

Curricularizing Social Movements

The Election of Chicago's First Black Mayor as Content, Pedagogy, and Futurities

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I hope someday to be remembered by history as the Mayor who cared about people and who was, above all, fair. A Mayor who helped, who really helped, heal our wounds and stood the watch while the City and its people answered the greatest challenge in more than a century. Who saw that City renewed.

—Harold Washington, *Inaugural Address 1983*

HAROLD WASHINGTON, CHICAGO'S FIRST BLACK MAYOR, has been memorialized for his progressive and democratic leadership. Elected to office for the first time in 1983 and again in 1987, Washington, whose nickname was the *People's Mayor*, represented a beacon of hope in a long line of exclusion in Chicago politics. What is important to note about the election of Harold Washington, and other Black mayors voted in office during the 1980s, is that they were elected in large part, if not solely, by the social movement organizing taking place in their cities, what Harold Washington often referred to as coalition building. Without the large-scale social movement organizing that took place in Chicago prior to 1983 (when Washington took office for the first time) Harold Washington would not have been mayor. As Grayson Mitchell, a key member of Washington's campaign team, put it, "It became a movement. ... We weren't running shit. I mean it had a momentum all of its own" (Muwakkil et al., 2007, p. 80). A movement elected Washington, whose election will forever go down in Chicago and global history for its significance. The 1983 mayoral election drew a record number of voters, including over 96 percent of eligible Black voters and nearly 50 percent of all eligible Latinx voters (Preston, 1983). The election represented a long overdue fracture in the business-as-usual politics of the windy city, whose nickname comes from the hot air blown from politicians' mouths, not the Lake Michigan breeze.

By extending previous scholarship on social movements as collective memory (Camp, 2013; Kelley, 2002; Kubal & Becerra, 2014), this paper seeks to highlight the possibilities and potential in transforming social movements of the past into p-20 curriculum for students, what I term *curricularizing social movements*. I use the term curricularizing social movements to

conceptualize the active transformation of social movements into educational experiences for students. As I detail in this paper, social movements contain content-rich curricular and liberatory pedagogical insights. They can provide content that is relevant to students' lives and communities and that may activate their curiosities, heighten their analyses of their lived experiences, and provide roadmaps into their pasts and futures. Additionally, the interactions of people within social movements—the ways in which they learned from and taught each other—can provide pedagogical examples for educators to be reinvented in contemporary educational settings.

To support this argument, I present a historical narrative of the programming that took place in Operation Breadbasket (Breadbasket), a Chicago Black organizing hub and one of the many influential social movement organizations that led to the election of Chicago's first Black mayor. I reviewed several sources of data for this study. I located 13 surveillance transcripts that were created by the Chicago Police Department between 1969 and 1974, documenting their surveillance of Harold Washington's visits to Breadbasket. Each contained notes from interviews given by confidential informants that helped bring to life Harold Washington's experience at Breadbasket. I also used publicly available accounts from people who attended Breadbasket activities to support the descriptions contained in the surveillance transcripts. Finally, I analyzed a copy of Breadbasket's *Guide for Political Education*—a document containing the structure and processes that Breadbasket used to educate and activate its membership. Together this data unearthed the rich narrative and conceptualization presented here.

Harold Washington's rise to the mayorship and, more importantly, the social movement organizing that made that election run successful can serve as important sources of collective memory (Kubal & Becerra, 2014) to apply in the contemporary world. We live in a world where markets matter more than the people, where racial capitalism is the mechanism of exploitation and historical exclusion (Robinson, 1983). The stories of struggle and triumph are often hidden from the mainstream. As threats to the normalcy of power distribution and authoritarianism, these stories of social movement organizing from the past are dangerous. Discovering the past, particularly stories that are disappearing or have disappeared, may provide us with roadmaps for the future. Here, the future is not so imaginary. It is a (re)contextualization and a (re)building of the work done by those who came before us. The social movement organizing that took place at Breadbasket, that led to the election of Harold Washington, may provide one of many of many of those roadmaps.

The stories of the past, ones that are relevant in geography and culture to students' lived experiences, may better link students to their pasts in ways that other content cannot. Social movement organizations like Breadbasket in Chicago were doing the work of teaching and learning under the framing of political education. As I detail later, a great deal of Breadbasket's programming was about creating inquisitive spaces, bound through the investigation of peoples' experiences and actions, to reduce pain in their lives. Educators may find value in the pedagogical processes used by social movement organizations of the past, especially ones like Breadbasket, that were exceptionally successful at organizing dispossessed peoples (Fanon, 1963) in their original formation.

After detailing the theoretical frameworks that bound this study, I locate the curriculum present at Breadbasket by presenting a historical narrative that situates the social movement organization as an educational endeavor, useful to contemporary educators. I conclude by detailing how curricularizing social movements may support students' healing, can support teaching that moves away from a banking method (Freire, 1970) towards a co-constructed and culturally-sustaining method (Paris & Alim, 2017), and can illuminate the geographies of education.

Breadbasket was one of many spaces where Chicago's dispossessed were able to build political awareness, clarity, and action. And it certainly was not the only space where Black people were organized leading up to Washington's election. I present this story as one of many examples of social movement organizing that could be curricularized, not in a biographical sense, but in relation to praxis. What is very clear to see with the organizing taking place at Breadbasket was a deep commitment to education and action. The leadership of Breadbasket recognized the value in heightening the peoples' analyses while also providing them the tools needed to create positive change in their lives. I hope that this story, and the others existent in the many communities across the world that have resisted oppression, can call other educators and educational stakeholders to create, and demand, more teaching and learning opportunities rooted in the exploration of social movements. Their unveiling may be a pathway to creating more just futures.

Social Movements As Collective Memory

Curriculum can represent many things. The field is more than the content used in learning exchanges. Here, I take an experientialist orientation (Shubert, 1986) to curriculum. The experientialist sees curriculum as “an interchange of experiences and ideas ... centered ... in community ... that realizes ... democracy and education must grow symbiotically, each nourishing and replenishing the other” (Shubert, 1986, p. 17). Learning in this orientation occurs as groups reflect on their experiences.

Freire (1970) writes that teaching and learning is linked to what he calls “revolutionary futurity” (p. 84). Curriculum in this sense

affirms women [sic] and men [sic] as beings who transcend themselves ... for whom looking at the past must only be a means of understanding more clearly what and who they are so that they can more wisely build the future. (p. 84)

Here, I present a conceptualization that views historical social movements as curriculum—curriculum to be studied, to be contextualized, and to be utilized as pedagogy. Moving curriculum from a noun to a verb, an action, I advocate for the *curricularizing* of social movements. Curricularizing social movements, transforming them into teaching and learning opportunities, creates connections for people to become readers and writers of their worlds, using memories of the past as conduits to reconstruct their futures.

Kubal and Becerra (2014) remind us that “collective memories are shared ideas about the past which provide a framework for interpreting the present” (p. 865). They make important connections to the ways in which social movements shape and construct collective memories. To compliment this framing, scholar Robin D.G. Kelley (2002) highlights the importance of remembering social movements, writing “social movements generate new knowledge, new theories, new questions. The most radical ideas often grow out of a concrete intellectual engagement with the problems of aggrieved populations confronting systems of oppression” (p. 9). I use Kelley's operationalization of social movements as “incubators of knowledge” (p. 8) that “transport us to another place, compel us to relive horrors and, more importantly, enable us to imagine a new society” (p. 9). Kelley calls for more historians to document “these movements that were deliberately suppressed from memory” (Camp, 2013, p. 227). This paper is a contribution to that call.

Chicago: A City on the Make

In 1962, Breadbasket, an organization started by Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., and the Southern Christian Leadership Council, began to work with Chicago Public School teacher Al Raby, head of the Coordinating Council of Community Organizations (CCCCO). The CCCC had been leading much of the organizing against the racist policies of Chicago Public Schools. In September of 1966 King announced that Breadbasket would be moving to Chicago. According to Taylor Branch (2007), “King chose Chicago for the music of Mahalia Jackson, the transplanted heartland of the Mississippi, and in part because the Al Raby Coalition (CCCCO) pushed hardest for his help” (p. 321). Chicago Theological Seminary student, Jesse Jackson, would be appointed as the head of the Chicago chapter. Jackson went on to build one of the largest multi-racial, intergenerational, and interdisciplinary social movements in Chicago’s history.

Breadbasket centralized economic issues and successfully organized against companies that exploited their community for capital and provided no jobs to the residents. Breadbasket successfully organized Black communities in Chicago (and other working-class communities), bringing in thousands of jobs through their economic campaigns and galvanizing their membership to recognize their collective power to create positive change. Breadbasket was known for its Saturday workshops, which drew thousands to their headquarters on 79th and Halsted in the city’s southside. Celebrities, activists, and politicians joined Harold Washington in engaging the Breadbasket membership. For example, Angela Davis, who visited October 23, 1971, spoke about welfare rights (Chicago Police Department, 1971b). Aretha Franklin, Stevie Wonder, and Cannonball Adderley were frequently in attendance, playing music and speaking out against inequities in the Black community (Deppe, 2017). Renault Robinson, who at the time was the head of the Afro-American Patrolman’s league and later Washington’s campaign manager, talked about discrimination within the city police department (Chicago Police Department, 1971a).

While the celebrities and the educational speakers drew the people out, everyone at Breadbasket was a teacher and learner. Donna Walker-Kuhne (2019), who attended the Saturday workshops as a teenager said this about their impact on her, and her family,

I was deeply affected by those three hours of classes and discussion. We learned about economic development; we were exposed to political analysis, and we learned how those issues impacted the Black community. We talked about the civil rights movement, the impact of racism, and the unjust beatings that Black people were experiencing at the hands of the Chicago police. We planned pickets, marches and voter registration drives. And we even got schooled in personal finance management!

Every meeting opened with entertainment, often by celebrity icons, such as Michael Jackson or Roberta Flack. . . . In creating this format, Dr. King and presented by Rev. Jesse Jackson utilized the arts, cultural traditions and rituals of both Africa and the African-American church to mobilize and mold us into civil rights warriors.

Every session left me feeling more informed, empowered and proud to be an African-American. I felt hopeful and determined that we could change our destiny. I remember returning home and sharing all my notes with my sisters and mom. I was so passionate about these gatherings that my entire family—my two sisters, my mom and my aunt—soon joined Operation Breadbasket, and we were the first family to take classes. (n.p.)

Breadbasket, as a social movement organization, both in place and practice, was a space where hope was cultivated, where Black life was celebrated, and where Chicago's "civil rights warriors" (Walker-Kuhne, 2019, n.p.) built coalitions across issues and positionalities. When Harold Washington attended Breadbasket meetings, he did so as a politician and comrade. While the 13 available surveillance transcripts all cited Harold Washington's attendance, only a handful detail instances where he spoke. At Breadbasket, among other places, Washington began to develop and expand his reach to people, his unique ability to listen deeply to the needs of people, and activate them to hold him and other politicians accountable. While these events prepared Washington, in part, to become a people's leader, they are also pedagogical examples. Washington, like an educator, listened deeply to the people he served, built connections from their experiences and the work he did, and was bound in a co-constructed and collective vision for a more just world.

In 1969, Breadbasket opened a Division for Political Education, which created and implemented the Political Education Workshop. The Political Education Workshop aimed to "to enable people to better understand the mechanics of power, how it works, what it takes to make it work and how they might empower themselves and others to have some say-so about their own destiny" (S.C.L.C. Operation Breadbasket Political Education Division, 1970, p. 1). It created spaces of praxis (Freire, 1970)—spaces where the participants were both teachers and students, where the curriculum was rooted in their experiences, and where their freedom could be both imagined and actualized. This educative arm of the organization developed its own curriculum and had 15 teachers and two school administrators. Many of the teachers, organizers, and participants of the political education workshops went on to serve in key roles in Washington's 1979, 1983, and 1987 campaigns for mayor and/or key roles in his mayoral administration. These were much more than voting workshops; they were aimed at supporting an oppressed people's self-determination.

The Political Education Workshop consisted of two parts. Part one "consists of current city, state, and national issues. Our discussions of these issues may bring to light a problem of concern ... we then ask what can we do to bring about a change" (S.C.L.C. Operation Breadbasket Political Education Division, 1970, p. 1). Part two consisted of six classes (Campaign Management, Office Management, Public Relations, Research 1, Advanced Research, and Precinct Coordinating) that represented the "basic knowledge necessary for running a political campaign" (S.C.L.C. Operation Breadbasket Political Education Division, 1970, p. 1). Participants of the workshops left with better understandings of the world around them and, more importantly, their power to create change in that world. Black social movement organizing in Chicago was gaining the attention of those in power.

When Washington spoke at Breadbasket events it was often about legislation that he was leading downstate. He shared news about welfare, police brutality, employment, education, and prisoner-rights legislation he was working on. This legislation was in direct response to the issues Washington heard about as he listened to people, which he did more of than speaking at Breadbasket. Washington was politicized at Breadbasket. While he was sitting on stage during the Saturday workshops and other Breadbasket events that drew thousands of attendees from across the city, he heard the stories and struggles of other Black speakers.

In 1971, Jesse Jackson, head of Chicago's Breadbasket, split from the organization and announced the formation of People United to Save Humanity (PUSH). While Breadbasket took a sharp turn toward the advancement of Black capitalism, the Saturday workshops continued, as did the Chicago Police Department surveillance. Surveillance records during this time period

demonstrate a more vocal State Representative Washington, who continued to share updates on legislation he was working on and who began to speak more to the people about their ability to create change. For example, in November of 1973, in front of a crowd of 1800 people, Washington spoke about the power of the people to get legislation passed. He said, “when this pressure is used right, then you have power. The people expect a lot from their representatives, but the representative is only as strong as the people he represents” (Chicago Police Department, 1973, n.p.). Harold’s commitment to the people he served was put on display time and time again at Breadbasket and at PUSH. He was proving that he was committed to creating better conditions for Black people in Chicago.

The groundwork laid at Breadbasket and PUSH over 15 years helped Washington build a large base, build his analysis of the issues, and build his leadership identity. He proved himself, as State Representative and Congressman, to be trustworthy. Furthermore, he demonstrated his ability to respond to the racial inequities so visible in his city by using his political power. Washington’s legislative work wasn’t solely about passing legislation, which he did. It was about making Black life visible to the legislature, responding to the oppression that Black people faced, and celebrating Black culture. Richard J. Daley’s death in 1976 left an opening in Chicago’s political scene, particularly for the rise of Black power. The time following was critical for rupturing the machine politics that had run the city for so long (pre-dating Daley). Chicago’s political forces on the Black left had been preparing for a moment like this one for years. Chicago’s Black residents, whom Washington represented as a state representative and eventually congressman, had been organizing, 15 years before his 1983 election victory, for better municipal and legislative representation. Many of these organizers frequented Breadbasket’s (and later PUSH’s) Saturday service and their political education workshop. The Black left in the city seized the time to put forth a Black candidate with strong ties to community and a history of coalition building. Because of his relationship with social movement organizations, especially the people who frequented Breadbasket and PUSH, Washington emerged as a viable candidate to become Chicago’s first Black mayor. Washington had almost 25 years of legislative experience and was unapologetic in the ways he advocated for Black people and against anti-Black violence. Through vociferous organizing and diligence, Chicago had their candidate for mayor selected by the people.

Curricularizing Social Movements

There is a curriculum within the social movement organizing that led to the election of Chicago’s first Black mayor. It is a curriculum where reading the world is relevant to the reader and one where reading leads to a re-writing of that world. Unlike other politicians, whose victories were won largely due to the support of a select few wealthy financiers, Harold Washington’s 1983 mayoral campaign awoke an entire city. Organizing for the first Black mayor of Chicago started long before Lu Palmer (1989), a well-known Black Chicago radio-show host and community activist, coined the slogan, “We shall see in 83” (n.p.). It started in the churches, it started in the schools, and it started within the events held at organizing bases like Breadbasket and PUSH.

When transformed into curriculum, the social movements that led to Washington’s election dismantle the false narrative of individualized leadership. The People’s Mayor was put forth by people, led on behalf of those people, and was accountable to those people. He entered into spaces as both teacher and student. Washington often attended Breadbasket workshops to learn about how intimately connected the people were to the issues he advocated for as State Representative and

Congressman. Every step in Washington's campaign to the mayorship involved a deep humanizing commitment to people and to what he often referred to as "coalition building." The people recognized this commitment and loved him deeply for it.

Sadly, Harold Washington died in 1987, during the first year of his second term as mayor. His legacy lived after his death because his work was so closely bound to the people and to the social movements that supported him in office, but now, the memories of Washington's legacy are beginning to evaporate (Wilson et al., 2019). Curricularizing the social movements that led to Washington's election may support the ignition of legacies on the brink of extinguishment. Given the state of the world today, with stark differences in basic human rights along lines of race, class, and other identities, it provides an opportunity to ask how schools, and other formal and informal educational spaces, might better support students in actualizing their potential to change the world around them.

Social movements of the past can be curricularized in many ways. In this article, I articulated, among others, two major curricular contributions—content and pedagogy. Social justice educators in search of more culturally relevant (Ladson-Billings, 1992) and sustaining (Paris & Alim, 2017) curriculum may find value in curricularizing social movements of the past. They are rich in their content that, when contextualized within students' lives and communities, can serve as connective pathways between them and their past. Here, content should stretch beyond the memorization of dates, names, and places. Content can also serve as an analytic. An analysis of the social movements of the past might also illuminate the learning experiences used to heighten peoples' analysis of the structures of oppression existent in their lives. The workshops at Breadbasket were, in large part, about heightening the ways in which people were able to problematize oppression in their lives, moving the blame away from themselves and towards the structures of oppression. Translated to a classroom setting, this content may serve a parallel purpose. The content of social movements of the past may be useful in supporting students' movement away from blaming themselves, their families, and their communities for pain in their lives. Instead of this self-blaming, individualized notion of oppression, the content of social movements can support an identification of the systems, policies, and processes that contribute to pain in peoples' lives.

Social movements of the past also reveal pedagogical practices that center love and justice. When analyzed for their pedagogical contributions, social movements like the one that elected Harold Washington can speak to the sorts of humanizing conditions necessary for learning, the ways in which teachers can facilitate explorations of their students' lives, and examples of justice-centered interactions that diminish the hierarchy between teachers and students. The Political Education Workshops at Breadbasket were more like families than school classrooms. The community amongst the students became crucial for the transformational aims of the curriculum. The students at Breadbasket were a community of learners who explored their lives and took action in an effort to transform them. Whether they recognized it or not, social movements like Breadbasket had a pedagogy—a pedagogy bound in love and justice; one that viewed the students as fully capable and fully human; a pedagogy that recognized all could be teachers, and all could be learners; a pedagogy bound in the real-world, not standardized numerical outcomes.

In addition to the content and pedagogical practices that may emerge from curricularizing social movements, there are additional insights that I will expand upon here. As I detail, curricularizing social movements, integrating them into educational settings in and out of schools, can support healing, move away from the banking method of teaching towards a more dialogic

interactive education, and illuminate the educational contexts and conditions within social movement organizing.

Healing

Students in schools across the U.S. enter with their experiences from the outside world. The adoption of “mindsets” does little to remove the traumatic structures of harm from society. While some educators have begun to explore the usefulness in relevant (Ladson-Billings, 1992) and sustaining (Paris & Alim, 2017) pedagogical experiences, there is a need to explore the restorative and transformative nature of these interactions more deeply. Educators, and more specifically the milieus they create, can play a role in healing. Freire (1970) reminds us that education can be used as a tool to both read and re-write the world. Education in this sense, then, represents an act of freedom, of humanization. An exploration of the “why of ... pain” (Freire, 2011) can lead to hope. Concrete hope, as Freire (1970, 2011) calls it, in this sense is not only a move away from fatalism, but also a mechanism to heal from the pain in students’ lives.

Dispossessed students of all ages may enter into schools with false notions of their power. The structures of oppression condition their worlds and send them messages that strip them of their humanity. Schools continue this social reproduction when they view students as empty vessels to be filled. When curricularized, social movements create the conditions for education to serve as a mechanism of healing. Operation Breadbasket was a space for people to better understand the “why” (Freire, 2011) of their pain, better locating the mechanisms of oppression existent in their lives. Freire (2011) also reminds us that the recognition of the “situation of oppression does not yet liberate the oppressed. But the revelation is a step in the right direction” (p. 23). The analysis of the world, and the related action to make it better, all make the world a less harmful place. In the act of healing the world, we heal ourselves.

Curricularizing social movements of the past can support healing. People organizing for a Black mayor in Chicago sought healing. Chicago had been a place of oppression for so long. Electing someone with a commitment to social justice for all oppressed peoples was also about creating the conditions for healing. There are other social movements that represent the same. Social movements of the past, both in content and pedagogy, may illuminate the spaces and interactions of healing—spaces and interactions that can be reborn in and out of schools.

Spatial Conditions of Liberatory Education

The social movement organizing that led to Harold Washington’s election was educative but did not necessarily center schools in that responsibility. How could the community rely on schools, and the machine that controlled them, as the sole spaces of their liberation?

There exists a distinction between education and schooling here that I will elaborate on briefly. Schooling, like the banking method, is a tool of social reproduction and oppression—a tool that sorts society. Education, on the other hand, represents something more freeing, more liberatory, more emancipatory. Education supports a recognition of one’s power to transform the world, where schooling helps one to be complacent with the order of the world. As Freire (1970) put it, education, in the sense that I define it, “identifies with the movement which engages the people as beings aware of their incompleteness” (p. 84).

Curricularizing social movements of the past might illuminate the spatial contexts of education, helping to bring light to the educative potential of all spaces in the community. The social movements that led to the election of the Harold Washington, and more importantly that led to the peoples' recognition of their power to create change in their lives, took place in churches, barbershops, and family rooms, around kitchen tables and in other communal spaces where people felt safe and connected. Spaces where they could share their experiences in the world connected them to structures of oppression and led them to engage in action to fracture those oppressive structures. These were spaces where an education for liberation could be actualized.

I call on other school-based educators to build more alliances with the educative spaces in their school communities. These alliances can help extend the educative capacities of schools while also providing school-based practitioners with real-world, asset-based, examples of education that can be integrated into their classrooms. Curricularizing social movements means understanding the educative capacities and functioning of the spaces and places existent in communities outside of formal schools.

Away from the Banking Method

Schooling often is performed through what Freire (1970) describes as banking methods. In this sense, students are positioned as empty vessels, only to be filled with the knowledge deemed appropriate by the school (and thus the state). These methods seek control and order, cooperation and compliance. A problem-posing education, one that uses lived experience as curriculum much like the workshops at Breadbasket, has different aspirations. Here, education is an act of freedom. As Freire (1970) wrote, “problem-posing education—which accepts neither a ‘well-behaved’ present nor a predetermined future—roots itself in the dynamic present and becomes revolutionary. Problem-posing education is revolutionary futurity” (p. 84).

Social movements do not organize people through banking methods. As detailed through the examples of Breadbasket workshops, I illuminate problem-posing pedagogies. The relationships at Breadbasket were bound in beloved community, what King described as the inextricable connections between people. People at Breadbasket workshops were able to see that they were not alone in their oppression, but also build a community of revolutionaries to alter those conditions.

Curricularizing social movements offers both content and pedagogies that move teaching and learning away from a banking method and towards a collaborative, relational, and revolutionary methodology that transforms classrooms into spaces of investigation. In these co-constructed educative spaces, students' lives and communities are curriculum to be explored, problematized, and transformed.

Conclusion

As detailed in this paper, social movements hold curricular value in creating the conditions to explore the past, present, and future. When used for the content and their pedagogical practices, social movements as curriculum represent something more freeing, more liberating. I use the social movement organizing that led to the election of Chicago's first Black mayor as one of many examples of social movement organizing that could be used in classroom spaces in and out of

schools. The social movement organizing that led to Harold Washington's mayoral election can be found in other places to illuminate a number of issues and communal responses to said structures of oppression.

Imagine a student in Chicago, reading, or watching, and listening to the stories of the organizing that led up to Washington's victory or a student in any community across the world learning about the social movements that developed their community over time. How many of those stories might that student and their classmates connect to? What legacies might they make contemporary connections to? What futures might be created in that student's imagination, not so distant from the past? What futures might be created if that student's classroom was constructed to foster action to actualize the conditions that they imagine?

I encourage others to locate the social movements local to their spaces and places and consider their curricular usefulness. These movements may be supportive in creating spaces where people can imagine and actualize a more just and equitable world—a world that may not be so futuristic, but a world grounded in real occurrences of the past that make the future. Social movements of the past may provide these critical roadmaps to the future.

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