

SNCC Digital Gateway: Our Voices

Internationalism: Organizing 6PAC

Clip 1: Geri Augusto “Learning from C.L.R. James”

Geri Augusto: But what he wanted us to think about, what he thought was important was now’s the time, we’ve had decades of socialist countries and even communist countries, we’ve had the beginning, we’ve had Pan Africanism in the sense of independence, movements that were success-- but a lot of stuff was still wrong, we haven’t got there. Because he was always about freedom, human freedom. This didn’t get us there. Particularly the socialism and the theories of which he had been a part didn’t get us there. Alas, didn’t get us there. So he was very interested in the okay, what today we call post-colonial. We thought this would get us there, we thought just an independence movement would get us there, we thought that we, some of us thought that being part of the international, whichever, communist international, would get us there and it didn’t. And there was something that he felt came out of the African American struggle, and particularly SNCC and the Black Panth-- he’s big on this time of Black Power and what Black Power, how it might be defined and marrying Black Power, coming out of the U.S., he’s not here so God forgive if I’m paraphrasing, but this is kind of the conversation. What would it mean if Black Power could meet African liberation movements, could take enough of the understanding of dialectical materialism and the importance of class, marry that to the importance of race, and then do something that would push, and if this was C.L.R., he would say all peoples, but in the first place Black people, towards a real kind of freedom.

Clip 2: Geri Augusto “Rootedness in Community”

Geri Augusto: So what he liked about SNCC, that history of what happened in Lowndes County, in Mississippi, in wherever it was, it wasn’t just the political part but it was the rootedness in community. As he saw it, the young people who had asked people, well what do you really want, and then coming out with the answer understanding of, oh you want power over your life in every way that is important. To him that was such a bold and it was pro--progress had been made. So he wanted to know, could that also, you know, could the Pan African Congress bring about this kind of, this marriage of this.

Clip 3: “SNCC’s Foreign Policy”

Courtland Cox: I mean I think it was important to the Tanzanians that other countries would be, you know, involved, and had respect for it because if that didn’t, I mean, while they viewed the United States as important, they viewed, that support was critical. Because Nyerere’s view was alright 1945 there were no states. Now we’re talking ‘73, ‘74, now there’re states, and that reality has to be recognized and that was important. So the other person—so we have to now spend time going up to the OAU to present to the OAU to get them. And so C.L.R., Fletcher, myself, went up to the OAU to begin to have those conversations with the OAU. And we got some resolution from the OAU of support.

Charlie Cobb: From the secretary general and the like --

Courtland Cox: Actually it was an OAU meeting.

Charlie Cobb: Oh you went to an OAU meeting?

Courtland Cox: An actual meeting of the OAU. So we heard Senghor, all of that. So we went to Addis.

Geri Augusto: This is not a small, the way Courtland's telling it, we got that, we went, let's go back --

Charlie Cobb: Yeah, I want these particular details.

Geri Augusto: By now, right, 30 something, maybe 30, your age --

Courtland Cox: At this point I'm 32 years old.

Geri Augusto: So you've got a 32-year-old who is going, African American, maybe with a suit, maybe without a suit, probably what we call a Nyerere suit, that's what you've got on there. But you've got-- he's going to the OAU, Organization of African Unity, everybody who comes to that is a head of state or minister of foreign affairs, this is why I call it SNCC's foreign policy. You see, I mean, and it's the habit of, alright, we'll go to these arenas and we'll speak. Yes I'm 32 and they're 65, so what? I'm going, you know, no I don't have a state. I don't even have a municipal government, but yes I'm going. Oh, it's that SNCC philosophy of it has to be done, we'll just go ahead and do it, and you don't look around-- who's going to do it? You're going to do it and then he will deploy you and "You're going to come with me in the capacity of" you give people titles they don't even have. Okay, this is the work you will do. And they go and do it. Listen to them. There are a lot of elements. I subsequently became a diplomat for all extensive purposes. So now, later I knew all the things that it takes, but you're talking about a protocol system, which you know, you didn't grow up in it, it ain't your job, you don't work for the State Department, you don't work for the United Nations, you don't work for the Red Cross, but you are moving in those kinds of, in that kind of supranational arena with experienced, seasoned, and in many cases vile, politicians, who are giving speeches in various languages. It's a whole, it's a show, it's a political theater, in the true sense of the word political theater, and you are dropping in on that to persuade these people to participate in a Pan African gathering.

Courtland Cox: And we have, as you mentioned, didn't have a state and so forth, we didn't have a lot of money either. And I, in fact, my wife showed me a letter that I sent to her back in '73 or so, and it said, Really, I've spent some of our money on the Sixth Pan African Congress, and I promise to get it back. So, it was. So she. I mean. You know. You know it's.

Geri Augusto: By the way, no salaries involved. Let's just be clear. Your money to your place to live, your money to travel, but none of us, no salary involved ever, from the Center for Black Education forward. There's no salary involved with that.

Courtland Cox: So now, the OAU agrees and then we get a letter, I get a message from Sékou Touré who said --

Geri Augusto: The President

Courtland Cox: The President of Guinea. Who says, "I've been engaged in the revolution, you know, I stood up against the French, this point maybe ten years, and how come I'm not involved and nobody's come to talk to me about it?" So I got on a plane, went to Guinea to talk to him...So I go and I, you know, I wait, they give me a room, a hotel room, and they say the President will-- so, I wait for two days, and then they say the President will see you. And I walk into this room. He's sitting in the middle and all sorts

of people are around him and you sit down there. And he wants me to tell him about the Sixth Pan African Congress. Again, 32 years old, and as I said earlier, my whole thinking is, You're not gonna, we're not gonna let him see ya sweat. You know. So I do have this long, yellow pad. And I have all my points. And I go down point by point by point and he you know reads and then he says, yes, we will support you and so forth.

Clip 4: Courtland Cox "The Call"

Courtland Cox: And it said, "The twentieth century is a century of Black Power. It has already been marked by two dynamics. First, a unified conception of all peoples who have been colonized." Which is to say there's that relationship. "The second, they're known by friends and enemies as members of the Third World." So we're not just talking about Africa, we're talking about the Third World. "And the most significant members of the Third World are those who strive for power to the people and Black Power to Black people." So there's a whole sense of, you know, that is, and that's a phrase that the Panthers took up later on. "On the other hand, white power, which ruled unchallenged for so long during the very century, is marked by unparalleled degeneration. First by two savage and global wars, such as the world has never seen before. The same mentality prepares for a third war. Its barbarism unpurged, European power strives at all cost to maintain that domination from which the formerly colonial peoples are breaking. That is the world white power seeks to maintain at a time when the colonial peoples have begun one of the greatest movements towards human freedom that the world has ever known. The Sixth Pan African Congress, to be held in the United Republic of Tanzania in June 1973 --

Geri Augusto: Which became June 1974.

Courtland Cox: 1974. So I'm just saying, it was a sense of being part of that, you know world history. And then --

Geri Augusto: There's a whole history of Pan African Congresses.

Clip 5: Geri Augusto "Drafting the Call"

Geri Augusto: And the one quarrel he had when I finished the draft and had to show it to him, he said there's not enough, I don't know if he called it class consciousness, but it was very much, because it was coming out of the Center for Black Education. My mind is educated by Center for Black Education. So there was, to put not too fine a tune on, a lot of Black, not enough attention on class consciousness, but enough, the history part very well done, and then he said, why did you add the science and technology part on? And I had to explain, for us it was about if you are going to be there, to go there or if you are there, if you don't have the skills and the wherewithal to take the society to be able to cover its needs and create new things, then what's the point? What's the point of just having an ideological or political position but you can't do anything? Which was very much the CBE's position of don't go to Africa if you don't know how to do nothin'. Please don't go to visit or find your roots. You've got to be able to take something that will be useful. And so that's why it was there.

Clip 6: "Preference to Independent States"

Charlie Cobb: Before you do that, could you talk a little bit more about the differences/tensions between state and non-state actors in terms of the dynamic of 6PAC?

Geri Augusto: I think he -- let him finish, I think it's important for him to talk about the Caribbean because that's where it comes to the head.

Courtland Cox: I just think, the state actors felt that the, and this is really the Caribbean, it comes out most in the Caribbean, that the state actors felt that they were the state and that they should be the representatives of the at the Sixth Pan African Congress. The non-state actors felt, given the call, which we were talking about, this was a call to them. The Tanzanian government felt that since they were a government, they had to give preference to the government over any non-state actors.

Geri Augusto: And not just give preference but they thought it wouldn't have a legitimacy, you wouldn't be able to do the things you said you wanted to for support of the African liberation movements. It was kind of an on the ground view. Like Tanzania is neighbored to Mozambique. If Tanzania hadn't been an independent neighbor to Mozambique, FRELIMO couldn't have its struggle. So while they understood the facilitating and certain role of things that were not state governments, they didn't think we'd be able to advance on the agenda if you didn't have people who were actually in government power. That's their position.

Clip 7: Geri Augusto "African Liberation Movements as Observers"

Geri Augusto: Let me say the other, besides Courtland being Bennett and not in it, he sent me to be the liaison to the liberation movements. So I had to go and visit each of these offices and that's how I came to know them. Go to the office and you know keep them informed, so I was to keep them informed, they were given, I believe, observer status rather than delegate status, because the delegates were -- the delegates where African people were in a minority of the national population were delegates. But the delegates of states that had independence and the majority was Black anyway, were stated representatives. The liberation movements, and this was a discussion, not for us but for them, the independent African states and the OAU liberation committee, because there was a committee, it's headquartered in Dar Es Salaam but worked out of Zimbabwe, and they decided the liberation movements would be observers, official observers and very important observers but --

Charlie Cobb: Observers.

Geri Augusto: Observers. Which didn't sit well with any of them, and Courtland said to me, "Keep them informed, go around," so everything -- there were always bulletins and things that were happening, which delegates were coming, there was always news and I was the information officer -- perhaps I should say that, my official position, Courtland was the secretary general, I was the information officer, and I can't remember what Kathy Flewellen was, we had appropriate titles, and so I went every week to visit one or more of them. Carefully. The PAC and the ANC and the UNITA movement. ZANU and ZAPU, they were both there at the time if I recall, and FROLIZI, the PAC and the ANC -- I went through that one -- the only one that we didn't do that was RENAMO or whoever the predecessor was from Mozambique, had been kicked out. So there was only FRELIMO. But in each of these countries, I should say, there were always usually at that time still two competing African liberation movements, so that also is its own tension. So one of the important things is which one of, say I'm from Zimbabwe, which one of these organizations is going to get the recognition of the already independent African states. Which will come through the OAU. So you get an OAU liberation committee recognition. So we're plumped down also in the middle of that, and the way that, this is what I mean by plowing through the work, Courtland said, "You liaise with them, you make sure they have information."