

Waveland: Work-Study Institute, February-March, 1965.
Notes by Jane Stembridge about a class held by Stokely Carmichael.

The most important class was "Stokely's speech class." He put eight sentences on the blackboard, with a line between, like this:

I digs wine	\\	I enjoy drinking cocktails
The peoples wants freedom	\\	The people want freedom
Whereinsoever the policemens	\\	Anywhere the officers of the law go, they
goes they causes troubles		cause trouble
I wants to reddish to vote	\\	I want to register to vote

Stokely: What do you think about these sentences? Such as--The peoples wants freedom.

Zelma: It doesn't sound right.

Stokely: What do you mean?

Zelma: "Peoples" isn't right.

Stokely: Does it mean anything?

Milton: People means everybody. Peoples means everybody in the world.

Alma: Both sentences are right as long as you understand them.

Henry: They're both okay, but in speech class you have to use correct English.

(Stokely writes "correct English" in corner of blackboard.)

Zelma: I was taught at least to use the sentences on the right side.

Stokely: Does anybody you know use the sentences on the left?

Class: Yes.

Stokely: Are they wrong?

Zelma: In terms of English, they are wrong.

Stokely: Who decides what is correct English and what is incorrect English?

Milton: People made rules. People in England, I guess.

Stokely: You all say some people speak like on the left side of the board. Could they go anywhere and speak that way? Could they go to Harvard?

Class: Yes...No...Disagreement

Stokely: Does Mr. Turnbow (Hartman Turnbow, courageous local leader from Mileston in Holmes County) speak like on the left side?

Class: Yes.

Stokely: Could Mr. Turnbow go to Harvard and speak like that? "I wants to reddish to vote."

Class: Yes.

Stokely: Would he be embarrassed?

Class: Yes...No...Disagreement again.

Zelma: He wouldn't be, but I would. It doesn't sound right.

Stokely: Suppose someone from Harvard came to Holmes County and said, "I want to register to vote." Would he be embarrassed?

Zelma: No.

Stokely: Is it embarrassing at Harvard but not in Holmes County? The way you speak?

Milton: It's inherited. It's depending on where you come from. The people at Harvard would understand.

Stokely: Do you think the people at Harvard should forgive you?

Milton: The people at Harvard should help teach us correct English.

Alma: Why should we change if we understand what we mean?

Shirley: It is embarrassing.

Stokely: Which way do most people talk?

Class: Like on the left.

(He asks each student. All but two say "left." One says that southerners speak like on the left, northerners on the right. Another said that southerners speak like on the left, but the majority of people speak like on the right side.)

Stokely: Which way do radio and television people speak?

Class: Left.

(There was a distinction made between northern commentators and local programs. Most programs were local and spoke like on the left, the class said.)

Stokely: Which way do teachers speak?

Class: On the left, except in class.

Stokely: If most people speak like the left, why are they trying to change these people?

Gladys: If you don't talk right, society rejects you. It embarrasses other people if you don't talk right.

Hank: But Mississippi society, ours, isn't embarrassed by it.

Shirley: But the middle class wouldn't class us with them.

Hank: They won't accept "reddish." What is reddish? It's Negro dialect and it's something you eat.

Stokely: Will society reject you if you don't speak like on the right side of the board? Gladys said society would reject you.

Gladys: You might as well face it, man: What we gotta do is go out and become middle class. If you can't speak good English, you don't have a car, a job or anything.

Stokely: If society rejects you because you don't speak good English, should you learn to speak good English?

Class: No!

Alma: I'm tired of doing what society say. Let society say "reddish" for a while. People ought to just accept each other.

Zelma: I think we should be speaking just like we always have.

Alma: If I change for society, I wouldn't be free anyway.

Ernestine: I'd like to learn correct English for my own sake.

Shirley: I would too.

Alma: If the majority speaks like on the left, then a minority must rule society. Why do we have to change to be accepted by the minority group?

Stokely: Let's think about two questions for next time: What is society? Who makes the rules for society?