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“Everyone You Don’t Like is a Communist.”

The Highlander Center and the Civil Rights Movement in Knoxville, 1961-1971

By Michael Blum*

In June 1963, Myles Horton, director of the Highlander Folk School, his attorney Ed Lynch, and their wives had lunch at Cline’s Grill and Sundries in Maryville, Tennessee. As they finished eating, the owner, Jim Cline, cursed at them and then attacked Myles Horton and hit Ed Lynch. After the beating, Cline expressed little regret, saying: “I had informed Horton’s lawyer not to bring him out here. His lawyer has been a customer quite a while. Horton came just to provoke. I had several customers get up and leave when they came in. When they were slow in leaving I helped them. Their story is exaggerated.” The attack left Horton unconscious, with a cut on the back of his head, a black eye, and possibly a broken elbow. Because of those injuries, Horton could not remember much of the incident afterward.

The Highlander Folk School invoked strong feelings for Tennesseans, because of the long-running public belief that Highlander harbored communists and promoted pro-communist thought. Jim Cline and many others believed that Horton was a communist who threatened the American way of life. More directly, Horton scared off customers, and his vilification in the media justified the beating. Horton, who repeatedly denied charges of promoting communism, saw himself as a promoter of American democracy. Through Highlander, he provided civic education, encouraged African Americans to vote, and promoted integration, all of which created greater racial equality and spread democracy. Lynch supported Horton’s goals and risked harm to ensure that Highlander continued its efforts. In the

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larger picture, the two perspectives brought to issue what it meant to be an American in the early 1960s. For Cline, Americanism meant fighting communism and maintaining the status quo. For Horton, Americanism was about expanding democracy to all, especially groups on the periphery of society. These differing philosophies converged during Highlander’s participation in the Civil Rights Movement in Knoxville during the 1960s.

In 1961, after decades of inquiries from anti-communist investigators, the state of Tennessee revoked the Highlander Folk School’s charter and seized all of its buildings and property near Monteagle. After the closure, leaders secured a new charter, relocated the school to Knoxville, and renamed it the Highlander Research and Education Center. But few Knoxeans welcomed the school with open arms, especially as the Civil Rights Movement intensified at the national level. In fact, Highlander’s reputation made it too radical for many of the city’s civil rights leaders, social activists, and elected officials.

The Civil Rights Movement in Knoxville remained low key because it was conducted through negotiations among activists, elected officials, and business leaders. Civil rights leaders in Knoxville believed that Highlander’s presence had the potential to derail their progress. Negotiations led to a degree of social change, minimal violence and unrest, and limited media attention. For example, the direct action movement brought about the desegregation of most public spaces before the Civil Rights Act of 1964, but failed to address other inequalities. Such partial victories created a fragile relationship among these groups. Highlander threatened to upset the progress of the movement by attracting negative media attention to the city’s race relations. More importantly, Highlander pushed for an accelerated pace of change and complete racial equality, a step that city officials remained unprepared to take. Highlander’s agenda had the potential to disrupt the balance between activists, elected officials, and business leaders.

The Highlander Center drew the ire of elected officials and local whites in Knoxville, largely because Horton and other leaders refused to engage with local officials and businessmen. Instead, Highlander focused on civil rights activism across the country and expected local activists to embrace their work on national issues. Because of the charges of promoting communism, many activists viewed the Highlander Center as an unwelcome outsider capable of disrupting the Civil Rights Movement in Knoxville and also a challenge to their control of civil rights activism. In response to the perceived spread of communism, several groups, including elected officials and the Ku Klux Klan combined their efforts to rid Knoxville of the school, which came to fruition in 1971.

Scholars have focused on the school’s founding in the 1930s until the Monteagle campus closed in 1961, with limited discussion of Highlander’s decade in Knoxville and the several lessons. Primarily, communism permeated the school, and scholars have shown how the school’s efforts to challenge segregation practices and research and development of labor organizations were met with harassment and resistance by federal and state authorities. The school faced varied approaches and strategies from its early days, with a focus on participatory education and training.

The Highlander Folk School is a testament to the belief that education can be a powerful tool for social change. To do so, Highlander focused on building strong alliances with unions, making it possible to overcome the challenges it faced, and perhaps the only way to achieve real progress. Highlander’s unique philosophy, as articulated by its founder, A. Philip Randolph, of Highlander after 1961, was to advocate the participation of labor in the movement, while also focusing on the education of leaders needed for the participatory movement. Highlander programs were designed to be conducted in a non-violent, non-partisan manner.

Highlander’s success was built on its focus on building strong alliances and racial integration, and its leadership in the struggle for civil rights. The school’s legacy continues today as an important institution in the fight for social justice and equality.

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2 Scholars have examined the role of Highlander in Tennessee: The Highlander Center and the History of Tennessee, by William L. Wilson, Jr. (Chapel Hill, NC, 1980).


4 See, for example, David Montgomery, The New Deal and the Farmer (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1988).
to issue what it meant to be Americanism meant fighting discrimination. For Horton, Americanism was fundamentally about the right to organize. After the Highlander Folk School's charter was revoked in 1933, Horton moved the school to Knoxville, Tennessee, to reopen it as the Highlander Research and Education Center. But few of the school's staff were local, and the school's influence waned. In fact, Highlander's influence began to decline even before the Civil War, as the city's civil rights leaders, such as Martin Luther King Jr. and Ralph Abernathy, became more prominent.

The school's influence remained low key because it was unable to attract significant numbers of activists, elected officials, and community leaders. However, the school continued to operate successfully, even though it faced financial difficulties and a lack of support. Despite these challenges, the school maintained its reputation as a center for civil rights education and activism.

The school's success in Knoxville offered several lessons. Primarily, it highlighted the importance of community organizing and grassroots mobilization. The school's approach to organizing was based on the principle of nonviolence and the belief that change could be achieved through dialogue and understanding. This approach was successful in Knoxville, where the school was able to bring together community leaders and activists to work towards common goals.

The school's approach to organizing was also successful in other communities, such as Montgomery, Alabama, where the school played a key role in the Montgomery Bus Boycott. The school's approach to organizing was based on the principle of nonviolence and the belief that change could be achieved through dialogue and understanding.

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In conclusion, the Highlander Research and Education Center was a key player in the civil rights movement and played a significant role in the development of the modern civil rights movement. The school's approach to organizing was based on the principle of nonviolence and the belief that change could be achieved through dialogue and understanding. This approach was successful in Knoxville, where the school was able to bring together community leaders and activists to work towards common goals.


4 Highlander defines popular education as a "participatory process that brings with people's experiences and, through reflection, dialogue, and cooperation, develops collective analysis and strategies for action." In this process, everyone is a teacher, everyone is a learner, and everyone has within them the seed to make change. Highlander Research and Education Center, Weaving Threads of Justice: Highlander Center's 75th Anniversary Book of Yarn (New Market, TN, 2007), 2.
War. Following World War II, the perceived threat of domestic communists emerged a concern for many Americans. Politicians and law enforcement demanded investigations and led relentless pursuits of alleged un-Americans. In the process, however, red hunters applied the label of communist to many people and groups, including those involved in the Civil Rights Movement, in order to silence or suppress their voices. The anti-communist rhetoric of the Cold War thrust Highlander into the national spotlight. The school’s activism made it a prime target for accusations of communist training. During this unpredictable time, any threat to the status quo seemed harmful to American efforts to win ideological victories in the Cold War. Criticism of the American system of government helped the Soviet Union, the reasoning went, and therefore communists were at the root of attempted change. This argument made Highlander’s efforts for social change difficult. The controversy surrounding the school intensified when it shifted its focus to school desegregation.

In 1955, shortly after the Brown v. Board of Education decisions, the Highlander staff began programs aimed at desegregating schools. Their plan called for training organizers at all grades, in line with the national spaces, and encouraged the voice of Jim Crow in the South. Politicians and others in 1954, the school launched a campaign to save their ground. Suits filed in 1954 paved the way for the work amid resistance.

In early 1955, the state legislature passed following weeks and three months of a Friend of the Court sympathetic to the cause. As of the school, the recommendation was sent to the Senate for the signature of Highlanders.

In late 1955, state Attorney General Edward O. Shut down a number of events from an investigation that showed when Highlander’s money was collected. The money was divided among candy, cigarettes, and visitors who were not included in uncovered costs.

In late 1955, Highlander’s efforts to desegregate schools resulted in changes that the school taught communists, including Martin Luther King Jr. and Rosa Parks. This 1965 billboard, which showed King attending an integrated event at Highlander in 1957, announced to motorists that King and all who supported Highlander were communists.

Highlander Center, New Market, Tennessee.

Footnotes:
5 Highlander: A Brief History of the Highlander Center, New Market, Tennessee.
plan called for neighborhood schools, the simultaneous desegregation of all grades, integrated staff, and a standard curriculum. It shifted, in concert with the national Civil Rights Movement, to sit-ins, desegregation of public spaces, and citizenship schools, which taught participants to read and encouraged voter registration. Because of the Cold War and the culture of Jim Crow segregation practices, these efforts garnered harassment from politicians and white extremists, especially in the South. For example, in 1954, the Georgia Commission of Education launched a propaganda campaign across the South that cast Highlander as a communist training ground. Such red-baiting campaigns led to further scrutiny and inquiry into the work at Highlander.

In early February 1959, Tennessee's House of Representatives passed legislation to investigate charges of communism at Highlander. In the following weeks, the investigating committee, composed of two state senators and three representatives, heard testimony from the school's neighbors, Ed Friend of the Georgia Commission of Education, Myles Horton, and a few sympathetic witnesses. The hearings established that the integrated structure of the school violated state segregation laws. By early March, the committee recommended that the school's charter be revoked. The state's house and senate responded with a joint resolution authorizing further investigation of Highlander.

In late July 1959, the Grundy County Sheriff, highway patrolmen, and state Attorney General A.F. Sloan raided Highlander. The results of the raid led Sloan to file an additional motion requesting that the property be shut down immediately because of illegal beer sales. This charge stemmed from an incident in 1957, at the end of a program for labor union officials, when Highlander served beer and charged each participant a small fee to cover costs. In addition, staff made communal shopping trips, during which money was collected from a white person purchased toiletries, candy, cigarettes, and other small items, including beer for African American visitors who could not shop in the county's segregated stores. The "evidence" uncovered during the raid eventually forced the school out of Monteagle.

In late 1959, the state circuit court in Grundy County heard the Highlander case. Lawyers for the state of Tennessee took issue with the school's charter, which classified it as tax-exempt "non-profit, general welfare" private school. State attorneys argued that Highlander violated segregation laws, sold beer, and that founder Myles Horton profited from running the school. In February 1960, the court ruled in favor of the state, with Judge C.C. Chittin explaining that "the segregation laws of the state

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5 Highlander Folk School, "Basic Policies for Presentation to Local School Boards," July 24-August 6, 1955, McClung Historical Collection, Knox County Public Library, Knoxville.

as applied to private schools are constitutional and valid" and the selling of beer without a license violated state laws. The decision revoked Highlander's charter, which meant that because the school had no stockholders or owners, the state of Tennessee took control of the property. Highlander's attorney Cecil Branstetter and others expected the ruling because many of the jury members reported that "it was against their religion for whites and Negroes to sit in the same classroom." After the ruling, Highlander's Board of Directors approached the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) to help overturn the decision, Branstetter worked to obtain a new trial, and Horton vowed to appeal to the Supreme Court to reinstate the school's charter.

Throughout the legal battles, staff members continued their interracial activism. In late June 1960, Highlander conducted a workshop for white southerners focused on helping African Americans register to vote. In early July, Reverend Ewell Reagin began a six-week program to prepare black and white high school students for integrated education.

By the summer of 1960, leaders of Highlander planned to expand programs to East Tennessee and temporarily relocate their school to Knoxville. By late July, the Board of Directors announced plans for the move. The school would move into a large two-story home on Riverside Drive, which was located in a racially mixed community close to downtown known as Mountain View. The board also elected Lewis Sinclair, the first African American to receive a graduate degree in economics from the University of Tennessee and a Tennessee Valley Authority statistician, to the group, in an attempt to build connections with the local African American community. At the same time, Horton and others established a trust agreement to create a new institution legally separate from the Highlander Folk School, which would allow their programs to continue if the courts upheld the decision to revoke the charter and seize the Montagle property.

The publicity surrounding the case heightened fears about Highlander's ties to communists. In March 1961, an anonymous citizen wrote to the Director of the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), J. Edgar Hoover to inquire about the school's link to communists. Hoover did not release the FBI's information, but left a note in Highlander's file that the school had "been the subject of numerous allegations that it is a communist school and the headquarters of communism in Eastern Tennessee due primarily to its racial character." Hoover's unwillingness to share information was explained in a later memo, which reported that the FBI's most recent investigation,

from 1941 to 1945, was not released. The FBI has been repudiating the conclusion. Therefore it did not release the 1940s report, and the Highlander has continued to refuse to reveal any information about its membership or activities.

In April 1961, the Board of Directors made a decision to revoke the licenses for four students who appeared in the school with alcohol and beer cans, whiskey, and a Bible verse appearing in the school's yard. After the decision, the school was closed, and the board of directors appointed a new board of directors to manage the school.

The decision to revoke the licenses for these students was the result of the school's refusal to adhere to the state's liquor laws. The court ruled that the school was subject to state law, and the school's refusal to comply was grounds for the decision. The court also ruled that the school was a private institution, and therefore subject to state law. The court further ruled that the school's refusal to comply with state law was grounds for the decision.

As the chapters of the folk school movement took over the Highlander Folk School, the state took over the school in 1961. Horton was replaced by a new director, and the school was to be used as a school for African Americans.

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11 Letter to FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover, March 27, 1961; J. Edgar Hoover Letter, April 5, 1961, all in Highlander Folk School, FBI File 61-7511-270.
and valid” and the selling of Highlander’s property. Highlander’s stockholders did not own or have any stockholders or owners interest in or control of the property. Highlander’s attorney argued the decision was invalid because many of the jury members were black, and there was no record of the decision. The decision was made by the Board of Directors of the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) to help overturn the previous decision and uphold Highlander’s charter.

In 1961, Highlander continued their inter racial efforts by conducting a workshop for white southerners to register to vote. In early 1961, the school announced plans for the move. On September 1, 1960, they announced plans for the move to a new home on Riverside Drive, which was located a few blocks north of downtown Knoxville.works. The new home was described as being a “little black community” and was located on the edge of the African American community. In June 1961, Highlander announced plans to establish a new school, the Highlander Folk School, which would focus on the study of African American history and culture. The school was founded to provide an educational alternative to the segregated schools of the South. Highlander was one of the first organizations to publicly challenge the Jim Crow laws and the segregation of schools. The school was founded by James Lawson, a civil rights activist, and was initially supported by the Highlander Folk School. The school was a center for the nonviolent movement and provided training and resources to the civil rights movement.

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officials, and segregated merchants. While these groups had divergent views, negotiations led to a degree of social change, namely desegregation, and racial peace. These tenuous negotiations continued throughout the remainder of the 1960s. Highlander's leaders never participated in these discussions. Instead they pushed for racial equality at the national level.

In Knoxville, Highlander conducted programs for local activists and those across the South. Myles Horton remembered “We moved to Knoxville, where we knew it would be safer than out in the country and settled into a big house in the Black community, and we had a lot of support and protection from local labor unions.”9 Once in Knoxville, Highlander resumed a full slate of programs. Staff members rented a second building on East Main across from the Shiloh Presbyterian Church. It housed a number of citizenship schools, during which staff members taught participants, usually poor African Americans, how to register to vote. Highlander also

held weekly discussions for students from the University of Tennessee, Knoxville College, and nearby Maryville College. These programs made up only a small portion of Highlander's activism. Most of their programs occurred across the South. For example, in the fall of 1966, Highlander staff members led a voter education workshop in Fitzgerald, Georgia, an agricultural stabilization and conservation program in Edwards, Mississippi, and an Appalachian cultural revival workshop in Knoxville.

For conservative whites in East Tennessee, the arrival of Highlander signaled trouble. Rumors of the school's communist teachings traveled fast in the Cold War climate, where fear of change and hypersensitivity to perceived threats to the traditional American way of life dominated. These circumstances made Highlander a threat to the city's safety, unpopular with residents, and fundamentally un-American. It also brought the possibility of inflaming civil rights activism by pushing for faster and more drastic social change.

Highlander's arrival provided a challenge to those involved with civil rights activism and created fear of racially based violence. For elected officials and businessmen, the school threatened to disrupt the city's economic growth and change the dynamics of the local Civil Rights Movement. Any race-related violence threatened economic growth, and therefore Highlander's aggressive tactics could not be part of local efforts to improve race relations. Highlander also put local activists in a precarious position. The school had the potential to connect local efforts with the national Civil Rights Movement, but it also had the potential to ruin their relationship with powerful whites. In the end, activists were unwilling to gamble with Highlander and instead put their efforts into other forms of activism, including War on Poverty programs or electoral politics.

Local elected officials took steps to prevent Highlander from operating, such as creating new city ordinances. City law director T. Mack Blackburn, at the request of Mayor John Duncan, produced an emergency ordinance forcing any school opened after November 7 to submit parking plans, numbers of students, teachers, staff, and guests, and a schedule of events for the City Council's approval. The ordinance did not apply to schools already operating. Though the ordinance did not mention Highlander, Blackburn "conceded that it is directed at that school." The Knoxville Journal reported the ordinance "indicates strongly that the intent is to provide the Council with more than one ground for refusing to approve the Highlander location.

29 Aimee Horton, "Highlander Center Serves the South," Knoxville Flashlight Herald, September 14, 1963.
30 Highlander Center, Summary of Highlander Center Programs May 1, 1966 to May 1, 1967, 1966 Workshops, Summary, Activities, all at Highlander Center.
on Riverside Drive."22 Local elected officials wanted Highlander to vanish immediately. They did not, however, break the law to force its exit. Staying within the law ensured dealings with Highlander remained orderly. Instead, local officials waited for Highlander's staff to violate the law, but they never did.

The City Council's measure did not stop Highlander from carrying out its programs. The school refused to be intimidated by or work with Knoxville institutions, including the City Council or the Knoxville Journal, the city's conservative newspaper. Throughout November 1961, Highlander hosted informal discussions and held workshops across the country. The staff also learned to navigate the inner-workings of Knoxville. For example, anticipating a negative article, the schools banned a Knoxville Journal reporter and photographer from attending a talk by Robert Blakely, a journalist and adult education professor at the University of Iowa.21

The move to Knoxville did little to change the outlook of Highlander's staff and students. Given its mission and history, the school had been unpopular, garnered harassment, and suffered decades of investigations and accusations. Staff members carried on because of their moral responsibility to expand American democracy, often risking harm to do so.

The constant red baiting drew white supremacists to Knoxville. In late 1962, a group of white supremacists founded a chapter of the White Citizens' Council, a segregationist group which originated in Mississippi. The chapter developed strategies to prevent integration in Knoxville and to interfere with the activities at Highlander. Leaders explained that the chapter started because "Knoxville is especially important as the location of the Highlander Folk School. This communist-related organization uses its Knoxville headquarters to promote racial strife throughout the South."24 The White Citizens' Council brought an additional threat and served as a good example of how Highlander disrupted the gradual progress of the Civil Rights Movement in Knoxville.

In June 1963, a group of Highlander volunteers and staff members hiked up Rich Mountain, one of the peaks in the Great Smoky Mountains located about an hour outside of Knoxville, to conduct a program. Robert Gustafson, a graduate student from the University of Vermont, and his wife Mary taught black and white students from across the country about the importance of integration. The Gustafsons, both white, wanted to "provide living and working experience for Negroes and whites from the North and the South." During their trip, the Blount County sheriff received a number of phone calls demanding a stop to the campout. One anonymous caller threatened to kill them if something is not investigated. Up ahead, "white and Negroes go together. . . . Others went with a group on camping, delinquency of children, what about Highlander," arrested.26 The arrests became the topic of discussion in trial the Blount County Mountain campout in July. Cans were still being scattered on Hartsook's property, and the defendants were definitely worse.

The ensuing sexual encounters with the "considerable number" who was apparent to everyone jammed into the car, they get in blood in a way that the Grand Jury thought and that those being threats.27 Several recollections of the trial, said, "A girl came in, and she said, 'a color girl on another one of the tops' who was court he entered.

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30 Highlander, June 27, 1963.
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Volunteers and staff members conduct a program, Robert of Vermont, and his wife across the country about the white, wanted to "provide from the North County sheriff received a campout. One anonymous

caller threatened, "There will be nigger blood running in these mountains if something isn't done." These calls prompted the sheriff's office to investigate. Upon reaching the camp site, Sheriff Roger Trotter witnessed, "white and Negro males and females were in bed in the same tent, but not together. . . . One Negro man was sitting on the bed of a white woman others were up laughing and talking." Deputies arrested the entire group on charges ranging from disorderly conduct to contributing to the delinquency of minors. Officers immediately questioned Robert Gustafson about Highlander's links to communism. He denied any affiliation but was arrested. The next day Myles Horton arranged bond for the group.

The arrests led to the end of the program. Afterward, the campsite became the target of a suspected arson incident. As group members awaited trial the Blount County sheriff's office received a call about a fire at the Rich Mountain camp site. On arrival, they found the campsite burned down and gas cans strewn about. After a preliminary glance, Knoxville Fire Marshal Gene Harts, suspected arson saying: "There were two separate fires, and they definitely were of an incendiary nature." 28

The ensuing trial was tense because of allegations of interracial sexual encounters at the campsite. The Knoxville News Sentinel reported that "considerable tension and some hostility towards the defendants was apparent in the courtroom. More than 200, including a few Negroes, jammed into the room, lining the walls solidly. Another 100, who could not get in stood in the large hallways on the second floor." It was later reported that the Grand Dragon of the Tennessee Ku Klux Klan attended the trial and that those involved in the proceedings, including the judge, received threats. Several sheriff's deputies testified about the camp raid, with their recollections more inflammatory than first reported. Deputy Bob Kennedy said, "A girl came out of one of the tents, putting her brassiere on" and that he saw a "colored boy and girl on a cot together, and a white boy and colored girl on another cot." He claimed, "most of the girls had on pajamas. Some of the tops were not buttoned." Maryville Policeman James Allen told the court he entered a tent and saw two youths nude from the waist down and
one without a top." The testimony alluded to interracial sexual activities, a major violation of Jim Crow mores.

As Highlander's attorney questioned the camp participants, hostility continued. Repeated interruptions to Mrs. Gustafson's testimony and references to race by state's attorney David Rosier "brought a sharp rebuke from Judge Shields following an outburst by spectators in the emotion laden atmosphere of the courtroom." Rosier also sent a warning to future campers: "we want them to know what will happen to them when they start this kind of thing in Blount County...we don't want them here!" The insinuation of interracial sex ensured that the Highlander group would be judged on their violation of local customs rather than adherence to the law, and thus they stood little chance of receiving a fair trial.

The trial ended quickly. Seven of the camp attendees were found guilty of their minor offenses and received five or ten dollar fines. The Gustafsons were held until a grand jury could hear their charges for contributing to the delinquency of a minor. Myles Horton paid all the fines and posted $1,000 bond for the Gustafsons.

Knoxville Mayor John Duncan relied on the criminal justice system to deal with Highlander. In the middle of the Blount County trial, Walter Gourdin, of the Fountain City Central Baptist Church, wrote to Duncan asking him to close Highlander. While lacking the legal authority to close the school, Duncan replied, "we have certainly been greatly concerned about the operation of this place since it has been in Knoxville." The mayor also suggested that Attorney General Clarence Blackburn should investigate because it might spur "individuals who did have information concerning violations of the law would come forth and divulge this information." He also implied that the FBI already kept a close watch on Highlander.

Other city officials disagreed with Duncan's call for an investigation. Not all law enforcement officials were eager to close the school, especially if no crimes were being reported. They waited for proof of a crime before taking interest in Highlander. In response to Duncan's call for an investigation, Blackburn told the Knoxville Journal that he did not wish to conduct a witch hunt, but he would prosecute the school for legitimate violations of city laws. Discussions of an investigation led to conversations between Horton, Police Chief French Harris, and Sheriff Carl Ford. Harris offered, "We will be glad to investigate any legitimate complaints at the school, but I can find nothing that would indicate any law being violated there. Just because an organization

or person is doing something that doesn't agree with the feelings of certain other persons, doesn't mean that an organization or person is violating a law." Further, many city officials believed that the FBI and the IRS were keeping close watch on Highlander.\(^8\) Blackburn's response was supported by a memo from J. Edgar Hoover to the Knoxville branch instructing agents to "discreetly obtain the names of all officers, teachers and students who are currently connected...[but] no active investigation may be conducted. You should insure that obtaining these names does not become a matter of public information in your territory."\(^7\) To offer proof of their good intentions, Highlander staff members began their own publicity campaign shortly after the Blount County trial.

In August 1963, Highlander launched an educational campaign explaining the school's purpose and programs to help distance itself from the communist label. Highlander staff bought space in newspapers to reprint supportive articles, wrote stories presenting the facts, and encouraged local people to express their support in print.\(^9\) Several days later during a speech at First United Presbyterian Church in nearby Oak Ridge, Horton declared the school was "unpopular but not subversive" and promoted brotherhood and democracy. He then separated the school from past leaders James Dombrowski and Don West, who many called unapologetic communists. Horton pointed out that those early leaders had not participated in Highlander activities since the 1930s.\(^3\)

Horton took his education campaign to other parts of the South. An interview with the Charleston News and Courier provided Horton an opportunity to educate the public. He blamed the charges of communism on the school's racially integrated environment. Horton explained that a "chief of police said after talking with me 'the trouble with Horton is he's been an integrationist for 30 years.' I think you know anybody who's an integrationist is immediately suspect."\(^3\) In a Knoxville News-Sentinel article, Amicie Horton, daughter of Myles Horton, highlighted the school's voter education programs and their efforts to increase participation in American democracy. She explained that most of Highlander's local programs included discussion groups and lectures by prominent people, including University of Chicago historian Walter Johnson's talk on "The President and the People." Her article aligned Highlander with well-established American institutions, such as Christianity and electoral politics.\(^4\)


\(^{32}\) Memo from J. Edgar Hoover to SAC Knoxville, July 29, 1963, FBI File 61-7511.270.


\(^{34}\) "Myles Horton Speaks to OR Presbyterians," Knoxville Journal, August 29, 1963.


\(^{36}\) Amicie Horton, "Highlander Center Serves the South," Knoxville Flashlight Herald, September 14, 1963.
The education campaign had few immediate effects. In fact, extremist groups went on the attack. In August 1966, the Ku Klux Klan staged a march in Knoxville. Rather than attempt to stop the march, staff members supported their right to demonstrate. As the Klan arrived, Myles Horton remembered that they invited:

all the Black neighbors and all white friends of Highlander in Knoxville to come to a picnic on the Highlander lawn. . . . We had seven or eight hundred people there, and we had a hundred kids playing right down by the road, and off-duty Black policemen volunteered to come out to see that none of the Klan people got on our land. . . . The chief of police had told them to take a vacation that day because he didn’t want them near the parade. They didn’t wear their uniform, but they had their guns strapped around them. . . . The Klan was humiliated, because we turned the purpose of their march around and made fun of them instead of letting them intimidate us. They looked very embarrassed as they went by, and although they were supposed to march back again, they took another route to avoid having to deal with that crowd jeering and making fun of them.43

The demonstration was the most visible manifestation of the Klan’s harassment. Since Highlander’s move to Knoxville, leaders routinely experienced sinister phone calls, vandalism, break-ins, and threats.44 The harassment culminated in early October when two homemade fire bombs burned part of the house on Riverside Drive. As a result, Highlander had its property and automobile insurance cancelled, creating a financial crisis, which would not be resolved for over a year.45

As Highlander recovered from the attack, state politicians geared up for a new investigation. In their view, the school was an immediate threat to the citizens of the state. To rid themselves of this threat, they stretched the law. The process of fighting investigations cost Highlander resources and time, both of which were scarce. Even though the looming investigation never occurred, the discussion tarnished Highlander and reinforced its association with communists. On the other side, the politicians who pushed for investigation cast themselves as anti-communist, a feather in their cap for upcoming elections.

During 1967, members of the state legislature rehashed charges of communist activity at Highlander. In December, State Representative Odell Lane, a Republican from Knoxville, proposed two resolutions to the state legislature to investigate Highlander.46

The first resolution, co-sponsored by two state senators, reported that the school was involved in activities contrary to the interest of the State of Tennessee. According to the resolution, the school would be represented by the attorney general.47 The resolution mandated investigations and brought in the state attorney general.48 Lane, as a member of the Democratic Party, obtained the resolution mandating investigation of the school from the House.49 The resolution was about a possible investigation into the school.

The legislature considered the resolutions, and many debates ensued. Congressmen wanted to investigate the school. Representatives and senators debated the resolutions.46

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late effects. In fact, extremist groups like the Ku Klux Klan staged a counterprotest. As the march approached, staff members of the Highlander arrived, Myles Horton and

Robert Howard. They told the marchers to return to Knoxville to regroup. . . . We had seven or eight hundred kids playing right in our school yard. Many of them volunteered to come and protect our land. . . . The chief had been hurt that day because he didn’t have the manpower in their uniform, but they went in to stop it. . . . The Klan was humiliated, . . . it all came around and made fun of them. The chief looked very embarrassed. He was supposed to march back and tell me how to deal with that crowd.

Despite outside attacks and charges of harboring communists, leaders of Highlander hosted many training programs and conferences at their Knoxville headquarters including an Appalachian conference in 1965. Photograph by Torsten Horton, 1965, Highlander Center, New Market, Tennessee.

The legislature to investigate Highlander. Lane was the nephew of Cas Walker, a City Council member, local business owner, and vocal critic of Highlander. The first resolution, which called for an investigative committee made up of two state senators and three representatives, explained that "it has been reported that the Highlander Research Center of Knox County . . . may be involved in activities subversive to the govern of our State and that it is in the interest of the State and its people that a committee of this General Assembly be constituted for the purposes of investigating such reports." The other resolution mandated that a number of law enforcement agencies, including the state attorney general, investigate Highlander to "cut this cancerous growth from our state and cast it out to die in the richness of Americanism and loyalty." Lane also claimed that Highlander served as a "front for wild parties, a headquarters for plots and dark schemes" as well as communist activity. The House tabled the second resolution, but continued discussions about a possible investigation.

The legislature questioned Lane's demand for an investigation as fellow congressmen worried about the validity of his claims. During the ensuing debate, Representative Thomas Wiseman asked if Highlander violated any

House Joint Resolution No. 14, FBI File 61-7511-308.
laws. Lane replied, "only what I've heard.... Officer Frank Sherwood in Knoxville told me about a sex orgy in a funeral home. Highlander was having one of their workshops, members were drunk, girls and boys falling off the tables and talking in unknown tongues." Representative Harold Bradley asked about the possibility that nothing illegal occurred at Highlander. Lane responded that he only knew what he had been told and that "our mayor [Leonard Rogers] is upholding the school." Bradley retorted, "you are putting us [the Legislature] in a most unusual position if the mayor is upholding the school."  

Highlander's officials knew that the vague terms of the resolution could lead to a wide ranging investigation and another shutdown of the school. Highlander board chairman Dr. Charles Comillion responded to Lane's resolution: "This sort of investigation is primarily for the purpose of making sensational charges which seldom, if ever, are proven. These charges pave the way for continued harassment and intimidation." Leaders argued that Highlander had already been through several investigations, which revealed no wrongdoing. On March 1, Lane's resolution to investigate Highlander moved to the Judiciary Committee. It traversed the legislative process despite the efforts of Scott Bates, a professor at the University of the South and Highlander board member, who sent letters to representatives. Bates argued that Highlander had been investigated twice by the FBI, was not on the attorney general's list of subversive organizations, and had been granted tax exempt status by the IRS. In addition, the 1959 investigation failed to uncover any communist activity. Bates failed to halt the process, but he recruited several legislators to his position. 

In early April, the proposed resolution drew more criticism. The vague wording of the resolution created disagreement among elected officials. Democratic Representative Tom Wiseman argued "this is a legislative witch hunt. If they've violated any laws, we've got the grand jury process." Democratic Representative Norvell responded that the legislation did not make any charges, it only asked for an investigation. Wiseman retorted, "if you can do it to Highlander Folk School today, you can do it tomorrow to the Presbyterian Church or any other group." All of the Knoxville legislators except Robert Booker, a Knoxville-based civil rights activist turned politician, supported the resolution. Booker told his colleagues "it is not the function of this Legislature to do the dirty work of local governments.... Now Knox County is back again tossing the controversy [over Highlander] into the lap of the Legislature to satisfy the petty prejudices and political chicanery of local 

demagogues."  

On April 5, 1967, after the resolution was cleared in committee, the House of Representatives voted to approve the resolution. The motion was carried by a vote of 40 to 17 with贺 7 votes not voting. On April 10, the resolution was sent to the Senate. The Senate, like the House, was divided on the proposal. On April 12, the Senate voted 21 to 10 to approve the resolution. On April 13, the resolution was sent to Governor C. B. McMillan for his signature. He signed it into law, making it mandatory for local government agencies to investigate and report any illegal activity at Highlander. The Senate then adjourned sine die. 

The battle for Highlander's future continued, but with new tactics. The school's leaders, including Robert Booker, knew they had to fight on multiple fronts. They appealed to the courts and sought support from the National Civil Rights Movement. The school's future was uncertain, but they refused to give up. 

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46 Ibid. 
49 "Highlander Probe Set for Vote," Knoxville News Sentinel, April 7, 1967.
... Officer Frank Sherwood in his home. Highlander was having problems, girls and boys falling off the program. Representative Harold Bradley believes illegal occurred at Highlander. He had been told that "our school," Bradley retorted, "you usual position if the mayor is ...

The passage of the resolution garnered a number of reactions. Myles Horton told the UT Daily Beacon that the pending investigation was based on bad intentions and lies. The people who testified were immune from libel laws and therefore free to make unfounded charges. Horton explained that "the only reason the legislature wants to have another hearing is that ten or twenty years from now, they can come back and take testimony in publicized records against us as a fact." It was also motivated by "the old fashioned idea that everyone you don't like is a communist."

Highlander's lawyers, with help from the ACLU filed suit in district court. On June 20, District Court Judge William Miller issued an injunction against the investigation. Highlander's lawyer Cecil Bannister argued that the investigation was "not enacted in good faith and is without basis in fact to justify the assumption that plaintiffs' activities were subversive." During the hearing, the court considered a brief filed by Martin Luther King Jr. He proclaimed Highlander was not subversive and that legislative investigations "result inevitably in inhibiting the free exercise of rights under the Constitution." Judge Miller postponed the investigation until another hearing in August.

The injunction led to turmoil in the Senate. Elected officials had different ideas about the legality of the resolution. Senator Clayton Elam, a Democrat from Memphis, claimed that the State Attorney General George McCannless refused to fight the injunction. Elam reported, "I personally asked for the attorney general to defend the resolution and we got no cooperation. He [McCannless] said they wouldn't defend the lawsuit because it did not have a chance." Republican Senator W.E. Michael also encouraged McCannless to act saying: "the overriding question here is whether the sovereign state ..."
companies combined to use the waterfront of Tennessee would create room for these new housing projects simultaneously. It would  
be the most germane strategy, displaced most of the people  
in the Riverside Drive area and opening up land for building.  
The Knoxville Housing Authority was  
including "shotgun" housing maintenance is lacking too  
structures."

Urban renewal was a hot topic in Knoxville. With the  
new investigations, however, the city was prepared. In the  
late 1960s, the staff began an investigation of the school  
and came to the conclusion that the city needed fund more  
for the school. The New York Times, as "legal authorities believe it was the  
first time a federal court had enjoined a state legislative investigation." The following month, Lane and  
State Senator Fred Barry began planning another investigation, this time by  
looking into welfare corporations chartered by the state of Tennessee. By  
1968, however, Knoxville officials finally found a way to get rid of Highlander.

City officials planned for a massive revitalization effort which put parts  
of Knoxville just east of downtown, and the location of Highlander, in the crosshairs of urban development. City officials and local businessmen focused on improving the downtown area to attract businesses and industry. New  

companies combined with the expansion of Oak Ridge and the University of Tennessee would create additional jobs and boost the economy. To make room for these new businesses, the city undertook several urban renewal projects simultaneously. The Mountain View area urban renewal proved to be the most germane to Highlander. The project began in 1964 and displaced most of the African American community, including residents in the Riverside Drive area where Highlander was located. In addition to opening up land for businesses, the project sought to eliminate housing that the Knoxville Housing Authority described as "obsolete frame buildings, including 'shotgun' [shacks] and similar type structures. Upkeep and maintenance is lacking due to the futility of trying to upgrade most of the structures."

Urban renewal was the ultimate cause of Highlander's departure from Knoxville. With the Mountain View project on the horizon and threats of new investigations, Horton and others planned to depart the city. In the late 1960s, the staff began an extensive fundraising campaign to support the move of the school to New Market, Tennessee. In 1970, Highlander stepped up its capital fundraising campaign, which aimed to raise $250,000. The money would fund the costs of the move and construction of new facilities on the school's Jefferson County property. The facilities in Knoxville were inadequate. The New Market site could house a number of buildings, including a library and large dormitory, which created a better learning environment. In July 1970, construction at the New Market property commenced. Staff member Mike Clark planned for the final move to take place in the middle of November. He suggested a Thanksgiving gathering for staff and local supporters to get them comfortable with the new facilities. He worried that "there will be some resistance or uneasiness from some mountain people in that situation and the sooner we can have folks who know that and deal with it by getting people involved fast the sooner that place will be used to

95 William Bruce Wheeler, Knoxville, Tennessee: A Mountain City in the New South (Knoxville, 2005), 136-137.
96 Knoxville Housing Authority, Annual Report for Year Ended March 31, 1964 to the Honorable John Duncan of the City of Knoxville, 16, Knoxville Community Development Corporation Papers, Knox County Archives.
97 Knoxville Housing Authority, Knoxville Urban Renewal Final Project Report, Part 1, 2, MOC 1, Community Development Papers, Knox County Archives.
100 Staff Meeting Minutes, July 15, 1971, Highlander Dated Materials, 1971 Staff Meeting Minutes, Memos, Field Notes, Correspondence, Highlander Center.
its full potential." The staff also worried about securing the necessary loans to finance the property. Leaders reported that Hamilton National Bank in Knoxville denied Highlander a loan because "we were too controversial," but Wilson York, of Danville, Virginia, pledged to find a loan by speaking to African American bankers in Tennessee.66

The Knoxville Journal had the final word on Highlander's move. It reported that "the interracial institution which already has left its controversial mark on at least three Tennessee counties soon will move its headquarters from Knoxville to rural Jefferson County." Fittingly, the second half of the article was dedicated to past controversies and accusations of communism.66

The Highlander Research and Education Center's decade in Knoxville provides an example of the Cold War's effects on the Civil Rights Movement. The fear of communism proved pervasive enough to make allegations and rumors about Highlander's ties to communism a fact in the minds of many Knoxvillians. This made Highlander an outsider in the city's civil rights community and paved the way for a decade of harassment. It also ensured that local activists avoid the school, funnelling their efforts into other forms of activism, such as War on Poverty programs. Further, Highlander was unable to gain a foothold in Knoxville because of the power of local politics, community activism, and the deep roots of segregation in the South well after the Brown v. Board decisions. Since leaving Knoxville, the Highlander Research and Education Center prospered, and today it offers a wide range of training and educational programs from its headquarters in New Market.

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64 Memo From Mike Clark to Frank Adams, October 20, 1971, Highlander Dated Materials, 1971 Staff Meeting Minutes, Memos, Field Notes, Correspondence, Highlander Center.
65 Staff Meeting, October 8, 1971, Highlander Dated Materials, Highlander Center.