

«An idea unleashed in history»: Dr Martin Luther King Jr and the campaign to end poverty in America

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Abstract: As well as being a civil rights advocate, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr consistently called for human rights for all. He opposed poverty, racism, imperialism and political disfranchisement as part of an analysis, which viewed inequality not only in American but also in global terms. In order to address poverty and related human rights issues, King proposed a Poor People's Campaign (PPC). In May 1968, only weeks after King's assassination, the PPC saw thousands of poor people travel to Washington DC to protest against poverty. The demonstrators occupied sacred space in the nation's capital by building a temporary community, known as Resurrection City. During preparations for the PPC and in Washington, the activists drew on a rich legacy of adult education from previous civil rights campaigns. The approaches adopted by PPC participants were innovative and represented alternatives to conventional educational practices. These included Freedom Schools, a Poor People's University, workshops, marches and demonstrations, which assisted the protesters to come together in coalition to challenge dominant hegemonic narratives concerning the causes, nature and scope of poverty. Although ultimately unsuccessful in its aspiration to end economic injustice in America, the PPC undoubtedly laid the seeds for future anti-poverty activism. The article draws on primary source documents and oral testimonies from five archives.

Keywords: civil rights; adult education; poverty; Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

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1. Introduction

By 1967, in the United States, elements of the civil rights movement coalesced with the opposition against the war in Vietnam to mount serious challenges against the social and political policies of the federal government. Dr Martin Luther King Jr provided leadership for this struggle through his analysis, which fused the issues of economic injustice, American militarism, and the struggles of oppressed peoples across the globe. The Poor People's Campaign was the vehicle he hoped would bring about an end to poverty in the United States. The idea for a Poor People's Campaign

(PPC), i.e. a multi-racial effort of the low-income to campaign for full employment, decent housing, health care and universal education, marked a logical development in the career of Dr Martin Luther King Jr. The PPC consisted of a 'broad coalition of the poor, and was not exclusively a protest movement of African-Americans' (Gollin, 1968, p. 7). The plans and organising efforts created 'a populist image of poor people of all backgrounds' coming together to press their demands (Gollin, 1968, p.7). Chase (1998 p.24) argues the idea of the Poor People's Campaign (PPC) was for a «class-based» confrontation to force real change. Prominent SCLC leader and Resurrection City manager Jesse Jackson agreed that the focus was on «class, primarily, and race, secondarily» (Jackson 1968, p. 67).

2. Adult education in American history

The term 'adult education' in the U.S. has a rich legacy stretching back to the 19th century. By 1899, at least four different individuals had used the term, including the Director of New York City's Board of Education Free Lectures programme, Henry M Leipziger, under whose leadership liberal adult education prospered (Stubblefield and Rachal, 1994). More recently, Harold W Stubblefield has identified how adult civic education after 1945 assisted adults to acquire the competencies necessary for participation in civic life. He wrote that the «ultimate purpose was to create a public opinion able to assess critically the accomplishment of government and citizens able to identify and solve common problems» (Stubblefield, 1974, p. 227). Stubblefield also argued that in the post-World War 2 period, American civic education had drastically changed from the old «Americanisation» idea, and by contrast was characterised by citizen participation, individual development, aware and informed citizenry. Of relevance to the struggle of African-Americans for equality, adult education provision in the U.S. has often reflected 'a common thread of learning' i.e. the individual's existence and interaction within society (Muetz and Frush, 2007). Scholars have also identified a number of dominant values that have guided the adult education movement in the U.S., values reflected in learning activities associated with the civil rights movement. Muetz and Frush, (2007, p 42), note these include the values of «hope and optimism», in «encouraging learners to seek individual growth with the assumption this will lead to a better society». In this vein, civil rights activists believed a better life could be achieved in the face of adversity. «Courage» is another value historically associated with adult education, a quality equally relevant to civil rights activism. Referring in particular to adult educators, Muetz and Frush, (2007, p 420), argue that «the ability to move others to think can be linked to the value of courage and goals for adult education».

3. Adult education and the American civil rights movement

Dr. Martin Luther King Jr 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). King's organisation, the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC), saw adult education practice to be an essential component of any successful campaign.

As an organisation, the SCLC 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, KL). Their approach was learner-centred and was underpinned by the basic principle that the «community level is where things really count and where people really grow» (SCLC papers, KL).

The SCLC was involved from the early 1960s in grassroots educational efforts designed to reach «southern disadvantaged blacks» (SCLC papers, KL). The flagship SCLC Citizenship Education Programme (CEP), an adult grassroots training initiative, owed much to the work of individuals such as Dorothy Cotton, Septima Clark and Ella Baker (Crawford *et al.*, 1990). Cotton described the programme as ‘basic but important to achieving our purpose’ (Cotton, 2012, p. 240). It prepared marginalised individuals and communities to work with local government systems to gain access to services and resources. Later described as the «best-kept secret of the civil rights movement» (Cotton, 2012), the Citizenship Education Programme (CEP) grew out of the work of the renowned integrated Highlander Folk School in Tennessee and its collaboration with grassroots organisers in Sea Island communities off the coasts of Georgia and South Carolina. Under the leadership of Myles Horton, Highlander Folk School had become a «powerful tool for the development of movement organisation» (Robnett, 1997, p. 88). Horton sought to use «education as one of the instruments for bringing about a new social order» (Bell *et al.*, 1990, p. xxiii). Highlander supported «co-operative problem solving» and sought to «foster leadership among ordinary citizens» (Charron, 2009, p. 5). From the 1950s, Highlander Folk School was a meeting place for civil rights activists to come together to learn how to take forward their campaigns for equality of the races (Adams *et al.*, 1975). The FBI and others targeted it as a «hotbed» of communism. Many of the women who were involved in organising the Montgomery bus boycott in 1955-56 had previously attended Highlander, including Rosa Parks and members of the influential Women’s Political Council (Garrow, 1987; Robinson, 1989; Robnett, 1997; Burns, 1997; Hamilton, 2013).

In 1961, the SCLC took over CEP as its own official programme. From the early 1960s, through to the planned Poor People’s Campaign (PPC) in 1968, CEP trained countless thousands of low-income people in non-violence and encouraged them to «actively re-envision themselves and create their radically new roles in the transformation of their communities, their nation, and their world» (Harding, 2012). The focus initially was on teaching literacy and more fundamentally linking personal concerns to the overall direction of the civil rights movement (Robnett, 1997, p. 91). The goal was to «teach citizenship by helping people to help themselves and then to participate in bettering their communities» (Charron, 2009, p. 3). CEP provided the foundation for the SCLC mobilisation strategies, «graduates» played a strategic role in SCLC campaigns including the Poor People’s Campaign. CEP represented an alternative to conventional educational practices. Myles Horton had stressed the importance of organising the programme outside of the formal schooling system (Bell *et al.*, 1990, p. 70). Class meetings often took place in tents, community centres, or as in Resurrection City during the Poor People’s Campaign, in the open and under the trees. Certified teachers trained to teach children and not adults were discouraged from offering their services. Teachers adopted a «peer teaching»

approach; they were often «no better educated than those they were teaching to read and write» (Bell et al., 190, p. 79). Black teachers were initially preferred, because of the assumption in a racist society, that whites would dominate black students and therefore have an adverse effect on learning.

CEP enjoyed many landmark successes. Most notably, it helped to prepare thousands of activists who joined the March on Washington in August 1963. The organisers needed masses of people to put the case in Washington «for jobs and freedom». Preparations saw thousands attend workshops in advance of their trip. Dorothy Cotton stressed the importance of the counter-hegemonic role played by citizenship classes in the preparations:

CEP sessions were designed to help empower them (demonstrators), and to remove the mental programming that put forth the notion that government was all-powerful and alien, to «we the people». The people came to claim their role as owners of government. We had arrived at a new place, a new consciousness (Cotton, 2012, p. 221).

Adult education also played an integral role in the voter registration campaigns in the South. So-called «Freedom Schools», based on the CEP approach, became a vehicle for change. In the fight for the ballot, Freedom Schools advanced the cause of voter registration in the Deep South during Freedom Summer in 1964 (Rachal 2000). Participants studied in order to pass the oppressive voter registration literacy tests. Myles Horton described the voter registration classes as more akin to a community organisation i.e. «the students were talking about using their citizenship to do something» (Bell *et al.*, 1990, p. 72). During Freedom Summer, thousands of activists converged on the «closed society» of Mississippi to organise voter registration. Their target was to overthrow the «social paralysis» in Mississippi, a state where «black children had been thrown out of class for asking about civil rights and teachers had been fired for saying the wrong thing» (CSR). Freedom Schools were democratic, targeted at all ages including young children and adults, and encouraged students to share their knowledge and experiences. The curriculum included reading, writing, and basic maths. The curriculum aimed to challenge student's curiosity about the world, introduce them to their own culture and background, and «teach literacy skills in one integrated programme» (CSR). Other subjects included «leadership development», which gave students «the perspective of being in a long line of protest and pressure for social and economic justice» through study of black history and how it connected to the civil rights movement (CSR).

Young people i.e. «tenth and eleventh graders» benefited from the Freedom Schools in a number of ways. The experience gave them a «broad intellectual and academic experience» during the summer, and helped «to form the basis for state-wide student action such as school boycotts, based on their increased awareness» (CSR). Young people and adult participants wrote articles for Freedom School newspapers and investigated local working conditions. Reflecting a global dimension to their work, Freedom Schools held a convention in August 1964 where they called for sanctions against South Africa. The civil rights movement viewed Freedom Schools as «parallel institutions» in the black community i.e. it was crucial

to build their own opposing educational institutions instead of relying on white power structures. Even showing up for a class meeting was as an act of defiance by participants. Whites throughout Mississippi fiercely opposed the organisation of the Freedom Schools. Hundreds of student volunteers from other states arrived to assist in Freedom Summer. The volunteers were predominantly white; few had previous experience of activism. The first wave arrived in Mississippi on June 20th, 1964. White racists murdered three activists, James Chaney, James Schwerner, and Andrew Goodman. The crime made headlines across America and beyond and brought new determination to all of the activists in Mississippi. Freedom Summer in general challenged the dominant hegemony that blacks were happy and content with the separation of the races and their second-class citizenship. Despite violence and intimidation, activists continued to establish Freedom Schools, and voter registration drives, in community centres in more than 40 locations across Mississippi. This success echoed the comments of Dorothy Cotton, CEP organiser, who described the programme as a «runaway train that could not be stopped» (Cotton, 2012, p. 214).

The attempts to win the ballot continued beyond Freedom Summer. In 1965, events in Selma, Alabama, captured the attention of the world. Marches, demonstrations and citizenship schools were organised and were instrumental in ensuring the passage of the Voting Rights Act of 1965. In Selma, young people were inspired by the example of their counterparts in Birmingham in 1963, who as part of the «Children's Movement» had joined the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) campaign to bring an end to discrimination in what was regarded as one of the most segregated towns in America. Young people participated in marches, demonstrations and boycotts of local businesses in Birmingham (Halberstam, 1998). King was harshly criticised by Malcolm X for allowing children to be in harm's way in Birmingham. King recognised however, that children should be active agents in constructing their own futures. In any case, school students freely chose to participate in the campaigns in Birmingham, Selma and elsewhere, sometimes against the expressed wishes of their parents. The SCLC started non-violent training in Birmingham in 1963 with a focus on children. The idea of non-violence was to attack the 'conscience' of a person rather than their body. Children as young as nine attended the sessions. They were motivated by a desire to experience a better future, according to CEP organiser Dorothy Cotton (Cotton, 2012, p. 212). The children were learning what was «meant by non-violent protest and why it was important» (Cotton, 2012, p 213). The children of Birmingham and Selma showed great courage in standing up to the violence and intimidation they experienced. Raymond Arsenault (2013, p 149) noted of Selma that «before meaningful change could occur in the lives of blacks in America, the structural bulwarks of disfranchisement and second-class citizenship had to be confronted and identified in dramatic fashion, highlighted in a way that would disrupt and confound long-standing political and social conventions. This instrumental drama was exactly what was accomplished in Selma».

It was noted by 1965, that the curriculum for the Citizenship Education Programme (CEP), 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). Myles Horton later argued that CEP was not about reading and writing, the real purpose was to be a «citizen». He observed that it had been important to move on from the literacy schools, and to help people «understand how they could use their vote more intelligently and get them interested in running for office» (Bell *et al.*, 1990, p. 82). Students learned therefore of «citizenship responsibilities that ranged from establishing local voting leagues to paying taxes and lobbying for improved municipal services» (Charron, 2009, p.3). 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, KL).

4. Dr. King and the issue of economic injustice

Myles Horton observed, «the poor who can't read and write have a sense that, without structural changes, nothing is worth getting excited about» (Bell *et al.*, 1990, p. 93). King himself appreciated that radical change was required to improve the condition of poor people in American society. As well as being a civil rights advocate, Dr Martin Luther King Jr was a radical leader who fought against all forms of inequality throughout his life. King consistently called for human rights for all, he opposed poverty, racism, imperialism and political disfranchisement as part of an analysis, which viewed inequality not only in American but also in global terms. From the early days of his career at the forefront of the civil rights movement, Dr Martin Luther King Jr surrounded himself with socialist thinking activists. These figures included labour union leader A Philip Randolph and Bayard Rustin, a pacifist and civil rights activist. Rustin was an authority on Gandhian methods of non-violence and civil disobedience and also shaped King's views on economic justice and the role of labour unions from the time of the Montgomery Bus Boycott in 1955-56 (D'Emalio, 2003). During the sit-ins of the early 1960s, Rustin fused social and economic issues by arguing that there was no point in being able to sit at a lunch counter if blacks could not afford to pay for lunch.

Most people identify King with the iconic «I have a Dream Speech», delivered as part of the March on Washington in August 1963. Both Bayard Rustin and A Philip Randolph were closely involved in the organisation of the event. King's references in his speech to the integration of the races and to «freedom» have endured as the predominant memories of that day. The media neglected other messages in his speech. The March on Washington was more generally concerned with «Jobs and Freedom», and King's powerful speech included references to those who lived on a 'lonely island of poverty' and in «the corners of American society». Any assumption therefore that the Poor People's Campaign (PPC) in 1968 represented a departure for King is misleading. In 1956 during the Montgomery Bus Boycott, King committed himself to «winning economic and political power for our race» (MLK archive, BU). In 1957, he 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 archive, BU). In 1961, King argued for human rights agendas in noting that «our needs are identified with labour's needs-decent wages, fair working conditions, liveable housing, and old age security, health and welfare measures»

(MLK archive, BU). He consistently located the civil rights struggle in a broader context, even viewing discrimination including the denial of the right to vote as part of a desire by whites to maintain «economic enslavement» (MLK archive, BU).

The civil rights movement in America initially attacked two levels of institutional racism in America, racism enforced by law (*de jure*), and racism not enforced by law but existing in fact (*de facto*) (Williams, 2007). The so-called «Jim Crow» laws in the South established rigid segregation and removed many blacks from the ballot. By the end of 1965, two major pieces of legislation had been achieved i.e. the Civil Rights Act of 1964, and the Voting Rights Act of 1965. In theory, these addressed social and political issues respectively, but on their own could never bring full equality. By the mid-1960s, King recognised more than ever that economic injustice should now be the predominant focus of his attention. 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. Many of the ideas contained in the Freedom Budget would also find their way into the demands articulated under the banner of the Poor People's Campaign (PPC) in 1968. The Freedom Budget called for structural reforms and linked «racial justice for African-Americans and economic justice for all» (Le Blanc *et al.*, 2013). The Freedom Budget cemented King's position as a leader who supported radical solutions to address exploitation of all kinds. King's growing opposition to the Vietnam War during this period was also inseparable from his struggle for economic justice. The Vietnam War led King to fuse racism, militarism and economic injustice in his condemnation of a conflict, which in his view saw the haemorrhaging of funds away from President Lyndon Johnson's War on Poverty.

Unrest in urban centres in the United States between 1965 and 1968 helped King to see even more clearly that poverty was in reality a class issue that transcended race. King placed jobs, housing and education at the centre of a new ambitious urban agenda. His initial goal was to bring national reform in these areas through another successful localised campaign (Jackson, 2007). Consequently, in 1965, King began an effort to create a non-violent movement in the north, in the Chicago slums. He aspired to create an Open City in Chicago i.e. take direct action and non-violence to the north, mobilise both black and white to end the situation of slum tenements, enforce open housing policies, open up job opportunities, and make the resources of social institutions available to all (Jackson, 2007).

The challenges facing King in Chicago were profound. The «Great Migration» to the north, resulting from both world wars, had brought relatively better prospects for blacks compared to conditions in the rural south. Race relations were poor in Chicago however; the growth of suburbia under Eisenhower in the 1950s merely increased the physical separation of the races. An estimated 95% of suburban residents were white. King outlined a «Chicago Plan» i.e. community organising and dramatic protest against the organisations that «maintained slums». King aspired to «empower» the poor through organisation at the community level to include protest marches and demonstrations. King argued that northern injustice was a consequence of 'economic exploitation'. Rents were higher for blacks; King spoke of a «colour tax» in this regard. A Chicago umbrella group, the Co-ordinating

Council of Community Organisations (CCCO), had already focused on trying to break down school segregation and segregation generally. The SCLC «Chicago Freedom Movement» targeted their attention on slums and segregated housing, the «slum colony». The emphasis was initially on trying to forge coalitions in poor communities. King believed that through organisational efforts he could move poor blacks from «passive» subjects to «active» citizens. King continued to argue that non-violent direct action was the key to success. The SCLC strategy in Chicago included dramatic demonstrations against white homeowners and real estate agents. Marches were organised in all-white neighbourhoods. King's presence in Chicago was antagonistic to whites. He responded to white violence by arguing that «power» explained poverty and violence (Jackson, 2007).

King described the experience in Chicago as the «worst racism» of his life. He observed that «powerlessness» defined everyday life in the urban slums. Chicago led King closer to the idea of building a nationwide coalition of poor people of all races who would push America towards some kind of democratic socialism (Jackson, 2007). He had formulated the Chicago campaign in a broader social and political context, which saw his ideas challenged by black nationalists in urban centres across the north. Unlike black nationalists, King maintained a belief in the necessity for integration of the races across class and race lines. He also thought it was imperative to hold the line on non-violence in the face of black nationalist calls for «self-defence». Adult education was an essential ingredient, activists in Chicago attended workshops on non-violence. He was encouraged by young gang members in Chicago who had been trained by the SCLC in non-violence to prepare them to take on the roles of marshals during marches, and who, according to King, now had a «sense of belonging». The experience of Chicago also told King that he needed the support of sympathetic whites and the federal government. King advised Senator Robert Kennedy that the «white majority's poverty of conscience found its mirror image in the ghetto's despair». The poor were «unheard» and «unfelt» he argued. King concluded the movement was grappling with «basic class issues between the privileged and the underprivileged» (Jackson, 2007).

5. The Poor People's Campaign

All of this paved the way for a Poor People's Campaign (PPC), which King hoped, would bring important federal government legislation to combat poverty (Fager, 1969; Wright, 2007; Mantler, 2008). King conceived of the idea of a Poor People's Campaign (PPC) in late 1967. Marian Wright, counsel to the National Association for the Advancement of Coloured People (NAACP), and Senator Robert Kennedy, encouraged King to bring the poor to Washington King's plan was to mobilise the poor of all races across the nation to travel to Washington where they would occupy space and dramatise the issue of poverty. Senator Robert Kennedy thought that an occupation by the poor of Washington would result in major concessions from government to make them go back to their homes across America (Hamilton, 2016). Andrew Young of the SCLC described the plan as part of a great American tradition of non-violent dissent (Young, 1996). Previous examples of demonstrators occupying space in Washington included Coxey's Army of the unemployed in 1894 and the

Veterans' Bonus March of 1932. Both of these earlier demonstrations in Washington showed how «ambitious, skillful and daring organisers challenged the government and claimed the capital as a political space where citizens could voice their concerns to their elected leaders» (Barber, 2002).

In early 1968, with planning well underway for the PPC, a strike by sanitation workers in Memphis, Tennessee, drew King's attention. He saw an opportunity in Memphis to dramatise the condition of the working poor, whose plight he had seen at first hand in Chicago and elsewhere. King said to his aides, who were skeptical about involvement in Memphis, 'these are poor folks; if we don't stop for them then we don't need to go to Washington'. He added «the plight of the black and of the underpaid worker is one situation in the U.S. They go hand in hand» (Honey, 2007). In a speech in Memphis, King returned to the theme of «powerlessness», a concept as previously mentioned he had spoken of in Chicago in 1966 in relation to those who lived in the slums. He argued that black poverty did not result because of inherent faults in any individual, but was a consequence of the «powerlessness» inflicted by unjust structures of power (Honey, 2007). King proclaimed that «freedom is not something that is voluntarily given by the oppressor. It is something that must be demanded by the oppressed».

In the 1960s, the plantation legacy was in evidence in Memphis. Politically, working class blacks had no power or influence. Attempts to get city recognition of a black sanitation workers union were unsuccessful. The death of two workers in an accident caused by faulty equipment in January 1968 proved the catalyst leading to a strike. Public opinion split across race lines, white opposition to black union organising became a proxy war against the civil rights movement more generally. Blacks in contrast viewed union recognition as central to their civil and human rights (Jackson, 2007). The sanitation workers demands included better wages, overtime pay, safety programmes, and union recognition.

On March 28, 1968, a march led by King in Memphis in support of the workers on, led to widespread disruption and police attacks on the marchers. The chaos around the march encouraged white allies of King to claim that he could no longer hold the line on non-violence. The FBI, consistent opponents of the civil rights movement and its goals, blamed the disorder on King, claiming that violence followed him around. The violence at the march was a great blow to King and led to increasing criticism from black nationalists who viewed «turning the other cheek» as part of a slave mentality. King had hoped that the Poor People's Campaign (PPC) would be a means of uniting the disparate elements of a fractured civil rights movement. As mentioned earlier, King's approaches to non-violence and civil disobedience drew from the example of Gandhi who had confronted the power of «those who resisted progress» and for whom non-violent action «was not just intelligent, it was indispensable» (Hodgson, 2009, p.54). Adult learning might have prevented the disorder at the Memphis March. For example, Dorothy Cotton, of the SCLC Citizenship Education Programme (CEP), later revealed that there had been a delay in plans to set up workshops on non-violence in Memphis. Cotton argued that it had always been important for the SCLC to convince local activists of the SCLC commitment to organising, teaching, and motivating people to work from the non-violent perspective (Cotton, 2012, p. 257).

Despite the opposition of many of his closest aides who feared for his safety, King decided to return to Memphis on April 3rd 1968, to offer further support to the striking sanitation workers. In what was to become his final speech, King in effect wrote his own eulogy. He outlined the power of non-violence, and the determination of the «oppressed» to effect social change. The speech captured his essential reasons for mounting a Poor People's Campaign. King was assassinated on April 4th 1968. The Memphis strike then ended in agreement. Civil rights leader James Lawson of the SCLC said that 'the spirit of Memphis had brought about a «threshold moment»'. Other public workers strikes followed, inspired by the example of Memphis e.g. black female workers in Charleston, South Carolina. Despite the great void left by the death of Dr. King, the movement decided to continue with the Poor People's Campaign. His death had 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). PPC activist Tyrone Brooks reflected that 'we had no option but to continue as a tribute to Dr King' (personal interview by author, 2014).

6. Learning for change

Organisers worked from late 1967 to plan the Poor People's Campaign (PPC) (Sidy, 2012). The civil rights movement did not exist in a vacuum and the wider social and political culture in which it operated was influential in providing support for the campaign. Previous civil rights campaigns including the Montgomery bus boycott in 1955-56 had benefited from the foundations laid by individual activists and the contributions of civic organisations including women's groups, the churches and labour unions all of whom came together in coalition against racism and discrimination (Branch 1988; Brinkley 2000). In preparation for the PPC, the SCLC provided opportunities for prospective participants for reflection and discussion on the nature of poverty in America through means of «work-study» programmes (SCLC papers, KL). An Educational Task Force (ETF) worked nation-wide to educate and involve both the poor and the non-poor in the issue of poverty (SCLC papers, KL). Hundreds of «sponsoring organisations» i.e. groups already working in communities on poverty issues, signed up for the campaign. These included the Committee for Poor People, Kentucky; Freedom and Peace Committee, NY; Mexican American Youth Organisation, Texas; United Farm Workers, NY (SCLC papers, KL). The organisations reflected the diversity and complexity of activism across the nation. 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).

Perhaps the most remarkable group were those who travelled part of the distance to Washington by Mule Train. They were organised in the small town of Marks in Mississippi, which according to the U.S. census of 1960, was the poorest town in the poorest state in America. 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). The registration forms completed by those in Marks who joined the PPC effort revealed insights into the depth and scope of poverty experienced in the area. They confirmed for example that many residents in the county had no running water in their houses. Some had no income, yet due to punitive government restrictions, received no welfare support (SCLC papers, 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 in a «low swamp» (SCLC papers, KL). The SCLC reported that some blacks in Quitman County were 'near starvation' (SCLC papers, KL). In selecting Marks as the starting point for the campaign, Dr King calculated the nation would hear the voices of the poorest in society for the first time. Poverty would also be in the national spotlight. 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.

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 SCLC drew a crucial lesson from previous campaigns including Freedom Summer, 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, KL). Typically, two mass meetings and two workshops were organised each week in Marks as part of an adult education programme (SCLC papers, KL). Organisers targeted those with no previous experience of campaign participation, and who would likely form the main body of people travelling to Washington. With the planned occupation in Washington in mind, the primary focus was 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, KL).

The ways in which workshop group leaders interacted with learners drew from the Citizenship Education Programme (CEP) principles of good practice and therefore represented a rejection of more formal models of education. The workshop facilitators began with the issues of concern to local people. Bernice Robinson, the first CEP teacher at Highlander Folk School, had observed that the most important thing she said to the students at a new class was «I am here to learn with you» (Bell *et al.*, 1990, p. 156). The workshops were 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). The approach in Marks 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, 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.

Eventually, the Marks group were ready and prepared to leave for Washington. Fifteen wagons set off. Local people were «not for turning back». The wagons contained «as many poor people as they'll carry now they are sure nobody's going to turn them around» (SCLC papers, KL). They were a group of people who were determined that their voices would be heard for the first time. Many of them had never before left Quitman County. Several were simple sharecroppers; almost all had little or no income. Workshops, demonstrations and marches helped prepare them for the trip to Washington. Marks resident Joy Miller said that she was going to Washington for «freedom, better houses and better clothes and food» (SCLC papers, 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, KL). One activist observed, «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). The learning made possible by the PPC challenged the hegemonic practices, values and expectations, which governed life in Marks. Low-income people had come together as a group and for the first time, experienced a sense of independence from a stifling white racist society. Their actions in joining the campaign, participating together in learning activities, and travelling to Washington, represented a rejection of the implicit and explicit strict segregation codes in their state. Conforming to the old ways was no longer an option. The legacy of slavery, including racist stereotypes that held blacks were happy with their condition, was set aside.

Individuals in Marks arguably 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). Ezra Hampton 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, KL). The New York Times quoted Marks resident, 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 ain't the stupid ones, and besides what could be more stupid than to say somebody deserves to be poor?» (SCLC papers, KL).

One hundred and fifteen people including a mother of 13 children, set off from Marks. 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 SCLC reported a «carnival atmosphere»; many children came to view the mules, as they made ready to leave (SCLC papers, KL). Political slogans emblazoned on the sides of the wagons allowed those on board to reach out to others sharing a common bond of poverty in the communities the Mule Train passed through. One slogan commented on government policy priorities of the period with the message «Which is better? Send Man to Moon or Feed Him on Earth». 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.

7. Occupying Washington

On May 15th 1968, Resurrection City, the shantytown built to house the PPC demonstrators, opened in the Mall in Washington. The SCLC vowed to remain there until federal government met their campaign demands (Nipson, 1972). The plan then was to continue the campaign across the nation after the participants had returned to their own communities from Washington. A multi-racial group of around 6,500 poor people from across the United States took up residence in the temporary community. The SCLC attempted to register all of those entering the temporary city. They reported:

The information that is available on our 6312 registrants, although limited in nature, is unique in the history of social protest movements. It will help to document accurately the character of those whose presence in Washington sharply posed the problem of poverty to the entire nation in the spring of 1968 (Gollin, 1968).

Thousands of non-resident participants at Resurrection City were not registered. They included some Mexican-Americans and Native Americans who stayed in alternative accommodation in Washington, 4,000 Puerto Ricans who came for one day to show their support (Gollin, 1968, p. 3), and volunteers such as health care professionals and students. An estimated 50,000 from across the nation also took part in a mass multi-racial demonstration badged as «Solidarity Day» on June 19th, 1968. The SCLC argued that Resurrection City 'was set up primarily to show the world, the nation, how people can live in togetherness' from all backgrounds (Peterson, 1968, p. 35).

In the spirit of non-violence, the demonstrators arrived only with their demands for the federal government to end poverty in the United States. The demands included a range of civil and human rights issues as set out below:

America is 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, KL).

Their main demand was for an Economic Bill of Rights to apply to all citizens. This radical demand 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 for better homes, affordable and accessible health care, and better quality education. In Resurrection City, activists lived in specially constructed wooden huts and tents on the Mall in the symbolic shadow of the Lincoln Memorial. Resurrection City was however a short-lived experiment. DC authorities (Gollin, 1969, p.7) tore it down after only six weeks. During its brief existence, the city had a basic infrastructure, with attempts made to incorporate many of the facilities found in larger permanent urban centres. The normal city functions of maintenance, sanitation, supplies, information (scheduling, communications, and mail), security (police, fire protection), transportation, health services, food services, childcare, and recreation were all addressed (Finkelstein, 1969, CC). It also had a City Hall, a Health Care Centre, and in recognition of the importance given to adult learning, a Poor People's University (PPU), Freedom Schools and a Library. Resurrection City was viewed as «a useful model of community development in action», and «there was, in some areas, a sense of place and participation seldom seen in slums or public housing» (Wiebenson, 1969, p. 411).

8. Organising the poor in Resurrection City

With many different groups of poor sharing the same space in Resurrection City, complete unity of purpose was impossible. Activists acknowledged that «cultural, programmatic and ideological differences present a serious organisational problem for the city» (Moore, 1968, CC). There were some tensions between different racial groups and within them. A key activist observed that:

You had a city going; and like in any other city, everybody wanted to be the top politician in that city. So there was a normal, healthy struggle of poor people finding out that they had power and wanted to exercise it (Shannon, 1968, p. 45, RB).

Conflicts between different racial and cultural groups made co-operation difficult, but many learned from their close contact with their neighbours in Resurrection City. For example, a member of the Sioux tribe acknowledged that some members of her community thought it wrong to mix with black people but she actively went round «educating people» to try to change their minds (Walker, August 1968, p. 10, RB). Bad publicity however damaged the reputation of the PPC. Bretz (2010, p. 19) suggests that the leadership of the SCLC were less astute than King had been in his handling of the news media. By contrast, activist John Rutherford believed government because of its «growing efficiency» eventually closed the city. He argued that it had been «well run and well structured» (Rutherford, July 4th, 1968, RB). Incessant wet weather «had a drastic, if immeasurable, effect on continued residency as it created difficult living conditions» (Gollin, 1968, p. 7). Another resident claimed the authorities «were afraid of the strength that had withstood the endless

rain» (in Freedman, 1970, p. 126). Jesse Jackson, Mayor of Resurrection City, wrote that «problems in the city were amplified out of all proportion by the news media» (1968, p. 66). For many of the poor, «the mud hole was a paradise» as they had raised their standard of living by moving in (Freedman, 1970, p. 31). However, it is naive to assume that life in the city was unproblematic. The children who were there with their parents found the experience challenging (Afield *et al.* 1970). One activist observed that just as in any community, «there were people there who'd give you the shirt off their backs, and others who'd kill you for yours, and every type in between» (in Freedman, 1970, p. 18). Jesse Jackson observed that inter-racial tension was not surprising since throughout American history the poor had been taught that other poor groups were their «enemies» (1968, p. 66).

9. The Poor People's University (PPU) and Freedom Schools

The overall purpose of the PPC was to ignite a nationwide «action-oriented programme» (Wright, 2007, p. 412). In early 1968 King had spoken of his intention to «dislocate Washington by legitimate nonviolent protest», and threatened to cast the government as the «villain» if it did not respond positively to the demands of the PPC. He described the campaign as the nation's «last desperate chance» to meet the challenges of poverty (The Washingtonian, February, 1968, p. 52). In the event, daily life in Resurrection City was organised so that participants could play their part in working for change in their life circumstances. Daily demonstrations and marches disrupted the city without seeking to destroy life and property. The lobbying of Congress took place every day. The range of formal and informal learning opportunities included workshops, meetings and discussions, Freedom Schools, demonstrations, and cultural events. One hundred and fifty volunteer advocates, the «Speakers Bureau» or the Educational Task Force, a component of the PPC, took on a public education role.

Many of the poor in Resurrection City had little or no education. The campaign required active, committed, non-violent and informed campaigners who as far as possible were working to a common agenda. The solution to the twin but related challenges of 'building community' and creating the capacity for activism in Resurrection City and beyond lay in great measure with adult education. One leader of the SCLC noted:

Resurrection City brought people into a «domestic» relationship with each other, but it was now important to harness this potential to bring everyone forward into a «philosophical context» to be used as a vehicle for non-violent direct action (Sampson, July 8th, 1968, p.28, RB).

The centrepiece of the adult education effort at Resurrection City was the Poor People's University (PPU). The PPU aimed to:

Serve to help educate and equip for community and national action. It is a «true» university in that it will serve people of greatly varying educational backgrounds. Its purpose is to produce a greater level of awareness and

action on the need to confront the American social structure. Coupled with the equipment, the expertise, for social change, this effort can provide the basis for far-reaching and long-lasting ameliorative change (SCLC papers, KL).

The Poor People's University required few resources; it operated out of a small office and a tent. The plan was to «confront» both the issue of poverty and tactics for its elimination through meetings, lectures, films, presentations and discussion groups (SCLC papers, KL). Activities were free of charge and open to all. Books particularly those «dealing with minorities and their needs» were available (SCLC papers, KL). In the spirit of the Citizenship Education Programme (CEP), the PPU was a fluid entity i.e. courses, discussions and events were organised where there was a need and space was available. As previously mentioned, discussions often took place «under the trees» (SCLC papers, KL). The curriculum was expanded through the contribution of educators from the national organisation Scholarship, Education and Defense Fund for Racial Equality (SEDFRE), which «worked at grassroots level to effect social change» (Rich, April, 1968, p. 1, CC). The Newman (2006) notion of the «activist» educator in social movements, who helps people translate their anger and frustration into forms of action whose impact will be useful, is particularly helpful here in understanding the SEDFRE approach (Newman, 2006, p. 50). SEDFRE provided skills training including specialised training in human resources, delivered workshops on the theory and practice of community development, and organised discussions and workshops on the techniques and strategies of citizen participation and non-violent civil disobedience (Moore, June^{5th}, 1968, CC). Workshop topics on the first day of the Poor People's University (PPU) included «the problems of human communications», «man's first literature», and «social welfare problems» (PPU Newsletter, May 31, 1968, KL). A mass meeting followed, to which all were invited. The schedule for June 9-15, 1968, included «the politics of race», and «American black literature» (SCLC papers, KL).

The legacy of Freedom Schools loomed large in Resurrection City. The PPU was planned and conceived as a greatly expanded «Freedom School» (Cooks, May 16th, 1968, RB). In the Freedom School tradition, teaching was learner-centred and not driven by the authority and perceived wisdom of the teacher, with the curriculum intended to reflect the life experiences of participants. A press article heralded the arrival of Freedom Schools in Resurrection City with the heading «Freedom Schools Open: No Philosophy and No Pencils» (SCLC papers, KL). Organiser Charles Cheng said, «we are not going to make decisions for the community», and «we will radically depart from traditional educational methods» (SCLC papers, KL). Freedom School classes were held anywhere, and were spontaneously organised each day depending on what was happening in the campaign. From 100 to 200 participants regularly attended each session. The Freedom School curriculum in Resurrection City included discussions on the «participants» personal experiences of poverty (SCLC papers, KL). In the spirit of the Citizenship Education Programme (CEP), teachers were recruited who included «drop-outs» and «professors», «poor» people led some classes. The training of teachers took place at a local community controlled school. Charles Cheng observed «Freedom Schools were about empowering people to take control of their own lives, including their own institutions». (Cheng,

RB). Cheng's belief in the value of the Freedom Schools echoed their success in previous campaigns. The Director of CEP, Dorothy Cotton, observed:

Once people accepted they did not have to live as victims-- the goal of CEP training, they changed how they saw and felt about themselves. This personal transformation was fundamental to realising the promise of democracy (Cotton, 2012, p. 240).

10. Challenging dominant narratives about the causes of poverty

Resurrection City arguably became a centre of political education and activism. As Holst (2011, p. 125) argues, in social movements, an education based on the lived realities of subjects, «is key to making them aware of the revolutionary nature of their objective situation as a part of the development of a critical revolutionary practice». The PPU programme came out of the life experiences of the poor who were there. Meek (2011, p. 168) has identified how scholars are increasingly looking at the experiential learning that occurs in everyday contexts, such as discussion groups and political demonstrations, to explore how movements integrate cultural and political ideals in an educational setting (Holst 2002; Gouin, 2009). In addition to the PPU and Freedom School activities, demonstrations took place every day at executive agency buildings especially the Department of Agriculture, the Supreme Court, the White House and other symbolic landmarks. These provided a valuable outlet for participants and helped engender the feeling they were in Washington on serious business. In one example, the women from Resurrection City decided to demonstrate at the Capitol building, the seat of American political power. In a standoff with police, the women, appreciating they did not have a permit to march that day, declared they were there as «tourists» and wanted to meet their Senators (Freedman, 1970). It was reported each «side knew each other too well» and a compromise was agreed which allowed the women to enter the Capitol and claim they had «liberated» part of the building (in Freedman, 1970, p. 59).

The adverse reaction to the PPC arguably further polarised opinion on race and poverty across America. There was a sense the PPC had alienated the nation and that things were moving too far and too fast on the poverty issue. Senator Robert F Kennedy's assassination in early June 1968, whilst campaigning for the presidency, was a great blow for many in Resurrection City who had come to regard him as a standard-bearer in the fight against poverty (Clarke 2008; Schmitt 2010, Hamilton, 2016). President of the SCLC, Ralph Abernathy, reflected that Kennedy's death was another manifestation of the «daily violence and oppression» in America visited on citizens through inadequate housing, lack of decent education and hunger (Abernathy, June 6th, 1968, p.1, KL).

From the perspective of opponents, the campaign presented a significant threat to the stability of Washington and American society more generally. Political elites in particular mobilised against the idea of the «great unwashed» coming to Washington. Segregationist politician, Senator Stennis of Mississippi, had 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 no less than an assault on capitalist values and a threat to social order. The PPC challenged the status quo. 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 based on their alleged communist sympathies (Garrow, 1983; McKnight, 1998). Hoover was implacably opposed to the PPC, and from early March 1968, made plans to disrupt the campaign through techniques such as spreading lies and rumours to discourage potential recruits from joining the campaign in Washington (Kotz, 2005, pp. 387-88).

Resurrection City was torn down beginning on June 24th 1968. In late 1968, the government claimed campaign leaders felt it had met about half of the PPC demands (SCLC papers, KL). Bretz (2010, p.19) notes that the SCLC leadership lowered their demands as the campaign progressed. The SCLC thought that the major gains included the truly national nature of the PPC; «some money although not enough», for health facilities and medical care, education, roads and welfare; a multi-million dollar housing law; and finally the prevention of widespread riots and violence «due to our non-violent confrontation in Washington» (SCLC papers, KL). Overall the hopes for significant and immediate action on poverty were dashed which has contributed to a view ever since the PPC was a failure. Legislation had been demanded in three areas i.e. housing, employment, welfare. The only action came through a Fair Housing bill (SCLC papers, KL). Attention has tended to focus on the failure of government to meet many of the campaign demands. However, the PPC was potentially life changing for many participants. Jesse Jackson reflected that Resurrection City «cannot be seen as a mud hole in Washington, but it is rather an idea unleashed in history... the idea has taken root and is growing across the country» (Jackson, 1968, p. 74). A health care professional reflected in 1968 that although she had previously «intellectually» understood poverty, Resurrection City was where she really began to learn the true nature of the issue and «intended to communicate this to people outside» (Billings, Aug 1968, p. 1698). The low-income participants had also learned a great deal. Charles Cheng maintained:

The Freedom Schools in the broadest sense started the day the poor people began to leave their homes. People had the «School», through the action of being in the PPC (Cheng, CSR).

Langdon (2011) has indicated how learning in social movements can occur in concentrated moments of struggle, as people learn it is possible to challenge the unchallengeable and learn the practical processes of making this happen. From the moment the poor began to prepare for their journey to Washington, many felt themselves part of something historic. Their experience was part of the learning process associated with participation in social movements. Social movement theory suggests that engagement in local communities and social movements is an important

factor for learning solidarity and coalition building strategies (Larrabure, 2011 p.194). Meek (2011, p. 169) notes that within social movements, such unacknowledged learning is particularly common and quotes Foley (1999, p. 1) who indicates it is «embedded in action and is often not recognised as learning». One of the criticisms levelled against the poor was that they were there in Washington simply to demand handouts. This is to distort the purpose of the campaign, and the importance of adult learning within it. The claim was that Resurrection City «radicalised» many people (Shannon, 1968, p. 20, RB). Important progress was made in creating a critical mass of people who now considered that their experiences of poverty constituted a common bond between them and who had the new knowledge and confidence to carry forward their struggle for economic equality. Despite disagreements between the constituencies represented in Resurrection City, Jesse Jackson (1968, p. 66) argued that Resurrection City allowed the poor from different backgrounds to come together and in the process began «learning to appreciate the other and to gather information about the other». He added that it «was wallowing together in the mud that we were allowed to hear, to feel and to see each other for the first time in our American experience».

11. Dismantling authoritarianism

Learning activities in Resurrection City rejected banking education and embraced the principle of the need to deal with «real life experiences, experiences which reveal the crucial problems faced by the poor and it is essential the poor be free to articulate their problems» (SCLC papers, KL). Jesse Jackson (1968, p. 67) reflected that the informal meetings provided a forum for the poor to come together and understand the «history of discrimination» from the different perspectives represented there e.g. as a consequence of their history the «Indians' were “anti-colonial” and made this clear to other groups. There were analytical sessions where participants discussed their felt needs, sought a deeper understanding of their dilemma and learned about protest, collaboration and management of conflict» (Moore, 1968, CC). The poor were arguably politicised in the process. 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. In order to challenge dominance, Freire has argued that ‘a decolonising of mentality’ is required (Freire, 1978, p. 14). The learning experiences made possible by the PPC, arguably gave

local people effective access to knowledge and information assisting them to begin to challenge the status quo of poverty and discrimination. The PPC in this sense helped to transform people into active citizens and no longer passive subjects. Mule Train activist 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 do not say «yes, suh, boss», anymore (in Freeman, 1998, p. 117).

Although she understood that change at the national level had been limited following the PPC, Collins nevertheless articulated a strong case that her involvement had changed her both as an individual and as a member of a broader Marks community of poor people. During what for many was a great period of social and personal upheaval, she «stood tall» and rejected the idea that change for her and her family was not possible. In an interview conducted by this author, Dr Bernard Lafayette, appointed by Dr King as national co-ordinator of the PPC, explained 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).

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. Lang, 2014). During the PPC, low-income people came together in the workshops, meetings and demonstrations in moments of learning. Some situations can provide both a place and space for disenfranchised groups to learn together (Grace *et al.*, 2009, p. 72). Through learning, the civil rights slogan of «I am somebody» resonated in Marks and elsewhere as the poorest people in the community found common ground alongside others in similar economic situations. In taking matters into their own hands, PPC participants found new strength and confidence. Hill (2004) argues that activism in itself is the practice of adult education. By acting to change their world, those who travelled to Washington can be viewed as an example of the kind of oppressed people, 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).

The PPC arguably brought validation to those who went to Washington. 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. 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 encouraged «critical» adult learning, i.e. it led to «empowerment and development of voice» (Hill, 2004, p. 87). Through their presence

on the journey to Washington and in Resurrection City, low-income participants thrust poverty and the inequalities associated with it into the national spotlight. 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».

In terms of learning «from» a movement, the SCLC thought that the greatest gain was the exposure of poverty to the American public (SCLC papers, KL). The SCLC itself observed that «It is the nation and world at large that are in desperate need of education» (SCLC papers, KL). As Eaklor (1997) argues, «without visibility there is no history». It has been demonstrated how social movements can create «counter publics» and «counter knowledges» which challenge the hegemony of dominant corporate and state discourses (Walter, 2007, p. 259). Daily demonstrations by the poor in Washington played their part and dramatised poverty to the public and government executive agencies. Thanks to Resurrection City, the nation also understood that poverty was not restricted to any particular group or any region. The PPC can be regarded as an example of how the experience of a social movement «is testament not only to the transformative power of such (adult) learning for individuals, but also to its role in sparking social change across diverse boundaries of concern, outrage and conviction» (Walter, 2007, p. 259). In this connection, Holst (2011) has also referred to the «transformative learning» made possible by social movements in that they are a means through which society learns about itself and its future. One campaigner reflected that Resurrection City was:

An extremely valuable educational tool for the whole society. It was a national demonstration, it was a great sit-in, sleep-in, stay-in and demonstration-in, and it came to Washington (Shannon, August 12th, 1968, p. 20, RB).

12. Conclusion

A number of scholars have identified different models of adult education provision. Thomas (1982) highlighted four models i.e. revolution, reform, maintenance and conservation. Jarvis (1985) described «education from above», «education of equals», and a «reformist perspective». With reference to adult civic education in the U.S post 1945 period, Harold W Stubblefield wrote that generally it did not opt for radical social change, rather it called for «evolutionary social change whereby the people themselves identified problematic situations and executed change strategies» (Stubblefield, 1974, p. 236). Where can we place the American civil rights movement? Thomas (1986, pp. 287-288) wrote that Freire gave educators the breakthrough, that is the recognition that the root of oppression in all societies derives from the distribution of power, which Freire advocated powerless people in all systems should understand partly through adult education. The American civil rights movement demonstrated crucial links between education, power and social change, and the importance of learning and the content of programmes in these relationships. Activists viewed adult education as a potential programme of action to serve their particular social interests and purposes. In order to achieve their

ambitious goals, movement campaigns offered alternative models to that of more formal education, for example through the medium of demonstrations, workshops, and marches.

The learning that took place during the Poor People's Campaign in particular was potentially radical. Lovett (1988, p. XV1) identified three elements in the radical tradition of adult education, i.e. it has linked education to social movements, it has sought to construct alternative adult education organisations and movements, and finally it has emphasised a collective perspective concerned with individual and collective advancement. All of these criteria apply to the civil rights movement. It has also been observed that the real test of the intentions of any educational enterprise are to be found in the content of the education provided (Harrop, 1987, p 440). The Citizenship Education Programme (CEP), which sought to develop adult citizens through group learning, helped to lay the seeds of activism for the Poor People's Campaign (PPC) in 1968 through a curriculum, which drew from the life experiences of participants. Jackson (1980) states that through education, people can be more aware and conscious of the economic, historical and political factors, which have influenced their place in society. Of particular relevance to the PPC, Jackson (1980) maintained that motivation comes from learning about the way society works and how people relate to that. Participants in the PPC came to a position where they challenged the dominant philosophy that the reasons for an individual's life situation lay in his or her own inadequacies, passed on from generation to generation. Dr Martin Luther King Jr understood that the roots of poverty and inequality were located in social, structural and external constraints and causes. PPC participants had effective access to critical and developmental programmes of learning. The workshops, marches and demonstrations assisted them to consider the causes of poverty and to understand the goals and aspirations of the movement. Those involved in adult education have been described as «planners of the future, not surveyors of the past» (Houle 1992, p. 35). This is no truer than in the example of the American civil rights movement. An activist from Marks, Mississippi, maintained, the PPC «will give poor people a chance to live again in all ways» (SCLC papers, KL).

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