

SNCC Digital Gateway: Our Voices

Internationalism: Pan-Africanism

Clip 1: Geri Augusto “Towards a Black University”

Geri Augusto: For me, of course, the consciousness, this background starts with growing up in a house with Charles and Florence Tate who always made a point of going to the nearby HBCUs and finding the one African student or two who had nowhere to go for Thanksgiving or Christmas. Which meant that these kids, older than me, were staying in the house, and they were coming from places like Gambia, Kenya, whatever, and I would have the chance to sit in the kitchen with them and ask them things. So, basically, it was that and reading books was all I had. I went to Howard University in 1966 on a scholarship and so mid-way through that the Towards of Black University happen and the first build up of Black students’ consciousness around Black studies and the various demonstrations that erupted all over the country, but Howard was actually, thinking in the chronology, first...You’d be trained in respectability in a certain way that made us question, well, why should we feel bad about how we look? How we dress? How our hair looks? So forth. And this is coupled with an interest in Africa, a very romantic interest but an interest in Africa. The point I would like to spend a bit more time talking about is a discussion about the Towards of a Black University which was a conference. That all these various struggles and kind of ferment were, general Black Power atmosphere outside, and the assassinations of Malcolm X and Martin Luther King, and so forth. But Towards a Black University was one of the earliest, if not the earliest, attempts, at least on the east coast, of coming up with a studied, reflective idea of what it would mean to have a university that was Black. And Black didn’t just mean that the color would be Black, that the students would be Black, that the professors would be Black, but what would we need to study? How would we need to study the history of Black people in the United States? How would we need to study Africa? How would we need to position Africa in the world? How would we think about the Caribbean...But this was the pre to a few of us, a handful of us, seeking out the Center for Black Education, which had recently opened. And we essentially decided that we’re going to abandon campus politics as a way of thinking about Africa and being radically Black and Black Power...the defining moments of my consciousness came not to be what I did as a student but when we decided doing things as a student was not enough. And that’s where the Center for Black Education makes a difference for me.

Clip 2: Courtland Cox “From Africa to Drum & Spear and the Center for Black Education”

Courtland Cox: After we came back from the trip, we organized Drum & Spear Bookstore and Press and then the Center for Black Education, so after coming back from Africa, you had the whole discussion of Black Power starting in 1966, you know, we were doing, we’re doing, you know, the visit to Africa in ‘67, in ‘68 we found Drum & Spear Press, Drum & Spear Bookstore, and eventually Center for Black Education. I’m also teaching at Federal City College, so that there was a sense that we had to create a sense of consciousness that was important. And I think we need to really, and I was thinking about it last night, there was a whole sense, while you had in the South the voter registration issue and the sense of, you know, saying that sharecroppers couldn’t vote, we had all that, within the country, there was a whole negation of the Black community, I mean, intellectually and other ways so the sense that you couldn’t think, I mean, just take the sports arena. There were no Black quarterbacks, there were no

Black pitchers, there were no -- because the sense that anything that dealt with intellectual kinds and mental kinds of things, you know, Black people didn't have the capacity.

Clip 3: Geri Augusto "Read into an International Consciousness"

Geri Augusto: You could walk into Drum & Spear Bookstore, which many people did, from right off the street, and you could read yourself into an international consciousness. Just go from shelf to shelf. So at 19-years-old I knew about the Huk Rebellion, I've never been to the Philippines yet, but if you give me a person from the Philippines I can discuss the Huk Rebellion, the Muslim community and all of it was from the books on the shelf. There were struggles in Latin America, struggles in Asia, struggles that you could just go into Drum & Spear and that collection of books that were on the shelves would prepare you. And African literature. So much so that when I got to Dar Es Salaam and I had a chance to talk to people who were extremely conscious, extremely radical, I was surprised to find that they hadn't read as much African literature as I had read. This is me never having been to Africa. But we read straight through the Heinemann Writers Series which starts number 1 Chinua Achebe *Things Fall Apart* and goes there were by the time we would start going to Tanzania, maybe 90 books, maybe 100, somewhere between 50 and 100, but we would have read, we would've considered ourselves remiss landing in Africa and not read all that, only to find that most Africans, conscious as they were, had not read it.

Clip 4: Jennifer Lawson "Informing People About Africa"

Jennifer Lawson: I helped do the design for the bookstore, the interior decoration design for the bookstore when it moved from one location to another. I also then served sort of really a de facto art director for Drum & Spear Press, and Courtland and I had conversations about Africa and about how little people in this country knew about Africa, and we started talking about children's books, and so Courtland, Daphne Muse, and a group of us sat and started a conversation about what a children's book might look like. What kinds of things that we would put into such a children's book. And that became a concept -- *Children of Africa*, and so we created this book, *Children of Africa*, we made it, we wanted it to be something that families would participate in and that children would participate in, so we made it the most participatory thing that we could think of at that point, so it was a coloring book, so it was black and white line drawings, which I did, and that the one side though, what was different about it was that we had one side the right hand pages were for the children and so that had then a more sort of straightforward text. The left hand side though was for the parent or the adult participant to read along to the children and to be engaged in conversation. So, that was more little factoids of information about Africa. But the whole idea was that we weren't seeing this simply as a coloring book but as a way of informing people about Africa. So, you can tell from that kind of project and the other projects that we did, Drum & Spear, work by C.L.R. James or the Palestinian poetry, that we were really interested in trying to create works that would help people understand more about the world.

Clip 5: Charlie Cobb & Courtland Cox "Math, Science, and a Black Education"

Charlie Cobb: And then what we asked of Federal City College was for a Black education program as distinct from a Black studie--it's one thing, yes you can study Black writers or African history or whatever, but if you're going to have a Black education program, it should include math and science, any subject because it wasn't the subject, it was the question of using the education.

Courtland Cox: Some of that comes up too about relationship to Africa shouldn't only be this on the social level, science and technology was a big part. I mean, I think that we were thinking, I mean, as we

began to think about it, I mean, we were moving up out of the Lowndes County experience and discussion about what would it take for us to exist in a real way over not just in terms of the social issues and so forth but what were the economic issues? What were the technical issues? What were all the things? We were searching for a way to have self-sufficiency as an alternative to what we viewed because what we viewed was that the denial of our existence. I don't think people really understood, you know, that pervasive sense of the denial and the power of the statement of "Black is beautiful" because at that time, the whole thrust of the Black middle class and so forth was to try to get as close to the white community, physically, as possible.

Clip 6: Geri Augusto "Black into Independent People"

Geri Augusto: It was the philosophy of the Center of Black Education that brought those of us who were not part of the founding to it, and I had a little document which I let escape my hands because I was showing everybody, but it was a recruiting document in '69 for the Center for Black Education and so one thing was about Black and how that was defined. It meant Black from wherever. It wasn't Black from D.C. or Black from the United States but Black from wherever. And the people came were from the Caribbean, and a couple even from Africa as well as that. But the independent part, which is not part of the name but part of what was being searched for and attracted us to it was that it was going to be an independent institution and to me that's important, coming out of the SNCC history and what had happened in Lowndes County, in Mississippi and everywhere. This notion of something that was independent. Inde -- a self-definition but independent. I think today we might say alternative but then we would've tended more to say independent, not an alternative, just an alternative education sounds like we'd like to dress in a certain way or eat in a different way, alternative whatever, but independent because it had a purpose and that purpose was making you and yours and the community and kind of concentric circles of Black here, Black there, Black everywhere into independent people and communities, which is kind of a direct line from a SNCC philosophy, done an evolution of it.

Clip 7: Geri Augusto "Publications & the *Pan-African*"

Geri Augusto: I joined the communication sector, which meant I was working with Kojo Nnamdi, Ivey Young, [[Ivan, I forget Ivan's last name, Little, and Harley Little, her partner]]. Harley was a great photographer. Ivan was an impressive organizer of cuttings, at that time that's how you do your collection of newspapers, clippings and cuttings and cataloguing them and whatever, so the Center had a Pan-African library, which consists of cuttings, of news about Africa. We'd scour, get it wherever you could. From *Muhammad Speaks*, *Jet*, *Ebony*, it had to be that way, *Freedomways*, wherever you could get, you know, information from Black publications primarily. Cut them and clip them, but also from the mainstream newspapers. If it was about Africa, if it was about the Caribbean, if it was about Black communities. So that's one thing. The other thing was the publication. And I think this is major because it turns out, over a lifetime of working with radical social movements, one of the main things is to have a publication. You may be 10 people or you may be 10,000, but have a publication that expresses your opinion, that brings to your publics or constituencies the news or the information or the interpretation you want. So the center had a paper that was called the *Pan-African*, which I think was reflective of the ideological bent of the Center, and its face turned towards what today, then we didn't use the term so much, but today we would use Africa and the Diaspora. So it was a Pan-African perspective.

Clip 8: Tony Bogues "Institute of the Black World"

Tony Bogues: But also something else was important which I have to say. Institute of the Black World.

Charlie Cobb: In Atlanta.

Tony Bogues: Yes. Because Bobby goes to work with the Institute of the Black World, and Vincent Harding, Walter is also part of the Institute of the Black World.

Geri Augusto: Walter Rodney.

Tony Bogues: Sylvia Wynter was part of the Institute of the Black World. C.L.R. James gives a set of lectures on the Black Jacobins and the Black Reconstruction to the Institute of the Black World. Institute of the Black World wants to do a big edition book on education in the Black world and change. And they assign Bobby to do Jamaica, Caribbean. And Bobby is not in Jamaica, by that time he's out of Jamaica and he's between Dartmouth and Northwestern Universities. And they asked Richard Small to be the person to help with this project and Richard takes me on to do research and I'm in my first year at university, so this is before I left before I dropped out of university to become a trade union organizer. And this, I go to do research, which is to interview ordinary peasant Jamaicans who were prominent in the 1930 rebellion in Jamaica but who had never been given their due. The ordinary people who have not been told, whose stories have never been told. And I remember being driven by Richard Small to a place called Peanut Valley or something up in Clarendon and interviewing and writing about a man called Robert [unsure: Rumpart] who was very old at the time but who led something called the Poor Man Land Improvement Association. That was important but that could have never happened without the Institute for the Black World [...]

Geri Augusto: The other thing that's important beyond the instance of Jamaica is what the Institute of the Black World meant in other places for people who would never get to the Institute of the Black World, but that it had public, I think we should underplay the importance of publications. Not everybody is traveling around. People aren't coming here to give talks and people aren't being sent out to give talks, but the books, the publications and the newspapers that Black people did, radical, Black organizations, no matter how small did these newspapers and the newspapers could carry and travel. And you would even be asked in these different places you might be to contribute to a newspaper that was being published somewhere else. And that was the method by which a lot these ideas and models and news. A lot of times I stop and think how is it that we know the names and the institutions and the parties that Tony mentions. Or how is it that Tony knows some of the names and the parties and institutions that we would mention when we weren't traveling to these places. It's the newspapers.

Clip 9: Courtland Cox "We Are An African People"

Courtland Cox: I think the big thrust, the big, giant energy moving from Black Power to Pan-Africanism is it broke the psychological, it broke a lot of the psychological destruction that had been visited upon the Black community. There was an assertion that one: Black is Beautiful, two: We Are an African People. We began to define ourselves in ways that did not allow other people to define us. And so so we began to now see and search for different relationships that we could have. We began to use terminology that we did not use and Drum & Spear Bookstore was important because it gave people a tangible place to go and reinforced the thinking that was being talked about, so that they could go and get J.A. Rogers, they could go and get Du Bois. They could go and get Chancellor Williams, they can go and get the East African Publishing, they could go and get, you know, place things that were happening in Latin America. They could go and get, you know, *The Little Red Book*. They could go and get a lot of things because the sense was not only we were not trapped in the United States, we could move, look to Africa, look to the world. We could look to examples. We knew what was going on with Mao and we knew what was going on with the Vietnamese. We began to become much more worldly in terms of, because even, like, for

example, in '68 when King spoke about the Vietnam War, the criticism of King was you cannot speak about anything outside of race and being a negro. And how dare you even think beyond that, you know, so, I mean, so you had to break the kind of apartheid status that existed mentally, not physically but at least mentally. And that allowed us to look for other relationships.