The Jackson Plan: A Struggle for Self-Determination, Participatory Democracy, and Economic Justice

Posted on Jul 7, 2012 in <u>Featured</u>, <u>Jackson</u> http://mxgm.org/the-jackson-plan-a-struggle-for-self-determination-participatory-democracy-and-economic-justice/

The Jackson Plan: A Struggle for Self-Determination, Participatory Democracy, and Economic Justice

A major progressive initiative is underway in Jackson, Mississippi. This initiative demonstrates tremendous promise and potential in making a major contribution towards improving the overall quality of life of the people of Jackson, Mississippi, particularly people of African descent. This initiative is the *Jackson Plan* and it is being spearheaded by the Malcolm X Grassroots Movement (MXGM) and the Jackson People's Assembly.

The Jackson Plan is an initiative to apply many of the best practices in the promotion of participatory democracy, solidarity economy, and sustainable development and combine them with progressive community organizing and electoral politics. The objectives of the Jackson Plan are to deepen democracy in Mississippi and to build a vibrant, people centered solidarity economy in Jackson and throughout the state of Mississippi that empowers Black and other oppressed peoples in the state.

The Jackson Plan has many local, national and international antecedents, but it is fundamentally the brain child of the Jackson People's Assembly. The Jackson People's Assembly is the product of the Mississippi Disaster Relief Coalition (MSDRC) that was spearheaded by MXGM in 2005 in the wake of Hurricane Katrina's devastation of Gulf Coast communities in Mississippi, Louisiana, Alabama and Texas. Between 2006 and 2008, this coalition expanded and transformed itself into the Jackson People's Assembly. In 2009, MXGM and the People's Assembly were able to elect human rights lawyer and MXGM co-founder Chokwe Lumumba to the Jackson City Council representing Ward 2.

What follows is a brief presentation of the Jackson Plan as an initiative to build a base of autonomous power in Jackson that can serve as a catalyst for the attainment of Black self-determination and the democratic transformation of the economy.

Program or Pillars

The J - K Plan has three fundamental programmatic components that are designed to build a mass base with the political clarity, organizational capacity, and material self-sufficiency to advance core objectives of the plan. The three fundamental programmatic components are:

• Building People's Assemblies

- Building a Network of Progressive Political Candidates
- Building a broad based Solidarity Economy

People's Assemblies

The People's Assemblies that MXGM are working to build in Jackson and throughout the state of Mississippi are designed to be vehicles of Black self-determination and autonomous political authority of the oppressed peoples' and communities in Jackson. The Assemblies are organized as expressions of participatory or direct democracy, wherein there is guided facilitation and agenda setting provided by the committees that compose the People's Task Force, but no preordained hierarchy. The People's Task Force is the working or executing body of the Assembly. The Task Force is composed of committees that are organized around proposals emerging from the Assembly to carry out various tasks and initiatives, such as organizing campaigns and long-term institution building and development work.

Rooted in a History of Resistance

The People's Assemblies model advanced by MXGM has a long, rich history in Mississippi and in the Black Liberation Movement in general. The roots of our Assembly model are drawn from the spiritual or prayer circles that were organized, often clandestinely, by enslaved Africans – to express their humanity, build and sustain community, fortify their spirits and organize resistance. The vehicle gained public expression in Mississippi with the organization of "Negro Peoples Conventions" at the start of Reconstruction to develop autonomous programs of action to realize freedom as -Blacks themselves desired it and to determine their relationship to the Union

This expression of people's power remerged time and again in Black communities in Mississippi as a means to resist the systemic exploitation and terror of white supremacy and to exercise and exert some degree of self-determination. The last great expression of this vehicles power in Mississippi occurred in the early 1960's. It was stimulated by a campaign of coordinated resistance organized by militant local leaders like Medgar Evers that drew on the national capacity and courage of organizations like the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) and the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE). This campaign created the democratic space necessary for Black communities in Mississippi to organize themselves to resist more effectively. Broad, participatory based People's Assemblies were the most common form of this self-organization[1]. One of the most memorable outgrowths of this wave of Peoples Assemblies in Mississippi was the creation of the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party (MSFDP), which tested the concrete limits of the Voting Rights Act and challenged white hegemonic control over the Democratic Party in the state of Mississippi and throughout the south.

It is this legacy of People's Assemblies that MXGM is grounding itself in, and one we encourage others, particularly those in the Occupy movement, to study to help guide our collective practice in the present to build a better future.

A Comprehensive Electoral Strategy: Mounting an Effective Defense and Offense:

MXGM firmly believes that at this stage in the struggle for Black Liberation that the movement must be firmly committed to building and exercising what we have come to regard as "dual power" — building autonomous power outside of the realm of the state (i.e. the government) in the form of People's Assemblies and engaging electoral politics on a limited scale with the express intent of building radical voting blocks and electing candidates drawn from the ranks of the Assemblies themselves. As we have learned through our own experiences and our extensive study of the experiences of others that we cannot afford to ignore the power of the state.

First and foremost our engagement with electoral politics is to try to negate the repressive powers of the state and contain the growing influence of trans-national corporations in our communities. From police violence to the divestment of jobs and public resources, there are many challenges facing our communities that require us to leverage every available means of power to save lives and improve conditions. We also engage electoral politics as a means to create political openings that provide a broader platform for a restoration of the "commons"[2], create more public utilities (i.e. universal health care and comprehensive public transportation), and the democratic transformation of the economy. One strategy without the other is like mounting a defense without an offense or vice versa. Both are critical to advancing authentic, transformative change.

Fundamental to our engagement with electoral politics is the principle that we must build and employ independent political vehicles that are not bound to or controlled by either of the two monopoly parties in the United States. We are particularly focused on building an independent political force that challenges the Two Party monopoly and empowers oppressed people and communities throughout the state of Mississippi. In the effort to build on the legacy of independent electoral engagement by Blacks in Mississippi, MXGM's members are all registered members of the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party (MSFDP) and are starting to work as activists within the party to extend its reach and impact.

It is this combination of building and exercising dual power – building autonomous People's Assemblies and critical engagement with the state via independent party politics – that are the two fundamental political pillars of the Jackson Plan.

To date, some of the accomplishments of this model beyond the 2009 election of Chokwe Lumumba include:

- Leading the campaign to elect the first ever Black Sheriff of Hinds County, Tyron Lewis, in August 2011[3];
- Leading the campaign to Free the Scott Sisters, which won their release in January 2011[4];
- Successfully campaigned to save the J Tran city public transportation in Jackson from devastating austerity cuts planned by current Mayor Harvey Johnson;
- and united with the Mississippi Immigrant Rights Alliance (MIRA) and other progressive forces to pass an anti-racial profiling ordinance in Jackson and to defeat Arizona styled anti-immigrant legislation in Mississippi in 2011 and 2012 respectively[5].

Building a Local Solidarity Economy

The critical third pillar of the Jackson Plan is the long-term commitment to build a local Solidarity Economy that links with regional and national Solidarity Economy networks to advance the struggle for economic democracy.

Solidarity Economy as a concept describes a process of promoting cooperative economics that promote social solidarity, mutual aid, reciprocity, and generosity[6]. It also describes the horizontal and autonomously driven networking of a range of cooperative institutions that support and promote the aforementioned values ranging from worker cooperatives to informal affinity based neighborhood bartering networks.

Our conception of Solidarity Economy is inspired by the Mondragon Federation of Cooperative Enterprises based in the Basque region of Spain[7] but also draws from the best practices and experiences of the Solidarity Economy and other alternative economic initiatives already in motion in Latin America and the United States. We are working to make these practices and experiences relevant in Jackson and to make greater links with existing cooperative institutions in the state and the region that help broaden their reach and impact on the local and regional economy. The Solidarity Economy practices and institutions that MXGM is working to build in Jackson include:

- Building a network of cooperative and mutually reinforcing enterprises and institutions, specifically worker, consumer, and housing cooperatives, and community development credit unions as the foundation of our local Solidarity Economy
- Building sustainable, Green (re)development and Green economy networks and enterprises, starting with a Green housing initiative
- Building a network of local urban farms, regional agricultural cooperatives, and farmers markets. Drawing heavily from recent experiences in Detroit, we hope to achieve food sovereignty and combat obesity and chronic health issues in the state associated with limited access to healthy foods and unhealthy food environments
- Developing local community and conservation land trusts as a primary means to begin the process of reconstructing the "Commons" in the city and region by decommodifying land and housing
- Organizing to reconstruct and extend the Public Sector, particularly public finance of
 community development, to be pursued as a means of rebuilding the Public Sector to
 ensure there is adequate infrastructure to provide quality health care, accessible mass
 transportation, and decent, affordable public housing, etc.

In building along these lines we aim to transform the economy of Jackson and the region as a whole to generate the resources needed to advance this admittedly ambitious plan.

Turning Theory into Action: Organizing Campaigns and Alliance Building

These fundamental program components or pillars of the Jackson Plan will only be built through grassroots organizing and alliance building. The key to the organizing component of the overall plan is the launching and successful execution of several strategic and synergistic organizing campaigns. The most critical of these organizing campaigns are:

- The Amandla[8] Education Project
- Take Back the Land
- Operation Black Belt
- 2013 Electoral Campaigns

The Amandla Education Project

The Amandla Project is a youth and community education project specializing in skill building for civic engagement and participation. The Project provides training to youth and community members in the People's Assembly and the broader civil society in Jackson on community organizing, conflict resolution, critical literacy, media literacy, journalism and media advocacy, political theory, political economy, human rights advocacy, cooperative planning and management, participatory budgeting, the principles and practices of solidarity economy, sustainable economic development, and ecological sustainability. The Project also specializes in teaching the rich history of social struggle in Jackson and Mississippi in general, focusing on the legacy of struggle to deepening and expanding democracy in the state and the lessons from these struggles that can be employed today to enhance civic engagement and participation.

In its first year, the Amandla Project will recruit, train, and organize 100 youth and community organizers. These 100 individuals will serve as the core organizing cadre for the Jackson Plan. Our objective is to place 10 organizers in each of Jacksons 7 Wards and to utilize the remaining 30 to enhance the overall organizing capacity of progressive forces in the state of Mississippi. Mississippi

These organizers will be trained by a team of experienced organizers drawn from the ranks of MXGM, Mississippi Chapter of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, Mississippi Workers Center for Human Rights and other allied organizations that support the People's Assembly and the Jackson Plan.

Training 100 organizers is a critical start, but is in no way sufficient to meet the comprehensive needs of the Jackson Plan. To develop and train the cohorts and cadre of organizers needed to realize the objectives of this plan, MXGM, MS NAACP and the Praxis Project are working in alliance to build a training school by the start 2013 that will serve as the cornerstone of this long term educational initiative.

The Take Back the Land Campaign

The Take Back the Land campaign is an initiative to create a network of urban farms and farmers markets to promote a healthy diet, affordable produce, and food sovereignty in the city. It also aims to create a land trust network, cooperative housing, and a workers cooperative network to provide a base of employment for many of the un and under employed

The Take Back the Land campaign will focus on occupying vacant land, abandoned homes and industrial facilities and convert them into usable agricultural land for urban farming, refurbished green housing to establish a cooperative housing network, and community space to establish training facilities, business centers and recreation spaces.

Aspects of this campaign have already been launched by MXGM with the healthy foods initiative and Fannie Lou Hammer gardens project. This initiative is also conceptually linked with the National Take Back the Land Movement that was launched in 2009 by the Land and Housing Action Group (LHAG) of the US Human Rights Network (USHRN), which originally consisted of MXGM, Survivors Village, Chicago Anti-Eviction Campaign, and Take Back the Land Miami.[9]

Operation Black Belt

Operation Black Belt is a campaign to expand worker organizing in Jackson and Mississippi overall, concentrating particularly on Black and immigrant workers. The aim is to organize these workers into associations and unions to provide them with collective voice and power and improve their standards of living.

The long-term objective of this campaign is to challenge, and eventually overturn, the "right to work" laws and policies in Mississippi. These laws and polices play a major role in sustaining the extreme rates of poverty and health disparities in the state, and must be overturned in order to improve the living standards of the vast majority of its residents. MXGM and the People's Assembly aim to partner with the Mississippi Workers Center for Human Rights to build and expand this critical long-term campaign.

2013 Electoral Campaigns

For the 2013 City Elections in Jackson, the Jackson People's Assembly and MXGM are prepared to run two candidates. One candidate, Attorney Chokwe Lumumba, who currently serves as the City Councilman for Ward 2, will run for Mayor. The other candidate is June Hardwick, who is also an Attorney, will run for City Council in Ward 7.

The objective of running these candidates and winning these offices is to create political space and advance policy that will provide maneuverable space for the autonomous initiatives promoted as part of the Jackson Plan to develop and grow. They are also intended to be used to build more Ward based People's Assemblies and Task Forces in Jackson, base build for the overall plan, and raise political consciousness about the need for self-determination and economic democracy to solve many of the longstanding issues effecting Black people.

In order to create the democratic space desired, we aim to introduce several critical practices and tools into the governance processes of the Jacksoncity government that will help foster and facilitate the growth of participatory democracy. Some of these processes and tools include:

o Participatory Budgeting

to allow the residents of Jackson direct access and decision making power over the budgeting process in the city

- *Gender-Sensitive Budgeting* to address the adverse impact of policy execution as reflected in budget priorities that negatively impact women and children
- *Human Rights Education and Promotion* will require all city employee's to undergo human rights training to ensure that their policies and practices adhere to international standard of compliance with the various treaties ratified by the United States government and the results based norms established by the United Nations

We also aim to make several critical structural changes to the city of Jackson's governance structure. The most critical change we will propose and fight for is:

 Creating a Human Rights Charter to replace the existing city charter as the basis of sovereignty and governance for the city

And finally we aim to advance several economic and social changes on a structural level in Jacksonvia the governance process. These include:

- Expanding Public Transportation, by increasing transport lines and launching a fleet of green vehicles that utilize natural gas, ethanol, and electric energy
- Creating a network of solar and wind powered generators throughout the city to expand and create a sustainable power grid
- Creating a South-South Trading Network and Fair Trade Zone, that will seek to create trading partnerships with international trading blocs such as CARICOM (the Caribbean Community and Common Market) and ALBA (the Bolivarian Alliance for the Americas)

Alliance Building

Following the example of Malcolm X and countless Black political strategists and organizers before and after him, MXGM is a major advocate for strategic alliance building and united front politics. We are clear that none of our strategic objectives and demands can be attained simply by the forces we can muster. And few of our transitional goals and objectives can be reached without creating substantive alliances with strategic partners and allies. The Jackson Plan, as a transitional plan, is no exception to the rule.

Alliance building has been central to the operations of MXGM in Jackson. In many fundamental respects, the roots of the Jackson People's Assembly rest with the principled alliance of Black progressive organizations like Southern Echo, MS NAACP, MS Workers Center, Nation of Islam, MS ACLU, N'COBRA, MIRA, MS Freedom Democratic Party, NCBL, etc., assembled in the early 1990's to combat environmental racism, labor exploitation, and various aspects of institutional racism in Mississippi. Some of the key alliances we have formed or helped support over the last 20 plus years include the Andre Jones Justice Committee, MS Justice Coalition, Concerned Citizens Alliance, Jackson Human Rights Coalition, Concerned Workers of Frito Lay, Johnnie Griffin Justice Committee, Anti-Klan Coalition, Kwanza Coalition, Chokwe Lumumba Legal Support and Defense Committees, Workers United for Self Determination, City Wide Coalition for Selective Buying Campaign, Grassroots Convention, Committee to Free the Scott Sisters and the Full Pardon Committee for the Scott Sisters.

In order for the Jackson Plan and its objectives to be realized, we are going to have to build a broad alliance in the city that is aligned with the principle aims of the Plan and the initiatives that emerge from the People's Assemblies. This alliance will intentionally be multi-national in its outlook and orientation, but be based in and lead by Black working class communities and forces. We assess our strategic allies being the growing Latino community and various immigrant populations that are migrating to the state seeking employment in the agricultural, construction, and professional service sectors. The strategic nature of these forces rests with our common interest in eradicating white supremacy and institutional racism. This alliance will also give due focus to building principled relationships with white progressive forces throughout the city and state who are essential to the current and foreseeable balance of power in the state. Our immediate aim is to win enough of these forces over to our vision and program so as to weaken, if not altogether neutralize, aspects of white conservative power in the state.

The objectives of the Jackson Plan require the building of coalitions and alliances that far exceed the borders of Mississippi. We envision the coalitions and alliances we are seeking to build in Mississippi as being an essential cornerstone to the building of a strategic South by Southwest radical peoples' alliance, rooted in the rebuilding of principled alliances amongst the primary oppressed peoples' in the U.S., namely Blacks, Xicanos, and Indigenous Nations. When and if linked with the growing immigrant population, this grand alliance possesses within it the potential to transform the United States into an entirely new social project.

What You can do to help promote and advance the J - K Plan

MXGM believes that for organizing initiatives like the Jackson Plan to be successful, it will take a balance of self-reliant initiative, will and resourcing combined with genuine solidarity and joint struggle on the part of our allies. To help see this initiative to fruition, we are calling on our allies and supporters to build with us in the following concrete ways:

Promotion and Education

The first critical task is to spread the word about the Jackson Plan. Promote it amongst your family, friends and comrades and wherever you live, work, play, rest or pray. Promote the democratic potential the plan represents and educate people about the importance of this initiative, the lessons that can be learned from it, how it can be applied in their context, and how they can support it.

Resource Generation

No major social initiative such as the Jackson Plan can succeed without resources. The Jackson Plan needs a broad array of resources, but the two most fundamental resources it needs are money and skilled volunteers.

We need money for a great number of things, but more specifically to help support and build our organizing drives and campaigns, which includes paying organizers, covering work expenses (transportation, operations, facilities, etc.), and producing and promoting educational and agitation materials. If all our allies and supporters were to make small individual donations, we

firmly believe we could raise millions to support this critical work. In this spirit, we are challenging everyone who supports the Jackson Plan and the work of MXGM to make a contribution of \$5 or more to this work to ensure that it succeeds. You can make a tax deductible contribution by donating to Community Aid and Development, Inc., which is our 501c3 fiduciary agent, by visiting http://www.cadnational.org/.

The types of skills we need are organizing, managerial, fundraising, entrepreneurial, and technical in the fields of social networking, farming, construction, engineering, journalism and media, and health care. We are looking for volunteers to come to Jackson and make commitments to help at strategic times for short-term campaign initiatives, mainly for one or two weeks. And, when and where possible, to make more long term commitments for several months or years to work under the discipline of MXGM and the People's Assemblies.

Solidarity and Joint Campaigns

Political support for the Jackson Plan and the many initiatives within it is just as essential as resource support. We strongly encourage folks in the South to join us in building and extending Operation Black Belt, as this campaign ultimately needs to be a Southern wide initiative in order to be successful. The Amandla Project needs book and curriculum donations, pedagogical exchanges, and volunteer trainers to help it get started. We further call on our allies and supporters everywhere to support our 2013 electoral campaigns by joining one of our volunteer brigades that will start in the summer of 2012 to carry out the will of the People's Assembly. And of course make generous financial contributions to the campaign coffers of Chokwe Lumumba and June Hardwick.

More critically however, we would like to encourage our allies and supporters outside of Mississippi to form local and regional *Jackson Solidarity Circles* to support the Plan and relate directly with MXGM and the People's Assembly to support some or all of the aforementioned initiatives. We want to strongly encourage organizing and organizational development anywhere to enable social transformation to happen everywhere.

We are also looking to inspire, encourage, and support Jackson like plans in other Black Belt regions of the South. In particular, Black Belt regions with mid-sized cities like Jackson with similar race and class demographics, as these represent the greatest potential for success given the current balance of forces in the US, primarily because these cities don't possess the same degree of consolidated transnational capital to contend with as do larger cities. We would hope that over time Jackson Plan Solidarity Committees throughout the Black Belt South would take up this call to action and build their own local political bases of support to engage in dual power initiatives that can link with the forces advancing the Jackson Plan to empower Black and oppressed communities in the South.

If people would like to work more closely with MXGM to build the Jackson Plan we strongly encourage people of Afrikan descent to join MXGM. People interested in joining should contact our national organizer Kamau Franklin at kamauadeaabiodun@yahoo.com. We strongly encourage whites and other non-Afrikan peoples' committed to anti-racist, anti-imperialist, anti-sexist politics interested in working directly with us to join the Malcolm X Solidarity Committee

(MXSC). People interested in joining the MXSC should contact malcolmxsolidaritycommittee@gmail.com.

Forward!

The Jackson Plan is a major initiative in the effort to deepen democracy and build a solidarity economy. To the extent that this plan calls for a critical engagement with electoral politics, we take heed of the lesson and warning issued by Guyanese Professor Walter Rodney, who stated:

"I say this very deliberately. Not even those of us who stand on this platform can tell you that the remedy in Guyana is that a new set of people must take over from old set of people, and we will run the system better. That is no solution to the problems of Guyana. The problem is much more fundamental than that. We are saying that working class people will get justice only when they take the initiative. When they move themselves! Nobody else can give (freedom) as gift. Someone who comes claiming to be a liberator is either deluding himself or he is trying to delude the people. He either doesn't understand the process of real life. Or he is trying to suggest that you do not understand it. And so long as we suffer of a warped concept of politics as being leadership, we're going to be in a lot of trouble." — Walter A. Rodney, In the Sky's Wild Noise

We draw two lessons from this statement and the history associated with it. One, that to engage is to not be deluded about the discriminatory and hierarchal nature of the system, nor deny its proven ability to contain and absorb resistance, or to reduce radicals to status quo managers. The lesson we draw from Rodney's statements are that we have to fight in every arena to create democratic space to allow oppressed and exploited people the freedom and autonomy to ultimately empower themselves. The second lesson regards leadership. MXGM believes that leadership is necessary to help stimulate, motivate, and educate struggling people, but that leaders and leadership are no substitutes for the people themselves and for autonomous mass movement with distributed or horizontal leadership. As the legendary Fannie Lou Hammer said, "we have enough strong people to do this. For peoples to win this election, it would set a precedent for other counties in the state. Peoples need a victory so bad. We've been working here since '62 and we haven't got nothing, excepting a helluva lot of heartaches." [10]

The Jackson Plan ultimately aims to build a strong people, prepared to improve their future and seize their own destiny. We hope you will join us in its building and advancement.

Unity and Struggle!

For updates and more information about the Jackson Plan please visit the following websites and social media sources:

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- [1] See "I've Got the Light of Freedom: the Organizing Tradition and the Mississippi Freedom Struggle", by Charles M. Payne; "Local People: the Struggle for Civil Rights in Mississippi", by Charles Dittmer; "The Origins of the Civil Rights Movement: Black Communities Organizing for Change", by Aldon D. Morris; "A Little Taste of Freedom: the Black Freedom Struggle in Claiborne County, Mississippi", by Emilye Crosby; and "Freedom is an Endless Meeting: Democracy in Action in Social Movements", by Francesca Polletta.
- [2] The "Commons" refers to the resources of the earth that everyone is dependent upon and must utilize to survive and thrive. The essential "Common's" are land, water, and air.
- [3] See Black Agena Morning Shot August 29, 2011 interview with Kamau Franklin by Kali Akuno at http://youtu.be/IIJcginZkpw. And "Lewis prepares for the Future", by Elizabeth Waibel at http://www.jacksonfreepress.com/index.php/print_view/47994.
- [4] See "Lumumba says Scott sisters released because of supporters" at http://youtu.be/oXBm_szT_5E. And "Scott Sisters Finally Set Free" at http://colorlines.com/archives/2011/01/scott sisters finally set free.html.
- [5] See "A New Kind of Southern Strategy", by Susan Eaton at http://www.thenation.com/article/162694/new-kind-southern-strategy.
- [6] For more information on Solidarity Economy see the works of Ethan Miller, particularly "Solidarity Economy: Key Concepts and Issues" at http://www.communityeconomies.org/site/assets/media/Ethan_Miller_Miller_Solidarity_Economy_Key_Issues_2010.pdf.
- [7] For more information on the Mondragon visit http://www.mondragon-corporation.com/ENG.aspx.
- [8] "Amandla" is a Xhosa or Zulu word for "Power". It is used in a fashion similar to the slogan, "Black Power" by the BLM in theUnited States. It is used in call and response form, and the response is "Awethu", which means "to us". Combined it means "Power to the People", as made popular in theUnited States by the Black Panther Party for Self-Defense. This slogan was and remains common in the Azanian (i.e. South African) Freedom Movement.
- [9] For more background on the National Take Back the Land Movement and its history visit http://navigatingthestorm.blogspot.com/ or http://www.takebacktheland.org/.
- [10] Quote taken from "This Little Light of Mine: The Life of Fannie Lou Hammer", by Kay Miles, page 176.