

# UNIVERSITY SIN FRONTERAS LIBERATION SUMMER

Cita Cook ([ccook@westga.edu](mailto:ccook@westga.edu))  
Project South

## KEY POINTS FROM THE MEETING OF UNIVERSIDAD SIN FRONTERAS ON AUGUST 15, 2012 CLASS 6 (FINAL)

### INTRODUCTIONS BY STEPHANIE GUILLOU AND RUBEN SOLIS

- This class will help us think about how people learn.
- Working for liberation is a continual process. We take actions that break down colonial systems everyday but still need to renew regularly our commitment to the struggle.
- Where are we in the long battle against colonialism?
- How can we talk and work together most effectively to understand colonialism and dismantle racism, while also imagining and creating a better society?
- How can we teach what we've been learning? How can emancipatory education help bring about liberation?

### PRESENTATION BY JENICE VIEW ON EMANCIPATORY EDUCATION

- We are going to teach each other about core liberation struggles, thinking about the theory and practice of what we've been doing.
- Ideas offered by class members about the best context for learning experiences: non-school settings, especially in existing communities; discussions and conversations with others, especially those that build stronger connections; struggles; hands-on activities; activities that enhance our ability to learn from our bodies, including our muscles and our hair; a diverse group; access to beer; the ability to cry as a way to break through to new awareness; challenges, including incarceration
- Some common elements shared by these different contexts: expressions of varied emotions; connections with others; empowering/confronting power; action involving and acceptance of our bodies; growth of various kinds

### SMALL GROUP REPORTS ON FOUR LIBERATION STRUGGLES

1. The Democratic Republic of Congo : presentation of a chart showing the elements of the struggle which led to colonization, those which opposed it, and the material conditions which affected these developments

- 1884-1960: Colonization, imposed by King Leopold II until 1908 and then by Belgium until 1960, a time period when industrializing nations and corporations were seeking access to new raw materials, workers, and consumers.
- 1960: After the successful struggle for independence, Patrice Lumumba became Prime Minister, reflecting a growing worldwide rejection of colonial values and the rise of Pan-Africanism.
- 1961: Lumumba was assassinated and replaced by U.S./CIA-backed Joseph Mobutu until 1997 as a counter-response to grassroots liberation movements. Globalizing economic institutions, particularly the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank, imposed debt responsibilities on the neo-colonized nations.

2. Liberation Theology in Latin America : presentation of a skit, complete with liberation theology

posters, which portrayed how believers in liberation theology might have persuaded a Columbian peasant to stop believing in the established military and accept the leadership of a militant Jesus and Camilo Torres, a Catholic priest who was killed in 1966 in his first battle as a guerilla. Liberation theologians encouraged supporters of justice to use their faith to fight power, which they identified as a fight against institutional sin.

3. Caribbean Pan-African Movement : presentation of a skit involving the reactions of two women to a television program which presented contradictory versions of the life of Amy Garvey, the wife of Marcus Garvey. One reporter portrayed her as an admirable Pan-Africanist leader and the other made her seem somewhat crazy and a hindrance to the movement. The women watching the program were shocked both at what they had not already known and at the ability of the media to harm the reputation of a famous person.

[Note from Cita: I've discovered some information relevant to research on Amy Garvey that some of you might already know. There were two Amy Garveys. Both were wives of Marcus Garvey and life-long Pan-Africanist activists. The first, Amy Ashwood Garvey, lived with her husband for only a couple of months. She then criticized him in various ways as she became an international leader of a version of Pan-Africanism that emphasized the importance of women. Amy Jacques Garvey was married to Marcus Garvey from 1922 to his death in 1940. She supported Garveyism until her death in 1973, calling for a more traditional but still activist role for women in the movement. I assume that the documents that inspired the skit were about Amy Ashwood Garvey.]

4. Southern Civil Rights Movement : presentation of a group reading of a call to southerners to join the Civil Rights Movement in order to build a stronger community; to gain equality and equal representation; to create radical ideas, beliefs, governance, education, and demonstrations; and to build this movement through non-violent direct action. They aimed, as well, to sustain a youth movement, to expand the Civil Rights Movement, to develop models reflecting their values for organizing and for social interactions, and to build their own history. They were guided by the models of a number of Civil Rights leaders, particularly Ella Baker.

#### **DISCUSSION OF THE COMMONALITIES BETWEEN THE MOVEMENTS**

- Pattern of movements rising and falling and rising again
- All involving experiences of oppression and resistance to it
- Character assassination and other distortions of the facts of history by their enemies
- Revealing the violence of colonialism, through both mass killings and assassinations of leaders (Lumumba, Camilo Torres, Walter Rodney, Archbishop Romero, Malcolm X, and many others)
- Public violence being used against movements as a form of terrorism
- Owning their own history by presenting the truth
- Much movement activism from the 1950s through the 1970s, but with roots going much earlier
- Expanding their impact by reaching out to other groups
- Gaining strength from faith
- Reliance on technology of different kinds to spread their messages

#### **DISCUSSION OF LESSONS FROM THE CLASS ACTIVITY AND FROM THE MOVEMENTS**

- More time for this activity and clearer instructions would have helped.
- Distributing different documents to individuals in a group encouraged working together.
- The process required choosing from many possible stories and lessons for the presentation.
- Deliberately choosing conflicting articles can stimulate useful questions.
- Access to music for the presentations would have been helpful, along with information on the role of music and other arts in each of the movements.

- We need to develop strategies which take advantage of the dynamic relationship between teaching and learning.
- We need to redefine terms that have been colonized so we can imagine and communicate, for example, what real independence and democracy would mean.
- We also need a people’s version of Christianity and other religious faiths.
- We should learn from the commonalities between previous movements to look for and pay attention to the commonalities between our different campaigns so we won’t miss opportunities to get to know each other and to work together.
- We are privileged to be able to stand on the shoulders of so many inspiring people.

## **DEBRIEFING AND FEEDBACK FROM JENICE**

- See the handout with information and space for comments about the different methods of emancipatory pedagogy.
- Focusing on primary (first-hand/original) sources allows us to develop more of a sense of how people in the past experienced and thought about their lives, but secondary (not first-hand) materials can help give those documents a fuller context, synthesize the information found only by reading many, many primary documents, and include possible explanations for the events and developments being studied. Consider the possible differences between Wikipedia and other encyclopedic summations of history and those by historical scholars. In starting a lesson, however, something as basic as a picture book can be an effective jumping-off point.
- Limited time in a learning session (or limited space for written materials) makes it necessary to edit thoughtfully. Notice the decisions about information and documents that are made in textbooks and other common methods of relating history.
- In choosing documents for a discussion, vary the nature of the documents according to length, target audiences, writing style (wordy and not so wordy), use of images; remember that some in the group may be reluctant readers who can learn most from a short quote.
- Movements, by definition, have countless activities going on at the same time.
- Think about ways for quiet, shy people to participate in the learning process and in a movement.
- “Constructivist” pedagogy emphasizes the benefits of recognizing that everyone has some knowledge to share and that we can learn more if we combine all of that knowledge.
- “Popcorn” pedagogy allows anyone to pop into the discussion whenever they have something to say, allowing free-wheeling brainstorming but giving more power to quicker (not necessarily deeper) thinkers with loud voices and self-confidence.
- The handout of the two Learning Pyramids (without research records to support the numbers given) reminds us of the important to include different kinds of activities in any learning situation.
- Individuals vary in the ways in which they learn best. Pay attention to your own learning style, as well as that of others, and to the varying desires of a particular audience.
- Research does support the effectiveness of using the arts as part of learning (performance, visuals, music, etc.).
- The strategy of focusing on the personal stories of individuals, whether in the past or today, is not a trivial approach since it reveals the extent of personal conflicts and failings in the lives of people too often portrayed as perfect heroes. We need to see ourselves in the lives of the people we study.
- Including biographical information about more than one leader for each movement can help demystify activism and leadership by showing that a movement’s success relies not on the existence of a solitary, heroic leader who seems capable of more than any of us could do but on the determination, contributions, and cooperation of many ordinary human beings.

- A social justice orientation to learning often reveals more complexities to the history than are usually recognized, particularly how many people were involved in specific developments
- A group process can be difficult, requiring a clear purpose and sensitive facilitators.
- We have a number of methods to counter our lack of knowledge about the past—including oral history (only for the recent past), family stories, field studies, analysis of documents—but we have to accept the reality that we cannot know everything. It is important to think about the most useful questions, even if we cannot find documented answers for them.
- Always leave open the possibility of unknown elements in a historical narrative. We know, for example, that Bartolome de las Casas opposed the oppression of indigenous Americans by the Spanish in the sixteenth century, but the fact that we do not know about any other priests who also did so does not necessarily mean that he was the only one.

### **STEPS'S CONCLUDING THOUGHTS ABOUT THIS CLASS**

- We are claiming this moment as the inauguration of the Universidad Sin Fronteras, with the presentation of the first certificates to all who participated in the process.
- This class did not accept the boundaries usually imposed on learning and teaching. We covered history from the time when Europeans declared their “right of discovery” to recent years when we have been reclaiming our bodies.
- We want to keep working together and to spread the methods and meaning of the class for many years to come, whether that be twenty or two-hundred.
- We believe in and will continue to work for collective development.

### **TO DO FOR THE CLASS (AND FOR THE FUTURE OF THE WORLD)**

1. Share with two other class members and then write out your life map at the end of the class, thinking particularly about how emancipatory education affected who you are today. Exchanging our personal histories can help us develop more mutual understanding so we can work together more effectively.
2. The People’s Movement Assembly (PMA) for this class will be on Wednesday, August 29. We shall discuss issues such as the following:
  - What did we get out of the course?
  - What should we do now? How we are gong to change the world?
  - What is life-sustaining for people suffering from colonialism?
  - What can we learn from people who died for the common good?
  - When and how should we collectivize?
  -
3. Join in the presentation of a report on our course at the Southern Movement Assembly in Lowndes County, Alabama on September 21. Google “Southern Movement Assembly” if this link does not work: ([http://projectsouth.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/07/5AsTheSouthGoesSpring2012\\_SMAOverview.pdf](http://projectsouth.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/07/5AsTheSouthGoesSpring2012_SMAOverview.pdf))
4. Between now and the election on November 6, we shall be focused on stimulating people to vote while also exposing the myths of democracy and developing a regional action plan that resonates within and drives new possibilities, nationally and globally.
5. After the election, we shall unite in creating a “People’s First One-Hundred Days.”

This summation of the main points made at a class for the Liberation Summer of the Universidad Sin Fronteras is selective, to some extent organized by topic rather than in the order in which they were stated, and often paraphrased. I encourage anyone in the class to suggest additions or corrections.