

An Earned Insurgency: Quality Education as a Constitutional Right

ROBERT P. MOSES

The Algebra Project, Inc.

In the following pages, Robert Moses tells the history of the early civil rights movement in Mississippi, focusing on the individuals, alliances, and strategies that brought about fundamental change in the United States and ultimately made possible the election of Barack Obama to the presidency. Moses describes how the efforts of Justice Department officials working from the “top” of society combined with the day-to-day work of sharecroppers and organizers at the “bottom” to challenge Jim Crow. His story takes us from the front lines of the movement in Mississippi to his contemporary efforts to ensure that all children in this country receive a quality education. While working from the bottom of today’s movement for educational equality, he calls on Obama to provide the leadership needed at the top to ensure lasting change. In this “illuminated story” he infuses his narration (in sans serif) with his own reflections and insights about the lessons this story offers.

Senator Lyndon Baines Johnson couldn’t have imagined that the bill he designed in 1957 to preserve the national unity of the Democratic Party would eventually lead to the party’s unraveling and set the stage for the election of Barack Obama as president in 2008. Nor, for that matter, could President Eisenhower. Perhaps Senator Strom Thurmond understood its long-term significance: the rest of the southern senators yielded their filibuster against the bill, but the senator from South Carolina held the Senate floor for twenty-four hours and eighteen minutes. When he finally yielded and a vote was allowed, the Senate passed the bill.

The Civil Rights Act of 1957 was, at the time, considered a “toothless” bill (Gittinger & Fisher, 2004). Jackie Robinson fired off a telegram on August 13 to Eisenhower’s assistant: “AM OPPOSED TO CIVIL RIGHTS BILL IN ITS PRESENT FORM. . . . HOPE THE PRESIDENT WILL VETO IT” (Robinson, 1957). Nonetheless, Eisenhower signed the bill into law.

On February 1, 1960, four freshmen at North Carolina Agricultural and Technical State University stepped into history at a Woolworth’s store in Greens-

boro. Their sit-in put into motion a powerful youth movement that found some "tooth" in the 1957 Civil Rights Act. Theirs was a strategy that LBJ could not have foreseen: It would eventually dismantle Jim Crow in the national Democratic Party and open a crevasse in the racial orientation of national party politics.

The basic story of fundamental change in the United States is a story of alliances between the top and the bottom. The country is surprising in its ability to come forward with individuals, buried in its constituencies, who act in pivotal ways at crucial points in the nation's history. They act in the context of larger institutions or movements to drive this country forward. What all these groups have in common is the belief that this country should close the gap between its ideals and its practices. Much of this story is hidden. We rarely talk about the Mississippi civil rights movement, its impact on the national Democratic Party, and how these events ignited the evolution of the party to the point where it could nominate Barack Obama for president in 2008. It is really important to foreground that history.

The story of the movement in Mississippi is one of largely unknown people—people who are not in the general public view, who carried enormous weight in shaping the different movements and policies for civil rights. While there were certainly discussions at the level of the president and Congress, it was people in small domains who understood the energy that was needed and who made the moves necessary to put change into motion.

Pulling from the Top, Pushing from the Bottom

Clueless at Harvard, but outed by the sit-ins, in the summer of 1960 I found my way to Atlanta, the movement, and Ella Baker, director of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC), Martin Luther King Jr.'s organization. Ella and the student movement came together on April 15, 1960, at Ella's alma mater, Shaw University. Energized by the sit-ins, nemesis of Jim Crow South, and guided by Ella's brand of leadership, together they created the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), nemesis of Jim Crow Nation. That same summer Harold Tyler, chief of the new Civil Rights Division in the Justice Department, looking to fill a high-ranking, scarcely sought-after first-assistant position, tracked down John Doar, a fellow Princeton graduate. Over the phone and "sight unseen," Tyler offered him the job (Branch, 1988, p. 331). As assistant attorney general for civil rights, Doar seized an "opportunity, the great chance to work on a very important problem in American government . . . a situation in the sixties where really we didn't have an honest system of self government" (Lamb, 2009).

At first an almost one-man "work force," acting "partly as his own FBI agent," Doar was shocked by waves of hands-up, church-testifying African Americans protesting notices of eviction for registering to vote.¹ That same summer, Doar

initiated his work on dishonest self-government in Fayette County, Tennessee (Branch, 1988, pp. 334, 335). As he later wrote:

I can still recall how the Division [of Civil Rights] operated during the 1961–1963 time period. On a Friday afternoon I would see a row of suitcases and briefcases lined up in the first floor corridor. . . . Whenever lawyers went south to investigate, they departed Washington on Friday night to return on the third Sunday following. This meant sixteen straight days in the field. . . . As the Division lawyers criss-crossed the rural roads of Louisiana, Mississippi, and Alabama, they found a complex legal and social network designed to protect and preserve the caste system. . . . They also saw that Louisiana, Mississippi, and Alabama remained largely a part of the American frontier, the rural white society riddled throughout with bewildering patterns of suspicion and silence. . . . The spirit of the Division lawyers assigned to enforce the Civil Rights Acts was governed by . . . a philosophy grounded in hope. This kind of hope is not the same as optimism. It is not a willingness to invest in an enterprise that is obviously heralded for early success, but rather the ability to work hard for something because it makes sense, not because it stands a chance to succeed. (Doar, 1997, pp. 4–5)

I began to understand the alliances between top and bottom in the early sixties around the voting rights movement in Mississippi. At the top was a small cadre of lawyers in the Civil Rights Division, headed by Burke Marshall and John Doar. They were the only force at the federal level that had a strategy about how to obtain the right to vote for black Americans. Their strategy was to give bite to the 1957 Civil Rights Act through the federal court system. They weren't entirely successful, but they did pave the way for a major constitutional shift down the road. But for most of that time, Marshall and Doar were pretty isolated, working on that issue within the federal government.

One year after Doar was hired, a Greyhound bus carrying "Freedom Riders" from Washington, DC, and bound for New Orleans was attacked on May 14, 1961, in Anniston, Alabama. The rides, started by James Farmer and the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE), marked the first strategy in SNCC's insurgency against Jim Crow Nation. After the bus was bombed in Anniston, John F. Kennedy, four months a president, "ordered" the rides stopped before they fully started. As he piled on the pressure, most riders abandoned the buses and flew into New Orleans instead (Dittmer, 1995, p. 92). But a determined rider, John Lewis, made it back to Nashville where he, Diane Nash, and nine other students defied both the president of the United States and the terror of Jim Crow and got back on the bus. They rode an *earned insurgency*, watched by the nation and the world, and forced Kennedy's new administration to confront the boundaries of state and national citizenship and jurisdiction.

The Freedom Riders never did reach New Orleans. Robert Kennedy, the U.S. attorney general, cut a deal with Mississippi governor Ross Barnett: if Mississippi promised to protect the Freedom Riders, the White House would quietly

stand by while they were calmly arrested and “whisked” away by Mississippi police (Dittmer, 1995, p. 93).

While Doar and his allies continued their work from the top, at the bottom was the movement. The energy from the sit-in movement that came into Mississippi via SNCC, and its subsequent work to set up a voter registration program, acted in tandem with the Justice Department. But the movement’s focus on nonviolent direct action couldn’t sustain itself in Mississippi without people ready to “do the Mandela”—large numbers of people ready to stay in jail with no bail and fill up the jails with a mountain of protest that the nation could not ignore. There was no legal basis for a federal intervention, there wasn’t enough of a black middle class like they had in Nashville and Atlanta to post bail, and the national civil rights organizations weren’t interested at all in trying to launch a sit-in movement in Mississippi, where violence reigned. The importance of the 1957 Civil Rights Act was that without it, and without the cadre of Justice Department lawyers at the top, we would not have been able to actually advance the voting program in Mississippi, because we needed the federal government to be able to intervene on our behalf.

The Voter Registration Insurgency in Mississippi

In August of 1960, nine months before the Freedom Riders made their route infamous, Ella and Jane Stenbridge put me on an Atlanta Greyhound bound for Mississippi. Representing the sit-in movement, but more deeply aware of my ride, I slid to the back of the bus as it approached Anniston, where a state trooper stopped the bus to take a look. Scouting for SNCC, my “Back of the Bus Freedom Ride” took me to Ella’s contacts in Talladega, Birmingham, Clarksdale, Cleveland, Jackson, Shreveport, New Orleans, Gulfport, Biloxi, and Mobile. But it was the stop in Cleveland, in the heart of the Mississippi Delta, where I entered history and the world of Amzie Moore. I wrote Jane: “Amzie is the best I’ve met yet. . . . He works in the post office, down to two hours a day, and lives like a brick wall in a brick house, dug into this country like a tree beside the water” (Branch, 1988, p. 330).

Amzie laid out SNCC’s voter registration insurgency for the Delta. He knew that Freedom Rides, though a good thing, didn’t go straight to the heart of what troubled Mississippi: Jim Crow politics (Payne, 1995, p. 105). Shortly after I arrived, Amzie responded to C. C. Bryant, head of McComb’s NAACP, and sent me to head up a voter registration initiative. SNCC would first pursue Jim Crow’s noose all around Pike, Amite, and Walthall counties, the southwest corner of Mississippi—Klan country. I boarded the back of a Greyhound and headed for McComb. C. C. and Webb Owens met me at the bus station. As we went house to house in Burgland to get folk to the Masonic Temple for voter registration workshops, little kids up and down the roads saw SNCC Freedom Riders. Webb, the “treasurer,” had a “safe-deposit pocket” into which we

poured \$5 and \$10 contributions collected over two weeks in July from the people who cut hair, dry-cleaned clothes, ran restaurants and gas stations, built houses, and deaconed churches.

We began in McComb, but as news of the SNCC voter registration drive spread by local radio, we began to spread out. Mrs. Schoby came with her sister and asked if we would go with them and their brother to Liberty, across the county line in Amite. Webb Owens, "Super Cool Daddy," stashed his cane in front of him on both hands, leaned forward just a little bit, opened his "fish eye" as wide as he could, and stared in stone silence: McComb was one thing, Amite was another. I agreed to go. On our way back from the Liberty courthouse on August 15, the Mississippi highway patrol stopped our car and arrested me. I put in a call to John Doar, a connection that made a difference. I lucked out, being connected collect like I did.

What brought the movement—the Freedom Ride and its concept of nonviolent direct action—into Mississippi couldn't sustain it there. What *did* sustain it was Amzie's insight that this energy could be focused around the right to vote and that the Civil Rights Division could intervene by turning the jailhouse key. I think I was arrested about seven times in Mississippi, as the point person of the action for the vote, but every time as I was arrested, particularly after laying the initial groundwork in southwest Mississippi, the Justice Department came to turn that key. We were actually *able* to organize. That is, we had what I came to call a *crawl space*. This space was created by the civil rights bill on the one hand, and, on the other, the Kennedy administration's interpretation of the bill through Bobby Kennedy, Burke Marshall, and John Doar.

The Lived Constitution v. the Legal Constitution

Two weeks later a phone call wouldn't do. I had been released from jail and had spent two weeks on the farm of E. W. Steptoe, head of the Amite County NAACP. E. W. had set up our voting classes in his tiny wooden church up the road from his farm. The youngest of his eight children, Charlie and Shirley Jean, were still at home: Charlie herded the cows up the road and milked them every morning, while Shirley Jean carried water from the pump into the kitchen for Sing to whip up biscuits and start another day. At the crack of dawn on August 29, 1961, Curtis Dawson swung by Steptoe's to pick me up, and we headed to Liberty to meet Preacher Knox. We drove up Knox's pothole-heaven driveway, but he wasn't home; he wasn't at the courthouse either. Still searching, we walked down Liberty's Main Street—a place where the Civil Rights Act of 1957 had no tooth. Stitching up and calling up followed my beating up at the hands of Billy Jack Caston, a nephew of the sheriff. After the "jury trial" that acquitted Caston, I too, like Doar, reached for a "philosophy grounded in hope." But Mississippi's juries were deep in the clutch of Jim Crow, incapable of enacting justice. I realized then that the county's seat is not Lincoln's seat, and the legal

Constitution is simply not the lived Constitution. In these conditions, the only thing that made sense were the lives of Amzie, C. C., Webb, and E. W. living the struggle.

One month later, John Doar swung through Amite while working on another division case. Back at Steptoe's farm, we gave him a country welcome and then hit the roads to talk with people who wanted to vote. The next morning Herbert Lee lay dead at the cotton gin in Liberty, shot by Eugene Hurst, a member of the state legislature and a "neighbor" to Lee and Steptoe. Doar hit his office at 10:00 that night. He wrote:

Hurst claimed that Lee had come at him with a tire iron. Although the Division believed that the killing was unjustified, we were never able to do anything about it. Lewis Allen, a local black logging trucker, saw what had happened. The next morning he testified under pressure to a coroner's jury that he saw Lee with the tire iron. [His supporters] inquired whether under federal law there was a way Allen could be protected. We said no. (Doar, 1997, p. 6)

Burke Marshall decided that suing local law enforcement would only lead to more violence. Two years later Allen was murdered, and with no federal statute available to prosecute these crimes, the case was left unsolved.

The Preamble to the Constitution says, "We the people": It's we the people who ordain and establish the Constitution, and it's we the people who actually live it. But the adjudicated Constitution—the Constitution based on legal precedent—limited what the Justice Department would do in the 1960s. On the "bottom," we were doing the "lived" Constitution. As a result, our work eventually helped convince the Justice Department that their strategy of working locally, case by case, wasn't going to work. In Mississippi, in the counties where the problem was the most severe, we ran into violence. The Justice Department and the administration were not willing to be implicated in providing federal protection—either for people trying to register to vote or for voter registration workers. Still, we kept pushing from the bottom as far as we could. In the end, the Department of Justice drafted a strategy to go for state-wide legal suits that would create a federal mandate protecting the right to vote. This gave the voting rights legislation its bite.

Giving the Voting Rights Act Its Bite

After the summer of 1961, the Civil Rights Division and Dave Norman began to enact a new, broader strategy that relied on federal suits against the states. The Department of Justice sued the State of Louisiana, arguing that its voter registration requirements violated the U.S. Constitution. The strategy quickly expanded.

On August 29, 1962, the Division filed suit on behalf of the United States against the state of Mississippi . . . challenging the entire system of regis-

tration in Mississippi on three grounds: . . . [including that] tests of intelligence, understanding or comprehension in Mississippi were unconstitutional because black citizens had not been afforded an educational opportunity equal to that afforded white citizens. (Doar, 1997, p. 8)

While we waited for a ruling in Louisiana, the U.S. government lost its case in Mississippi. Judge Brown, in his dissent against the Mississippi decision, wrote that “the immediate means—the understanding test—must be judged, both in its purpose and in its effect,” in light of Mississippi’s policy of segregated “education and the wide disparity in the quality and quantity of education afforded by Mississippi to its white and Negro children” (Doar, 1997, p. 11).

Then, on November 27, 1963—two months before Lewis Allen’s murder, five days after the assassination of President Kennedy, and eighty-eight years after President Grant called for the constitutional amendment to educate potential voters—Judge Wisdom of the Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, handed down the court’s opinion in *United States v. the State of Louisiana* (1963).² He said, in effect, that this nation, having refused to educate freed slaves and their descendants because they didn’t intend for them to vote, cannot now deny them the vote because they are not so educated.

Wisdom’s decision called forth the language of Justice John Marshall Harlan’s dissenting opinion in *Plessy v. Ferguson* (1896), which marked a crucial constitutional moment in the history of our nation’s recognition of the disconnect between its ideals and actual practices:

The white race deems itself to be the dominant race in this country . . . but in the view of the Constitution, in the eye of the law, there is in this country no superior, dominant ruling class of citizens. . . . Our Constitution is color-blind. . . . In respect of civil rights, all citizens are equal before the law. . . . It is, therefore, to be regretted that this high tribunal . . . has reached the conclusion that it is competent for a State to regulate the enjoyment by citizens of their civil rights solely upon the basis of race. . . . We boast of the freedom enjoyed by our people above all other peoples. But it is difficult to reconcile that boast with a state of the law which, practically, puts the brand of servitude and degradation upon a large class of our fellow-citizens, our equals before the law. The thin disguise of “equal” accommodations . . . will not mislead anyone, nor atone for the wrong this day done.

In his decision, Wisdom argued that this nation could no longer justify one wrong with another.

Political Literacy and Party Politics

Unaware of Wisdom’s ruling, we lived Harlan’s “wrong this day done.” The murders of Herbert Lee and Lewis Allen drove deep into SNCC’s Mississippi work, into our “crawl space.” This crawl space was not a place like a farm or a home is a place, a geography of family and familiarity, if not love. It was a metaphor for the dusty difficulty of knocking on minds, of our work to recon-

cile Americans' "boast of the freedom enjoyed by our people above all other peoples" with "the wrong this day done" (*Plessy v. Ferguson*, 1896). It took knocking against the hard heads of Jim Crow Nation, but it also took knocking on the minds of sharecroppers for them to create the demand for change. Earning the insurgency in the Delta took more than facing down the terror of Jim Crow. It took facing down the logic of Jim Crow, too. Thinkable? Not really. Doable? History happens.

The question of education emerged most forcefully in the Delta, where sharecroppers who were illiterate were going down to register to vote. We were saying to them, "Look, if you're going to break out of this cycle, you have to go down even though you can't read and write." In a federal district court in Greenville, Mississippi, in 1963, Judge Clayton asked SNCC organizers, "Why are you taking illiterates down to register to vote?" The basic argument, like *Wisdom's Louisiana* decision, relied on the concept of fairness. Education is a basic American value, and it was fundamentally unfair to deny people access to education and to use their lack of education to deny them political access.

By 1962, I was working with one elderly man in Greenville whose teacher was trying to get him to read the word "can" using a picture of a garbage can. Given his background and culture as a sharecropper, I knew there was no way he would learn the three-letter word "can" from that picture. I recruited my former professor at Hamilton College, John W. Blyth, and Burke Marshall, and we got \$60,000 in Gulf Oil stock from the Taconic Foundation to build a literacy program designed to build on the knowledge of the Mississippi sharecroppers. Blyth taught SNCC workers to produce reading materials over the course of the Freedom Summer.

The literacy program started because it wasn't enough just to work on the vote; we were looking at how to put in place the literacy competencies that would be needed when people finally got the vote. We began organizing political campaigns. As early as 1961, I was the road manager for R. L. T. Smith, who ran in the Democratic primary for the southwest Mississippi congressional seat. In 1963 we ran our own candidates—Fannie Lou Hamer, Victoria Gray, Aaron Henry, and Ed King—for state offices in Mississippi. After the assassination of NAACP field secretary Medgar Evers on June 11, 1963, more students and resources flooded into Mississippi. After the assassination of President Kennedy several months later, we turned our attention from the nation's executive structure to its political party structure. To do that we formed the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party (MFDP) in 1964. This focus led us to discover the critical key to unlocking the apartheid situation in Mississippi: the National Democratic Party. The MFDP put its energy into challenging the segregated process that produced the national party's all-white delegation. The nation watched on television as MFDP leaders made their case before the Democratic Party's Convention Credentials Committee.

I first saw Mrs. Hamer's power on the school bus that Amzie got hold of in 1962 to take the first group of blacks from Ruleville down to Indianola in Sunflower County to register to vote. On that ride, there was this one lady who sang her heart out from the moment the bus took off until we landed in Indianola. That was Mrs. Fannie Lou Hamer. Her singing on the trip drove fear away from the bus; her testimony at the credentials committee two years later drove Jim Crow away from the National Democratic Party. In fact, Mrs. Hamer's authenticity was our secret weapon: the lives of the nation's sharecroppers ran through the marrow of her bones too deep to be disguised in any way. Her testimony, her voice, opened the crevasse into the racial orientation of national party politics. The lead editorial in the August 26, 1964, *New York Herald Tribune* proclaimed that "Mississippi and all the South were dramatically put on notice that a new age of Negro political rights has dawned, in which the past has no place and the present is only prologue." After this victory, Mrs. Hamer returned to her county, her people, her home and, tragically, back to the realities of segregation and "the wrong this day done."

As southern states were forced to open up their state Democratic delegations, they had to change how politicians behaved. This change opened the way for the Democratic Party to evolve to the point it has now reached, where it can nominate an African American for president. The roots of that evolution lie in the change in party structure that happened in 1964; this change, in turn, had its roots in the voting drive and the struggle to promote educational and political literacy.

One of the wrongs that Fannie Lou returned to at home was "sharecropper education." In 1970, Mrs. Hamer filed suit against the county, charging it with failing to desegregate its schools. She won. "Out of the new *Hamer et al. v. Sunflower County* case, a biracial committee on desegregation was formed and Hamer was appointed its head" (Lee, 2000, p.168). But whites for the most part withdrew from the public schools. By 2006 "only 2 percent of Sunflower County public school students were white" (Asch, 2008, p. 293).

Creating Our Crawl Space: Earning the Insurgency Today

I returned to Indianola in 1991. I found Dave Dennis, who codirected the movement's Council of Federated Organizations (COFO) in the 1960s, and together we spearheaded the Algebra Project in the Delta. We held our first training at Valley State University with two groups of trainees. There were white teachers from a middle school north of the railroad tracks, which was around 45 percent white, and black teachers from a middle school south of those tracks, whose students were all black. We spent the first two days discussing table arrangements. Left to themselves, the participants selected "separate but equal" tables.

Over the last quarter-century, the focus of my work has been on education. The Algebra Project has been looking at the bottom quartile of students and saying that our current national policy to remediate these students is a non-policy. Right now 50 percent of incoming freshmen at state universities who want to go into science and math can't get through the initial course of college algebra. We need a policy to accelerate them. With funding from the National Science Foundation, the Algebra Project works within individual classrooms, where we get students to agree to do ninety minutes of math with us every day for four years of high school. They work to catch up on their deficits and jump through the country's three hoops: the state hoop, the ACT/SAT hoop, and the university hoop. The project asks, "Can we have a different conversation in the country about what to do with the students at the bottom in education?"

I have spent the better part of fifteen years doing Algebra Project work in Mississippi. The achievements of the SNCC-driven Mississippi movement put to shame what has happened with education. Jim Crow has been eliminated de jure but not de facto in public school education. There is still "sharecropper education" for black students in Mississippi, but we, as a nation, lack the outrage about it.

The Algebra Project and its offshoot, The Young People's Project (TYPP), take seriously the building of a movement for a constitutional amendment that says that every child in the country is a child of the country and has a right to a quality public school education. This movement, called Quality Public School Education as a Constitutional Right (QECR), is one way to keep struggling against the "wrong this day done" in this country.

In this country, you have to earn your insurgency. You have to capture the imagination of the people in the federal government who actually want to close the gap between our espoused ideals and the practices that we tolerate. This gap has existed throughout our history, and there are always people trying to close it. The students in the Algebra Project and The Young People's Project face the same problem we faced in the 1960s. America is as practical as ever; unless our youth can actually demonstrate that they are part of the solution, hammering away at the doors or in the streets isn't going to create change.

Demanding educational rights requires courage in the face of terror. But today it requires a different kind of courage than the sort we had in the 1960s. It's not physical courage; it's intellectual and it's knowledge-based. One of the students in the Algebra Project is doing college math after two and a half years in the program. He doesn't know that; he has no idea what they do in college. In order for him to *imagine* himself in college, he has to be convinced that he's doing the work that he's going to be assigned in college; he needs to believe that if he works at it, he will be able to learn how to do it. He began at

the bottom of the bottom. This is the earning that he has had to do—to build a knowledge base, day in and day out, for four years of high school.

Changing the Constitution

Without educational equality, there is no way to break the cycle we're now in. The question is: if we believe that there is talent here in the United States, how are we going to capture it? The current situation, in which the domain of educational rights is lodged in state constitutions, is untenable. The nation cannot mobilize the kind of intellectual force that it needs in the twenty-first century state by state. Rather, we need a national constitutional amendment to fundamentally shift our educational policy, and this requires a president's help.

But we can help begin a national conversation. We can work the demand side. In other words, we must create the force of a demand so that this fundamental change is politically thinkable, if not safe. But to get a constitutional change on that issue, it's going to have to take leadership from the president. As James Bryant Conant wrote in 1961, we have never had a national policy or a national discussion about a federal education policy that would address the caste system in our schools. Instead, we have backed our way into policies to rescue different categories of students with different specialized programs—Upward Bound, charter schools, vouchers, affirmative action, ABC, magnet schools, you name it.

The Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments formed the constitutional bedrock for the action in the 1960s. Yes, it took a hundred years, but the constitutional basis for the action was already in place. We need that same constitutional bedrock to ground the changes we want to see now. It won't happen overnight. I think of my children and grandchildren and ask, "What is this generation doing to put in place something that the next generation—or the next two generations—can actualize?"

Notes

1. Doar was investigating claims that white landowners were evicting black sharecroppers who were attempting to register to vote in Haywood County, Tennessee.
2. President Grant addressed education in his seventh "State of the Union" address to Congress in 1875:

We are a republic whereof one man is as good as another before the law. Under such a form of government it is of the greatest importance that all should be possessed of education of intelligence enough to cast a vote with a right understanding of its meaning. As a primary step, therefore, to our advancement in all that has marked our progress in the past century, I suggest your earnest consideration, and most earnestly recommended it, that a constitutional amendment be submitted to legislatures of the several states for ratification, making it the duty of each of the several states to establish and forever maintain free public schools adequate to the education of all of children in the rudimentary branches within their respective limits, irrespective of sex, color, birth place, or religion. (para. 7)

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