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The Mule Train - Adult Learning and the Poor People's Campaign 1968

Abstract

This article examines the neglected role of adult learning in the 1968 Poor People's Campaign (PPC) through a case study of a low-income group from Marks in Mississippi, regarded as the poorest town in America. Social movement theory and both Gramsci and Freire provide a conceptual framework for the study. Over 100 people travelled in May 1968 from Marks to Washington DC where they set up camp with thousands of others to campaign against poverty. Part of their journey was completed on wagons pulled by mules on what was known as the Mule Train. Before departure for Washington and on route, the Marks contingent, the majority of whom had little or no formal education, learned together in workshops, meetings and demonstrations. How and what they learned both individually and collectively provides fresh and unique insights into the impact and enduring legacy of the PPC. The article draws on primary source material including documents and interviews, and secondary sources. It is argued that those on the Mule Train were radicalised by what they learned together as poor people and that their presence also educated America. Further, the lost legacy of the Mule Train also has relevance for 21st century anti-poverty campaigners.

Keys words

The Mule Train, civil rights, poverty, Freire, Gramsci, the pedagogy of presence.

Introduction

In May 1968 around 115 poor people departed from the small town of Marks in Mississippi to travel to Washington DC where they would set up camp in a temporary shanty town called Resurrection City. They were participants in the Poor People's Campaign (PPC). The driving force behind the campaign was Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) leader Dr Martin Luther King Jr whose assassination in April 1968 threatened briefly to bring a halt to the initiative. In Washington the group from Marks joined around 6,000 other poor people of all races to take part in daily demonstrations, marches and other forms of protest intended to force government to bring forward legislation to address poverty. Congressman Bennie G Thompson wrote recently that the stories of how the poor came to Washington as part of the 1968 Poor People's Campaign (PPC):

Deserve a prominent place in American history certainly no less than Brown v Board of Education or the Boston Tea Party (in Lackey, 2014, p. 13).

His generous claim is at odds with more commonly held perceptions that the PPC was 'an almost perfect failure' which was 'poorly timed, poorly organised and poorly led' (McKnight, 1998, p. 107). The PPC has invariably been regarded as a footnote in the story of the civil rights movement. This does little justice to the people who in 1968 made the challenging journey to Washington to occupy space and to make their case directly to government. Especially significant was the contingent who travelled from Marks, Mississippi, which according to the 1960 national census figures for average income was officially the poorest town in the poorest state in America (US Census Bureau, 1960). Part of the journey from Marks was undertaken on wagons pulled by mules on what was known as the Mule Train. The association of the mule with the cause of black equality has its origins in

the unfulfilled promise of ‘40 acres and a mule’ made to former slaves with the initial radical proposal for land redistribution coming in January 1865 from black leaders themselves (Gates, 2013). In the modern civil rights era the SCLC leaders saw mules and their enduring association with the impoverished dirt farmer as a ‘valuable metaphor for the economic changes and the resulting impacts on employment on which the PPC would focus’ (in Freeman, 1998, p. 89). The image of the mule was considered for use in 1962 in Alabama during a voter registration drive but found its true niche as attention in 1968 moved to the issue of poverty.

Before they departed for Washington and while on route the Marks people learned together in workshops, mass meetings and demonstrations. Their individual and collective learning experiences provide fresh and unique perspectives on the impact and enduring legacy of the PPC. The Mule Train features only briefly in the limited historiography of the PPC (e.g. Freeman, 1998; Wright, 2011; Lackey, 2014). Freeman (1998) provides a photographic record of the initiative and personal recollections of those involved. Lackey (2014) details the day by day events of the journey to Washington whilst Wright (2011) examines the Mule Train as an example of a social movement that fostered grass-roots organising simultaneously at the local, regional and national levels. Beyond these few examples we know little of the initiative and virtually nothing of what and how people learned as participants in the Mule Train.

This article places the learning experiences of low-income participants at the centre of an analysis of the impact and legacy of the Mule Train. Social movement theory including the ‘pedagogy of presence’, and the ideas of Gramsci and Freire, provide a conceptual framework for understanding how people learned, and what they learned, as participants in the campaign. Extensive archival work was undertaken by the author. Qualitative and quantitative data were drawn from primary documents, secondary sources, and oral testimonies. The most significant material was stored in the Dr Martin Luther King Jr Library and Archives in Atlanta. This provided information on the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) approach to adult education and also the learning activities in Marks organised under the auspices of the PPC. Of further particular value were the registration forms completed in 1968 in Marks, Quitman County, by PPC participants. These provided information on individual economic and social circumstances, reasons for joining the campaign effort, and aspirations for its outcome. The Dr Martin Luther King Jr papers at the Howard Gotlieb Archival Research Centre, Boston University, provided valuable insights into Dr King’s career long commitment to eradicating poverty. Some additional material came from the Ralph J Bunche Civil Rights Oral History Collection at Howard University in Washington DC. In addition the author conducted two interviews. The first was with Dr Bernard Lafayette who was appointed by Dr Martin Luther King Jr as the national co-ordinator of the PPC and who was therefore able to offer unique insights. Dr Lafayette had participated in many of the early civil rights movement campaigns including the sit-ins, the Freedom Rides, and played a leading organisational role in the voter-registration campaign in Selma from 1963-1965. He had particularly impressed Dr King with his organisation of a non-violent march in New York in 1967 against the war in Vietnam. The second interview was with PPC activist Tyrone Brooks.

The Poor People’s Campaign (PPC)

The plan to mobilise the poor of all races from across America to go to Washington originated at a meeting in September 1967 between Dr Martin Luther King Jr and Marian

Wright of the National Association for Coloured People (NAACP). Wright recommended that the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) focus on poverty through a Washington DC campaign involving non-violent actions (Lafayette, 2014). Senator Robert Kennedy had advised her to encourage Dr King to bring the poor to Washington. Kennedy believed this would prove to be so disruptive to government business that concessions would have been forthcoming to make them go home (Schmitt, 2010; Hamilton, 2013). The SCLC later cited evidence from government field hearings conducted by Kennedy and others claiming that these revealed poverty to be no less than ‘a national disgrace’ with ‘chronic hunger and malnutrition’ to be found in every part of the USA (SCLC papers, box 177, folder 1, p. 1, KL). SCLC leader Andrew Young later wrote that the plan to occupy space in Washington ‘was part of a constitutionally protected tradition of Americans petitioning the government for the redress of grievances’ (Young, 1996, p. 443). Precursors in American history included Coxe’s Army of the unemployed in 1894 and the Bonus Marchers in 1932 (Zinn and Arnove, 2004). In recent years the modern occupation movement has taken many different forms e.g. Greenham Common Women’s Peace Camp, Occupy Wall Street, Cyprus ‘No Borders Camp’ and the events of the Arab Spring to name just a few. A claim has been made that the modern global movement began with the Spanish Indignados Movement in Madrid in 2011 (Barnett, 2011). However the multi-racial Poor People’s Campaign in 1968 can be seen as a significant precursor of the global antipoverty social movements of the 21st century. Jesse Jackson in fact alerted occupy protesters in Detroit in 2011 to the legacy of the King campaign in the hope that its example would give inspiration to new generations.

Dr Bernard Lafayette, appointed by Dr King as national co-ordinator of the PPC, explained in an interview conducted by this author, why it was important to go to Washington:

‘Presence’ was for us a powerful form of protest. The Federal Government regulates in terms of the distribution of wealth, government is the overseer. We asked the question of who is control of the resources of the nation. Who has the power to bring forward legislation? (Lafayette, 2014).

King was aware that campaigners needed allies in Washington to effect change since that was where policy was determined. Throughout his career he regularly highlighted the central role of the federal government as the prime regulator of resources with the capacity to make life better for the poor. In 1959 for example he maintained that:

The government alone has the power to establish the legal undergirding that can ensure progress against discrimination at the heart of the economic system (MLK papers, box 23, folder 4, p. 6, May, 1959, BU).

In 1961, King cited the New Deal as an example of how federal intervention had successfully changed fundamental economic relationships in what had been an especially testing period for America (MLK papers, box 11, folder 1, pp. 1- 2, February 4th 1961, BU).

The shanty-town of Resurrection City built to house the PPC demonstrators was officially opened in the Mall in Washington on May 15th 1968. The plan was to remain there until campaign demands had been met by federal government. Their intention was not merely to occupy Washington, in practical terms the idea was that through their visibility and actions poor people could shame America and force the pace of change. In early 1968 King spoke of his intention to ‘dislocate Washington by legitimate nonviolent protest’, threatened to cast the government as the ‘villain’ if it did not respond positively to the demands of the PPC, and

described the campaign as the nation's 'last desperate chance' to meet the challenges of poverty (The Washingtonian, February, 1968, p. 52). The SCLC recognised that fresh approaches were required to wrestle further support from the federal government in a context in which sympathy for the movement had ebbed away.

PPC demands

By November 1967 the SCLC agreed to organise the PPC and scheduled it to begin in Spring the following year. In drafting their demands the SCLC included a range of civil and human rights issues as reflected in their description of America as:

The dazzling affluent society of two-car-fur-coat families, yet millions of Americans, blacks, whites, Mexicans, Puerto Ricans, Indians, retire each evening with pangs of hunger; they suffer from crowded and insanitary housing in Northern tenements, Southern shacks; they grow up with unattended diseases and abnormalities; they live a life of underdeveloped intellect due to the wasted years of a poor, negative education. (SCLC papers, box 180, folder 10, pp. 1-2, KL).

The main demand was for an Economic Bill of Rights to apply to every citizen. This was to include a meaningful guaranteed job with a liveable wage, a secure and efficient income, the ability to access land for economic reasons, access to capital for the less well-off, and the middle class were to have a large role in government. Associated demands were made for better homes, affordable and accessible health care and better quality education. Specific 'attainable' demands included the creation of one million public service jobs; adoption of the Housing and Urban Development Act; repeal of punitive welfare restrictions; additional funds for ant-poverty programmes; expanded food distribution; collective bargaining rights for farm workers. Influential groups including the National Welfare Rights Organisation helped formulate demands presented to Congress (Jackson, 2007, p. 345). The success of the campaign in recruiting poor Puerto Ricans, Mexican-Americans, blacks, Native Americans, whites and others was evidenced in part by the prominence given to a range of additional specific demands which were eventually presented to Congress e.g. fishing and land rights.

From late 1967 the PPC organisers worked intensively across America to plan the initiative. Groups and organisations already working with the poor were signed up to support the campaign with opportunities provided for them for reflection and discussion on the nature of poverty in America by means of work-study programmes (SCLC papers, box 177, folder 38, pp. 2-3, May 1968, KL). An Educational Task Force (ETF) was established to educate and involve both the poor and the non-poor in the issue of poverty (SCLC papers, box 177, folder 38, p. 1). The ETF recruited volunteers with experience of public service i.e. from the Peace Corps and its domestic equivalent VISTA (SCLC papers, box 177, folder 38, p. 4). Hundreds of 'sponsoring organisations' i.e. groups already working in communities on poverty issues, signed up for the campaign. King's assassination in Memphis in April 1968 threatened to bring a halt to proceedings although his loss eventually stiffened the resolve of the SCLC and their affiliates to continue his legacy. Activist Lee Dora Collins stated that before King's death it had been difficult to get people to go to Washington, but after that 'people came from everywhere' (in Freeman, 1998, p.116). In an interview with this author PPC activist Tyrone Brooks reflected that 'we had no option but to continue as a tribute to Dr King' (Brooks, 2014). King's death however left a void which was difficult to fill.

Plans for the campaign were also overshadowed by competing visions, vested interests, and the different agendas of individuals and organisations as the SCLC sought to bring everyone together in uneasy coalition (Hamilton, 2013, p. 9). Whilst some groups and organisations across the nation gave enthusiastic support others regarded the days of mass demonstrations as over and refused to co-operate (Hamilton, 2013, p. 9). King's determination to launch the PPC with an emphasis where necessary on civil disobedience leading to major disruption to Washington was denounced as ill-timed and ill-advised even within the leadership of the SCLC. Andrew Young of the SCLC later recalled that James Bevel had favoured the idea of the PPC expanding into a 'stop the draft' campaign, Jesse Jackson originally preferred to concentrate on the existing SCLC project Operation Breadbasket, and Bayard Rustin 'was sceptical' (Young, 1996, p. 444). Bayard Rustin was one of King's key strategists who supported the concept of a multi-racial campaign to target economic injustice, yet felt that the political climate would not be conducive to tactics of civil disobedience in what was likely to be a polarised national election year in 1968 (Levine, 2000). He was overruled by King, who believed that 'arousing the general public to the need for economic justice for the poor would be strategic, and made civil disobedience a central part of the strategy' (Swarthmore College, 2015). From the outset Rustin argued in favour of a series of specific and achievable demands which would be unambiguously understood by government and also stressed the need in this new phase of the civil rights struggle for every participant to be clear as strategy and tactics in advance of the campaign in Washington (Swarthmore College, 2015). Such divisions at the top of the SCLC remained in the final days of the campaign as evidenced in continuing disagreements over strategy and purpose with Rustin expressing the view in Resurrection City that campaign demands lacked clear focus (McKnight, 1998, p. 126). Rustin and Ralph Abernathy were reported to have squabbled regularly in the shanty-town (Afield and Gibson, 1970, p. 22). Activist John Reynolds noted also that there were personality clashes among the leadership in Resurrection City including between Jesse Jackson and Hosea Williams (Reynolds, 2012, p. 139).

More broadly, in a context which was hostile to the idea of the 'great unwashed' coming to Washington, Senator Stennis of Mississippi called for the poor to be blockaded (Branch, 2006, p. 745). Andrew Young noted that plans for the PPC led to the campaigners and not poverty becoming the 'enemy' from the perspective of Congress (Young, 1996, p. 446). The critique that America pays its debts to the poorest in society represented to many among the political elites no less than an assault on capitalist values and a threat to social order. The negative reaction reflected fear of a campaign which can be seen as an example of a social movement which in Harley's terms offered 'an important alternative to the politics of the state' (Harley, 2012, p. 3). In a climate of the Cold War and urban unrest, campaign language including the emphasis on economic agendas led FBI Director Hoover to step up existing surveillance and harassment of the movement on the basis of their alleged communist sympathies (Garrow, 1983; McKnight, 1998).

Dr Martin Luther King Jr and poverty

Despite the opposition to his plans King remained convinced in early 1968 that a campaign to highlight poverty fitted the needs of the civil rights movement in a period of profound

change. However the assumption that King came late to the issue of poverty is misleading. It has been observed that:

Historians have said little about King's personal commitment to ending poverty and even less about his vision for the PPC as an historic effort of the poor to unite across racial, gender, ethnic, religious and geographic lines (The Poverty Initiative, 2012, p. 11).

For Honey (2011, p. xiv), too many people still think of King in a narrow sense as a 'civil rights' rather than a 'human rights' leader. It has even been alleged that attempts have been to 'dilute and sanitise much of what King represented' (Le Blanc and Yates, 2013, p. 15).

The relative absence in some mainstream civil rights movement literature of the PPC and Dr King's commitment to the issues it represented can be compared to for example the iconic status accorded to the 'March on Washington' in 1963, an event which ironically was also concerned with jobs and inequality. The radical nature of the PPC may go some way at least to explaining why it has been relegated to the margins in the historiography of the movement. It has been argued that:

'Many on the left have a false conception of MLK portraying him as a well-meaning if naïve liberal...finally coming to see...that some variant of socialism might be necessary' (Blanc and Yates, 2013, p. 44).

Jackson (2007, p. 5) has written that King's plans for a PPC did not represent a significant departure for him. The PPC can in fact be viewed as a natural progression of King's career-long fight to achieve equality of condition for all in the USA and represents his further development as a radical leader. In 1957 King for example declared that he never intended to adjust himself to the 'tragic inequalities of an economic system which takes necessities from the many to give luxuries to the few' (MLK papers, box 23, folder 2, p. 14, September 2, 1957, BU). In 1961 he pointed the way to broad PPC human rights agendas still seven years ahead in noting that:

Our needs are identified with labour's needs-decent wages, fair working conditions, liveable housing, old age security, health and welfare measures (MLK papers, box 11, folder 1, p. 3, December 11, 1961, BU).

King consistently located the civil rights struggle in a broader context, even viewing discrimination as part of a desire by whites to maintain 'economic enslavement' (MLK papers, box 11, folder 2, p. 2, August 18th 1962, BU). King biographer David Garrow argues that King dealt 'substantively' with issues of economic justice in raising class issues and in highlighting the need for 'democratic socialism' (in Le Blanc and Yates, 2013, p. 44). From the early days of his career King surrounded himself with activists whose 'thinking was shaped by Marxist perspectives' (Blanc and Yates, 2013, p. 46). These figures included labour union leader A Philip Randolph, Bayard Rustin, and Ella Baker. As early as 1955-56 the pacifist and civil rights activist Rustin was said to have 'adopted the role of teacher to a pupil' to King during the Montgomery bus boycott (D'Emilio, 2003, p. 230). Rustin has largely been written out of history in part due to prejudice over his homosexuality. In a Cold War context Rustin's socialism as well as his sexuality made him a target for those opposed to the movement (Blanc and Yates, 2013, p. 55). Rustin was particularly influential in shaping King's views on economic justice, and in educating him on the importance of labour unions (Honey, 2011). During the early sit-ins in the 1950s Rustin argued for example there was no point in being able to sit at a lunch counter if blacks could not afford to pay for lunch

(Levine, 2000, p.173). Both Rustin and Randolph were key players in the organisation of the 1963 March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom at which King delivered his famous 'I have a dream' speech. Three years after the 1963 March on Washington its core organisers including King, Rustin and Randolph brought forward an ambitious and radical 'Freedom Budget for all Americans', King himself wrote the foreword of the proposal which envisaged the elimination of poverty within ten years. The Freedom Budget called for structural reforms and linked 'racial justice for African-Americans and economic justice for all' (Le Blanc, 2013, p. 1). Many of the ideas contained in the Freedom Budget would find their way into the demands articulated under the banner of the PPC in 1968, i.e. a multi-racial democratic effort to campaign for full employment, decent housing, health care and universal education. The Freedom Budget cemented King's position as a leader who supported radical solutions to address economic exploitation. Le Blanc (2013, p. 3) also argues that King's growing opposition to the Vietnam War during this period was inseparable from 'advancing the struggle for economic justice'. The Vietnam War led King to fuse racism, militarism and economic injustice in his condemnation of a conflict which saw the hemorrhaging of funds away from President Lyndon Johnson's War on Poverty.

The Mule Train

Planning for the PPC at the local and regional levels across the U.S. led to nine 'caravans' dubbed 'Freedom Roads' eventually making the journey in May 1968 to Washington. They were the Eastern, the Appalachia Trail, the Southern, the Midwestern, the Indian, the San Francisco, the Western, the Mule Train, the Memphis Freedom Trail (The Poverty Initiative, 2012, p. 24). The Southern caravan for example started out from Selma in Alabama in early May 1968 and consisted of 392 people travelling in 7 buses and 10 cars, 500 poor people departed from Chicago on the Midwestern caravan (SCLC papers, box 177, folder 8, p. 3, KL).

The Mule Train which left from Marks, Quitman County in Mississippi provides an important case study for understanding the significant and pivotal role adult learning played in the campaign. In early 1968 King was so shocked by the poverty he found in Marks that he openly cried and decided for symbolic reasons the PPC would begin there. The personal testimonies of impoverished mothers in Marks led Dr King to relate that 'I wept with them as I heard numerous women stand up on their feet. I heard them talking about the fact that they didn't even have any blankets to cover their children up on a cold night' (in Branch, 2006, p. 721). In selecting Marks as the starting point for the campaign he calculated that the voices of the poorest in society would be heard and that poverty would be firmly placed in the national spotlight. It was agreed that the poor from Marks would travel to Washington in wagons pulled by mules. The symbolism of the mules sent out a powerful message. Their historical symbolic significance allied to their quiet, timeless dignity represented universal poverty as they travelled slowly through Mississippi, Alabama and Georgia before being loaded onto a train in Atlanta for the final leg to Washington. The inspirational tactic to have the poor travel from Marks at least part of the way to Washington on the Mule Train also had a pedagogical purpose. The Mule Train was a means of educating the American public about the realities of poverty. According to Bernard Lafayette (2014) the purpose of the PPC was 'to put a face on poverty' and in this connection explained that:

The Mule Train was a publicity arm. It would take a long time to get to Washington and would attract press and media interest.

Activist Myrna Copeland reflected this perspective:

I think this is something that has to be done. Perhaps this can be looked on as an education for the people of America. I think a lot of Americans just don't realise, are ignorant of how many poor people live in the US (in Freeman, 1998, p. 121).

Building a campaign in Marks

Cotton remained the main source of income for the majority of the 21,000 population of the whole of Quitman County including the 2,402 residents of Marks (Lackey, 2014, p. 23). Schools remained segregated and multiple indicators of poverty were in evidence. The registration forms completed by those in Marks who joined the PPC effort reveal insights into the depth and scope of poverty experienced in the area and confirm that many in the county for example were without running water in their houses; some had no income yet were not on welfare e.g. 46 year old Elsie Mitchell and 18 year old Rosa May to cite just two examples (SCLC papers, box 180, folder 21, KL). The majority in Marks were either unemployed or underemployed and lived in sub-standard housing with some houses even standing in water. Local resident Willie Brown, a father of ten children, reported that his house was situated in a 'low swamp' (SCLC papers, box 186, folder 7, KL). SCLC staff members were informed that blacks in Quitman County were 'near starvation' (SCLC papers, box 178, folder 9, p. 2, KL). Because of the poverty to be found there and the history of discrimination in the Mississippi Delta, Quitman County came to be regarded by the SCLC as the most important county of the whole campaign (SCLC papers, box 178, folder 9, p. 8, KL). The overall impact of the PPC rested therefore to a great extent on whatever success might be achieved in Marks.

Campaigners resolved to build a campaign from the bottom up and a Project Director was appointed for Quitman County with the brief to recruit 'hard-core poor people' (SCLC papers, box 178, folder 12, KL). In early 1968 King visited meeting places throughout Mississippi where poor people came together. His self-styled 'People to People Tours' had a pedagogical purpose in that they were intended to be 'informative and educational, for the haves, but much more so for the have-nots' (SCLC papers, box 178, folder 10, KL). Local organisers were advised that grass roots leaders and poor people were the most important people in the area and that arrangements should be made for King to meet them in their own neighbourhoods and homes so that he could observe poverty at first hand (SCLC papers, box 179, folder 4, p. 3, KL). Plans in Marks were assisted by opportunities for the SCLC to tap into the rich seam of local activism which had characterised Mississippi for decades. Nearly every single civil rights organisation in Mississippi was represented at meetings held by King in March 1968 (SCLC papers, box 178, folder 9, KL). Dittmer noted in his ground-breaking work on civil rights in Mississippi that the PPC helped to foster closer co-operation between groups who previously felt they had little in common (Dittmer, 1994, p. 419). In April 1968 for example discussions were held with a variety of organisations in Mississippi including state-wide welfare rights groups, Grenada County Freedom Movement, the National Association for the Advancement of Coloured People (NAACP) and the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party (MFDP) as well as mass meetings to which the local community were invited (SCLC papers, box 178, folder 9, p. 1, KL). Although initially opposed to the concept of the PPC on the grounds that it was unlikely to succeed and would drain resources away from other campaigns the NAACP in Mississippi eventually endorsed the campaign (Lackey, 2014, p. 58).

Adult education and the SCLC

Dr King observed that ‘education without social action is a one-sided value because it has no true power potential, whereas social action without education is a weak expression of pure energy’ (in Lackey, 2014, p. 41). The SCLC supported this philosophy and saw adult education practice to be an essential component of any successful campaign. As an organisation it was committed to the notion of lifelong learning and observed in 1962 ‘that modern society does not live by asking is everybody happy but rather is everybody learning?’ (SCLC papers, box 155, folder 23, p. 5, KL). Their approach was underpinned by the basic principle that the ‘community level is where things really count and where people really grow’ (SCLC papers, box 155, folder 23, p. 3, KL). The SCLC was involved from the early 1960s in grass-roots educational efforts designed to reach ‘southern disadvantaged blacks’ (SCLC papers, box 151, folder 8, November 1965, KL). Black women in particular were at the heart of the attempts to organise and educate at the grass-roots (Crawford et al, 1990; Robnett, 1997). The flagship SCLC Citizenship Education Programme stemmed from the efforts of Ella Baker, acting executive director of the SCLC in the late 1950s. Concerned about the failure of early SCLC attempts to mobilise participation in voter registration schemes in small towns and rural communities, Baker looked to the example of the programme at the renowned integrated Highlander Folk School in Tennessee which had become a ‘powerful tool for the development of movement organisation’ (Robnett, 1997, p. 88). Many of the women involved in organising the Montgomery bus boycott had previously attended Highlander, including Rosa Parks and members of the influential Women’s Political Council (Garrow, 1987; Robnett, 1997; Hamilton, 2013). Another African-American woman, the inspirational Septima Clark, was responsible for the success of the Highlander Citizenship Education Programme. Clark had grasped the importance of ‘bridge leaders’, often women, who could utilise interpersonal ties in small communities to facilitate recruitment of the masses to movement campaigns (Robnett, 1997, p. 89). Encouraged by Baker, it was agreed by King and the founder of Highlander, Myles Horton, to establish a facility where Clark could train activists. The focus was on teaching literacy and more fundamentally linking personal concerns to the overall direction of the civil rights movement (Robnett, 1997, p. 91). It was noted by 1965 that the curriculum for the Citizenship Education Programme had developed from an almost exclusive focus on basic reading and writing to include courses and workshops in political education and the ‘techniques of group organisation designed to facilitate massive social change’ (SCLC papers, box 151, folder 8, KL). The SCLC maintained that having participated in citizenship education ‘blacks could then take their rightful place as concerned, informed and responsible participants in American society’ (SCLC papers, box 155, folder 26, KL).

The contribution of adult learning to advancing the objectives of the civil rights movement was further evidenced during Freedom Summer in Mississippi in 1964 where the Student Non-Violent Co-ordinating Committee (SNCC) in collaboration with other civil rights groups mobilised to organise voter registration. Freedom Summer was characterised by adult learning with an emphasis on political awareness, literacy education and practical skills (Rachal, 2000, p. 166). The SCLC learned from the approaches to adult learning which were taken during Freedom Summer by SNCC and others. They also recognised from the experiences of the same initiative that the effort to mount a campaign against poverty in Mississippi in 1968 would be undertaken in a potentially hostile environment. Throughout Freedom Summer, activists were subjected to extreme violence and intimidation. An

organiser described Mississippi in 1964 in the following terms as:

The only place I have ever been where a black person can be fired from his job, evicted from his house, jailed and put in the state penitentiary, shot at, and starved for attempting to register to vote (SCLC papers, box 155, folder 26, p. 2, KL).

Understanding adult education in Marks

As plans got underway in Marks the SCLC reported in March 1968 that 200-300 activists had moved into 'Marks Tent City' from 'shack- homes' all around Mississippi (SCLC papers, box 177, folder 8, p. 1, KL). The modest temporary tent dwellings occupied by the activists were seen to represent those poor people who 'were not allowed to participate in society and who therefore had no voice' (Lafayette, 2014). The concept was inspired by the creation of tent communities on southern black-owned land to house those who had lost their jobs and homes as a consequence of participating in voter registration campaigns and other civil rights activities in the 1960s (Lafayette, 2014). SCLC staff told of at least four families in Quitman County who had been thrown off the land and who now lived with extended families; another 40 families were anticipating the same fate (SCLC papers, box 178, folder 9, pp. 2-3, KL). In a personal testimony mother of ten Mrs Lena Evans reported that her family had no place to live because 'the boss man has rented his land out' (SCLC papers, box 181, folder 5, KL). 74 year old Virginia Robinson from Quitman County reported that white people had stolen her land and killed her livestock and informed her that if 'she didn't move away she would be next' (SCL papers, box 181, folder 6, KL).

The symbolism of Tent-City set the tone for the campaign in Marks which would be shaped by the needs of the poor. The SCLC drew a crucial lesson from previous campaigns in observing that experience told them 'understanding the causes of political disfranchisement, social and economic inequities has proved to be the basic motivation for involvement' (SCLC papers, box 151, folder 30, p. 1, KL). Youngman argues (1986), that the aim of education should be to assist participants to change their consciousness, so that they become critically aware of their situation and see their potential for changing it. He also maintains however that an emphasis on consciousness and on the need for ideological struggle does not lessen the requirement for economic and political action, since the social circumstances which help create ideas in the experience of dominated classes need to be changed also. The SCLC seemed to have recognised these fundamental principles in planning the adult education activities in Marks. Typically two mass meetings were held each week in Marks from early March 1968, as well as two workshops as part of an adult education programme (SCLC papers, box 178, folder 12, p. 1, KL). The various activities were directed in particular at those with no previous experience of campaign participation and who it was anticipated would form the main body of people travelling to Washington. With the planned occupation in Washington in mind the primary focus was placed on providing opportunities for participants to reflect on the causes and manifestations of poverty and on how to take action to force government to address those issues. The importance of reflection on 'the nature of American society and how non-violence can effectively remould it' was prioritised (SCLC papers, box 180, folder 10, p. 4, KL). The way in which workshop group leaders interacted with learners was also important. The workshop facilitators began with the issues of concern to local people and allowed their voices to be heard. The workshops were designed to be democratic with respect given to every point of view so that they resembled the Freire notion of culture circles (Freire, 1973). Freire stressed the importance in learning situations for everyone involved to 'help each other growing mutually in the common effort to understand

the reality which they seek to transform' (Freire, 1978, p. 8). Whilst the programme was intended to be 'academic' the approach drew from the Freedom School tradition in that its 'offerings served only to give guidance and intensity to the motivation which adult citizens bring with them to classes' (SCLC papers, box 155, folder 34, p. 4, KL). The curriculum therefore reflected the economic and social realities faced by the community in their everyday lives and the means by which they could change their root condition. The intention in Marks was to raise the critical consciousness of participants with encouragement given to:

Look and then go back for more discussions, then another look and more talk with each other about what you saw and learned about the political process (SCLC papers, box 179, folder 5, p. 3, KL).

As Gramsci has argued the concept of hegemony demonstrates that consciousness is not only the product of ideas but also the result of a total social process. Youngman (1986) also makes the point that attitudes, values and beliefs are shaped by social experience, which itself is influenced by an individual's position within the division of labour. In Marks discrimination in all areas of life meant that blacks had never even dared for example to 'invade white social life at any level' (Lackey 2014, p. 26). Although the civil rights movement had long been active in Mississippi it remained difficult by 1968 to make progress in a state known as the 'closed society' particularly in small rural communities such as Marks. Robnett (1997, p. 90) argues whilst many blacks in rural communities in the 1950s and 60s were well aware of racial inequality, they did not have 'the basic information necessary to transform their prefigurative politics, based on personal experience'. Freire offers useful insights on this issue. As he argues in 'Pedagogy in Process', culture e.g. history, geography, usually only belongs to the colonisers i.e. 'the history of those colonised was thought to have begun with the civilising presence of the colonisers' (Freire, 1978, p. 14). In order to challenge this dominance Freire argued that 'a decolonising of mentality' was required (Freire, 1978, p. 14). The workshops in Marks arguably gave local people effective access to knowledge and information which brought about a gradual change in their mind-set and assisted them to begin to challenge the status quo. The curriculum included for example discussion on black history and the history of the movement. One other particular learning experience impacted on the consciousness of participants and had a significant impact on the course of the campaign. Local people in Marks reacted to what they saw as a disproportionate response by local authorities to an unauthorised PPC planning meeting at a local High School attended by hundreds of students. A prominent SCLC activist was arrested at the meeting resulting in students and teachers marching in protest at the heavy-handed approach. Further arrests followed leading to mass protests including a boycott of local schools which only ended as the Mule Train prepared to leave for Washington. It was apparent that in a real sense 'the civil rights movement had come to Quitman County' (Lackey, 2014, p. 38). Their education in the PPC had helped poor black people to see that they could interrupt white social life in a segregated society. Through their readiness to join together in collective action in organising the boycott and by taking their protest to the streets local people showed that they had been radicalised by what they perceived to be unjust treatment. As Robnett (1997, p. 90) argues, in a social movement learning experiences can provide people with information leading them to an understanding of the strategic politics of a campaign. The high school protest and aftermath can also be seen as an example of what Holst has identified as experiential learning, in which a political demonstration has resulted in the integration of a movement's cultural and political ideals (Holst, 2002). The hegemonic practices, values and expectations which governed life in Marks were challenged by the learning brought about by the PPC. Local people were now 'not for turning back'.

Freire also reminds us that how and what is learned must be consistent with the plan for a new society (Freire, 1978). An emphasis in the meetings and workshops in Marks on non-violent tactics reflected the importance as Figlan has argued for social movements to put into practice the politics and values they are fighting for (Figlan, et al, 2009, p. 21). The civil rights movement's tried and trusted methods of demonstrations and marches were to be bolstered in Washington by additional non-violent strategies to include the lobbying of Congress and stand-offs outside government buildings i.e. 'massive, energetic, protest tactics' (SCLC papers, box 180, folder 10, p. 4, KL). From around 1966 King had grown increasingly dismayed by the potential threats to his philosophy of non-violence from in particular the more strident voices of black power and Black Nationalism. The determination to fully integrate non-violence into the PPC had received fresh impetus following violent disturbances at a King event organised to support striking sanitation workers in Memphis in March 1968. The unrest in Memphis was used as a stick by opponents to discredit the PPC with claims made that the movement could no longer hold the line on non-violence nor control civil rights demonstrations. King was unwilling to compromise on non-violence having embraced the ideas of Gandhi on non-violence and civil disobedience. For Gandhi it was essential to inspire an education system with 'spiritual value, central to which was the doctrine of non-violence' (Steele and Taylor, 1994, p. 35). A key influence in shaping King's education on non-violence was Ms Lillian Smith, the celebrated southern novelist and civil rights activist. She was the individual who introduced King to Bayard Rustin, who as previously mentioned became a significant figure in his life. Rustin had extensive experience of non-violence through the Gandhian independence movement in India (Burns, 1997, p. 159). In Montgomery during the bus boycott Rustin assisted King to have a deeper understanding of Gandhi and emphasised to him that non-violence could fashion a transformative revolutionary movement (D'Emilio, 2003, p. 231). Experienced leaders in Marks ensured that participants understood and adhered to the philosophy and tactics of non-violence. Well-known activist Andrew Young led the first non-violence workshop in Marks (SCLC papers, box 177, folder 8, p. 2, KL).

The Wagon Master of the Mule Train Willie Bolden declared:

It was necessary to teach all these new folks the freedom songs, along with nonviolent tactics... It seemed like everybody turned out for these meetings. People were fired up, and we were trying to give them proper direction (in Freeman, 1998, pp. 125-26).

As we are reminded, Gramsci argued that everyone is capable of thinking, especially those who are not expected to think for themselves (in Harley, 2012, p. 15). Gramsci (1971) also maintained that critical social awareness and the development of the capacity to organise effectively for their own interests is equally valuable to all in society, and the development of counter-hegemony lies in the creation of counter-consciousness. Adult learning overall in Marks helped to encourage a common desire for change among PPC participants and a confidence they could bring this about. Personal testimonies highlighted the connection between learning and both individual and collective action. This was reflected by Mrs Rose Kendrick who observed:

Washington is the centre of government power and the national government has the money and we want it right now. Poor people do not get decent jobs, schools, health, government and police. Poor people do not get respect as human beings. Congressmen, you have the job and the money. I just want some of it so I can live (SCLC papers, box 181, folder 4, KL).

In another example, 76 year old George Nixon said he wanted 'better sewers and better homes', and in order to achieve those basic rights was determined to stay in Washington 'as long as they let me' (SCLC papers, box 180, folder 21, KL). A mother of five children living on minimal welfare payments declared that her family was just 'starving to death. Something needs to be done now - not after a while, now' (SCLC papers, box 179, folder 19, p. 2, KL). Activist Bertha Burres Johnson captured the new levels of understanding and the fresh attitudes of determination and defiance by stating that:

They are tired of being on these plantations - being poor and not being given their equal rights. So we're going to Washington to let them folks up there know that it is time they treated us right and we ain't gonna take it no more (in Freeman, 1998, p. 114).

It can also be evidenced that individuals in Marks now understood that they were not alone in their poverty. Green has noted that those who get involved in civil rights campaigns often ascribe greater meaning to what they had previously thought were possibly only personal or individual problems (Green, 2011, p. 66). *The New York Times* quoted Marks resident 19 year old Harry Smiley, 'one reason I want to go, is if all towns are like this one, we need to go' (in Freeman, 1998, p. 99). There was also a rejection of the idea that the poor were responsible for their situation, a young person in Marks observed:

Some of the things we learned have taught us that poor folk aint the stupid ones, and besides what could be more stupid than to say somebody deserves to be poor? (SCLC papers, box 177, folder 10, KL).

Heading for Washington

Although twice postponed due to a combination of bad weather, the King assassination and logistical challenges, the Mule Train eventually left for Washington on May 13th 1968. The organisation of the Mule Train as a mode of transport belies criticism that the campaign was inefficient and shambolic. Catering and other basic needs of the people undertaking the long trip as well as those of the animals were addressed. A PPC meeting in March 1968 highlighted the support and resources required for the Mule Train journey to Washington i.e. toilet facilities, blacksmith support, mechanic, food and water for travellers and the mules, medical support, laundry, places to stay on route (SCLC papers, box 180, folder 8, pp. 4-5, KL). Perhaps as a measure of the social and political climate of that period in America Bernard Lafayette observed that:

'Through the attention of the Humane Society more concern was expressed about the condition of the mules than the people but we got our message across' (Lafayette, 2014).

Alongside the Mule Train others were expected to travel to Washington by bus from Marks. As the Mule Train set off it represented the hopes and desires of poor people who had literally reached a crossroads in their lives. Everyone was 'on message' and ready to face the uncertainties which lay ahead on the trip to Washington. The Mule Train Wagon Master William Bolden noted that:

We got folks to understand that this was not going to be an easy journey. It had never been done before. We didn't know of anyone in our time that had undertaken such a task. We were going to have to stick together (in Freeman, 1998, pp. 125-26).

15 wagons made the journey. The wagons contained ‘as many poor people as they’ll carry now they are sure nobody’s going to turn them around’ (SCLC papers, box 177, folder 8, p. 4, KL). 115 people including Lee Dora Collins, a mother of 13, set off. The large majority were black, and 100 were poor people in addition to the 15 staffers. They spanned the generations, the youngest was 8 months and the oldest was 70 years; 20 children were under the age of 13 and over 40 were female (Freeman, 1998, p. 38). The presence of so many women and their children reflected an activism which helped to place the PPC demands for regulation and legislation in a gender context and in focussing on the needs of the family provided a powerful anti-poverty message which resonated all the way to Washington. Even before the Mule Train departed low-income women from the Mississippi Delta presented evidence to Senate Hearings in Memphis which highlighted hunger and health issues and in so doing educated elected representatives as to the realities of life for the poor (Green, 2011, p. 72). The SCLC reported a ‘carnival atmosphere’ as many children came to view the mules as they made ready to leave (SCLC papers, box 177, folder 8, p. 7, KL). The Wagon drivers were reported to have ‘practiced mule-talk’ together (SCLC papers, box 177, folder 8, p. 4, KL). With a sense of mischief and to the delight of onlookers the travellers also tweaked the noses of segregationist Mississippi Senators in naming two of the lead mules after them i.e. Stennis and Eastland.

In an authentic sense those people on board through their own life experiences represented the issues which had emerged in discussion and reflection in Mississippi and which consequently shaped and informed the demands presented to legislators in Washington. As recorded by the SCLC these embraced a range of civil and human rights including unemployment and underemployment, lack of decent housing, a discriminatory welfare system in which local whites determined the needs of blacks, the high cost of food stamps, lack of access to decent education, and inadequate federal programmes with local people denied real participation in the management of programmes at the grass roots level (SCLC papers, box 178, folder 9, pp. 1-2, KL). Marks resident Joy Miller said that she was going to Washington for ‘freedom, better houses and better clothes and food’ (SCLC papers, box 180, folder 21, KL). Mother of six Rosetta Hart recorded that she was:

Not able to eat a balanced diet; get jobs and pay, nor medical care. I am not able to pay my bills, my house needs fixing, I cannot keep warm in the winter. These are just some of the reasons I want to go to Washington (SCLC papers, box 181, folder 5, KL).

Political slogans emblazoned on the sides of the wagons allowed them to reach out to others sharing a common bond of poverty in the communities the Mule Train passed through. The slogans powerfully encapsulated the core campaign messages. They included a celebration of King and the enduring hopes of travellers with messages such as ‘I Have a Dream’, the inherent dignity of the travellers and the religious commitment of many was celebrated with ‘Don’t Laugh Folks, Jesus Was a Poor Man’ and ‘Jesus Was a Marcher’; one particular message reflected a determination to reach their goal in the nation’s capital and said simply ‘The Mule Train - Washington DC Bound’; others critiqued government policy priorities of the period with messages such as ‘Which is Better? Send Man to Moon or Feed Him on Earth’; and some articulated the fundamental human rights demands of the campaign i.e. ‘Everybody’s Got a Right to Work, Eat, Live’. As it travelled the Mule Train therefore implicitly and explicitly had a pedagogical function to inform onlookers and the press about the focus and significance of the campaign and at the same time questioned the inequities of capitalism.

It was reported on the first day on the road that the people on the Mule Train ignored the hostility of some whites they encountered and were in high spirits as they arrived for their first overnight stay (SCLC papers, box 177, folder 8, p. 8, KL). The caravan experienced some problems from local officials as they travelled through Mississippi, Alabama and Georgia. Georgia police arrested 67 PPC demonstrators for travelling on the Interstate Highway. According to activist Tyrone Brooks the SCLC threatened to build Resurrection City in Georgia unless Governor Maddox was more co-operative with the Mule Train (Brooks, 2014). The threat seemed to have the desired effect and following lengthy discussions all were released and agreement reached that the Mule Train could continue its journey in the emergency lane of the highway. The contrast between the Mule Train and the expression of white political structures as represented by the police in Georgia helped to further empower the mind-set of the poor people travelling on the caravan. Hill (2004, p. 93) has shown that for marginalised groups the experience of conflict can lead to learning, and it has the potential for growth and development. It seems also that the very act of participation in the historic effort had brought about learning in a group who were on the margins of society. Wagon Master Willie Bolden stressed the unity of the participants evident in facing down the challenges and obstacles placed in their path. He observed that 'if these people never accomplished anything else in their lives, they accomplished this' (in Freeman, 1998, p. 127). Asides from some harassment from passing cars and spectators, onlookers were generally welcoming as the Mule Train continued its path to Atlanta. Mississippi State University students waved good luck banners demanding an 'End to the War against the Poor' (in Freeman, 1998, p. 53). Other spectators bore no malice but were either bemused or amused as the Mule Train passed by. The Clarksdale Press Register for example reported on May 18th that the people of Grenada regarded it 'as though it were a circus parade passing through and so far no incidents of consequence have been reported' (in Lackey, 2014, p. 86).

The 'caravan' tactic generally was reported by the SCLC to have created an 'underground railway', a channel linking home communities with the final destination of Resurrection City and on the return journey (SCLC papers, box 16, folder 7, p. 6, KL). At each of the Mule Train stops local organisers mobilised to provide resources and support including food and accommodation for the poor people and the mules. As Wright points out the arrival of the Mule Train in each community bolstered existing groups and even helped create new groups (Wright, 2011, p. 112). The NAACP in Alabama had requested local branches to assist the Mule Train throughout the state (Lackey, 2014, p. 107). In Birmingham for example on June 6th the caravan stopped at the historic Sixteenth Baptist Church where a local organiser had been appointed to look after their needs. Some participants also left the caravan and others joined at the rest stops, a changeover of the guard which replenished the effort with fresh energies and allowed those leaving the caravan to head for home having played their part in the historic initiative. Local media captured the stops in each community and associated activities including the regular demonstrations thereby educating the public about the campaign and providing the oxygen of publicity the participants craved. The slow pace of the Mule Train brought with it the advantage that unlike those travelling on buses, cars and trains to Washington in other caravans they were constantly visible and could not be ignored. The mules managed to travel an average of 25 miles each day (Freeman, 1998, p. 40). Inevitably however other imperatives took over including the requirement to get to Resurrection City in time to participate in the planned demonstrations. The decision to complete the journey from Atlanta by train brought with it some criticism that somehow the poor had failed to meet their objective. For the participants the Mule Train represented in contrast a willingness of poor people to undergo hardship and disruption to their lives and those of their families, in pursuit

of a common goal. Mule Train activist Joan Cashin reflected that it was easy for outsiders to criticise the campaign and chose instead to focus on how the whole experience had enlightened and empowered her. She observed that:

The effort it took just to get the wagon train together, the people who are willing to take this very hard ride, and the symbolism of what it really means to take mules instead of Cadillacs, these are the most important things to me, rather than being able to say the mules walked every mile of the way between Marks and Washington (in Freeman, 1998, p. 121).

Campaigning in Washington

The Mule Train was the last of the caravans to make it to Washington when it arrived by train from Atlanta on June 15th 1968. The Washington phase of the PPC had already begun weeks before with the lobbying of Congress and press conferences led by the 'Committee of One Hundred', two-thirds of whom consisted of representatives of the poor from all over America and one-third national civil rights leaders (SCLC papers, Box 177, folder 20, KL). Anxious to get involved before the Washington phase of the campaign was over some of the Mule Train participants moved into Resurrection City and others into a local church centre. In Resurrection City they found many of the resources and facilities to be found in any small self-contained city including a City Hall, Library, and a Day Care Centre (Hamilton, 2013, p. 5). It was recorded that the 6,312 registrants came from 47 states and included Puerto-Ricans, Mexican-Americans, Native Americans and whites (SCLC papers, box 16, folder 7, pp. 4-8, KL). The intention to house campaigners in tents at Resurrection City as in Marks did not materialise (Lee, 2013, p 115). However their important symbolism was retained in that the wooden huts constructed for the residents of Resurrection City were designed to look like tents. The enduring reach of the PPC in this regard can even be seen in the 21st century campaigns such as Zuccotti Park where protesters carry on the tradition of living in tents which symbolically for them are 'more anarchistic' than conventional dwellings (Lee, 2013, p. 115).

The Mule Train activists arrived into a situation of alleged chaos and lack of organisation in Resurrection City. The shanty town became the story to the detriment of the campaign. It was reported that some children had been abandoned in the Day Care Centre by their parents (Afield and Gibson, 1970, p. 30) Accounts of daily life refer to the literal dampening of morale caused by incessant rain which turned the camp into a sea of mud. Given the housing conditions they had left behind in Marks it is unlikely the circumstances in Resurrection City would have shocked those who arrived on the Mule Train however. Different groups in Resurrection City strived to make their presence felt in the shared space. The SCLC reported on differences between experienced activists and 'youthful, poorly disciplined poverty warriors' (SCLC papers, box 16, folder 7, p. 9, KL). The core themes of the campaign were largely forgotten in the tide of adverse publicity and much of the good will which had been directed to the Mule Train was lost and has helped to define the campaign ever since.

It is possible however to see Resurrection City in a much more positive light. Daily life was arguably better organised and more diverse than press coverage suggested. As a snap shot the varied schedule for Friday June 14th, 1968 included a protest on school conditions by Mexican-Americans at the Department of Education, various other demonstrations and lobbying took place across town, activists addressed the Press Club, and the news media were briefed on responses of 3 federal agencies to campaign demands (SCLC papers, box 179, folder 34, KL). Another high point was when the Mule Train re-grouped to join a march, an

event captured by the media. The SCLC also made the optimistic claim that the campaign had succeeded in ‘uniting the poor in community and breaking down the racial barriers that have long prevented America’s poor people from joining together in a common cause’ (SCLC papers, box 179, folder 31, p. 3, KL). Cornel West has observed that it is politically and culturally difficult to build coalitions because of the mistrust between disenfranchised groups (in Grace et al, 2009, p. 75). The evidence would suggest that in Resurrection City some progress was made in breaking down the barriers. An architect responsible for designing Resurrection City noted that people were separated not by race but by geography, and that ‘there was more mixing than you would have seen elsewhere in 1968’ (Lee, 2013, p. 117). A local civil servant observed:

The press and the American public failed to recognise that the PPC brought together the poor and the militant from all areas - people who had not known each other before. What we had was a simulated ghetto and what can happen there (RBOH papers, Bates, HU).

A previous study has shown how poor people in Resurrection City learned together in forums including Freedom Schools and a Poor People’s University (Hamilton, 2013). An SCLC press release announced two days of workshops in Resurrection City on the economic condition of the poor:

Nationally known authorities and poor people will man the panels that will, with no holds barred, explore the impact poverty and cultural deprivation has on America today....It will prod the economics of depravity and the influence of disparity (SCLC papers, box 179, folder 28, KL).

Other discussions focussed on related human rights themes such as children and poverty, hunger, housing and unemployment. Further workshops were provided for the arrivals from Marks and elsewhere on citizen participation and non-violent civil disobedience (SCLC papers, box 9, folder 10, p. 1, KL). The workshops were facilitated by educators from the national organisation Scholarship, Education and Defence Fund for Racial Equality (SEDFRE) which worked at the ‘grass-roots level to effect social change’ (in Hamilton, 2013, p. 12). The campaigners also produced their own internal media outlets including ‘Soul Force’, the official organ of the SCLC. Together with regular position statements and press releases, Soul Force represented an important tool intended to heighten awareness of the campaign and sway public opinion. The SCLC had learned from previous campaigns including from the activism of SNCC during Freedom Summer in 1964 of the value of providing local communities with a variety of news media, books and newspapers which offered alternative counter-hegemonic messages to those normally provided by the state of Mississippi (SCLC papers, box 155, folder 26, p. 2, KL). Among a wide range of articles written by activists the Soul Force edition dated June 19th 1968 highlighted the exploitation of cheap labour; another piece stressed that the presence of the poor in Resurrection City showed that they ‘were tired of the rich getting richer and the poor getting poorer’; and in a further article the Soul Force magazine declared that ‘we are here for revolution - the continuing revolution of America’ (SCLC papers, box 180, folder 3, KL). It also celebrated the great tradition of dissent in American life in recollecting the abolitionist orators and Joe Hill’s ‘red book’ (SCLC papers, box 180, folder 3, p. 10, KL). Soul Force therefore offered a searing critique of capitalism, sought to further raise the consciousness of those involved in the campaign as to their place within the capitalist system, and stressed the importance of collective action in bringing about change.

Outcomes of the PPC

The actual legislative gains from Federal Government in response to campaign demands were relatively modest. Activist John Reynolds argued the achievements included additional nutrition programmes for the poor, new food stamp programmes, free school lunches, and insisted ‘the PPC was not in vain’ (Reynolds, 2012, p. 145). An additional 25 million dollars was provided for new anti-poverty projects and a new housing bill was passed with amendments to allow poor people to control housing projects (SCLC papers, box 177, folder 2, p. 2, KL). Arguably the most significant impact of the PPC was felt by the poor including those from Marks who travelled to Washington. The journeys to Washington forged a collective identity among the travellers and in particular a fresh awareness of what they shared in common. This outcome can be seen as an example of informal learning, which scholars have noted can be individual or collective, intentional or unplanned (e.g. Meek, 2011). It was reported for example in Resurrection City that one black woman who had organised a group from Seattle refused to turn over ‘her’ 56 Native American to someone else. ‘We’ve been integrated all the way from Seattle, and now you want to segregate us’ (in Afield et al, 1970, p. 10). At a rally a white woman received a raucous reception after claiming that she organised what she called ‘white blacks’ in the North and a Native American told of his joy in holding hands for the first time with ‘my black brothers, my Mexican-American brothers, my Puerto-Rican brothers’ (SCLC papers, box 179, folder 31, p. 3, KL). A key SCLC objective for the campaign was to ensure that poor people ‘take back with them a new realisation of their own dignity, rights, and political power in the political process for self-determination of their economic and social conditions’ (SCLC papers, box 179, folder 5, p.1, KL). An SCLC staff member argued persuasively that:

The poor learned about oppressive authority. I bet that changes them when they go back. There were a lot who came, who wanted to bring about change in the society and they were grass roots leaders from an area, and they came in so they would be a part of this and they would go back and impart that knowledge to their constituency, and indeed they did (RBOH papers, Shannon, HU).

For the first time the people who had made the journey also felt that their voices had been truly heard and many had been empowered by the whole experience. Although the majority of those who went to Washington from Marks and elsewhere had little or no education beyond the adult learning opportunities made possible through the PPC, there is evidence that they returned to their homes at the very least as more knowledgeable and more confident citizens. Activist Roland Freeman of the Marks Mule Train indicated how adult learning had transformed him when he observed:

Over my extended assignment with the Mule Train, I was exposed to an exciting combination of organising, teaching, learning, planning, and reacting. By the time it ended, I understood far more about myself, the world, and how we affect one another (in Freeman, 1998).

The Mule Train participant testimonies tell of how they returned to their communities vowing that things would never again be the same.

Lee Dora Collins observed:

I really enjoyed the whole experience, and I learned what we could do if we stuck together. I had never marched like that before. I saw my government turned us down. But the experience

lifted my spirits and changed the way I think forever. I got back here, and I don't 'yes, suh, boss', anymore (in Freeman, 1998, p. 117).

She also described how her son need not work in the cotton fields, and added 'that's all I was hoping for when I went to Washington, was to make things better for my family' (in Freeman, 1998, p. 117). Although Lee Dora Collins understood that change at the national level had been limited following the PPC, she nevertheless articulated a strong case that her participation had changed her both as an individual and as a member of a broader Marks community of poor people. She had been tested by the challenges of the trip to Washington but as a consequence had emerged as better informed and more confident.

Resurrection City was torn down by government after only six weeks and the remaining residents forcibly removed. The closure marked the end of a turbulent and short life for a community which had endured the constant attention of the forces of law and order including infiltration by the FBI, a notorious teargas attack by police, and the repeated calls of politicians to close the camp down. The residents also suffered a blow with the assassination of Senator Robert F Kennedy in early June. Kennedy was a strong supporter of the PPC and his funeral cortege stopped at Resurrection City in tribute to the poor (Schmitt, 2010, p. 308). SCLC President Ralph Abernathy reflected that his death was another manifestation of the daily violence visited on citizens in America through inadequate housing, unemployment and poor education (Hamilton, 2013, p. 15). In July 1968 Abernathy declared that it was now time for the poor people to move out from Washington into the nation to continue the struggle in home communities (SCLC papers, box 177, folder 1, KL). A national campaign which began in earnest at the local level in towns such as Marks now returned to its origins at the grass-roots.

Conclusion

What is the significance of the Mule Train in terms of the insights it can offer our understanding of learning in social movements? Hall et al (2011) have noted that it is possible to learn 'in' and learn 'from' social movements. In this connection, as mentioned earlier, Dr Bernard Lafayette emphasised that the 'presence' of poor people during the PPC represented a powerful form of protest. The 'pedagogy of presence' i.e. the teaching and learning that accompanies the mere presence of people, is well established in adult learning and education literature (e.g. Eaklor, 1997, Hill, 2004, Grace et al, 2009, Lang, 2014). Until the PPC came to Marks the poorest people in the community in many ways had no visible presence, they were marginalised and their voices went unheard in a white dominated society. In protesting their economic condition the PPC activists made a radical statement which announced their presence in a society which had previously rendered them silent. In terms of learning 'in' movements, their lack of presence was overcome in moments of learning as the community came together in the workshops, meetings and demonstrations. It is seen that some situations can provide both a place and space for disenfranchised groups to learn together (Grace et al, 2009, p. 72). Their presence on the Mule Train journey to Washington brought validation to them as poor people and to their quest to end poverty in America. Many of them had never before left their home communities and on the trip to Washington they shared a sense of purpose and a realisation they had embarked on an historic mission. As Blanc and Yates remind us (2013, p. 237) 'something wonderful happens to people when they are somehow determining their own destiny and beginning to control and change their real conditions'. Jesse Jackson (1968, pp. 66-67) also observed that the PPC allowed impoverished people to hear each other for the first time and helped them begin to understand

the discrimination experienced by other groups. Ezra Hampton from Quitman County wrote that he wanted to go to Washington 'to help to do all I can. We have poor white people here; we are fighting for poor people' (SCLC papers, box 181, folder 6, KL). People of all races and backgrounds acknowledged the existence of others who shared the common bond of poverty and together perhaps for the first time believed that change was possible. The Mule Train and Resurrection City can be seen as impressive examples of what Grace et al (2009, p.72) describe as sites of 'dialogue and interaction'. The shared occupation of space by the dispossessed on board the Mule Train and in Washington itself, encouraged 'critical' adult learning, i.e. it led to 'empowerment and development of voice' (Hill, 2004, p. 87). In taking matters into their own hands and in making their stand for change the Marks group found new strength and confidence as a consequence. Based on the experiences of other marginalised groups Hill (2004) argues that activism in itself is the practice of adult education. By acting to change their world the Mule Train travellers can be viewed as an example of the sort of oppressed people referred to by Barbara Ransby, who, 'whatever their level of formal education, had the ability to understand and interpret the world around them, to see the world for what it was and to move to transform it' (in Green, 2011, p. 58).

In relation to the significance of the pedagogy of presence for our understanding of learning 'from' social movements, the Mule Train can be viewed as one of the key events in social movement history, providing us with a model of good practice and the inspiration to see what is possible. The simple but profound symbolism of the mules and those travelling on the wagons projected a powerful message. On the journey to Washington and in Resurrection City the Mule Train participants thrust poverty and the inequalities associated with it into the national spotlight. It has been argued that without 'visibility' there is no history (in Hill, 2004, p. 92). The group from Marks refused to be ignored any longer and through their presence performed a public pedagogical function in demonstrating that poverty was endemic in the United States. Holst (2011) maintains that social movements are a means by which society learns about itself. The mules and those travelling on the wagons and what they represented in relation to poverty contrasted sharply with for example the visible signs of wealth on the highways including expensive cars and advertising billboards. The presence of the poor on route to Washington and in the capital itself as peaceful non-violent demonstrators countered in part at least the media and political onslaught against the initiative and in particular the dominant view that the 'great unwashed' were agitators who represented a threat to law and order. The travellers from Marks understood that their occupation of the Mall was in practice another form of public pedagogy i.e. a fundamental rejection of the dominant narrative that the poor themselves needed to be educated in order that economic inequality is eradicated. The presence of the poor in 1968 with their implicit and explicit outrage at poverty in America can be seen as an example of something that, as Cornel West argued, 'puts the focus where it belongs' i.e. on any form of discrimination that impedes the opportunities of everyday people to live lives of dignity and decency' (in Grace et al, 2009, p. 770). The campaigners calculated that 'it is the nation and world at large that are in desperate need of education' (SCLC papers, box 180, folder 10, p. 4, KL). An SCLC staff member stated that:

They (the nation) were confronted with the way the poor confronted them - they were affronted by that confrontation and they went back inside and they're thinking about it (RBOH papers, Shannon, HU).

The anti-poverty message of the PPC and what the initiative represented across a range of civil and human rights remains relevant today. It has been argued that 'the PPC anticipated

the challenges of our times' (Poverty Union Initiative, 2012, p. 11). The Budget for Freedom which King and others campaigned for in 1966 and which took real form in the demands and agenda of the PPC resonates in a current context in which many are denied employment, a liveable wage, decent housing and effective access to education and healthcare. The counter-hegemonic narrative of the Mule Train also endures. Giroux (2004) has written of how in the early 21st century, neo-liberal cultural politics acts as a form of public pedagogy which devalues the meaning of areas of life such as citizenship and education. Le Blanc and Yates (2013, p. 236) write that what is lacking today in the movements against poverty is an 'overarching ideology or mind-set' which can offer guidance on what can be done and how to do it. The same criticism cannot be directed towards the Mule Train. From the beginning of the campaign in Marks the initiative was driven by a desire to end economic exploitation in America. The campaign was underpinned by adult learning. The Mule Train vision for the future was to see an end to poverty for every citizen and this lofty ambition was reflected in a series of inter-connected demands. Le Blanc and Yates (2013, p. 240) believe that any future social movement campaign which aspires to end poverty and its manifestations needs to confront government, compel it to take action through democratic power, and must represent the interests of the majority of society. The PPC arguably met all of these criteria. Although the ambitious campaign demands for legislation to end poverty were not realised, the journey to Washington was not in vain. As an activist from Marks maintained, the Mule Train 'will give the poor people a chance to live again in all ways' (SCLC papers, box 180, folder 22, KL).

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