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Highlander Center: Hotlines and Cultural Bazaars

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Pedagogy and Theatre of the Oppressed Journal
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Highlander Center: Hotlines and Cultural Bazaars

Je Naé Taylor¹

Since the pandemic's arrival, Highlander has created specially tailored on-line community-building spaces, programs, and re-granting opportunities for artists working at the intersection of cultural production and social change. This report documents two examples. The first is a "Cultural Workers Hotline" for BIPOC artists to share struggles, needs, and strategies for (a) coping with the impact of the pandemic on their livelihoods and (b) creating change-oriented artistic responses to the pandemic in their communities. Highlander staff have held multiple weekly virtual spaces for all of our programs, and each gathering has employed an artist to be a graphic note taker. Illustrations are part of this report.

The second are Cultural Bazaars which use theatre skills including stage design, costume, spectators, games, images, forum and legislative theatre to be a forum for our people to engage and expand the fullness of their lives. The report includes two videos which document a Bazaar.

Since 1932 the Highlander Center has been gathering people. We are a catalyst for people. A bridge. A hill. A ground. A circle. And we intend to continue fostering the kind of cultural sharing that we have always encouraged. Those who are community culture workers and community cultural bearers need more time together to explore common concerns in greater depth. They need more space to deal creatively with the many sensitive aspects of communicating clearly across cultural lines.

We are convinced that we must continue to learn together how we build the grassroots movement to reclaim control of our culture and assess its value and traditions through analysis, teaching, learning, and actions. We have come to recognize a profound need for people to not only tell their stories but to tell them right and by doing so carve space that says we are here and this is what we have done and we won't go away.

¹ Je Nae Taylor is a Cultural Organizer at the Highlander Center, which is a catalyst for grassroots organizing and movement building in Appalachia and the South. We work with people fighting for **justice, equality** and **sustainability**, supporting their efforts to take collective action to shape their own destiny. More information about the Highlander Center can be found at <https://www.highlandercenter.org/>.

Highlander
HONORS
Septima Clark
ON HER BIRTHDAY
MAY 3 2020
MAY 3, 1916
DEC 15, 1987

WELCOME! OVER 100 PEOPLE IN THIS CALL OVER 250 WHO CONTRIBUTED TO THE SEPTIMA CLARK LEARNING CENTER

WE'RE HERE TODAY TO CELEBRATE HER LEGACY

LEARN HOW WE CAN WALK INTO HER LEGACY

SEE WHAT HIGHLANDER HAS DONE TO FORTIFY & SUPPORT HER LEGACY

Today we honor a woman that was one of the most brilliant women from the Low Country who taught hundreds of thousands what it meant to be a good person what it meant to be a good citizen and what it meant to believe in social justice...at a time that this work could've gotten her killed.

AGN-LEE SHE WAS AN OCEAN OF KNOWLEDGE, AN OCEAN OF EDUCATION, AWARENESS, SERVICE TO THE COMMUNITY

Video: "They say I'm your Teacher"
[A CLIP FROM THE MOVIE "YOU GOT TO MOVE" HAS] tells the story of the Citizenship School program that Septima brought to Highlander from the Sea Islands.

Bernice Robinson
CIVIL RIGHTS ACTIVIST, EDUCATOR, AND SEPTIMA CLARK'S COUSIN

THE ONLY WAY WE WOULD BE ABLE TO BRING ABOUT CHANGES WOULD BE THROUGH THE VOTE. BLACKS COULDN'T VOTE.

BERNICE ROBINSON

IN 1952 A WOMAN [DID IT WAS] A BLACK IN THOSE DAYS WOULD BE CALLED A WHORE. SHE WAS CALLED A WHORE BECAUSE SHE WAS PROBLEMS, AND DOWN HERE WE COULDN'T EVEN GO TO THE BROTHER. SO I THOUGHT THAT WOULD BE A KINDER-HEARD TO GO.

SEPTIMA CLARK ON HER BROTHER

IT WAS LIKE LIGHT COMING INTO DARKNESS. SINCE THEY HADN'T LEARN TO READ AND WRITE THEY ALWAYS VOTED... PEOPLE BECAME AWARE OF THE POWER WITHIN THEM TO GET THINGS DONE.

BERNICE ROBINSON

IF THERE WERE NO COMMUNITY ORGANIZATIONS IN THE PLACE WHERE THEY WERE THE OUTCASTS CLASSES, THEY WOULD BE ABLE TO GET TOGETHER AND ORGANIZE AND CREATE LOCAL LEAGUES AT IT'S OWNERS.

CITIZENSHIP SCHOOLS BECAME THE FIRST PROGRAM THAT SPREAD ACROSS THE SOUTH AND THE BASIS FOR THE CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT.

EVERYBODY IS A TEACHER. EVERYBODY IS A LEARNER.
- Highlander motto

Yvonne Clark Rhines
LISTED AS HIGHLANDER LEADER FOR 2 YEARS WITH AN ORGANIZATION THAT WAS \$100

Mateogle Memories
"IT WAS FOR THE BE BORN I WAS LITTLE... I GOT TO FIGHT WITH THE SONGS OF BORN [OF A FAMILY THAT LIVED ON THE GRASS]"

NERIE CLARK
WAS VERY YOUNG WHEN SHE WENT TO HIGHLANDER, BUT SHE HADN'T GENERAL TIMES IN THE SUMMER.

"I REMEMBER THAT WE ATE A LOT OF BAKED POTATOES UP THERE AND THE MUSIC WAS SO GOOD. WE WERE SO HAPPY. I LOVE REMEMBERING BEING IN THE MOUNTAIN AND MEETING ALL THE DIFFERENT PEOPLE."

Mama Sepaie
MAMA SEPAIE TAUGHT US EVERYTHING SHE TAUGHT US HOW TO GO CAMPING... SEE FISHES DOWN THE RIVER... AND EVERY CHRISTMAS SHE MADE PINEAPPLES FROM ONE AND EVERYONE CAME LIST TO GIVE ALMS TO THE CHURCH MEMBERS AND HER NEIGHBORS."

LORI ROBINSON JENNINGS
I SPENT MANY, MANY, MANY SUMMERS WITH HER [IN COLLETON]. I WAS CHALLENGED BY HER AS WELL AS BY MY BROTHER ROBINSON. SHE WAS MY EVERYTHING. I WAS TRULY BLESSED TO SEE A LOT OF THINGS ONE SUMMER AS TO... I TRY TO LIVE UPON THE ROAD THAT SHE DID FOR EVERYONE AND TRY TO BE LIKE HER."

Mama Sepaie didn't play when it came to going to church. One morning I had to say my church didn't fit. Mama Sepaie took a bible to those that said all the time out and I went to church with open eyes!

SEPTIMA UN
LORIE ROBINSON JENNINGS
That house had on your door policy. There was a sign on the door that said:
"Lorrie, maybe if everybody could come I stay."
AND WHY THE STATE (NOT A BROWN PEOPLE) OF THE

SEPTIMA CLARK LEARNING CENTER

ASH-LEE
WHAT A POWERFUL MESSAGE THESE 200+ PHOTOS TELL US. HOW LORIE ROBINSON & NERIE CLARK ARE THE REASON SO MANY OF US GET TO LIVE COMFORTABLE LIVES TODAY IN COLLETON. IN THE 1950S, WE STILL HAD SO MUCH TO DO BECAUSE OF THE SEPARATION. THEY MADE... ON BEHALF OF THE SOCIAL MOVEMENTS & HIGHLANDER, THANK YOU SO MUCH FOR SHARING THIS CLARK WITH US.

UPSTAIRS
THE LIBRARY & ARCHIVE ROOM OFFERS FOR RESEARCH AND EDUCATION.
FELLOWSHIP ROOMS WITH AN ELEVATOR

DOWNSTAIRS
MULTI-PURPOSE SPACE FOR MEETINGS TO GATHER, SHOW THE ARTS, AND MORE. PLEASE CONTACT US FOR MORE INFORMATION.

OUTSIDE
APPROXIMATE 1000+ OF THE SPACE AVAILABLE.
WALK, JOYFUL, AND MORE. PLEASE CONTACT US FOR MORE INFORMATION.

ONLINE
DIGITAL PRESENCE WITH A VIRTUAL HISTORY TOUR THROUGHOUT THE YEAR. THANK YOU TO THE HISTORY IN AN INTERACTIVE WAY.

THANK YOU TO ALL THE DONORS ON THIS CALL INCLUDING: CHRISTOPHER WALTER CLARK, AS WELL AS GREAT FRIENDS AND SUPPORTERS: ROBINSON CLARK, NERIE CLARK, BRUNSON CLARK, AND SEPTIMA PROTESTER CLARK.

THANK YOU HIGHLANDER STAFF: JAZELA RILEY, PAMELA NORRIS, BILLY GIBSON, OR GREENE, & THE FAMILY OF SEPTIMA CLARK.

Happy Birthday SEPTIMA CLARK!
DO SOMETHINGS TO HONOR HER TODAY

300 Not Bored!

We know that artists help create the worlds we yearn for, making it possible to experience the liberation we're seeking. Our work with artists comes most alive through our methodology of cultural organizing, which is the practice of combining the cultural traditions of people (spirituality, wellness, faith traditions) with people's artistic and cultural productions (art, theatre, music, dance, food) to shift policy and practice at the interpersonal, local, state, and regional levels (and beyond). The majority of Highlander's work happens in and across marginalized urban and rural communities, specifically those comprised of Black, Brown, and Indigenous people, working-class and cash poor white people, and LGBTQ+ folks in the region. Although not exclusively an arts-based organization, we have always centered cultural organizing and cultural work as fundamental to the educational work we move into the region, nation, and world.

Highlander is a capacity builder and connector for artists and change-makers who often slip through the cracks, creating space for them to refine their practice and gain access to critical resources to survive as artists and as people. Where the intersection of crises and oppressive systems (such as COVID-19 and anti-Black state violence) hit the hardest is where you will find Highlander's staff and participants working together to respond to direct needs while also envisioning and creating a better world. We are among the longest serving grassroots intermediaries working with social movements in the region, which gives us the opportunity to connect artists, cultural workers, and change-makers across generations.



In January 2020 we began asking "What is the recipe for culture at this time?".

Between January and March we traveled and gathered groups of up to 30 people to ask this question. In those gatherings we ate, occupied space, laughed, held hands, agitated one another's ideas and put forth effort to really interrogate how we defined culture and what we put into its recipe. Since the pandemic's arrival, we have engaged nearly 20,000 new people virtually, mostly from the region, with a special focus on specially tailored on-line community-building spaces, programs, and re-granting opportunities for artists working at the intersection of cultural production and social change.

Two examples stand out. First, within the first few weeks of March, Highlander convened over 500 Black, Brown, and Indigenous artists from across the region and US on a "Cultural Workers Hotline" to share struggles, needs, and strategies for (a) coping with the impact of the pandemic on their livelihoods and (b) creating change-oriented artistic responses to the pandemic in their communities. Secondly, Highlander staff have held multiple weekly virtual spaces for all of our programs, and each gathering has employed an artist to be a graphic notetaker, which means we are creating access for highly visual learners, employing underfunded artists, and generating a visual archive of hundreds of voices living through the pandemic.

