https://doi.org/10.29162/pv.40.1.79
Original scientific paper
Received on 21 October 2022
Accepted for publication on 14 May 2023

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"EACH ONE, TEACH ONE": THE PROVERBS AND PROVERBIAL EXPRESSIONS OF SEPTIMA POINSETTE CLARK

Abstract: Septima Poinsette Clark (1898-1987) is regarded as "the grandmother" of the Civil Rights Movement (1954-1968). Clark began teaching at sixteen and eventually grew to become one of the movement's masterminds. One of Clark's attributes that marks her as an educational guru is the fact that she frequently employed proverbs, and proverbial expressions as she worked diligently behind the scenes teaching literacy to the poor and disenfranchised, so they would be able to register themselves to vote and take part in political decision-making processes that impacted their lives daily. Clark's autobiographies, interviews, and other biographical materials largely illustrate that proverbial language helped Clark to connect to the important people she taught which included Rosa Parks (1913-2005) and Martin Luther King, Jr. (1929-1968). Proverbial language also helped Clark to communicate important values, beliefs, and pedagogical philosophy. The adult literacy and civics education programs that Clark developed fueled the voting registration drives of several important organizations including: Highlander Folk School (HFC), the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC), and the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE). This essay highlights some of the proverbs and proverbial language that Clark used as she helped to shape the Civil Rights Era.

Keywords: African-American, Civil Rights Movement (CRM), Highlander Folk School (HFC), Jim Crow, Reconstruction, Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC)

1. Introduction

One purpose of this article is to illustrate the extent that proverbs, sayings, and proverbial expressions are connected to issues surrounding social justice in America. While it is focused on Septima Poinsette Clark and her use of proverbial language, it is not a chronologically organized account of Clark's life or an attempt to document every single proverb or proverbial expression that Clark has ever used. Studies of this nature were most recently initiated by paremiologist and folklorist, Professor Wolfgang Mieder, whose scholarship on proverbs illustrates several important things: (1) Firstly, Mieder's scholarship proves that folklore, paremiology, and American history can be used in tandem to reexamine important people, places, and events. In fact, proverbs, sayings, and proverbial expressions often mark important events in history, functioning as mnemonic devices (Bowden 1996: 442), reminding us of the past and most recent monumental accomplishments of important Americans, such as the election of the nation's first African-American president (*"Yes We Can": Barack Obama's Proverbial Rhetoric* 2009). (2) Secondly, Mieder's scholarship demonstrates that these disciplines may be used together to better understand the important values, beliefs, and worldviews of significant leaders, some of whose important ideals are in accord with basic principles under which the United States was founded (*"Right Makes Might": Proverbs and American Worldview 2019; The Worldview of American Proverbs* 2020). (3) Thirdly, Mieder's work is the first to demonstrate that the lens of paremiology offers scholars a unique way to study the Civil Rights Era, because several important leaders used proverbs and proverbial expressions to communicate important messages regarding themselves and the long Civil Rights Movement (*"No Struggle, No Progress": Frederick Douglass and His Proverbial Rhetoric for Civil Rights* 2001; "Making A Way Out of No Way": Martin Luther King's Sermonic Proverbial Rhetoric 2010; "'Keep Your Eyes on the Prize': Congressman John Lewis's Proverbial Odyssey for Civil Rights" 2014). (4) Fourthly, works of this nature illustrate that examining the proverbial language of different leaders from the same movement offers scholar's differing perspectives and angles of perception for evaluating important events. (5) Fifthly,

examining multiple viewpoints may ultimately lead to a greater awareness of what some of these historical events mean for us in the present. Mieder's groundbreaking paremiological scholarship establishes a strong foundation on which other folklorists, historians, and paremiologist may build.

Likewise, this study offers a distinctive look at the Civil Rights Era due to Clark's unique position as an African-American female, and because of the irreplaceable roles that she played. Clark functioned largely behind the scenes throughout the movement teaching black and white people, many of whom never had the opportunity to receive any formal schooling, to read, so that they could become independent thinkers and registered voters. One of Clark's most well-remembered sayings is, "I train people to do their own talking" (Collins 2020). Thus, she was a very outspoken and vocal leader, but she gave very few public speeches. In private correspondences, interviews, and writings, Clark used proverbs and coined several well-remembered sayings. She also incorporated proverbial expressions far more often than any other form of traditional language. Furthermore, the proverbial language that Clark used is documented primarily in her autobiographies, interviews, and through other people's accounts. Clark primarily shared proverbial language as she worked in the background of the movement as an educator, activist, and political organizer, empowering tens of thousands of black people to stand up to racism and oppression and to speak for themselves. To understand the traditional language that Septima Clark used, in the form of proverbs and proverbial expressions, one must first understand some basic information regarding her early life, upbringing, and education.

2. Early life and education

Septima Poinsette Clark (1898-1987) was born in Charleston, South Carolina to Victoria Anderson Warren and Peter Poinsette. Warren was a free, mixed-race, American-born washerwoman who was raised in Haiti, but later returned to the U.S. following the Civil War (1861-1865). Clark's father, Peter Poinsette, was a man who was enslaved until his early twenties to a wealthy politician and first United States Minister to Mexico, Joel Roberts

Poinsette. He is most widely known for introducing his namesake, the Poinsettia plant, to American soil from Mexico in the 1820s. Clark's parents had a very strong influence on her life. They both valued education highly and though it is unknown exactly how much education they each received, they were very successful in instilling this value in their children. Her mother, Warren, often flaunted the fact that she was born "free issue," and she kept her vow to never become anyone's slave. Warren was known for her very light complexion, religious piety, and fiery temper. Warren was known to utter the saying: "I'm a little piece of leather, but I'm well put together" when she felt that her patience was being tested (Charron 2009: 33). In the 1830s and 1840s Charleston was the largest slave trading hub in the U.S. (Davila). After slavery ended, it remained a segregated city. Racism kept blacks and whites separated, while colorism and class discrimination kept black communities equally divided, and despite being a family of modest means, Clark's parents were very race-conscious and class-conscious. As a dark-skinned former slave, Peter Poinsette was fully cognizant of the low position that he held on Charleston's social ladder, which is one of the reasons why he chose to keep his slave name—he enjoyed the sense of prestige that it brought him. Likewise, Warren refused to let her daughters date and hang around with what she called "two-for-fives" or commoners who followed crowds and had no sense of direction in their own lives. Ironically, she also expressed disdain for all white people and very dark-skinned black people. While Clark embraced her parents' educational values and determined spirits, she did not take on any of her mother's class or color-conscious ways. In fact, Clark was determined to succeed, not because of her parents' background, but rather despite it (Charron 2009: 48).

3. Teaching and activism

Septima Clark became an impressive figure in American history for several reasons. She is known affectionately as the "Grandmother" of the Civil Rights Era (1954-1968) because it is a movement that she helped birth through her work at Highlander Folk School (HFC). Clark is also known as the "teacher" of the

Civil Rights Movement because the adult education schools that she established enabled tens of thousands of black people to become literate and politically active. Clark's teaching career spans many decades. In the early nineteen-hundreds, Clark was one of the very first educators to endorse adult literacy training solely as a means of civic empowerment for scores of illiterate and disenfranchised people in the state of South Carolina and across the South. These people had been barred from voting in several ways, including: physical violence, the implementation of complicated literacy tests, poll taxes, and land-owning requirements. Clark's teachings and teaching methods have enabled countless numbers of people to engage with the political process either through voting, running for public office, or becoming teachers in literacy and civics programs themselves. There were very few people who were involved in the Civil Rights Movement who taught as long as Clark or had the pedagogical skills and knowledge base that Clark had acquired. Clark began teaching in 1916 on Johns Island. She was a devoted teacher who worked diligently to establish a blueprint for educating the poor, illiterate, and dispossessed black and white people of the South. She taught basic skills such as reading, writing, and arithmetic, so that students could become: literate, independent, self-sufficient, and civically engaged. Clark wanted black people in the South, many of whom still lived on the same plantations that their ancestors were forced to work, to be able to vote, to run for office, and to ultimately take part in shaping their own destinies from a political standpoint. She did not believe that anyone who lacked these basic skills could become politically active in any meaningful way. Likewise, Clark felt that education would enable southern activists to perform the political work that would be necessary to eventually bring an end to segregation throughout the South and the rest of America. Clark also felt that educating the masses would also help to alleviate other problems in the African-American community, such as unemployment, homelessness, and widespread poverty.

At the age of eighteen after having just received her teaching certificate from the highly acclaimed Avery Normal Institute, Clark was assigned to teach the rural poor in a dilapidated, rundown, one-room shack on Johns Island. The practice of assigning

young black teachers to poor rural areas was common in South Carolina. Consequently, like many black teachers, Clark had far too many students of all ages and grade levels in one classroom, little pay, and few resources to work with. In fact, the majority of the black adult population was illiterate. "J.B. Felton, the second state agent for African-American schools, praised the 'unselfish service' of black teachers and the 'missionary spirit' with which they approached 'the removal of illiteracy'" (Charron 20009: 77). Felton also acknowledged that without state funding, black educators like Clark were essentially "making bricks without straw" (Mieder 2001: 142; Charron 2009: 78). Despite all the setbacks and challenges that Clark faced in her early years as a teacher on Johns Island, she continued to develop. Later in her career, Clark developed an adult education program that eventually proliferated all over the South. Clark's successful approach to activism and adult education was influenced by several factors. She was always focused on professional development and on advancing her own education. In addition to earning her teaching certificate at Avery, she earned a B.A. from Benedict College and an M. A. from Hampton Institute, respectively. She sought out additional teacher education training at Columbia University and Clark Atlanta University. Clark was also mentored by several important leaders during her lifetime including South Carolina adult education pioneer, Wil Lou Gray (1883-1984) (Ogden 2016) whom she worked for during the 1930s, and the world-renowned sociologist, W.E.B. DuBois (1868-1963) whom she was taught by in the 1940s. Clark gained much of her political organizing experience throughout her career as she participated in and sometimes led local branches of organizations such as the National Association of Colored People (NAACP), the Palmetto States Teacher Association (PSTA), the South Carolina Federation of Colored Women (SCFCW), and the Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA). By the time the Civil Rights Movement began in the 1950s, Clark's education, teaching experience, and advanced training had already supplied her with an overabundance of confidence. She was well-versed in pedagogy, civics, and political organizing, but one thing that is often overlooked by scholars is the traditional language that she used to communicate. It is a fact that Clark employed traditional language in the form of proverbs

and proverbial expressions as a way of communicating important ideas and concepts. Paremiologist Wolfgang Mieder most effectively tells us what proverbs are. Mieder's concise definition is derived from an extensive frequency study that he conducted in the 1980s of words contained in more than fifty proverb definitions. Mieder contends that:

"A proverb is a short, generally known sentence of the folk which contains wisdom, truth, morals, and traditional views in a metaphorical, fixed and memorizable form and which is handed down from generation to generation" (Mieder 2004: 3; Mieder 2008: 11).

The proverbs, sayings, and expressions that Clark uses, stand out like jewels of wisdom that convey a multitude of ideas concerning her personal values and beliefs. Additionally, they are used to convey her teaching philosophy and the unique ways that she conceptualizes notions such as freedom, equality, and justice.

In working with the young or old, Clark relied on several personal principles that have been preserved as proverbs, proverbial expressions, or popular sayings that help to define her legacy. One of Clark's most widely known sayings which has become proverbial overtime is the simple three-word phrase "Literacy means liberation," and this proverb communicates a philosophy that Clark spent her entire life teaching. (Collins; SNCC Digital Gateway) The idea that literacy education was a prerequisite to political and economic autonomy is a tenet that Clark stood by.

Another one of Clark's favorite educational tenets is encapsulated by a proverbial expression. The proverbial statement "to reach a person where they are," is how Clark approached her daily work and people remembered Clark for this fundamental idea. Of course, the statement is proverbial in the sense that it is not to be taken literally. It is not a reference to an individual's physical proximity to others. It is instead, a reference to one's current mental state. Civil rights activist, Victoria Gray explains: "One of the things I learned [from Clark] early on…is never underestimate the intelligence of *anyone* in the community…always try to meet people where they are and receive them at *whatever* point" (Charron 2009: 326). Clark always met the people where they were by focusing on the needs of her students and the needs

of the community, and she demonstrated an unwavering amount of patience in the classroom as many of her students came to her with no literacy skills at all. Additionally, Clark also aimed to instill in her pupils that each student is responsible for passing along the knowledge that they receive to others which Clark best communicated proverbially as — "Each one, teach one" (Doyle et al. 2012: 250). For centuries, this proverb of African origins has been used to describe the process by which a single individual learns to do something like reading and writing, or to perform some other skill, and in turn, shares this knowledge with others. "Each one teach one" is similar in meaning to the proverb "It takes a whole village to raise a child" (Doyle et al. 2012: 268; Speake 2015: 355) which also has African origins, being Nigerian specifically Igbo and Yoruban. (Speake 2015: 355) Clark took special pride in the fact that she did not speak for her students. Instead, she said often that she "trained people to do their own talking" (Charron 2009: 315). The people were then empowered in the sense that they were able to communicate the same literacy lessons and political lessons to others. For Clark, "Each one, teach one" illustrates her "folk" centered approach to learning, and it is a powerful philosophy by which Clark enabled entire communities throughout the South to become literate and politically involved. Proverbs and proverbial expressions are a very important component in Clark's verbal and rhetorical repertoire, and there is evidence that there are practical reasons why they are one of the primary ways that Clark chose to express herself.

4. Gullah culture and oral tradition

When Clark first began teaching on Johns Island in 1916, she was able to succeed because she came to the Island with a clear understanding of the Gullah language which is a major reason why students, parents, and community members alike trusted her. Years later when Clark returned to Johns Islands to recruit adult students to be trained and educated in literacy and citizenship at Highlander Folk School (HFS), it was again her familiarity with Sea Island culture and language that helped her to gain the community's confidence. Unfortunately, this same sentiment was not always extended to outsiders. For example, her white

colleague, Myles Horton, who founded HFS in Monteagle in the early1930s to help poor and disenfranchised coal mining communities in the Tennessee mountains, frequently ran into proverbial brick walls when trying to communicate with black Gullah community members. Horton did not understand their language including the plethora of expressions that they used, and he often wished that instead of incorporating so many folk expressions in their conversations, that Johns Islanders would be more direct (Charron 2009: 250). Clark explains Horton's difficulty: "Dedicated as he was, 'It was hard for him to hear them say, 'Now this happened the night that that cow had its calf on such-and-such a moon.' …He wanted them to come right to the point and they wouldn't do it.'" (Charron 2009: 250). Thus, throughout Highlander's existence, Horton depended heavily on Clark and her niece Bernice Robinson to be his mediators and facilitators in developing the Adult Education Program curriculum and in getting the Johns Island community involved in it. Clark says that Robinson was her proverbial 'right arm' (Clark 1962: 140; Bryan and Mieder 2016: 352) at Highlander. Ultimately, the literacy program that Highlander would implement ran through Clark.
Many of Clark's proverbs, sayings, and proverbial expressions illustrate her deep connection to the Gullah people of the South Carolina Sea Islands. In, *Echo* Clark says, "I've been all over the United States and I love this country its differing dialects and geographies and customs. But nowhere else have I found an atmosphere and a people—to me, understand—comparable to the atmosphere and the folk of my native section. The Low Country, I suppose, gets into your blood. More probably, indeed, it's in it when you're born" (Clark 1962: 47-48).

Clark also explains an important point concerning the evolution of Gullah culture. She says that the language spoken on Johns Island is a mixture of the French spoken by white Huguenot settlers and the many African languages of the black people who were brought there as slaves. People from all over the world traveled to South Carolina to participate in what were the largest known slave auctions in America. According to records, as many as 600 slaves were auctioned there at one time (Davila). Thus, there is ample evidence that the Gullah language and dialect are the result of a copious cultural contact zone created by

people that have frequented and inhabited the South Carolina Sea Islands for centuries since the onset of the Trans-Atlantic slave trade (c.1500-1800). Consequently, Gullah linguistic and dialectical influence extends to many black and white people all over the state of South Carolina.

Clark even gives readers a unique glimpse into some of the Gullah folk terminology and expressions that have influenced her the most. One obvious example is the word "echo" from which her first autobiography derives its namesake. Clark explains what the word means in Gullah. She says:

> You might say to a Gullah woman in speaking of a certain song that you wished her to sing. 'Sing it your way,' you might tell her, and she would reply, 'Well this is my echo.' By *echo* she would mean *tune*. Others may say, 'This is my *air*.' This latter sounds old-English to me, but I never could figure out how they got *echo*. (Clark 1962: 47)

The word echo is most commonly used in reference to literal sounds that reverberate, but Clark applies it as an expression to her own undying passion for social justice. Near the end of *Echo*, Clark reveals that the phrase "echo in my soul" is also featured in a Quaker folk song which she does not name in her biography. Throughout the Civil Rights Era, black and white members of HFS and SNCC held hands and sang after every meeting as a way of bonding. Clark describes the song as "an early Quaker hymn that originated long ago when George Fox and other founders of the Society of Friends were being imprisoned for their beliefs" (Clark 1962: 242). The verse that contains the phrase reads:

> My life flows on in endless song above earth's lamentation;
> I hear the real through far-off hymn that hails a new creation;
> Through all the tumult and the strife I hear the music ringing.
> It sounds an echo in my soul; how can I keep from singing! (Clark 1962: 242)

Another popular Gullah expression involves the substitution of the word *signal* for the word *denomination*, as in religious denomination. As Clark explains, a person might ask the question: "'Are you going to the preaching at the Methodist church tonight?', and one's reply might be 'No, that is not my signal'"

(Clark 1962: 47). Thus, the term signal may also be equated with the word *preference* or *liking*.

According to Clark, many people who are not from the S.C. Sea islands do not understand the folk expression "too dear" which simply means that an item is too lavish or pricey for one to afford. She says that a person may ask "'Are you going to buy that hat—or cow, or boat, or pig, or dress?' And the person may respond 'Py God, no! It is too dear!'" (Clark 1962: 47) Clark's example is accentuated by the exclamatory phrase *Py God* which Gullah people often uttered to express anger or surprise.

Clark's familiarity with and appreciation for Gullah language and culture illustrates that she treasured the Sea Island's linguistic and dialectical traditions, and they more than likely played a major role in shaping her worldview.

5. Emerging as a leader

Throughout *Echo* Clark employs proverbial language largely when addressing issues that are very important to her such as education, civil rights, freedom, and equality. In fact, one of the very first proverbs that she uses in *Echo* appears as she is explaining the unconventional methods that she uses to gain an education while growing up in segregated Charleston, S.C. during the early twentieth century. As Clark explains, her mother, Victoria Warren, a washer-woman with little disposable income, was determined to enroll young Clark into the prestigious Avery Normal Institute, but she had no idea how she would raise enough money to pay the expensive tuition fee. To sum up her mother's attitude towards the situation Clark says: "It has always been my contention that there's much truth to the old adage that where there's a will there's a way" (Clark 1962: 23). Clark then explains that she took a job babysitting for wealthy black newly-weds who lived in her neighborhood to make enough money to attend high school at Avery. The proverb "Where there's a will there's a way" (Whiting 1989: 683; Mieder 2001: 511-512; Mieder 2008: 115; Speake 2015: 346) helps Clark to explain to her audience that her will to work for what she wanted allowed her to succeed at Avery. Additionally, she describes Avery as a proverbial "paradise" where she instantly "fell in love with

reading and exploring the wonderland embraced in the covers of countless books" (Clark 1962: 24). Clark also enjoyed learning from Avery's many "dedicated teachers" (Clark 1962: 24). Avery is where young Clark discovered that her life passion would be learning and teaching.

Clark uses proverbial language to describe another significant turning point in her life—which is when she began to work closely with Myles Horton and Highlander Folk School. Clark as an outspoken leader of the Parent Teacher Association (PTA), invited Horton and his wife, Zilphia to conduct a workshop on integration in which "twenty-two communities were represented, and some ninety persons participated" (Clark 1962: 112). Horton, who was already known as a "race agitator" would be the group's keynote speaker. During the workshop information about HFS and the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) was shared. Clark knew beforehand that the unpopular move would garner plenty of negative attention among some of her moderate colleagues who did not want her "stirring up any trouble," but she had already decided that she would simply ignore them. Clark brushes their disapproval aside with a proverbial expression saying: "I just resolved in my mind to wear whatever criticism came along simply as a loose garment" (Clark 1962: 115). Despite Clark's resolve to wear criticism as a proverbial "loose garment," she still describes this event as the proverbial "final straw" that leads to her being fired by the Charleston School Board in 1956 (Clark 1962: 112). As a result of the controversial workshop, Clark generated a lot of attention from the local news media. After seeing Clark's name splashed across headlines, a principal admonished Clark for holding this meeting with a well-known proverb. The principal tells Clark that only "Fools rush in where angels fear to tread" (Clark 1962: 115; Mieder 2008: 96). In other words, the principal felt that Clark would only cause trouble for herself and others by getting involved with the social activism of Highlander and the NAACP. As Clark explains, even though there were those who were afraid for her job security, she remained undaunted because she knew that she was only doing the right thing by aligning herself with other advocates of integration and social justice. While her decision would ultimately lead to her firing, it also led

her to work full-time at Highlander Folk School as a teacher and later as director of programs. The adult education programs that Clark would implement eventually reached tens of thousands of students across a dozen states.

At another point in the narrative of *Echo*, Clark explains that Highlander was initially established on private land gifted to Horton by retired professor, former college president, and founder of Western State Teachers College for Women, Dr. Lilian Wyckoff Johnson (1864-1956). It was initially designed through the collaborative efforts of Johnson and Horton in the 1930s to help improve the living conditions for the hundreds of poor coal mine workers and their families who lived in the Grundy County, Tennessee area by educating them about their rights and making them aware of the many political decisions that affected them daily. Once the coal mining industry abandoned Monteagle, Tennessee, it was not replaced by any other industry, which left much of the Grundy County community poor and on welfare. Due to this unfortunate circumstance, many mountain dwellers would leave to find work in factories in larger cities such as Chicago and Detroit only to return after a short time (Clark 1962: 129). Clark employs a revealing proverb to characterize this predicament: "You simply can't get the mountains out of the people even though the people leave the mountains" (Clark 1962: 129). This is a variation of the proverb "You can take the boy out of the country, but you can't take the country out of the boy" (Speake 2015: 33). Clark employs this well-known proverb construction to better characterize the mountain population of Grundy County as a close-knit and friendly group who places a great amount of value on their home despite the ever-increasing poverty rate. Despite being among "friendly mountain folk," Highlander's stance on integration always presented an especially difficult barrier to get around. In fact, the community and the State of Tennessee did not become hostile toward HFS until Clark achieved success in recruiting larger numbers of black participants. The negative attention that the integrated workshops garnered, prompted the State of Tennessee to raid the facility in 1956 and to eventually close it down in 1961. Horton who remained a steadfast believer that HFS was an "idea" and thus could never truly be destroyed, relocated the school to Knoxville, Tennessee. Afterwards, upon

the request of the Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., the operation of Highlander's Adult Education Program was transferred to King's organization, the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC). There it continued as the Citizenship Education Program (CEP), a major component of SCLCs Crusade for Citizenship, under the leadership of Clark and Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) founder, Ella Baker. In one interview, Clark sheds more light on the logic behind her philosophy of "reaching her students where they are." She also explains some of the political struggles:

> To [teach] them to read and write so that they could register and vote. Because, see, all of these states had these stringent registration laws. They had to write their name in cursive writing here in Charleston and read a section of the election laws. In Georgia they had thirty questions they had to read and give answers to. In Mississippi they had twenty-four questions. And in Louisiana there were thirty questions that they had to read and answer. Now eastern Texas did not have that; in eastern Texas they had to pay poll tax, and we had to work with them to get them not to pay the poll tax. And they had to do that each year. So we had these differences all around. And in each state we had to do different things. (Hall 1976: 79)

Highlander's stance on politics and integration was not popular among racists, which is why Clark defends HFS throughout the narrative of *Echo*. HFS was also attacked because people believed the rumors that were being spread through the media. The media frequently portrayed HFS as either a communist organization, an illegal bootlegging operation, or an immoral group that practiced acts of debauchery, such as having interracial sex on the front lawn. Of course, those who were familiar with HFS knew that none of those things were going on there. In *Echo* Clark capitalizes on this point. She says, "The school that Myles established with Dr. Johnson's help was to be an instruction conducted on Christian principles and on an interracial basis; a place, as her home had been, where brotherhood would be felt, emphasized and practiced. And that is what drew me to Highlander and made it a place of light and hope and refreshment of the spirit" (Clark 1962: 131-132). Clark emphasizes High-

lander's theme of Christian brotherhood using a proverb. She says, "I like to think of Highlander as a place where the simple but profound ideals of Christianity were not only preached but practiced" (Clark 1962: 132). Not only did they teach brotherhood, but they also "practiced what they preached" (Whiting 1989: 510; Speake 2015: 254; Bryan and Mieder 2016: 606). This proverb helps to dispel any untruths regarding the purpose of the school or Horton's character.

Clark was instrumental in expanding Highlander's Adult Education Program to Johns Island, South Carolina. She would then utilize the program to recruit and train other teachers, who would then go on to open their own schools in the area and on neighboring Sea Islands. The program sought to reach all people, but they were primarily concerned about reaching the poor, disenfranchised, illiterate African-American populations. They taught many adults to read and write for the very first time, many of whom were still living and working on the very same plantations that their ancestors had been enslaved upon. Some participants did not even know how to hold a pencil, and some could not even recognize their own names. One of Clark's biggest fears is that without knowing how to read, they would never be able to pass the complicated literacy tests that were required of most black people who wanted to register to vote. After mastering basic reading and writing skills, students learned more about civics, and about their rights as American citizens, including how to register themselves to vote and how to actively participate in other political processes such as running for public office. As Clark explains, the adult literacy program at Highlander was very well-structured and implemented with a great deal of expertise. Highlander offered them educational opportunities most never had since they usually performed agricultural work yearround from sunup to sundown just to make enough money to survive as sharecroppers. Despite having access to new learning opportunities some of the Sea Islanders still had little interest in book learning or even voting. In fact, at one workshop two participants, a black undertaker from Georgia and a white woman from North Carolina, pointed out to Clark that it was difficult to interest most black people in voting, thus it would be best to just "let sleeping dogs lie" (Clark 1962: 184-185). To just "let

sleeping dogs lie" (Whiting 1989: 176; Speake 2015: 288; Bryan and Mieder 2016: 220) is a bit of proverbial advice that is memorable enough for Clark to include it in her narrative, but had she taken its message to heart, the program would not have continued to flourish. Likewise, Clark also had to contend with potential participant's fear of violent attacks from racists, and their fear of being fired, or driven away from their plantations because of their affiliation with Highlander Folk School. Therefore, some of the programs were limited to very few participants. "'Don't need no education to work in the fields,' was a sentiment sometimes voiced by black tenants and sharecropping parents, especially within earshot of the white landlords on whom their livelihoods depended" (Charron 2009: 53). Clark uses a proverb from the Bible to describe her attitude towards the conundrum of having to start out with very few students saying: "Nevertheless, as the Scriptures point out, often a small bit of yeast will be the leaven that raises the large loaf" (Galatians 5:9 KJV; Clark 1962: 159). At another point, to describe the growth of the schools, she alludes to yet another proverb. Clark says: "You see, one thing spreading out starts others. It's like the pebble thrown into the mill pond" (Clark 1962: 162; Whiting 1989: 412; Charron 2009: 259). More proverbial language which mirrors the same exact message comes from Clark biographer and historian, Katherine Mellon Charron who says: "Septima Clark discerned that seeds scattered sometimes disappear into the wind, but others take root and yield a bountiful harvest" (Charron 2009: 350). These ideas reflect Clark's religious upbringing, the agrarian lifestyle that she remained close to her entire life, and the farming communities that she served daily. Furthermore, the proverbial insights are evidence that Clark was fully aware of the fact that many people would not be on board with her, and they emphasize the notion that having just a few enthusiastic students would be more than enough to continue to expand the programs.

Clark closes *Echo* with two more proverbs from Scripture. At the end of the last chapter, she expresses optimism that the activism that has taken place throughout her lifetime will gradually bring about social justice in America. She says, "Yes, but the new year will be better. And the years after it better, and better. I so desperately hope that they will be, I so earnestly pray

that they will be, I have complete and utter faith if we falter and faint not, if we continue in good will and outreaching love the good fight, the truth some early day if not tomorrow will make us free" (Clark 1962: 242-243). "If we falter and faint not" is an allusion to a proverb from Scripture which reads: "If thou faint in the face of adversity, thy strength is small" (Proverbs 24:10 KJV). Likewise, Clark employs an extended variation of the biblical proverb "The truth shall set you free." The original verse reads: "And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free" (John 8:32 KJV; Mieder 2001: 8). This is certainly evidence that Clark had a propensity for using biblical proverbs and sayings. Additionally, in an interview conducted by historian, Robert Penn Warren in 1964, Clark uses another proverb from Scripture as she explains to Warren that she does not believe that America will ever become decent or even stable without exercising basic Christian principles. Clark articulates her vision for America's future as she invokes the proverbial Golden Rule (Mieder 2001: 184-192; Mieder 2008: 198-199; Bryan and Mieder 2016: 322; Mieder 2020a: 30) saying: "When I say the Christian principles… I mean just that…I mean that doing unto others as we would like to be done by. This is what I consider the Christian principles that I feel we'd have to take with us everywhere" (Warren). In the Bible the proverb reads: "Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them: for this is the law and the prophets" (Matthew 7:12 KJV). In examining Clark's proverbial language there is no doubt that religious faith is a driving force in her life and one of the main reasons why she refused to stop fighting for the equal rights of all people.

In the very same interview, Clark also displays her knowledge of American history as she quotes a proverb that was made famous by President Abraham Lincoln. Warren asks Clark how she feels about Lincoln, and she responds:

> I can't help but think that he was a wonderful president. I can remember one thing that I admire him for and that is when he was campaigning and this fellow Stanton was his arch enemy and talked against him. When he got ready to find the Secretary of War, he decided that this was the man to be the Secretary of War and he appointed him. All the members of his cabinet felt that this should

> not be, but he stood up and said, gentleman I've looked over the nation and I know that this is the best man for the job. It wasn't too long a woman stood beside him and said, Mr. President, you must be losing your mind, this man even talked about your personal appearance, and he said, madam, the best way to destroy your enemies is to make him your friend. And when he died many years after that many great things were said about him, but the greatest thing that was said was the thing that was said by Stanton, the Secretary of War, he said, this was a great man and his name will go down in the ages. So both of them went to their graves as friends and not as enemies. (Warren 2020)

The proverb "The best way to destroy your enemy is to make him your friend," and the anecdote that she shares with it, illustrate that it contains an important lesson, and depicts some of the values that Clark lives by such as friendship, togetherness, and to do as Lincoln and Stanton demonstrate—which is to work along with others to solve difficult problems. Martin Luther King, Jr. whom she taught and worked with also used the proverb in a sermon on loving enemies (King 1963: 39). Throughout Clark's lifetime she made far more allies than enemies. When Warren asks Clark if she knows that Lincoln was racist, Clark responds in the negative saying:

> I don't know any of the things that he said that makes me feel that he was a racist. I heard of his 10% plan to free the slave. I heard of him going down to Mississippi on a barge saying that when he became a man that he was gonna strike a blow that would stop this slavery cause he saw the slaves chained there on barges. I can't remember any of the [racist] things that he said. (Warren 2020)

Despite any controversy surrounding Lincoln, Clark does not believe that Lincoln was racist, and this impression was more than likely garnered in part by some of the proverbial wisdom that Clark attained by studying and remembering the president's words. The fact that Abraham Lincoln as a child vowed to one day strike a proverbial blow against slavery, obviously made a huge impression on Clark, and there is at least some evidence that the attitude exhibited by young Lincoln's strong proverbial language helped to motivate Clark as she continued to shape her own life and fight against racial injustice and oppression (Mied-

er 2001: 229-231). In fact, Clark uses the very same proverbial expression as she describes her own calculated and measured approach to practicing social activism saying: "Each time I pass through a new crisis…the sun is barely peeping through the storm clouds… I patiently wait to strike the blow when my inner self whispers, 'Now is the time'" (Charron 2009: 241-242). Most would agree that in speaking of striking proverbial blows against racial injustice, Clark is clearly stepping outside of prescribed gender roles for her time. However, Clark was still mild-mannered, soft-spoken, and kind, as most women were expected to be in a male-dominated society in the 1950s. Nevertheless, she was also cognizant of the fact that teaching literacy for the purpose of promoting political engagement in black communities is considered by most to be a militant and radical act. If it had garnered more attention, it could have easily gotten her killed. In fact, Clark uses what historian Katherine M. Charron refers to as the "tactical invisibility" (Charron 2009: 350) that most black women possessed to their advantage, and it allowed Clark and the other black women to continue to help manage transformative educational civil rights programs. Charron's insights and the idea of Clark patiently waiting for decades to strike proverbial blows in the name of social justice provides further evidence that Clark knew she was no passive role player, but one of the masterminds behind the Civil Rights Movement.

The "tactical invisibility" that Charron mentions was caused in part by the subservient roles that black women were expected to play in the community and in churches. Black women were largely viewed as organizers, nurturers, protectors, and moral support to male clergy. They were generally expected to be seen and not heard. This tradition of subservience also carried over to the church-affiliated clubs and organizations. Consequently, women such as Clark, Baker, and other female leaders knew that they were being radical on several different fronts when they held high-ranking positions in organizations and when they openly attacked white supremacy by themselves instead of waiting on their male counterparts to do it for them. Clark explains this scenario using the proverbial expression to live in a "man-made world" in an interview as she acknowledges the fact that she was constantly reminded that her presence was disrupting

the long-held tradition of male dominance (Walker 1976: 11). Clark says that when Dr. King appointed her to the executive board of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) her authority was always questioned simply because she was a woman: "Many times we'd go into the meeting and [Reverend Abernathy] always wanted to know why was I a member of that trustee board?" (Walker 1976: 12) Clark sums up the problem best as she employs the popular proverbial expression saying: "Well I think that we live in a man-made world, and because of that, as a man, he didn't feel as if women had really enough intelligence…" (Walker 1976: 11). In another instance, Clark explains a time when Dr. King gave an SCLC secretary the proverbial devil for allowing Clark to award certificates to program participants in place of himself (Bryan and Mieder 2016: 207):

> I found out that they didn't respect women too much. I went into a small community down here, and, we were getting affiliates started. And I don't know where Dr. King was, but I presented the certificates to the people who had joined. And he asked his secretary about it. And I wrote a letter thanking them for their help, and I showed it to her. And Dr. King, he too, wanted to know about me as a woman. So I had a copy of the letter, and I showed him that I said in the name of Dr. King, I'm presenting these certificates and so forth. And the little secretary was just fine and wondered why [he had] given her the devil for not letting him be the person to present these certificates. I said, "Well, of all the [nerve]…." (Hall 1976: 81-82)

Clark turns to the proverbial expression "man-made world" again as she explains that it was male chauvinism that caused Baker to leave SCLC after initiating the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) in 1960. She says Baker "was concerned about not being recognized in a man-made world, and it didn't bother me" (Hall 1976: 80). Clark reiterates: "And this is a man-made world we've been living in all these years. We're just coming to the forefront" (Hall 1976: 80). Likewise, living in a "man-world" caused Clark to be openly critical of black male leadership whenever they seemed to lack enough courage to stand up to white supremacy. In *Echo*, she uses another popular proverbial expression as she explains a time when she expressed

this very sentiment. In 1955 as school integration debates heated up and black boycotts of white businesses proliferated, due to outside pressure, the president of South Carolina State University threatened to expel any student that participated in a planned NAACP meeting on campus despite the university being historically black. Clark says in a letter to her close friend Mrs. Warring, that although she is very proud of the young students' activist spirit, the university president's actions are a prime example that there is "no spine in the backbone of the professionals" (Charron 2009: 239). In the letter, she also expresses full confidence that "the younger generation" will "ride over this [proverbial] hump" (Charron 2009: 239). While black male leadership often lacked a proverbial "spine" or "backbone," she acknowledges the fact that black women, contrarily have always been the "backbone" of the church and Civil Rights Movement (Hall 1976: 91; Mieder 2001: 117-118; Mieder 2009: 168; Mieder 2010: 217).

On at least two separate occasions Clark uses variations of the proverbial expression "to jump out of the frying pan into the fire" (Whiting 1989: 244). Clark's mother wanted her to marry a wealthy and upstanding member of the black community since in early twentieth-century Charleston, having lighter skin and wealth could easily gain a newly married black woman open access to all the most elite black social circles. Likewise, doing the opposite could just as easily get one barred from the very same groups. In an interview, Clark explains her difficult decision to turn down a marriage proposal from a well-off and popular black minister, and instead choosing to marry a dark-skinned and relatively poor, unknown sailor against her mother's wishes. She says: "My mother was so strict and had all those strict religious ideas, and I'd felt that I'd be jumping into another frying pan if I went into [being] a minister's wife. I didn't know you know, how I could live and please all the people, because I didn't feel as if I wanted to do all those things. And preacher's wives had to endure so much, you know. I didn't think that I could do it" (Hall 1976: 44-45). Shortly after being married in 1921, Clark discovered that her new husband, Nerie Clark, also remained married to another woman and when she confronted him about the matter, he asked her to leave their home. To add to her misfortune they had a child, a girl named Victoria Irma, who died in infancy. She

later gave birth to a healthy son, Nerie David Clark, Jr., who would never know his father because Nerie senior would die from liver failure at the age of thirty-five, before his son's third birthday (Charron: 2009 107-110). To make matters worse, her mother, Victoria Warren, never actually forgave Clark for marrying Nerie, Sr. even though she would later mend her relationship with her mother. This series of unfortunate events caused Clark to believe that she was being cursed by God for going against her mother's wishes, and for some time the deep spiral of depression that she found herself experiencing was pushing her towards committing suicide. Widowed at the age of twenty-seven, teaching the poor on John's Island, and engaging in activist efforts to improve social and economic conditions for black people in Charleston was one way that Clark overcame this difficult time in her life. She also uses a variation of the proverbial expression to describe what it was like to live with her in-laws after the death of her husband saying:

> My mother-in-law was of the same type as my mother; in the two families they made the decisions. So actually I had jumped from the frying pan into the fire. And since I was living under the roof of my in-laws, I felt that I should obey the rules of the household. (Clark 1962: 71)

It is rather telling that she would use this proverbial expression to describe one of the most difficult times in her life on at least two separate occasions that span nearly fifteen years apart. Perhaps in using the proverbial expression "to jump from the frying pan into the fire" (Whiting 1989: 244) Clark is signaling to her audience that the most difficult years of her life ultimately functioned as a rite of passage that ultimately helped her to value her own education, independence and voice as a teacher and civil rights activist.

Clark also uses other sayings that involve fire. In *Echo* she includes a proverb that was uttered by a man who was very much against Clark inviting Mrs. Elizabeth Warring, a white woman from the North, who was also an outspoken supporter of integration and staunch critic of all southern white women whom she believed to be inherently racist to speak before a YWCA annual meeting in Charleston. In a phone call, the director of the United

Givers Fund, a major source of funding for Charleston's YWCA, warns Clark of the controversy surrounding Warring. He says: "I live nine miles from her in Litchfield, Connecticut, and I can tell you there is fire where you see all that smoke" (Clark 1962: 97-98; Speake 2015: 290). As a result of Clark's decision to invite the integrationist to speak at the meeting, the YWCA executive director attempted to force Clark to sign a public statement saying that the information regarding the invitation was false, and Clark vehemently refused. In describing the media's reaction to this news Clark says:

> Well, the fat was in the fire! Letters and calls began to pour into the newspapers, and a reporter called me. The reporter wanted to know if these reports were true—did I say this and that, did I tell the executive secretary of the United Givers Fund that his paths didn't cross with Mrs. Waring's, did I tell them that I would not sign such a letter, did I refuse to sign the statement the trustees had written. I told him that I had refused to sign them, and I answered frankly and truthfully all his questions. The newspapers carried stories, the telephones buzzed, the gossipers had a field day. Never, I'm sure, had a YWCA annual meeting had more advance publicity. (Clark 1962: 98)

Clark uses the proverbial expression "the fat was in the fire," (Whiting 1989: 215), but she is certainly not alarmed by the proverbial field day that the media had. In fact, Clark communicated to one close friend that she determined that the issue would have to remain a proverbial "hot potato" (Clark 1962: 96; Whiting 1989: 508) because while it angered YWCA leaders and members, Clark did not feel comfortable rescinding a speaking invitation to a Federal judge's wife whom she felt could be a much more useful ally than donors or even timid black leaders. Despite the controversy that it caused, Mrs. Warring spoke at the meeting, and it became known as the 1950 Coming Street YWCA "shock treatment speech." Throughout the speech, Warring praised black Charleston women for their activist efforts and she also vehemently attacked white southerners whom she described as being "sick" and "confused" (LDHI). Although Clark did not share Warring's views of all southern white women, she remained friends with Mrs. Warring and her husband Judge Wa-

ties Warring long after Mrs. Warring gave her infamous speech. For years they continued to break social norms by having integrated meetings and social gatherings at one another's homes angering groups such as the Klu Klux Klan (KKK) and the all-white Citizen's Council (CC) who would continually issue death threats and attempt to intimidate Clark and Warring using violent scare tactics.

Clark and her colleague, Myles Horton took careful notice as sit-in protests that were initiated by four students from North Carolina Agricultural and Technical State University in Greensboro, North Carolina on February 1, 1960, proliferated across most of the southern states in a matter of weeks. Clark says on one occasion that in her view, the protest "spread like a wild prairie fire…to more than one hundred cities across the South" (Charron 2009: 290; Mieder 2010: 310). Clark's use of the proverbial expression "to spread like a wild prairie fire" is a biblical reference used to express excitement for the movement's new direction. A passage from Psalms reads:

> Like swarming bees, like wild prairie fire, they hemmed me in; in God's name I rubbed their faces in the dirt. I was right on the cliff-edge, ready to fall, when God grabbed and held me. God's my strength, he's also my song, and now he's my salvation. Hear the shouts, hear the triumph songs in the camp of the saved? The hand of God has turned the tide! The hand of God is raised in victory! The hand of God has turned the tide! (Psalm 118: 12-16 MSG)

No matter what version of the Bible one is reading, the verse is an exaltation of victory in the face of attack, and Clark's use of the expression brings attention to how fast the Sit-In Movement spread, and to the fact that the group of student protesters stood their ground in a very dangerous situation. The protestors from Greensboro included: Joseph McNeil, Franklin McCain, Ezell Blair, Jr. (a.k.a. Jibreel Khazan) and David Richmond. They became known as the A&T Four, and the Sit-In Movement that they initiated encouraged Horton to reposition his thinking on Highlander's future role in the Civil Rights Movement. While Clark already had confidence in the youth due to several successful integration workshops and conferences that she held at Highlander throughout the 1950s, Horton still held the perspec-

tive that Highlander should remain primarily focused on adults, but because of the exponential growth of the largely student-led Sit-In Movement, Horton began to think more about how to get young people involved (Charron 2009: 290). This is when Clark decided to call Ella Baker of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) and together, they organized a three-day conference at Highlander that lasted from April 1st thru April 3rd, and it included "forty-seven African Americans, thirty-five white students, representing twenty colleges in nineteen states and three foreign countries" (Charron 2009: 290). At the conference Clark and Baker helped the students to outline the goals and philosophy of what would be known as the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), the first and only black organization to be organized and led entirely by students. Clark and Baker's guidance and tutelage helped to guarantee the students that their proverbial "wild prairie fire" (Psalm 118: 12-16 MSG; Mieder 2010: 310) would continue to grow.

6. American ideals

Clark uses a plethora of proverbial expressions that communicate ways that she conceptualizes American ideals such as the right to education, freedom, justice, and equality. In Clark's later years she refers to education as the proverbial "tree of life." Clark retired from the classroom in the 1970s, but she never retired from the movement—continuing to work on behalf of the black community in Charleston, S.C. by serving the public school system as the first female African-American Charleston School Board member. Thus, the very same school system that fired her for belonging to the NAACP in 1956, sought her wisdom and counsel throughout the 1970s and 1980s (Charron 2009: 345). When the school board tried to distribute a pamphlet on American government that did not include any information about black political accomplishments at all, Clark quickly brought this issue to the school board's attention. In speaking of the incident Clark says: "I wanted to know who the black children would have to look up to in that book. There was nothing in there that would help black children to feel that they had a right to the tree of life, and I know how important that is" (Charron 2009: 345-346). The proverbial

tree of life could have very well been extended to black youth by teaching them more about Clark's legacy.

Another revealing proverbial expression from *Echo* which expresses Clark's American ideals appears in a letter from someone who donated money to Highlander Folk School after it was raided by the State of Tennessee and all assets and property were seized and auctioned off, forcing Myles Horton to relocate the school to Knoxville Tennessee, essentially starting all over again from scratch. In addition to sending a charitable donation, the contributor writes:

> The wheels of justice certainly operated in this case on a bent axle. I am sure that you feel as I do that nothing is to be gained by looking backward—only forward, and if determination, courage and vision are needed to create a new Highlander, you are endowed in abundance with all three. I can only stand in awe of what you have done and are willing to do. I hope that within a few weeks I will be able to add to this contribution and help you in whatever way I can to rebuild Highlander. (Clark 1962: 230)

Out of the nearly five-hundred letters that were written in support of HFS, Clark chose to include this letter in its entirety due in part to its proverbial wit and wisdom. There is quite a bit of humor and irony displayed in the idea of America's proverbial wheels of justice operating on a "bent axle." Furthermore, the humor and irony are tempered by the phrase "nothing is to be gained by looking backward—only forward" (Clark 1962: 230). These are the kinds of messages that Highlander needed during its time of calamity, and by including it in her narrative, Clark knew that it would only motivate more people to support the cause.

In addition to America's proverbial "wheels of justice," Clark also makes reference to America's proverbial "lamp of freedom" (Clark 1962: 233). As Clark is reflecting on all the friends that she has made during her nearly decade long tenure at Highlander, she laments the fact that HFS is being forced to close:

> These things and these faces I can never forget, and as I pray for the lamp of freedom to burn incessantly, I know that I am not weaving my life's pattern alone. Only one end of the threads do I hold in my hands; the other ends go many ways linking my life

> with others, my country with others. My pattern and my country's pattern will depend largely upon the awareness, the insights, the skills, the personal goals and the incentives of those who hold the other ends of those threads." (Clark 1962: 233-234)

Clark's extended weaving metaphor further highlights the fact that she knows that she is not alone in the struggle for social justice and equality. In fact, she views it as a struggle that she shares with the entire world.

Clark also refers to America's proverbial "fruits of democracy," and a part of what makes this proverbial expression so interesting is the way that Clark builds up to the proverbial language and uses it to heighten her message:

> So I work among the Negro people, who, we must agree, have the fewest of the democratic freedoms and many of whom have inadequate education or none at all, who live constantly under the fear of intimidation, insult and violence, I am reminded that here is the continuing test of our democratic form of government. In the recent rise of the image of hope for the segregated black man and his deliverance from this state of pseudo-slavery I see clearly the form of challenge. If permanent social patterns are to be created that are truly democratic, I maintain, then the most lowly being must enjoy equally with every other American the fruits of democracy. Only then will the Negro, and particularly the Negro parent, see the glimmer of light ahead, only then will he see a way out of his dilemma. (Clark 1962: 236-237)

Clark saves all the proverbial language for the very end of her statement so that it may help the reader to realize the enormity of the situation that she is describing. The idea that drastic change is the only thing that can facilitate a process that will still only take place gradually is her overall implication.

When Clark uses the proverbial expression "laws of the land," it is to point out the government's own political and social wrongdoing and its failure to practice humanitarianism. One instance of the expression being used appears near the end of *Echo* as she invokes another popular hymn that was sang at HFS. It just so happens that this particular hymn, entitled *Black and White* is as equally critical of the government as Clark is. It reads:

> The ink is black, the page is white, together we learn to read
> And write, to read and write;
> And now a child can understand this is the law of all the land;
> The ink is black, the page is white, together we learn to read
> And write, to read and write. (Clark 1962: 241)

The hymn promotes integrated education as the best way to encourage America's youth to believe in freedom and equality. Additionally, Clark repeats the proverbial expression "laws of the land," as she quotes a statement taken from a Highlander press release that she wrote. The statement is so important that she includes it twice in *Echo*, saying it once near the beginning, and then later near the end. In both instances, the proverbial expression "laws of the land" is also accompanied by other ideas regarding freedom that were popularized by Martin Luther King, Jr.:

> Highlander was established three decades ago it had been fighting for the rights of all people, whatever their race, religion or political persuasion, to meet together and discuss their problems, And it is because of this meeting together, and only because of this, I insist, that Highlander intermittently has been attacked by forces that oppose not only the principles of human brotherhood, but also the very law of the land as interpreted by our highest courts. (Clark 1962: 11, 207)

Clark then adds that despite the attacks, HFS will continue to serve all people. This statement is then followed by two ideas that were largely popularized by King although it is unknown if King or Clark used them first. Clark says: "Freedom has always been lost by a people who allowed their rights gradually to be whittled away. The threat to silence and to keep forever silent the voice of Highlander is a threat to the very existence of every organization in this nation and to the basic freedom of thought and expression of every American" (Clark 1962: 11, 207). The notion that "Freedom has always been lost by a people who allowed their rights gradually to be whittled away" and also her variation of the proverb "A threat to justice in one place is a threat to justice everywhere" (Mieder 2010: 354-356) may not have been popular when she first publishes her press release or *Echo*, but the ideas were popularized greatly by her former stu-

dent, Dr. King as he attracted a great deal of attention whenever he spoke in public.

There are other proverbial expressions that Clark uses in reference to social justice. In *Echo* she refers to the proverbial "good fight," (Clark 1962: 242). Historian and Clark biographer, Katherine M. Charron discusses the fact that Clark garnered much self-satisfaction from fighting proverbial good fights and winning them all. In fact, early in her career she did so on at least two separate occasions—once in 1919 when she worked with the NAACP to have more black teachers hired in the city of Charleston and when she worked with NAACP lawyers (including Thurgood Marshall) to force the cities of Columbia and Charleston to pay equal salaries to black teachers. With Clark's help, the NAACP won their case against the City of Columbia in 1944 and they later won their case against the city of Charleston in 1945 (Charron 2009). As a result of the court's verdicts and as a form of backlash, the Columbia School Board expanded their control over black educators by requiring all teachers to take recertification exams that would then determine their level of pay. Some teachers refused to take the exam, choosing resignation instead. Others performed so poorly on the test that their pay either stayed the same or they only saw marginal increases. Only a small number of black teachers performed well, and Clark was among them. She expresses a tremendous amount of confidence as she employs a proverbial expression to motivate her colleagues to take the recertification exam. At a meeting, as Palmetto States Teacher Association (PTSA) president, Clark says to distraught members: "If you say that you are not going to take that examination in the morning…I will be with you. But if some of you say tonight that you are on the fence on this proposition, then I know you will be the first ones there to take it. So I will let you know right now that I am going. I'm not afraid to take that examination" (Clark 1962: 83). This statement depicts a very self-reliant Clark, who demonstrates nothing but poised confidence as she tries to empower her colleagues to not straddle the proverbial fence on this one important issue. Clark says that her activists efforts paid off, not only in the satisfaction of having made the good fight, but also in actual cash (Charron 2009: 165). After earning an A on the recertification exam, Clark's once mea-

ger teacher salary tripled. Likewise, Clark also makes it known that there is still a proverbial price to pay (Mieder: 2009 286-288; Mieder 2020b: 172-173) for anyone who wishes to engage in any form of activism. She says: "I feel that before a person goes into work of this kind, he must search his soul and decide once and for all that this is the price he may have to pay for the freedom he is trying to establish" (Clark 1962: 11,12). Clark was always aware of the personal sacrifices that she made to stay involved in activism. The work that she did often left no time for friends or family. Additionally, there was the constant threat of violent retaliation from racists; so much so, that her immediate family was often afraid for her life. Likewise, her friends at times, were afraid to be associated with her. Once at an event in her honor, some of her sorority sisters, AKAs, refused to be photographed with her for fear of losing their jobs (Charron 2009: 245). Clark would continue to "pay the price" on behalf of her race and all people throughout her entire career.

There is another proverb that Clark uses in acknowledgement of her calculated and measured approach to political organizing. In the early 1960s as Clark's Citizenship Education Programs became increasingly popular, black organizations throughout the South requested training for their own members. Organizations such as the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), and the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) began to realize that if they wanted to empower the black communities from a political standpoint they must heed Clark's philosophy and first focus on education. People would then be able to use the basic literacy and civic skills that they have acquired to fill out voter registration forms, vote for the most viable candidates, and even run for political offices themselves. Clark was not surprised by the sudden upswing in participation, and she realized that the tens of thousands of newly registered black voters would be difficult for any political party to ignore. She uses a popular proverb to convey her belief that success was to be expected saying: "The acceptance of these services by other civil rights organizations says that great designs are based on method not madness" (Charron 2009: 319). "Great designs are based on method not madness" is an appropriate proverb that attests to

the program's positive results (Whiting 1989: 408; Bryan and Mieder 2016: 505).

7. Clark's enduring legacy

There are at least a few statements made by Clark which have become well-known sayings that most people can easily attribute to her. One such saying conveys the fact that Clark believed ignorance to be a far more immediate threat to humanity than some of its consequences such as racism or even segregation. In support of this conviction Clark famously states: "We need to be taught to study rather than believe, to inquire rather than to affirm" (Charron 2009: 341). This saying emphasizes the fact that she was always proud of teaching her students to study, think, and speak for themselves.

Finally, in her eightieth year, Clark was content that she had devoted her entire life to fights for civil rights and social justice. She was satisfied with all that she had accomplished. In fact, she says in her second autobiography, *Ready from Within* (1990) that old age is "the best part of life" (Clark 1990: 124). Clark then shares her reason for having this attitude, with a brief sentence which has since become a popular saying: "It's not that you have just grown old, but it is how you have grown old" (Charron 2009: 12). As Clark continues, she also alludes to a popular proverb: "I feel that I have grown old believing there is always a beautiful lining to that cloud that overshadows things" (Clark 1990: 124-125). This statement is an allusion to the well-known proverb "Every dark cloud always has a silver lining" (Mieder 2008: 12; Doyle et al. 2012: 39). Clark then delivers another brief sentence which has since become her most famous saying: "I have a great belief in the fact that whenever there is chaos, it creates wonderful thinking. I consider chaos a gift, and this has come during my old age" (Clark 1990: 125). The saying, "whenever there is chaos, it creates wonderful thinking" at first glance seems like an oxymoron or paradox. Many consider the Civil Rights Era to be the most chaotic years in American history, but it is also an era that Clark learned to navigate well. Amid the chaos, Clark demanded basic rights like the freedom to vote and equal pay for black teachers. Over time, with the calm, meticulous, and obser-

vant air of a veteran teacher, she taught others how to demand freedom and equality for themselves as well. Thus, it only makes sense that Clark would view chaos as a gift. One may even argue that she looked forward to chaos. Perhaps our present generation of Americans may benefit from viewing chaos as a gift as well.

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