

University of Mary Washington
Faculty Development Grant, 2009-2010
Final Report
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Building A Popular Front: Civil Rights, Unions, and Workers' Education in the Mid-Twentieth Century (And How the San Francisco Bay Area Got To Be the Way It Is)

1. Project Description

The aim of this project is to produce a book manuscript on progressive politics, the Popular Front, and left-labor-civil rights coalitions in the San Francisco Bay Area. The story centers on the shift of Popular Front ideals into the political mainstream, civil rights activism in the 1940s and 1950s, the persistence of coalitions in 1960s activism, and the production of political capital for progressive electoral victories in the 1960s and 1970s. Although this project is a regional study, an in-depth examination of the persistence of Popular Front coalitions in the Bay Area will document areas for research in other regions of the United States.

2. Goals and Specific Objectives

My specific goals with the faculty development grant were to expand my research base and write two chapters of my book. I completed both goals. With the research funding I was able to travel to San Francisco in August 2009 and conduct extensive archival research at the International Longshore and Warehouse Union Library and the Labor Archives and Research Center at San Francisco State University. The primary sources at these archives help me to tell a more complex and rich story of labor-civil rights coalitions and strengthen numerous chapters in my book. The course release in fall 2009 was especially helpful in allowing me to complete three (3) chapters and continue conducting research. I have begun to analyze the efforts and impact of local Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) chapters as well as regional civil rights activism in the 1960s and 1970s.

3. Potential Impact and Significance

This research conducted with the support of the faculty development grant is directly related to three courses I teach: Civil Rights and Movements for Racial Justice in the Twentieth Century, United States Labor History, and The Politics and Culture of the 1960s. I incorporated new findings from this research into numerous lectures in my courses, especially on labor-civil rights alliances. Although I did not teach United States Labor History in the 2009-2010 academic year, I will be using primary sources that I copied in future versions of the course. The articles from union newspapers, copies of speeches, and correspondence will help students see how unions organize and create worker solidarity. In addition, the primary sources illuminate first hand accounts of organizing and historical events and allow students to interpret the sources for themselves. I am pleased that this research will be brought directly into the classroom.

By examining the Bay Area as a case study, my book will further our understanding of political coalitions in urban America. The progressive victories won through protest movements and electoral politics in the 1960s and 1970s are rooted in the Popular Front coalitions from the 1940s and 1950s. Although the Bay Area provides a clear example of lasting Popular Front alliances, similar coalitions also shaped urban politics in New York, Chicago, Detroit, and Los Angeles. In addition, my book will be part of the growing body of scholarship that examines civil rights movements in the urban North and West. Studies of Philadelphia, New York, Detroit, and

Los Angeles have been at the center of recent groundbreaking scholarship on civil rights movements.

4. *Procedures and Methods*

This project is an interdisciplinary study of the Popular Front in the Bay Area and involves multiple research methods. I have conducted oral history interviews and archival research and incorporated theoretical approaches in American studies, comparative ethnic studies, sociology, and political science. The archival research I conducted with the support with of the faculty development grant strengthens the analysis in my book.

5. *Results*

In summer and fall 2009 I completed three (3) chapters of my book manuscript. In addition, I conducted new research on the region in the 1960s and 1970s that will be the focus of my research and writing efforts in summer and fall 2010. The ultimate goal of this project is to publish a book. At the American Studies Association (ASA) annual conference in November 2009, I had an extended conversation about my book with the history and American studies editor at Penn Press. I am planning to re-submit my revised manuscript during the 2010-2011 academic year.

6. *Dissemination of Results*

The results will be disseminated through the publication of my book. In addition, I am working on journal articles based on this research. Many of my findings will be outside the narrative of my book, but offer important analysis of specific labor unions and oral history narration. These narrower topics will become the basis for potential journal articles.