

Education in Black and White: Myles Horton and the Highlander Center's Vision for Social Justice, by Stephen Preskill, Oakland, University of California Press, 2021, 384 pages, \$29.95 (hardcover), ISBN 9780520302051.

Much has been written about an institution as longstanding as Highlander Research and Education Center (formerly Highlander Folk School). Most accounts mention Highlander in relation to the labor movement, the civil rights movement, or the student activism movement. Due to its importance in the South as a radical organizing school, Highlander figures prominently in biographies of influential activists from Martin Luther King, Jr to John Lewis. Other autobiographical testimonies of Septima Clark and Guy Carawan, for example, have described their work at the school in various programs. Stephen Preskill's book on Highlander and one of its founders (and arguably its most influential director), Myles Horton, joins a handful of studies that focus exclusively on Highlander and its history.

Education in Black and White: Myles Horton and the Highlander Center's Vision for Social Justice focuses on Horton's philosophical and practical beliefs as the direction of the school's role as an organizing and training center. This is where the book makes a significant contribution; Preskill's detailing of Horton's education and societal philosophy drives the book's direction and provides a strong narrative for the study. It covers some familiar ground of Highlander historiography, most notably John M. Glen's *Highlander: No Ordinary School, 1932-1962* (1988) which also grounded its analysis in Horton's philosophies and the school's activities. Similarly, Frank Adams' *Unearthing Seeds of Fire: The Idea of Highlander* (1975) was co-written with Horton and placed him at the center of the analysis. By opening the book with a prologue documenting the Highlander fire of March 2019 which remains unsolved at the

time of this review and included a white nationalist symbol on the pavement nearby, Preskill grounds his book with particular contemporary relevancy.

Across its fifteen main chapters, this study seeks to be “an addition to” previous chronicles on Highlander, and “in no way a replacement for any of it” (p. 8). Instead, Preskill’s approach is to center Horton in his analysis, “framing his story as an account of an educator, passionately committed to helping adults, mostly poor and forgotten, to wake up to their own historic agency” (p. 9). Horton was a fascinating person and integral to Highlander’s success, so it makes sense that he would be front and center, but the book seems to be both a biography of Horton and his work as well as a chronicling of Highlander’s contributions. This effort to approach the subject from both angles works well in the first eleven chapters, where Highlander’s initiatives and work aligned closely with Horton’s in the narrative. By the twelfth and thirteenth chapters, when the book moves into a discussion of Highlander’s influence in Appalachian communities outside of Tennessee, there is a perceptible shift in approach, but because Highlander remains the central focus, the chapters seem to flow together. However, in the fourteenth and fifteenth chapters, the focus on Horton’s international interests and his latter years at Highlander seem disconnected from the rest of the narrative. Perhaps it is the longer chronology of Preskill’s study that presents the continuity issue not present in Glen and Adams’ books (Glen’s ends in 1962 and Adams focuses on the period through the rest of the decade). This is a significant historiographical contribution, but Preskill’s argument was less clear in later chapters. The book would have benefitted from a clearer overarching argument that would connect all of the chapters, as well as a more definitive sense of its purpose; is it a book about Horton, or a book about Highlander?

With the exception of the prologue, the book focuses on the period of Highlander's history while Horton was alive, ending shortly after his death in January 1990. There are brief references throughout to people who were involved with Highlander after Horton's passing, such as John Gaventa, a later director of the center in the mid-1990s, but the book's telling of Highlander's history ends with Horton. Horton remained the director of Highlander through the 1960s, from which point the center has been led by other similarly-progressive individuals. To focus on Horton's continued involvement in Highlander's work after he left the directorship is understandable given his big personality and importance to Highlander, but Preskill's discussion of Highlander's Appalachian societal research involvement and internationalism focus in the latter chapters presented the opportunity to discuss the institution's direction independently of Horton.

At times the study's treatment of primary sources could have been more critical. In a representative example, the book's discussion of Highlander union gatherings in the mid-1940s includes a mention of how societal racism was counteracted by Highlander's commitment to interracial activities. "Many black representatives, not previously part of an interracial group, marveled at the respectful treatment they received at Highlander, which allowed them to relax and to get much more out of their experience there," Preskill writes. "At least one participant in the 1945 UAW summer term saw no hint of racial discrimination and summed up the experience as a triumph for Highlander and the union" (p. 116). The problem is that we do not hear from any Black participants directly about their experiences, so the reader has to just take at face value that this is in fact how Black participants felt. Using primary sources in this way limits the persuasiveness of Preskill's conclusions relating to racial inequality. This might be indicative of a lack of sources, but it begs the question if there were mentions of Black experiences at

Highlander during this period in other archival collections not consulted, such as those for unions that participated in workshops or in newspaper accounts.

Overall, Preskill's book on Horton and Highlander makes a significant contribution to the field, and is valuable for scholars of Highlander, Southern activism, and the early to mid-twentieth century South.

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