For 29 years, as so many of you know, Highlander Folk School at Monteagle, Tennessee was an adult education center to which people from across the South went to share experiences and learn from each other. Its founder and director, Myles Horton, often called it a "school for problems;" it worked to provide constructive approaches to the various problems that beset the South: first the depression and deep poverty, then the need for union organization, and always the task of finding ways to end racial segregation throughout the South. Hundreds of persons went to the school each year. Thousands more were influenced in their local communities by leaders trained at Highlander.

Long before the 1954 Supreme Court decision, Highlander workshops were discussing means toward desegregated schools and full citizenship for all people of the South. In fact, many of today's remarkable adult and student leaders of the great civil rights movement got their first impetus from Highlander workshops.

Attacked by Segregationists

Because of its effective leadership and its actual physical presence as an example of integrated democracy, the school has always been hounded and attacked by segregationists. They instigated official investigations—which produced no evidence of "subversion." They resorted to smears and name-calling—which failed to silence Highlander or frighten its friends.

However, Highlander's politically powerful opponents did succeed in closing the school at Monteagle. Not on the basis of the real issues of integration vs. segregation, but on charges of selling beer without a license and operating the school for private profit.

A local jury convicted, the U. S. Supreme Court would not review the verdict because no Federal question was involved, and the State of Tennessee confiscated the property that had been built with the labor, devotion and money given over the years by people who believed in the Highlander idea.

Burned to the Ground

Then, as if to erase the very thought of Highlander, some unknown persons burned to the ground the main educational building on the mountain-top; burned the place where lively discussion groups once centered, where lasting friendships were formed, where freedom songs once rang out into the night.

THAT IS THE PAST. But an idea cannot be destroyed with the destruction of physical property. HIGHLANDER TODAY is very much alive.

"I have long admired the noble purpose and creative work of this institution. For 25 years you have given the South some of its most responsible leaders in this great period of transition."

Dr. Martin Luther King, speaking at the 25th anniversary of Highlander, in 1957.

"This seems to me just another attempt, failing the Communist charge, to close up a school that has been proving day by day that colored people and white people can live, work and play together and grow in a Christian spirit of understanding and charity."

Mrs. Eleanor Roosevelt

(Quotation from her newspaper column during the 1869 trial which closed the school at Monteagle.)
THE EVENTFUL PRESENT

Under its new name and at a new address—THE HIGHLANDER RESEARCH AND EDUCATION CENTER, 1625 Riverside Drive, Knoxville, Tennessee—the school continues to practice its ideals of brotherhood and democracy—ideals for which its predecessors, the Highlander Folk School, was loved and hated and finally closed after 29 years as an integrated school in the South.

The new Charter, granted by the State of Tennessee in 1961, states that Highlander Center will work "to help adults assume responsibility and leadership and make the fullest use of opportunities in the democratic society," and that education "shall be available without discrimination as to race, color or creed."

For Highlander, of course, these are not just fancy words on an official document. Translating words into programs, Highlander has been concentrating on an immense need in areas of Education Workshops and Citizenship Schools.

Voter Education Workshops

From September 1962 to August 1963, for example, nearly 5,000 people participated in the classes, group meetings, and workshops held at the Center in Knoxville and in local communities in Mississippi, Louisiana, South Carolina and Tennessee.

A significant step forward was a recently held Southside Voter Education Internship Program at the Sea Island Center of Johns Island, South Carolina. The students—all local community leaders—met with experienced civil rights leaders and observed the voter registration, political education, and community improvement activities which are successfully underway in a similar program in Charleston County, South Carolina. Ms. Eula Jenkins, a member of the Highlander, directed the program with the help of Highlander staff.

The week-long workshops, the "attain a genuine understanding of their people’s needs.

ON THE Firing LINE

At a safe distance, it’s hard to fathom the danger and difficulty faced by those heroic people who are working to extend Negro registration and voting in diehard areas of the South. Some sense of the hazards may be gleaned by reading the following excerpts taken from matter-

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Continued on next fold

The camp was raiced without search warrants, the camp directors and young workcamps were arrested and later convicted of disorderly conduct, contributing to the delinquent minors, and such unwarranted charges. Highlander is also a defendant in the conviction, with the help of a courageous Maryville attorney, preparing to fight in the higher courts.

The half-constructed buildings at the camp site were burned to the ground—again by persons unknown.

Crul as they are, these recurrent attacks are themselves witnesses to Highlander’s enduring significance in the South. For Highlander is integrated in a way quite different from inter racial "committees," fine though these are. At Highlander, integration is a living thing. Straight down the line: Board of Directors, staff, and students. Highlander Center is a day-by-day demonstration of the democratic way of life for which it goes on educating community leaders.

If you really believe in this idea, and in putting ideals into practice, then HIGHLANDER CENTER serves (and certainly needs) your help—financially and morally.

In March 1963, the Internal Revenue Service of the U. S. Treasury Department granted tax-exemption to the Highlander Center and made all contributions to it deductible from date of Highlander Center’s incorporation, August, 1961.

Continued on next fold

THE NEW ATTACK

In the summer of 1963, hate-inspired forces again tried to destroy Highlander and all it stood for. This time the attack was directed against an incorporated new conference center in the Smoky Mountains near Maryville, Tennessee. Highlander had sponsored this project for years—to build a camp site for use by integrated educational, church and civic groups.

HIGHLANDER RESEARCH & EDUCATION CENTER

1625 Riverside Drive

Knoxville, Tennessee 37917

I contribute $... to Highlander’s work for Highlander...  

[Box for payment details]

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Rev. C. Conrad Browne
Associate Director

WE SHALL OVERCOME
Symbolic of Highlander’s breadth of influence is the song, “We Shall Overcome,” now the theme song of the freedom movement throughout the nation. Originally a Negro spiritual, then a Baptist hymn, it was used by tobacco workers on strike in the 40’s. Highlander’s leaders learned it from the strikers, composed new words and music arrangement, taught it to Highlander students, and finally to the young people who led the 1960 sit-ins, from which it spread over the nation.

Highlander’s greatest memorial, however is not a song; it’s the fact that there are today all across the South people who tell you that a weekend visit to this school changed their lives and set them to working more effectively to change their world.

HIGHLANDER CENTER
1625 Riverside Drive, Knoxville, Tennessee
August 29, 1968

Mr. Esau Jenkins
244 Spring Street
Charleston, South Carolina 29403

Dear Esau:

I guess the most exciting thing that happened to me at SCLC Conference was to see you there and to have a few minutes to chat with you and Septima. I was so happy to hear about the article in the "News and Courier" and glad today to have found it on my desk.

What more tremendous reward could you ask than that the "News-Courier" would print an article like this? A beautiful, living tribute to you and your ideas.

I think the entire Board would be more than happy to have copies of this article. Towards that end I am making photostats and sending them to all of them.

Sometimes our feeble efforts and our plodding ways seem to depress us. One of the great things about you that I have noticed is that you very seldom get discouraged and that you keep hold of the plough in spite of the many obstacles that have been thrown in your way.

Sincerely yours,

Conrad

C. Conrad Browne

CCB/rp
June 1, 1971

Mr. Esau Jenkins
244 Spring Street
Charleston, S.C. 29403

Dear Esau:

I was glad to see the article about you in The South Today. It reminded me of the wonderful times I had there on the island after Zilphia and I spent the night in your home on Johns Island and got acquainted with you and Mrs. Jenkins and your delightful children. I never got Johns Island out of my blood. You and the island remain an important part of my life.

Your resignation from the Board made me a little sad but I understand your desire to work on the Resources Committee instead of continuing your long years of usefulness on the Board. I am looking forward to many more years of working with you.

During my recent trip to Europe I talked about the Citizenship School Program in third world seminars both in Holland and Sweden. You started something that may well go around the world.

Best wishes to you and Mrs. Jenkins.

Cordially,

Myles Horton

MH:jd
November 17, 1972

Memo to: Board of Directors
       Committee on Resources
       Highlander Friends

From: The staff

We regret to inform you that Esau Jenkins died in Charleston, South Carolina, on November 1. Highlander staff members Myles Horton, Guy and Candie Carawan and Joyce Dukes Lawson joined with members of his family, Bernice Robinson, Septima Clark and over a thousand of his friends in a memorial service and burial ceremonies on November 3 and 4.

Esau Jenkins' life exemplified the development of grassroots black leaders in the South over the past forty years. His efforts to educate himself and his people on Johns Island spurred the creation of many community projects and the Citizenship Schools which were developed by Highlander and later by the Southern Christian Leadership Conference. Thousands of southerners have benefitted from his efforts to help build a new society. His work with Highlander has covered almost two decades, as a student, as an associate and as a board member. He will be deeply missed.
Do be sure about her conditions.

Rev. Ernest, you may read this need for your information, written by your friend and mine.

Mr. Esau Jenkins
244 Spring Street
Charleston, S.C. 29403

Pastor Willis, this is the letter I told you about on the phone Sunday. You may read it.