carolina election laws, particularly those setting forth the requirements for registering and voting, the laws concerning social security, laws relating to taxes, and various other topics of current importance."[26] As Clark has stated, this booklet was prepared in part to give the students materials that would be appropriate and helpful to them in learning to read. Just as important, though, she wanted to move beyond simple literacy and teach them things they would need to become more informed and active citizens. Because the readings were often difficult, Clark carefully abridged most selections to allow students to experience the gist of these pieces without being overwhelmed by their length or complexity. She also punctuated the booklet with guiding questions that helped students to grasp the main ideas and key supporting details.

The first test of the program's effectiveness was the ability of the students to become registered voters. All of them, without exception, passed that test. They read the required passages and signed their names so flawlessly that they could hardly be denied their registration certificates. They "were so happy about it that they came back to school fairly shouting."[27] It was a great triumph for Clark and Robinson and a landmark in the history of the civil rights movement. What stood out for Clark and Robinson, however, was how much they themselves had learned from the experience. Robinson commented enthusiastically how eagerly the students learned and how satisfying it was, given their thirst for knowledge, to teach them. Working with adults in this way became Robinson's new career path. Clark noted that the students themselves must guide what is learned. "You don't tell people what to do," she observed. "You let them tell you what they want done."[28] Or, as she said on another occasion: "We had to let them talk to us and say to us whatever they wanted to say."[29] The experience reaffirmed one of Clark's lifelong convictions—that a good teacher is, above all, a good listener,

intent on "always learning herself."[30] One of the hard-won results of all this learning and listening and assertive action was a fourfold increase in the number of Johns Island residents registered to vote by the early 1960s.

The success at Johns Island spawned many new citizenship schools, first on other islands along the South Carolina coast and later in communities such as Huntsville, Alabama; Savannah, Georgia; and Somerville, Tennessee. As Robinson and Clark refined their methods, the ability of these schools to teach increasingly large numbers of students also expanded. They grew proficient at using the specific, local experiences of their students as the basis for reading instruction, even as they also developed additional collections of readings in skillfully edited, highly accessible versions that presented useful facts about voting and a variety of social services. On Edisto Island, at least eighty participants from the local citizenship school qualified to vote between 1959 and 1960. The instruction they received focused on basic literacy but also included arithmetic, citizenship, sewing, and African American history. Clark was particularly proud to see that, as these programs expanded, it became apparent that islanders were also becoming more astute politically. Graduates were "speaking better, beginning to read other materials, becoming more willing to take places on committees, to serve as poll watchers or secretaries of voters' leagues."[31]

As Carl Tjerandsen points out in his discussion of citizenship education at Highlander, the work that had to be done to produce such changes could be incredibly fatiguing. He recounts the numerous visits Clark made to various schools, cooperatives, and private residences in one five-day week. On each of these visits she spoke or distributed literature or simply affirmed the good work that was being done.[32] Additionally, she maintained a busy workshop schedule at Highlander and continued to recruit new, eager participants for Highlander's all-important residential program. Giving people a taste of the freedom that was lived at Highlander, of the mutual respect that was practiced there, and of the support the staff so unstintingly supplied was almost always an important first step toward imagining new possibilities back home. Despite her wearying schedule, Clark felt revitalized every time she returned to Highlander to witness the energizing effects democratic living could have on beleaguered southern blacks.

Unfortunately, however, Highlander itself was feeling increasingly beleaguered as Tennessee's attacks on the school's progressive and integrationist policies grew even more intense. On July 31, 1959, state law enforcement officers, desperate to contrive a reason to put Highlander out of business, raided the school and charged it with illegal possession of liquor. They arrested Clark on the same charge, though she was a lifelong teetotaler. The trumped-up accusations led to a series of lawsuits that culminated in the decision by the Tennessee Supreme Court to revoke Highlander's charter. When the United States Supreme Court refused to review the case in October 1961, Highlander legally ceased to

exist. Although Highlander would soon be reborn as a center for education and research in Knoxville, it was no longer a viable site for citizenship education.

The SCLC and the Citizenship Education Project

In the meantime, Septima Clark had been successful in transferring responsibility for the citizenship education programs begun by Highlander to the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC). When Clark first brought these programs to the attention of Martin Luther King in 1959, he was so consumed by his commitment to direct, nonviolent resistance through demonstrations, marches, and sit-ins that he could not see the immediate value of Clark's ideas. But as the citizenship programs spread and enjoyed success in a wide range of communities in Georgia, Alabama, and Tennessee, King eventually succumbed to Clark's lobbying. He conceded that despite the enormous effort put into direct action, there was little to show for it. To paraphrase Tjerandsen, King admitted that demonstrations rarely resulted in oppressive laws being taken off the books or new power being gained by blacks. Citizenship education might be a way to reach out to more people, King reasoned, and to build enduring political alliances through the ballot. Thus was the Citizenship Education Project (CEP) born.[33]

It was not an easy birth, however. The organizational unwieldiness of the SCLC and the absence of a galvanizing crisis in 1961 stalled the progress of the CEP. Slowly, thanks to Clark's recruiting energy and imaginative teaching, as well as the mounting tension emerging from a civil rights clash in Albany, Georgia, the CEP began to advance. Clark's chief responsibility was training the teachers, who would then fan out to a variety of different communities to teach literacy, excite political awareness, and spur organized action. Most of the workshops to provide this training were held in Liberty County, Georgia, at the Dorchester Cooperative Community Center, which was associated with the United Church of Christ. Andrew Young, who had ties to this church, made the arrangements for securing the center and was responsible for overseeing the CEP, but he deferred to Clark as the center's "undisputed schoolmistress."[34]

The workshops that Clark led tended to follow a format similar to the one she had learned at Highlander. The people whom Clark, Young, and their colleague Dorothy Cotton carefully recruited were invited to spend four weekdays and an evening at the Dorchester Center. On the opening evening, time was spent getting acquainted and figuring out how the workshop could best serve the needs of those in attendance. The following day teaching sessions began in earnest. Music was used to warm up the participants and enliven the proceedings, and then a variety of strategies for teaching reading and introducing basic math were explored. As Taylor Branch has noted, Clark "taught her pupils how to figure out seed and fertilizer allotments" and, when focusing on literacy, "worked upward from street signs and newspapers to the portions of the state

constitutions required for voter registration."[35] According to Tjerandsen, Clark also used the Socratic method effectively. She asked numerous questions, painstakingly tracked responses that seemed contradictory, and patiently used the colloquy that ensued to impart skills and to deepen understanding of the Citizenship Education Project's larger implications. It was not enough for her that participants learn the processes for teaching literacy and arithmetic; they also had to increase their political awareness, learn to think more critically, and gain appreciation for the new leadership role they would be assuming in their communities.[36]

But Clark's real gift, as Branch has also pointed out, was in "recognizing natural leaders among the poorly educated yeomanry" and passing on to them the skills, confidence, and leadership they would need to be effective back in their home communities.[37] Like Ella Baker, she was a developmental leader of the first rank who saw ability in the most ordinary of people and who did all she could to develop this ability to expand the base of black voters and promote social justice. Clark always insisted that workshops must end with participants demonstrating in specific ways how they proposed to use the knowledge they had gained and what they planned to do to make a difference back home. Like Myles Horton, Clark believed that workshop participants should not return to their communities without a clear sense of what they had learned and what they intended to do with it.

Despite Clark's best efforts, however, a feeling prevailed that the citizenship schools had lost something in the transfer from Highlander to the SCLC. Apparently King and the other male leaders never fully appreciated the impact of the citizenship education movement. The SCLC failed to provide the funding that Clark always believed was necessary to fully capitalize on the value of the workshops. The number of trainees to be accommodated continued to balloon, and sessions were frequently cut short, leaving little time for the all-important "What will we do back home?" sessions. Additionally, procedures for following up on participants after they had begun to serve their communities were never clearly established. Clark also believed that because the CEP was run largely by women, it never received the respect it deserved. She has said quite bluntly that the men on the executive staff of the SCLC "didn't have any faith in women, none whatsoever."[38] Reverend Ralph Abernathy repeatedly complained about the presence of Clark on the SCLC's executive council, and King himself never took Clark as seriously as she would have liked. At one point she wrote King a letter expressing concern about his tendency to dominate the movement, willingly accepting invitations to lead every march or keynote every meeting. She proposed, like the dedicated developmental leader that she was, that he commit himself to developing more leaders who could lead major marches and deliver the necessary speeches at public demonstrations. According to Clark, when King read the letter to his staff, they laughed derisively, believing that no one but King could

spearhead the civil rights movement. Clark's view was that "you develop leaders as you go along, and as you develop these people let them show forth their development by leading."[39] She knew from experience that when you give ordinary people a chance to lead, when you build their confidence and impart a few skills along the way, there is no limit to what they can accomplish. Her lifelong quest was to develop such leaders wherever she found them and to instill in them the habit of learning—that for her was the hallmark of great leadership.

Despite the CEP's limitations, it nevertheless accomplished a great deal. By 1967 the SCLC had trained at least three thousand citizenship teachers. Clark estimated that these teachers had taught at least forty-two thousand others. As a result of the SCLC programs voter registration had more than doubled in Alabama, and more than tripled in Clark's native Charleston, by 1967.[40] The subsequent impact on voting and, over time, on law and social policy was incalculable. Clark was able to retire in 1970 knowing that her contribution to the struggle for social justice had been enormous.

Clark as Developmental Leader

Septima Clark stood out as a developmental leader. She was a devoted and unceasing learner. She listened more than she declaimed, witnessed more than she professed, and responded to the expressed needs of her students more often than she advanced her own personal perspective. Throughout her life as a teacher and leader she strove to establish the conditions for learners to tell their own stories, to reflect critically on their own experience, to grapple with their own problems, and to work out their own solutions. Even in her teens she was doing these things. There is no question, however, that her involvement at Highlander helped her to develop a philosophy of teaching and leadership that was consistent with these established practices and that also aided her in evolving new methods that were even more democratic than anything she had tried before.

In particular what she learned from Myles Horton and picked up during the many residential workshops that she attended at Highlander was that African Americans themselves had the capacity to bring about the transformation of their own communities. What Highlander could do is give them a taste of the emancipatory possibilities inherent in every local community and provide a few human and financial resources to begin to foster change back home. What Clark added to all of this was a talent for identifying, encouraging, and developing potential leaders. Her willingness to open herself up to the wisdom of others also sensitized her to what ordinary people could teach her and what they might need from her to develop their potential as leaders. The relationship that she cultivated with workshop participants was thus thoroughly mutual. She had much to learn from them, just as they had a great deal to learn from her. But Clark's faith in their ability, in their unique capacity to exert leadership in their own local communities, provided the basis for everything else that transpired between them.

Clark hated artifice of any kind. She refrained from flattering the powerful male leaders who surrounded her, and she refused to put herself above anyone else, despite her extensive education and breadth of organizing experience. She was happiest working directly with the ordinary people who needed her leadership most. As a leader who was also a teacher she endeavored to provide conditions that would support continued learning and spur concerted action. She understood the pedagogy of leadership. That is, she recognized there are ways to approach people and to collaborate with them on tasks that ensure success and that can then be used as a basis for further action and future growth.

Perhaps most important, Clark was genuine; she did not put on airs in an attempt to impress others. She practiced simple virtues such as humility, gentleness, simplicity, and courage. And whatever she asked others to do she was always willing to do herself. Finally, unlike SCLC leaders like King and Abernathy, who often showed little faith in her ability or in the value of the programs she proposed, her own faith in the people she worked with was unbounded, often allowing them to accomplish things that they thought were beyond their capabilities.

Clark's brand of developmental leadership is similar to what Robert Greenleaf has called servant leadership. Greenleaf stressed that one of the defining qualities of a servant leader is to be a listener first. Certainly Clark met this criterion.[41] She gradually realized as she traveled through eleven different southern states, trying to impart basic reading and writing skills to simple working people, that "I could say nothing . . . and no teacher as a rule could speak to them. We had to let them talk to us and say to us whatever they wanted to say."[42] She learned that the more she listened and came to understand what different groups were going through, the more she could then earn the right to speak up as well and perhaps introduce the groups that she met to some new ideas worth hearing. But her turn to speak had to be earned, and it had to be built on an authentic desire to listen and to learn from those around her.

Servant leaders, of course, are willing to do almost anything in order to serve their constituents better. Clark as a young teacher collected dry-cleaner bags so that she would have a writing surface upon which to record her students' stories and to compile their key words. Somewhat later, while attempting to overturn the South Carolina ban on black teachers being employed in public schools, she almost single-handedly gathered twenty thousand signatures for petitions supporting a new, more progressive statute. As the chief organizer of Highlander's citizenships schools, Clark never hesitated to do whatever was necessary to support Bernice Robinson and other teachers. If this meant ordering needed supplies, she would take care of it. If it meant distracting whites suspicious of what was going on in the back of a grocery store on Johns Island, she would do that,

17. Esau Jenkins (at lectern) introducing the Reverend Martin Luther King Jr. (seated third from left) at Emanuel AME Church in Charleston, April 13, 1962. Photograph courtesy of the Avery Research Center for African American History and Culture at the College of Charleston

too. Her goal was always to further the movement for civil rights, never to go out of her way to make herself look good.

Author Belinda Robnett writes about Clark explicitly as an important professional bridge leader, a view of leadership closely aligned with developmental leadership. By "bridge leader," Robnett means someone who leads informally and with little fanfare, but who does this work as part of their livelihood. Robnett particularly highlights Clark's work with the Citizen Education Project and her ability to connect with the rural black masses. When institutional networks failed and national associations performed poorly in attracting the working poor

to the civil rights movement, Clark and others used their interpersonal skills and their direct knowledge of local communities to awaken broad interest in literacy, the franchise, and civil rights.

Clark's genius as a bridge leader entailed her ability to translate the somewhat erudite goals of Martin Luther King's SCLC into language and practices that made sense to rural and working-class blacks. She did this literally by providing the people who sought literacy instruction with readable accounts of civil rights movement activity and of the laws that posed barriers for her students. She also did this more informally by talking with people honestly and directly and by exhorting them to give time and effort to a movement that she believed would enhance their freedom and strengthen their rights.

Additionally Clark stood out as a bridge leader because her initial efforts to further black literacy and thus fortify African American voting power were carried out largely on her own, with little or no support from national organizations or broad social movements. The Citizenship Education Project, which eventually gained renown as an arm of the SCLC, linked ordinary people struggling to secure their basic rights with a well-funded national movement. Clark's leadership made that connection possible.

In the end Clark was the kind of leader who, as she herself said, completely identified "with the people in the localities where they live and work."[43] Over time she developed a commitment to democracy that was reflected in everything she did as a teacher and leader. This was not simply an espoused commitment, but one she struggled to enact in every aspect of her professional and personal life. The conclusion of the statement that she wrote about her faith in democracy while in residence at Highlander is a fitting way to end this essay: "An army of democracy deeply rooted in the lives, struggles and traditions of the American people must be created. By broadening the scope of democracy to include everyone, and deepening the concept to include every relationship, the army of democracy would be so vast and so determined that nothing undemocratic could stand in its way."[44]

Notes

1. Charles Payne, *I've Got the Light of Freedom: The Organizing Tradition and the Mississippi Freedom Struggle* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995); Mary Belenky, Lynne A. Bond, and Jacqueline S. Weinstock, *A Tradition That Has No Name: Nurturing the Development of People, Families, and Communities* (New York: BasicBooks, 1997).
2. Belenky, Bond, and Weinstock, *Tradition That Has No Name,* 14.
3. Payne, *I've Got the Light of Freedom,* 68.
4. Ibid.
5. Ibid., 70.
6. Ibid.
7. Belenky, Bond, and Weinstock, *Tradition That Has No Name,* 272.
8. Payne, *I've Got the Light of Freedom,* 101.
9. Septima Clark, *Echo in My Soul* (New York: Dutton, 1962).

10. Ibid., 114.
11. Donna Langston, "The Women of Highlander," in *Women in the Civil Rights Movement: Trailblazers and Torchbearers, 1941–1965,* ed. Vicki L. Crawford, Jacqueline Anne Rouse, and Barbara Woods (Brooklyn, N.Y.: Carlson, 1990), 163–64.
12. Clark, *Echo in My Soul,* 117.
13. Myles Horton, *The Long Haul* (New York: Doubleday, 1990), 148.
14. Ibid.
15. Carl Tjerandsen, *Education for Citizenship: A Foundation's Experience* (Santa Cruz, Cal.: Emil Schwartzhaupt Foundation, 1980), 139.
16. Frank Adams with Myles Horton, *Unearthing Seeds of Fire: The Idea of Highlander* (Winston-Salem, N.C.: Blair, 1975), 99–103; Langston, "Women of Highlander," 151–53.
17. Adams and Horton, *Unearthing Seeds of Fire,* 131–32.
18. Cynthia Stokes Brown, *Ready from Within: Septima Clark and the Civil Rights Movement* (Trenton, N.J.: Africa World Press, 1990), 51–54; Clark, *Echo in my Soul,* 131–34.
19. Guy and Candie Carawan, *Ain't You Got a Right to the Tree of Life? The People of Johns Island, South Carolina—Their Faces, Their Words, and Their Songs* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1966), 167–69, 46–47.
20. Ibid., 49.
21. John Glen, *Highlander: No Ordinary School, 1932–1962* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1988), 162.
22. Aimee Horton, *The Highlander Folk School: A History of Its Major Programs, 1932–1961* (Brooklyn, N.Y.: Carlson, 1989), 224.
23. Ibid., 223.
24. Clark, *Echo in My Soul,* 147–48.
25. Brown, *Ready from Within,* 50.
26. Clark, *Echo in My Soul,* 150.
27. Ibid., 153.
28. Eliot Wigginton, ed., *Refuse to Stand Silently By: An Oral History of Grass Roots Social Activism in America, 1921–64* (New York: Doubleday, 1991), 243.
29. Brown, *Ready from Within,* 53.
30. Clark, *Echo in My Soul,* 152.
31. Tjerandsen, *Education for Citizenship,* 169.
32. Ibid.
33. Ibid., 181.
34. Taylor Branch, *Parting the Waters: America in the King Years, 1954–63* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1988), 576.
35. Ibid.
36. Tjerandsen, *Education for Citizenship,* 192.
37. Branch, *Parting the Waters,* 576.
38. Brown, *Ready from Within,* 77.
39. Ibid., 78.
40. Tjerandsen, *Education for Citizenship,* 196.
41. Robert Greenleaf, *Servant Leadership: A Journey into the Nature of Legitimate Power and Greatness* (New York: Paulist Press, 1977), 7–23.
42. Belinda Robnett, *How Long? How Long? African-American Women in the Struggle for Civil Rights* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 90.
43. Clark, *Echo in My Soul,* 238.
44. Ibid., 198.

Part 4 Resisters

The ways in which the state's white citizens responded to black demands for reform during the "Second Reconstruction" is the focus of part 4, "Resisters." South Carolina has largely enjoyed a reputation as a state that achieved racial equality without major incident. "Integration with Dignity" and integration with "grace and style" are phrases that are frequently used to describe South Carolina's response to the civil rights movement, especially for the years after the integration of Clemson University in 1963. The essays in this section, however, reveal that, far from embracing African American demands for equal protection, white South Carolinians resisted them at every turn. Their response may have been far less violent and headline-grabbing than that of Alabama and Mississippi, but it was no less embedded in an absolute commitment to the principles of white supremacy.

In the years following the Civil War, African Americans in South Carolina enjoyed unprecedented access to the political process, using their newfound equality at the voting booth to reframe the state's constitution so as to eliminate voting restrictions and facilitate the election of African Americans to political office for the first time in the state's history. Such progress was short-lived, however, and after 1876 white politicians began to implement voting qualifications, such as literacy tests and property ownership requirements, in a brazen program designed to limit access to the ballot. Perhaps most insidious, though, was the creation of the Democratic Party's all-white primary, a move that in states such as South Carolina—where an overwhelming majority of votes were cast for the Democratic candidate in the actual election—made the votes of even those few African Americans who were able to vote irrelevant. Although the Supreme Court began as early as the 1920s to end some of the barriers to an equal franchise, it was not until 1944 that it finally outlawed these all-white