

# Reflections from Bob Moses

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## **“Jimmie took the bullet”; Albert wrote the blog:**

I am sitting in *Mariposa*, the tiny café next to the fire station on Mass. Avenue in Central Square, just around the corner from 73 school street, the home, where for 14 years from 1982 to 1996, the Algebra Project (AP) incubated, where the families that launched the AP at the Open Program of the Martin Luther King (MLK) school in Cambridge gathered on many a New Years' Eve to do Kwanza and study the lives of those who lived *for* them as well as before them: four generations who, yearly, reminded themselves who they were, where they came from and where they were headed. We did not know then that MLK 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> graders from those Kwanza years were themselves headed to conceive, deliver, and raise up the Young People's Project (YPP): thirteen and fourteen year olds in 1985-'86, Basonge, Kari, Karimu, Omo and Taba trekked to Mississippi, as twenty-three and twenty-four year old graduates of the AP, and settled in 1995-'96 at Brinkley Middle School in Jackson Mississippi. A trek that transformed them from graduates of AP to founders of YPP: preaching math literacy to their peers, forging an unlikely alliance between math that's fun and work that's hip, imprinting youthful foot prints onto public school education fit for this century's citizens.

Ten years later, in the spring of 2006, I am sitting high up in the coliseum in Jackson, Mississippi watching an AP cohort from the bottom quartile of high school students from Lanier “Graduate on-time”:

In the Spring of '96, the first AP students at Brinkley middle school completed Algebra 1 and graduated; I walked with their Principal to Lanier High School and began a decade long investigation into AP math classes that empower 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> graders to raise the math bar. After six investigative years, in 2002, Mr. Hughes, the Principal, asked to increase the number of 9<sup>th</sup> grade students at the bottom taking AP algebra. Those six investigative years led to the following non-negotiables:

- AP students double their number of AP classes.
- AP teachers halve their quota of AP students but meet them twice as often.

In the middle of the 2002-'03 school year, Mr. Hughes offered 9<sup>th</sup> graders who failed to pass the state Algebra I test remedial algebra in the 10<sup>th</sup> grade. AP made a counter offer: 9<sup>th</sup> graders who passed our course but failed the state test could stay in the AP if they agreed to double up on college-prep math in their 10<sup>th</sup> grade year. At the coliseum in 2006, I was watching from on high 100% of those who did four years of “double-up college prep math” march “On-time”. (Please see graph on 1<sup>st</sup> page of attached Algebra Project Fall 2009 newsletter.)

It's Monday, Nov. 9, 2009; I'm at the Poster Session of the National Science Foundation's (NSF) DR K-12 meeting of Principle Investigators. The seed planted at Lanier took root, attracted the attention of research mathematicians and NSF awarded AP three grants, the last of which supports the establishment of cohorts at High Schools in Los Angeles, CA; Eldorado IL; Mansfield, OH; and Ypsilanti, MI. In addition, the entire Freshman Academy, 461 students, of the Boys and Girls high school in Brooklyn has signed onto the cohort model. At the NSF Poster Session, the AP poster headlines data from Lanier and argues for a shift in National Policy that offers students in the bottom quartile a "developmental" strategy for raising the high school math-bar:

- "An on-time graduation" benchmark rather than "an annual testing benchmark".
- "Raise the math-bar" by accelerating college prep math up, rather than remediating math down.
- Establish for the bottom quartile students a "readiness to succeed in college" rather than a "drop-out" or "social high school graduation" expectation.

It's the spring of 1963, President Kennedy is still alive, I'm a field secretary of the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) and I'm sitting in the witness stand in the Federal District Court of Greenville Mississippi; the court-room is packed to overflowing with sharecroppers from Greenwood. Briefly put, here's what happened: after a voter registration meeting, one of us, Jimmy Travis, took a bullet on highway 82 between Greenwood and Itta Bena, after that hundreds of sharecroppers marched with SNCC on the Greenwood courthouse to demand the right to vote, after which SNCC field secretaries: arrested under Mississippi law, transferred under Federal law by Bobby Kennedy, Attorney General, Burke Marshall, Assistant Attorney General for Civil Rights, and John Doar, our lawyer, convene with the Greenwood sharecroppers in the Greenville Federal District Court to reflect on Judge Clayton's Mississippi Federal District court question: why is SNCC asking Mississippi's illiterate sharecroppers to register to vote? A question that resonates forty-six years later: why is AP asking Mississippi's "sharecropper-educated students" to double up on AP high-school math? The SNCC/sharecropper alliance fought an earned insurgency against the Nation's Executive, Legislative and Judicial transfer, generation after "second-class citizen" generation, of dirt-scratched, poverty-stricken political and legal isolation. It is and will be no different for an AP-YPP/"sharecropped-educated student" alliance. For SNCC, the Mississippi Delta was an "unforgiving place" from which to create the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party (MFDP), catapult Fannie Lou Hamer into the 1964 Credential Committee hearing of the National Democrat Party Convention, instigate access for all minorities and women into that National Party Structure, and seep a crevasse into the Nation's political levy that flooded in our time onto the Nation's Presidential Delta. For AP-YPP, math literacy is likewise an "unforgiving space" from which to fight an earned insurgency against the Nation's Executive, Legislative and Judicial transfer, generation after "second-class student" generation, of inoculated-against-citizenship-via-"sharecropper education."

Jimmy Travis passed on July 28, 2009, but what he earned in 1963 when he caught that bullet on highway 82 between Greenwood and Itta Bena lives on. AP-YPP has taken hold in

Jimmy's home-town, Jackson Mississippi and Albert Sykes posted a YPP blog, "**In Gratitude**", to Jimmy, last Sept. 4<sup>th</sup>:

*Jimmie took the bullet that ultimately saved the life of Bob Moses. Had that bullet traveled in any other direction, this blog may never have existed. There would be no Algebra Project or YPP, no Omo to call for advice, no Maisha to call for an encouraging word. What Mr. Travis did for us we must do for the world. We must absorb the bullets that are intended to destroy our communities (inadequate education; restricted, if any, access to quality healthcare). We must be the bearers of burdens not intended for us as well as those that are. All of this has to be done in the spirit of selfless sacrifice. We all are intended to contribute something to this world which is greater than us: that outlives us. ...One bullet, caught by an unintended target, is what made our work possible. For what Jimmie Travis and others like him have done for us, YPP moves and lives in eternal gratitude. Thanks Jimmie!!!!*

Forty six years ago, unnoticed and unseen, Jimmie took the bullet that pointed the way to MFDP, the SNCC/Fannie Lou Hamer crevasse into the National Political Party Levy and the flood onto its Presidential Delta: unnoticed and unseen, Albert's blog seeps through the AP-YPP crevasse in the Nation's Public School Levy and trickles onto its Education Delta; please help us prepare for the flood to come.

Thanks for your support of this legacy and its ongoing work,



Bob Moses