

Lost World of U.S. Labor Education: Curricula at East and West Coast Community Schools, 1944-1957¹

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As the tide of battle in World War II swung decisively against the Axis in 1943-1944, the U.S. Communist Party transformed and upgraded its main east and west coast

labor schools -- the Jefferson School of Social Science in New York City and the California Labor School in San Francisco/Oakland. These changes were responses to the tremendous increase in war production in both cities, and the opportunity, indeed the necessity, to train workers (many of whom, especially in California, had recently migrated from the rural south) in trade union principles, and in anti-racism so as to protect the home front war effort.² Under Earl

¹ This paper is drawn from a book-in-progress, *"Training for the Class Struggle": Communist Education in the U.S.* Marv thanks Kerry Taylor, Lisa Rubens, Bob Cherny, Bill Issel, Annette T. Rubinstein, David Goldway (1907-1990), Alan Wald, Alexander Saxton and Ellen Schrecker for helpful critical comments on earlier (sometimes much earlier) drafts of this paper and has accepted many, but not all of their suggestions for revision. A version of this paper was presented at the Gotham Conference.

² Whatever its shortcomings, the Communist Party was an unquestioned champion of racial equality. See Gerald Horne, "The Red and the Black: The Communist Party and African-Americans," in Michael E. Brown, et al., eds., *New Studies in the Politics and Culture of U.S. Communism* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1993), 199-237. On the importance of the Communists' anti-racism in generating support (including financial contributions) from not necessarily left-leaning wealthy Jewish as well as non-Jewish business figures, see the comments of former California Labor School Director, Dave Jenkins, in his oral history, "The Union Movement, the California Labor School and San Francisco Politics, 1926-1988" in Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley [hereafter cited as Bancroft], pp. 156-159. (Hereafter the California Labor School shall be abbreviated in these notes to CLS.) The situation was different in New York where the money to found the Jefferson School came from what one of them

Browder's wartime leadership, the Communist Party at this time took a super-patriotic ideological turn, adopting a wartime no-strike pledge, advancing the new slogan "Communism is Twentieth Century Americanism,"³ and naming its eastern and midwestern adult schools after more or less mainstream American heroes—the Samuel Adams School in Boston, Tom Paine in Philadelphia, and George Washington Carver in Harlem, Abraham Lincoln in Chicago and Jefferson in New York. On the west coast simple geographical names—the Pacific Northwest Labor School (in Seattle), and the California Labor School—sufficed.⁴

Since the early 1920s the Party had sponsored open, adult educational centers (often under the name Workers Schools),⁵ but the wartime schools were conducted on a vastly expanded scale. Not only were there many more students than had attended the earlier Schools—thousands each term at each of

called "rich rebels" already aligned with the Communist Party. Rose Rubin, interview with Marvin Gettleman, New York, March 2, 1990.

³ On Browder and his ideas, see Maurice Isserman, *Which Side Were You On?: The American Communist Party During the Second World War* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1982), chap. 9 and Fraser M. Ottanelli, *The Communist Party of the United States: From the Depression to World War II* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1991), chap. 5.

⁴ At first, the CLS was named for the falsely-convicted labor leader Tom Mooney, who, after his release from prison in 1939, became something of an embarrassment to the California left. The reasons for dropping Mooney's name are set forth by Dave Jenkins, "The Union Movement, the CLS and San Francisco Politics, 1926-1988," Bancroft, p. 145. Cf. Jenkins interview with Marvin Gettleman, San Francisco, June 9, 1990.

⁵ On the first of these schools, see Marvin E. Gettleman, "The New York Workers School, 1923-1944: Communist Education in American Society," in Brown, et al., eds., *New Studies in the Politics and Culture of American Communism*, 261-28. I am also indebted to Professor Clyde Barrow for sharing with me his unpublished MS on the Workers School.

the dozen or so new schools—but the curriculum was also greatly expanded.⁶ Hundreds of courses were offered at the schools’ main centers and in outlying extension annexes.⁷ During wartime the schools’ primary (but, not only) aim was to forge in their classrooms and lecture halls “mass weapons, as sharp and decisive as bullets in the struggle against fascism.”⁸

In the immediate post-war period the slogan “Education for Jobs and Peace,”⁹ and corresponding curricular changes) prevailed. By 1946, with

⁶ The enrollments, 5,000 a year at the Jefferson School, and nearly than many at CLS (not to speak of the Communist labor schools in other cities, make this probably the largest system of adult education in the country (up to that time). But neither of the two main modern works on U.S. adult education (Joseph F. Kett, *The Pursuit of Knowledge under Difficulties* [Stanford CA: Stanford Univ. Press, 1994] or Patrick Keane and Howard W. Stubblefield, *Adult Education in the American Experience* [San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 1994]) contains so much as a word on these Communist schools. Explicit left wing accounts make a great show of invoking the undifferentiated past in order to “...recover the best of [America’s] radical and democratic tradition ... and pedagogy.” (Henry R. Giroux, *Schooling and the Struggle for Public Life: Critical Pedagogy in the Modern Age* [Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988], p. xii.) But, with one exception, neither Giroux nor other self-proclaimed radicals who have written on liberatory education have gone back to study what was actually done in this vein in previous decades. An exception is Stanley Aronowitz’s *Roll Over Beethoven: The Return of Cultural Strife* (Hanover NH: University Press of New England, 1933), which contains a rare and insightful -- though brief -- account of U.S. Communist education from the 1920s to the 1950s.

⁷ The Jefferson School had extension branches in the Bronx, Brooklyn, and New Jersey. The Jefferson School’s Harlem sub-branch, named the George Washington Carver School, was headed by the artist and writer Gwendolyn Bennett. A small collection of materials on the Carver School may be found in the New York Public Library’s Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture (New York City). The CLS established extension centers in Santa Rosa, Sacramento, Stockton, Fresno and other northern California locales, and a sub-branch in Oakland directed by Gordon Williams. (See brochure *California Labor School Expands* (n.d. [1946]) in the Library of the California State University, Northridge.) In 1947 the CLS opened another Branch in Los Angeles (superseding the earlier Party school there, the People’s Educational Center) directed by David Hedley. When Hedley died in 1948 the CLS branch in LA limped along a few more years, but died too in the early ‘50s. (Records of the LA CLS and the Peoples Educational Center are found at California State University, Northridge and at the Southern California Library for Social Science and Research, Los Angeles.)

⁸Course listings, Jefferson School of Social Science, Winter term, 1944, p. 3, Reference Center for Marxist Studies, New York City (hereafter RCMS).

⁹These are the slogans that appeared on CLS brochures in the 1945-47 period. These brochures have been preserved in the Labor Archives and Research Center, San Francisco State University (hereafter, LARC/SFSU), and in the Library of California State University, Northridge, and in the Southern California Library for Social Science and Research (Los Angeles).

Roosevelt dead and Browder ousted from Party leadership, Browder's signature strategy—that the Communists should aim at being respected and welcome allies of the New Deal—was rapidly fraying. The Jefferson School catalog warned in 1946 that “Fascism is not dead.... Oppression of the Negro people and anti-Semitism are increasing.... Resurgent imperialism, especially American imperialism, menaces the American people and the forward-marching peoples of all countries.” As the threatening Cold War clouds gathered, the Jefferson School (along with its counterparts on the west coast, and elsewhere) attempted “to provide the scientific understanding necessary” to solve these vital problems through individual and collective action.”¹⁰ How these educational institutions tried to do so is the subject of this paper.

One way was to open the schools to “the whole mass of the people,”¹¹ as the Jefferson School at first put it—later adding the qualification “...except known enemies of the working class.”¹² The same inclusive sentiment, phrased differently, appeared in the California Labor School's catalog description of entrance requirements, which was stated simply: “There are none.”¹³ The rare obstreperous anti-Communists

¹⁰ Course listings, Jefferson School of Social Science, Fall term, 1946, p.4 (RCMS).

¹¹ Course listings, Jefferson School of Social Science, Winter term, 1944, epigraph (a quotation from Thomas Jefferson's letter to James Madison, December 20, 1787) (RCMS). *The New York Times*, April 29, 1944, p.11, carried a news story announcing the Jefferson School's opening. The *San Francisco News*, May 16, 1944 carried an announcement of the CLS spring and summer plans.

¹² Course listings, Jefferson School of Social Science, Fall term, 1949, p. 3 (RCMS).

¹³ Course listings, CLS, Fall, 1946, LARC/SFSU, p. 8.

who were identifiable by their classroom behavior could be easily dealt with, but neither of the two major Party schools (the only ones formally prosecuted by the U.S. government's Subversive Activities Control Board [SACB]) were able to weed out secretly unfriendly students—especially those planted by the FBI. The very openness of these schools refuted (and was clearly intended to refute) the widespread view that Communists operated mainly by secretive and stealthy means.¹⁴ As hostility to Communism rose in the late 1940's and 1950s, the Jefferson School announced that attendance would no longer be taken in class so that Communist students (who had good reason to believe they would face harrassment if their Party membership were known) and non-Communists too would be protected by a “veil of anonymity.”¹⁵ But this precaution did little to deter the FBI. Hoover's Bureau, which always took the dimmest view possible of Communism and Communists,¹⁶ recruited (and paid) informers to attend the Party schools in order to collect data for the suppression that eventually came when the SACB forced both the Jefferson School and the California Labor School to close their doors in the mid-1950s.¹⁷

¹⁴On the problem of secrecy for Communists, see Ellen Schrecker, *Many Are the Crimes: McCarthyism in America* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999), 25-26. In his *Hammer and Hoe: Alabama Communists During the Great Depression* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1990), chap. 5, Robin D.G. Kelley shows that in the police state atmosphere of the segregated south, if Communists offered education it had to be secret and clandestine. The presumption is that Alabama was roughly typical, but until Kelley's research on left education is replicated for other southern states, we won't know for sure.

¹⁵ *The New York Times*, October 3, 1950, p. 15.

¹⁶On Hoover and the FBI, and the anti-Communist animus that obsessed both, see Schrecker, *Many Are the Crimes*, chap. 6.

¹⁷On how FBI witnesses' hostile testimony fit into the U.S. government's argument that Communist schools were “agents of a foreign power.” See reels 29 (Jefferson School) and 51

When these doors were opened a dozen years earlier students flocked through them and found a rich treat of curricular and extra-curricular offerings offered by a group of talented intellectuals in and near the Communist Party. Two years after its establishment, the Jefferson School offered at its 16th street “main campus”¹⁸ no less than 400 courses in a dozen different fields!¹⁹ History and contemporary affairs comprised the largest category. Like many of the other instructors and administrators, twin brothers Jack and Philip Foner who offered in 1946 Monday and Tuesday evening sections of an introductory American history course, had been fired in 1941 from their teaching jobs at the municipal colleges of New York City, as had The Jefferson School’s Director, Howard Selsam, his Assistant David Goldway, and several teachers. These firings were the main (and clearly intended) results of New York State’s own rehearsal

(CLS) of the microfilm edition of Records of the Subversive Activities Control Board, 1950-1972; produced in 1989 by the University Publications of America in Frederick, MD, with a useful introduction by Ellen Schrecker. The FBI agents who attended Party schools and then testified at SACB trials, complained bitterly about the denigration of religion in Jefferson School classes, but did not support J. Edgar Hoover’s fantasy about the Communist schools providing military training for armed assault against the U.S. government. (Cf. Hoover to Attorney General Homer Cummings, January 26, 1938 [President’s Secretary’s File, Box 56, FDR Library, Hyde Park, New York. I am indebted to Ellen Schrecker for bringing this item to my attention.] Cummings showed the letter to President Roosevelt the very next day. For Roosevelt’s anti-Communism, see Schrecker, *Many Are the Crimes*, chap. 3). The Jefferson School closed in 1956, the CLS the next year.

¹⁸Housed in a still-standing nine-story former furniture warehouse at Sixth Avenue and 16th Street in lower Manhattan, the Jefferson School was purchased for \$88,000 in 1943. Renovation costs were another \$58,000. Although it is now clear that “Moscow gold” made its way into U.S. Communist Party coffers, 1943 does not appear to be one of those times. The financing came from a series of \$100-a-plate fund-raising dinners, several held at the home of millionaire Communist, Frederick Vanderbilt Field.

¹⁹The data here is drawn from the 90 page Course listings, Jefferson School of Social Science, Fall term, 1946 (RCMS). In this paper, because of space limitations, I am treating only the adult curricula at the Jefferson School and CLS. Both schools had a small number of classes for children and teen-agers.

for McCarthyism—the “Rapp-Coudert” investigation and purge of New York City’s municipal colleges.²⁰

The California Labor School boasted an at least as distinguished faculty, even if its first Director, Dave Jenkins, had only an eighth-grade formal education. Jenkins was succeeded in 1948 by the School’s education director, Holland Roberts, who earlier had been a Stanford University professor of education.²¹ Most of the teachers in economic and political subjects were Communist Party officials, like Oleta Yates, Jules Carson and Celeste Strack or trade union officials (mainly from the ILWU and Public Workers Union). Whatever else it did, the California Labor School was also a kind of beaux arts academy,²² many of the finest teachers there were in the arts, dance and theater departments. For example, the reknowned muralist Anton Refregier attracted many students to his art classes at the School, offered when he was in California to do the Rincon Postal Annex murals. The experienced and dedicated drama director, Dave Sarvis helped

²⁰ See Marvin Gettleman, “Rehearsal for McCarthyism: The New York State Rapp-Coudert Committee and Academic Freedom, 1940-41,” paper delivered at the annual meeting of the American Historical Association, 1982; Stephen Lieberstein, “Purging the Profs: The Rapp-Coudert Committee in New York,” in Brown, et al., eds, *New Studies in the Politics and Culture of American Communism*, 91-122; Ellen Schrecker, *No Ivory Tower: McCarthyism & the Universities* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), chap. 3. After the Rapp-Coudert purges, the Communist Party established a short-lived School for Democracy (1942-3) in New York which, along with the New York Workers School, merged into the Jefferson School of Social Science in 1944.

²¹ Roberts’ autobiographical memoir of the CLS, “The Dangerous School,” is in the Holland Roberts Papers, LARC/SFSU, but must be supplemented by the ascerbic comments in Jenkins, “The Union Movement, the California Labor School and San Francisco Politics, 1926-1988,” Bancroft, pp. 150, 174.

²² This point is vividly made in Jenkins, “The Union Movement, the CLS and San Francisco Politics, 1926-1988,” Bancroft, 156-159, and in Jenkins interview with Marvin Gettleman, San Francisco, June 9, 1990.

produce and direct many of the California Labor School's elaborate theatrical presentations, among them the powerful labor drama *Stevedore*, set on the waterfront, and a political spoof on the musical *South Pacific*, entitled (soon after the establishment of the anti-Communist alliance, NATO) *North Atlantic*.²³ There was also a vigorous literary movement (and journal, *The San Francisco Writers Workshop*) that flourished at the west coast school, in which the future *New York Times* writer, Anthony Boucher and the novelist and later historian, Alexander Saxton were involved.²⁴ West coast psychiatrists and public health people taught some of the most popular courses at the California Labor School. A bitter behind-the-scenes battle flourished over these unorthodox offerings, and sometimes Jefferson School personnel were brought in from the east coast to lay down the correct anti-Freudian line, but soon eclectic psychological doctrines would, at least while Dave Jenkins was Director, creep back into the curriculum.²⁵ One of the latter moments may have been the appearance of the young non-Communist

²³ I wish to thank Professor Ben Harris of the University of Wisconsin, for calling my attention to the mimeographed lyrics of *North Atlantic* in the CLS papers, State Historical Society of Wisconsin, Madison. Cf. Dave Sarvis, interview with Marvin Gettleman, San Anselmo and Mill Vally, CA, June 10, 1990.

²⁴ Alexander Saxton, interview with Marvin Gettleman, Santa Rosa CA, October 1, 1999. Where this California literary movement fits into the broader left-wing literary scene of pre-and post-McCarthy era America will have to await Professor Alan Wald's forthcoming study. Still useful, however is Daniel Aron, *Writers on the Left: Episodes in American Literary Communism* (New York, 1961).

²⁵One of the CLS psychology faculty, Cavendish Moxon, set forth the rationale for an eclectic psycho-therapy in "Psychotherapy for Progressives," *Science & Society*, XXI Spring, 1948), pp. 197-217. Cf. Ben Harris, "'Don't Be Unconscious; Join Our Ranks': Psychology, Politics and Communist Education," *Rethinking Marxism* [Amherst, MA], VI (Spring, 1993), pp. 1-32. For the view of one of the CLS faculty members who admired and supported Jenkins, see George Hitchcock to Marvin Gettleman, August 9, 1991, in Gettleman's possession.

Erik Erikson delivering a lecture in a California Labor School course on Mental Hygiene Today.²⁶

Aside from the very different east and west coast approaches to psychology, there was much cooperation and intellectual cross-fertilization between the two schools—mainly taking the form of using writings by such faculty at the New York school as Philip S. Foner, Howard Selsam and Herbert Morais in west coast courses.²⁷ An important history course taught under a variety of titles at both the Jefferson School and the California Labor School and at every earlier and later Party school²⁸ was in the fall of 1946 called “History and Problems of the Negro in America.” At the west coast school the Director Dave Jenkins (who later admitted he had been woefully underprepared) usually taught Negro history and related courses—until a group of African-American trade unionists from the School’s Oakland campus took over.²⁹ The Jefferson School instructor was the immeasurably better prepared Doxey A. Wilkerson, who had earlier taught at Howard University and had served on the staff of Gunnar Myrdal’s Carnegie

²⁶ Course listings, CLS, Fall term, 1945, LARC/SFSU, p. 15

²⁷ Syllabii of CLS courses in LARC/SFSU and in the Southern California Library for Social Studies and Research (Los Angeles) show dozens of instances in which the books of such Jefferson School teachers as Howard Selsam and Philip Foner are used, and both men travelled to the west coast to deliver lectures at CLS.

²⁸ For the positive version of African-American history first taught at the New York Workers School, see Gettleman, “New York Workers School” (note 5, above), p. 267. At CLS in its banner year, 1948, the course in “The Negro in the Labor Movement,” was team-taught by an all-black staff in the mainly black city of Oakland. It dealt with “The history of the Negro people in the trade union movement, with the record of their contributions, of the struggle for job and wage equality and current problems facing the Negro people.” Course listings, CLS, Winter, 1948, p. 16, California State University, Northridge.

²⁹ Jenkins interview, June 9, 1990.

Corporation-funded project that eventually produced the immensely influential study of race, *An American Dilemma* (1944). Wilkerson, whose wife Yolanda also taught at the Jefferson School, later became faculty and curriculum director, served on the Communist Party's defense team in the main Smith Act case, *Dennis v. U.S.* In 1956, disillusioned with the Party and its intellectual rigidity, Doxey Wilkerson was given the thankless but highly responsible task of closing up and selling off the Jefferson School—after which he resigned his long-time Communist membership.³⁰

Another veteran and victim of New York's Rapp-Coudert purges, George Squier, headed the Jefferson School's Trade Union Division, seeing to it that a comprehensive array of courses on collective bargaining, labor journalism and history, parliamentary procedure, public speaking, strike strategy, etc., were available. This Division offered many of these courses at union halls and at Jefferson School annexes around New York City, as well as at the main campus. In addition, on request, the School dispatched its teachers to shops and factories for lunch-hour talks, which left-wing bosses and foremen sometimes attended, along with the workers.³¹ Not only did the Jefferson School serve those unions in

³⁰ Doxey and Yolanda Wilkerson, interview with Marvin Gettleman, South Norwalk, Connecticut, July 18, 1990; *The New York Times* obituary, June 18, 1993. For Wilkerson's admission of dogmatism at the Jefferson School, see his letter (co-authored with Howard Selsam and David Goldway) in *Daily Worker*, May 6, 1956. According to one former student at the Jefferson School who migrated later to California, the west coast Communists were less dogmatic (Stanley Ofsevit, interview with Marvin Gettleman, Berkeley CA, June 4, 1990).

³¹ George Squier, interview with Marvin Gettleman, Ocean Bay Park, New York, October 13, 1974; Course listings, Jefferson School of Social Sciences, Fall term, 1946, p. 10-11, 27-30 (RCMS), and other Jefferson School bulletins at RCMS, the Tamiment Library (New York University), and the Jefferson School Papers, (State Historical Society of Wisconsin).

the clothing and light industrial shops in the New York area willing to accept them (this of course excluded any shop where David Dubinsky's profoundly anti-Communist International Ladies' Garment Workers Union—sdf with its own internal educational programs—held sway), it was a union shop itself. Permanent Jefferson School employees, all members of Local 555, State, County and Municipal Workers of America, were entitled to one-week paid vacation, sick leave and an employee-friendly severance procedure. Women working there were entitled to maternity leave with assured return to their jobs. Salary levels varied from \$65 per week for the Director down to switchboard operators at \$35.³²

Although faculty and staff appear not to have been unionized on the west coast, the offerings in labor studies were far richer at the California Labor School—double the number at the Jefferson School in 1946. Some covered the same ground—organizing strategies, contact negotiations, duties of union officers and stewards.³³ California Trade Union Director Irwin Elber (a former organizer for the United Federal Workers union) administered a broad range of labor educational services which at first won begrudging support from Pacific coast AFL unions whose leaders were famously hostile to Communism, but who had no comparable educational programs.

³² Memorandum on Personnel Practice (1944?), Jefferson School Papers, State Historical Society of Wisconsin (microfilm frame 134).

³³ See for example Course listings, CLS, Spring term, 1946, LARC/SFSU, pp. 9-12. (One of the labor courses, one dealing with welfare benefits available to unionist and World War 2 veterans in San Francisco, was taught by Tillie Olsen, then Director of the CIO Community Service in California.)

Some of the older non-Communist rank and file members in these unions fondly remembered the ultra-radical Industrial Workers of the World (IWW), and had a measure of sympathy or at least respect—perhaps derived from the 1934 waterfront strikes—for Communism.³⁴ In San Francisco/Oakland, 75 AFL and CIO unions (plus the American Veterans Committee and the NAACP) initially sponsored and helped finance the California Labor School, but the single union that gave the most continuous and generous support was the International Longshoremens and Warehousemens Union. ILWU leader, Harry Bridges, who, despite his personal belief that all the education a worker needs takes “place on the shop floor or the docks,” saw to it that substantial financial aid went regularly to the California Labor School.³⁵ Like the Jefferson School, but in a much different labor context, the California Labor School also offered its services—preparing union pamphlets and newspapers, even offering dance concerts for local meetings—which were eagerly accepted by such unions as the ILWU, the Marine Cooks and Stewards, and many others.³⁶ The School’s active drama department sometimes sent theatrical troupes into dangerous strike situations in California’s Central Valley to entertain and encourage agricultural workers who faced growers determined to beat back all attempts at unionization in

³⁴ Bill Clifford, interview with Marvin Gettleman, Atlanta GA, November 4, 1900 (Clifford had been a student at CLS, and a west coast trade unionist).

³⁵Jenkins interview, June 9, 1990; Jenkins, “Union Movement, the CLS and San Francisco Politics, 1926-1988,” Bancroft, p. 151.

³⁶Course listings, CLS, Spring term, 1946, LARC/SFSU, pp. 6-7.

the fields. Often the actors had to bring burly Longshoremen along for defense against company goons.³⁷

At these Communist schools the teaching of Marxism was deemed no less a necessity than labor studies. In that “lost world” of pre-McCarthyist radicalism, Marxism was considered “the theory” and other subjects in the curriculum the praxis. The Jefferson School staff offered most (but not all³⁸) of its instruction in Marxist tenets in a course carried over from the earlier School for Democracy significantly entitled “The Science of Society.”³⁹ Inscribed in this course title was the conviction that Marxism *was* the Science of Society, and little else (besides anthropology and psychology) need be done to supplement it in the social studies curriculum, a view that seemed to be more prevalent at the Party school in New York than the one in San Francisco/Oakland.

³⁷David Sarvis (formerly of CLS Drama Department), interview with Marvin Gettleman, San Anselmo and Mill Valley, CA, June 9, 1990.

³⁸ There was at the Jefferson School an advanced Institute for Marxist Studies that had a 32 week comprehensive program, presumably for Party members only. This Institute was a major reason given for the SACB’s decision to force the Jefferson School to register as an agency of the Soviet Union -- to which the school responded by closing rather than complying. On this Institute, see Course Listings, Jefferson School of Social Science, Winter, 1955; Spring, 1955, Tamiment Library, New York University.

³⁹ On the School for Democracy, see note 20, above and (apparently the only published account) Alvah Bessie, “School for Democracy,” *New Masses*, XL (27 January 1942), pp. 12-13. The course reflected the title of the Marxist journal *Science & Society* (1936 --) for which several teachers at the Jefferson School as well as the CLS wrote. See David Goldway, “Fifty Years of *Science & Society*,” *Science & Society*, L (Fall, 1986), pp. 260-279. Jefferson School director Howard Selsam, wrote frequently for *Science & Society*, as did MIT mathematician Dirk Struik (a leader at Boston’s Samuel Adams School), classicist Alban Winspear (Director of Chicago’s Abraham Lincoln School), and Cavendish Moxon (a psychology teacher at CLS). See *Science & Society: General Index, 1936-1961* (New York: *Science & Society*, 1965), *passim*.

At the Jefferson School in 1946 no fewer than ten sections of the Science of Society (a pre-requisite for advanced courses) were offered, including a Saturday morning section for students on the night-shift during the week. Sometimes a Spanish-language section (Principios de Marxismo) was added.⁴⁰ The announced educational aim was “the scientific study of social life and development.” In 1946, the enumerated topics in dealt with in The Science of Society were fairly comprehensive:

The origin and nature of Capitalist Society
Imperialism: The Highest Stage of Capitalism
The Meaning of Fascism
What is a Nation?
Capitalist Democracy and Socialist Revolution
The Theory and Practice of Socialism
Just and Unjust Wars; The Problem of World Security
The Role of the Working Class and Its Organizations
The Tactics of the Class Struggle
The Materialist Conception of History⁴¹

Probably no other course in the Jefferson School curriculum varied so much as The Science of Society, changing each term as society itself changed, and as the Party line also shifted. A microscopic examination of these changes in the curriculum of even one Party school, cannot be attempted here,⁴² but three years later, in 1949, when Party schools everywhere in the U.S. were coming under

⁴⁰ Course listings, Jefferson School of Social Science, Winter term, 1955, p. 8, Tamiment Library, New York University.

⁴¹ Course listings, Jefferson School of Social Science, Fall term, 1946 (RCMS), pp. 14-15. The Director of the CLS wrote to New York for suggestions on how to offer the Science of Society on the west coast (Jenkins to Selsam [carbon copy], March 8, 1946, Holland Roberts Papers, LARC/SFSU), but may have ignored the advice. The course was only occasionally offered at the CLS (cf. syllabus for The Science of Society, CLS, Spring, 1954, California State University, Northridge)

⁴² The author will attempt more systematic treatment in “*Training for the Class Struggle*.”

attack, several of the courses had been altered. Class struggle was elevated from a subject whose tactics were explored to “the history of social development” itself. “The Negro Question” was added, along with the concept of “socialist democracy.”⁴³ These changes reflected a waning of enthusiasm for Truman-era liberalism in Party circles (more than reciprocated in the post-FDR White House), and a perceived need to defend the “peoples democracies” in Soviet-dominated eastern Europe—in short, the key issues in the oncoming the Cold War era.

As mentioned, this very Cold War and the domestic repression that accompanied it, destroyed the Communist schools in the U.S. and much of the Communist movement.⁴⁴ This destruction, and the later collapse of Communism in the Soviet Union and eastern Europe constitutes such a fundamental historical break that only a strenuous exercise of historical imagination can recapture the lost world of Communist education. This is especially true of what might be called the traditional cultural elements of the Party school curricula. Some anti-Communists, noting courses like “Modern Art: Cezanne to the Present,” Beethoven’s chamber music, Shakespeare’s plays, “The Novel and the People,” mural painting (taught at the California Labor School by the eminent muralist Anton Refregier) and “The Mystery Story” (taught at the

⁴³ Course outline, *The Science of Society: An Introduction to Marxism* (1949), Jefferson School Papers, Tamiment Library, New York University.

⁴⁴ In her discussion of this destruction in *Many Are the Crimes*, Schrecker correctly points out the destructive internal factors at work within the U.S. Communist Party itself, as well as the much overlooked fact that no capitalist country other than the U.S. experienced anything like the furor of McCarthyism in this period. (After McCarthyism the Party maintained several elements of an internal educational project, but these were a shadow of the open schools of the pre-1957 era.)

Jefferson School by Dashiell Hammett),⁴⁵ dismissed them as mere “come-ons” to draw people into the subversive Communist conspiracy.⁴⁶

From a less ideological, post-Cold War perspective these cultural aspects of the Party schools’ curricula can be seen to have several other pedagogical functions not dreamed of in the rarefied world of anti-Communist polemics. One of these might have been a “hidden curriculum” at the Communist schools—a hunger among the students for literary culture and self improvement (not antithetical to the announced aims of these schools, but also neither quite what they hoped to foster).⁴⁷

Another set of courses offered at east and west coast schools, which could not claim the status of high culture, seemed to be directed at the improvement of employment and life style. For example, a 1944 Jefferson School “Beauty and Fashion Clinic: Making the Most of your Appearance,” bears some resemblance to current dress-and-groom-for-success exhortations, but clear had another audience in mind.

This course will show the busy working woman how she can make herself more attractive with the least expenditure of time and money. She will develop

⁴⁵ Course listings, Jefferson School of Social Science, Fall 1946, pp. 39-48 (RCMS).

⁴⁶ Frank S. Meyer, Jefferson School of Social Science SACB testimony, reel 29, p. 117; CLS, SACB testimony, reel 51, pp. 23-25, 32. (Meyer, who Directed the Chicago Workers School before WW2, and taught at the Jefferson School after the war, became a fanatical anti-Communist, contributor of a volume to the Ford Foundation series on Communism in American Life. The book, *Molding of Communists: The Train-ing of the Communist Cadre* [New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1961], is a period piece of Cold War hysteria: unable to locate its subject in historical time or space it instead invokes an ageless model of Communist villainy.

not only a technique to meet her individual problems of appearance, but an understanding of the factors involved in beauty and fashion. The student will be taught how to put on make-up correctly, the best colors and types, ingredients of cosmetics and their effect on various skin types; protection of hands and skin for the woman industrial worker; how to balance a diet for health and beauty; how to control weight; exercises for posture and figure improvement, how to sit, stand and walk; how to choose the most becoming coiffures, how to care for the hair; clothes to flatter the figure, good and bad taste in fashion, how to dress for type, figure and job.⁴⁸

Directed at women factory and office workers, who might be union shop stewards or members of contract-negotiation committees and who learned that to be taken seriously by bosses, male union comrades and even men in the Party, a certain level of dress and grooming had to be attained. But many of the women were from immigrant family, with mothers and aunts unable to advise them on American concepts of acceptable beauty and fashion care. The Communist Party stepped in to remedy the situation.⁴⁹

⁴⁷ Michael Apple, "The Other Side of the Hidden Curriculum..." *Journal of Education*, CLXII (Winter, 1980). pp. 47-66. I am also indebted to Professor Walter Srebnick for discussion of his mother's search for culture at Party schools in New York in the 1930s and '40s.

⁴⁸ Course listings, Jefferson School of Social Science, Winter term, 1944, p. 46 (RCMS). The instructor, Isabel Johnson, was identified in the catalog as a fashion model and editor. This was apparently the same woman who married Alger Hiss on his release from prison in 1954. That same term the Jefferson School also offered dressmaking courses taught by Minerva Wolf, designer with "leading Fifth Avenue establishments." For similar courses at CLS, see course listings, Fall, 1945, pp. 13-15 (LARC/SFSU).

⁴⁹ Belle Bailynson Meyers, interview with Marvin Gettleman, New York City, February 28, 1988. A former Jefferson School student, and former worker at an electrical manufacturing shop whose workforce was organized into the left-led United Electrical Workers (UE), Belle Meyers made clear to me what social reality underlay this course on beauty and fashion.

Whatever else the Party schools did they had to address problems of student literacy, especially since difficult Marxist texts had to be taught in educational institutions tethered to such a theory-driven organization. Questions of teaching skills, student motivations and literacy-training did not come naturally to the Communist pedagogues at these schools. But such concerns pressed themselves on their attention in a variety of ways⁵⁰: many students lacked prior schooling; teachers (many of whom were autodidacts, or learned scholars unused to working class students), sometimes neglected coherence and clarity in classroom communication. What set off alarm bells were classes where none or few of the students returned for the second session. Teachers would have to be taken in hand, given advice and coaching by Doxey Wilkerson, or Assistant Director David Goldway. This was far more serious than a matter of statistical attrition; students who were unmotivated at classes were in danger of being lost to the movement.

And eventually, when Party schools were already under government threat, attention was directed at students with learning problems and undeveloped study habits. At the Jefferson School this concern resulted in the production of what should be considered a minor (but almost totally unknown) pedagogical classic: the 5-cent 16 page pamphlet, *How to Study*, which sought to motivate students by

⁵⁰ Interviews with administrators at both the CLS and Jefferson School clarified the ways in which pedagogical concerns arose there. Especially useful were the previously-cited Jenkins, Wilkerson interviews, to which I thankfully add a February 4, 1988 New York City interview with David Goldway, Assistant Director of the Jefferson School.

stressing that the “capitalist rulers” of the United States, out of fear of Marxism, spread the belief that sophisticated theories, such as Marxism are “only for the select few,”—not for working people.⁵¹ Therefore such people who do study Marxism have the added incentive of waging just and wholesome class struggle, confounding the capitalist oppressors, when they do their homework.⁵² Encapsulating the now widely-accepted pedagogical notion that the student’s confidence in *the ability to learn* should properly precede learning itself, *How to Study*, and parallel ideas that developed at the California Labor School,⁵³ could conceivably make a contribution to alleviate the present-day global crisis in education.

Perhaps what most clearly indicates that the educational concepts and curricula developed at the schools discussed in this paper represent a “lost world” of pedagogical innovation is their Marxist provenance. Such Marxism is now dispatched to the dustbin of quaint antiquated beliefs, and attempts to restore even

⁵¹ *How to Study: A Guide for Students* (New York: The Jefferson School of Social Science, n.d.). Attributed to left-wing New York psychoanalyst Harry K. Wells by Doxey Wilkerson (interview with Marvin Gettleman, July 18, 1990), this pamphlet is among the Jefferson School papers in the Tamiment Library, New York University. It has recently been re-edited and adapted (dropping adulatory references to Joseph Stalin and Harry Haywood) for present-day college students by Henry Foner and is at use at the CCNY Center for Worker Education in New York City. The original version will be printed as an appendix to “*Training for the Class Struggle*.”

⁵² In courses on Marxism this homework often included such knotty texts as Marx’s “Wage Labor and Capital,” an embryonic statement of the future argument in *Capital*, prepared in 1847 for a group of workers in Brussels.

⁵³ See the handwritten draft by Holland Roberts, CLS Educational Director of a memoir, “The War Years at Stanford and the CLS,” n.d., LARC/SFSU, where the idea of schools without even the possibility of failure was advanced -- a unknown precursor of some of the best current pedagogical thinking (e.g., William Glasser’s *Schools Without Failure* [New York: Harper & Row, 1969].)

the understanding of the departed era demand a considerable exercise of historical imagination. One must grasp the efforts of dedicated pedagogues directly inspired by Marx's celebrated "eleventh thesis" on Feuerbach—the necessity not only of interpreting the world, but also changing it.⁵⁴ I have elsewhere called this conviction of education as action to change the world "engaged pedagogy." It envisions teaching and learning as active not passive processes which leads to such salutary collective action,⁵⁵ as marching in May Day parades, students right alongside their teachers and school staff, transmuting mere study of "Negro history" into demonstrations and letter-writing campaigns against segregation, lynching and the poll tax. The central activity in the hoped-for transmutation of theory into action was of course (once World War II had ended) militant trade union activity.⁵⁶

This paper has attempted to show that at least for the United States⁵⁷ a liberatory praxis of labor education animated the actual pedagogy of Communist

⁵⁴ For the text of the 17-word "eleventh thesis," see Robert C. Tucker, *The Marx-Engels Reader* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1972), p. 109. It was part of Marx's notes on Ludwig Feuerbach's *Das Wesen des Christentums* [*The Essence of Christianity*] (1841) soon expanded into *The German Ideology*, written in 1845-1846, but not published in Marx's lifetime.

⁵⁵ Marvin E. Gettleman, "Engaged Pedagogy," paper presented at the Wayne State University conference on "The University and the City, March 5, 1999. (Sometimes this conception of education is associated with the pedagogical ideas of the Brazilian educator Paulo Freire (1921-1997), but Freire's important work only appeared after the destruction of the schools discussed in this paper.

⁵⁶ See Jefferson School memorandum to instructors (n.d. [1944 or 1945]) directing them to report on how many students supported sending telegrams to the U.S. Senate on a poll tax repeal bill, and adding there was no need to collect money since the school had ample funds left over from a prior telegram campaign to open a second front in Europe. Jefferson School Papers, State Historical Society of Wisconsin, microfilm edition, frame 231.

⁵⁷ Marxist and especially Communist education cannot be fully understood solely within national borders; it was an international phenomenon. To understand this broader dimension, the author of

Party educators who, at the very least, deserve attention because, whatever their flaws, they took the responsibility of teaching Marxism seriously.

this paper has founded the Project on the Comparative International History of Left Education. For an indication of the kind of cross-cultural scholarship fostered by this Project, see the issue of *Paedagogica Historica* [Ghent, Belgium], XXXV:1 (1999) devoted to selected episodes in the history of left education in 19 and 20 century Europe.