

Amelia Boynton Robinson builds a bridge to new civil rights movement

by Marianna Wertz

A new civil rights movement in America is emerging around the ongoing book promotion tour of Amelia Boynton Robinson, one of America's true living heroines. Since mid-September, she has spoken to thousands of Americans, young and old, of virtually every race and national origin, in cities all along the Eastern seaboard and the Midwest. Her message is very clear: To fight evil today, you must find the courage, as she did, to stand up for what is right, no matter the consequences. Her purpose is equally clear: to instill that courage in others.

Bridge Across Jordan, her autobiography, tells the story of her 50-year struggle for civil rights and human rights. It begins with her work, together with her first husband, S.W. Boynton, in the rural poverty of 1930s Selma, Alabama, bringing home extension service to the disenfranchised black population. In 1965, Mrs. Robinson invited Dr. Martin Luther King to come to Selma, to join her in the fight for voter registration rights for every African-American. She is perhaps best known as the woman who was gassed and beaten by Alabama state troopers on the Edmund Pettus Bridge, during the first attempt to march for voters' rights to the capital of Montgomery, on "Bloody Sunday," March 7, 1965, which is fully described in her autobiography. *Bridge Across Jordan* concludes with her current struggle, as a board member of the Schiller Institute, working with Lyndon LaRouche and Helga Zepp-LaRouche to build a worldwide movement for justice and human rights that is, as she says, following in the footsteps of Dr. King.

There are few leading survivors of the heroic struggle that African-Americans have waged in this century for the very basic rights which most Americans take for granted. Amelia Boynton Robinson is one of those few, and everywhere she has gone on this tour, from Maryland to New York to Minnesota, she is recognized as a living link to something great that once happened in this country, and a promise that such greatness can happen again. And the way to realize that promise today, she readily tells her audiences, "is to join Lyndon LaRouche and the Schiller Institute."

Unlike most authors, whose book tours are limited to bookstore gatherings and comfortable teas, Mrs. Robinson, at 80 years of age, has been addressing everything from outdoor political rallies on behalf of the independence of

Croatia, to full auditoriums in some of the poorest schools in the nation.

We need a political movement

On Sept. 25, at the beginning of her tour, she was a featured speaker at a mass rally in the nation's capital, in a lineup of speakers including several serving congressmen, to urge immediate recognition of Croatia's independence. The rally, with more than 1,000 people participating, was organized by Joseph DioGuardi, a former U.S. congressman who is president of the Albanian-American Civic League. "No man is an island," Mrs. Robinson told the crowd, as she compared the ongoing massacres of Croatians and others in what used to be Yugoslavia to the treatment of African-Americans in Alabama during the first half of this century.

She called on her listeners to build an effective political movement, behind the leadership of Lyndon LaRouche, to stop the horrors of the Bush administration. The only speaker to attack Bush directly, she said: "The oligarchy we have here is for genocide. The wars they start are designed to reduce population. . . . Bush and those like him will smile in your face, but they are out to divide us: divide and conquer."

In Pennsylvania, Mrs. Robinson was an immediate hit on the African-American radio stations WHAT and WDAS. The audience response was so lively to her first two-hour interview on WHAT that the station invited her back the next week, on Sept. 30, for a second interview, joined by Sen. Harris Wofford (D-Penn.), whose campaign against former U.S. Attorney General Richard Thornburgh she wholeheartedly endorsed. "My audience fell in love with you," the talk show host commented. Indeed, the calls were not only numerous but very agitated: "I am amazed at your courage," one caller said. "I think Dr. King started a wave, and it needs to become a tidal wave, to get us out of the rut we're in."

At the Philadelphia office of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), Mrs. Robinson drew the largest crowd of the year, who jammed the office to get autographed copies of her book and hear her speak. She was introduced by branch president Gladys Reese and former president O.G. Christian, who compared her suffering and her strength to St. Paul.

An ambassador we can trust

Mrs. Robinson was greeted in New York City as “one of the few American ambassadors a foreigner can trust . . . the LaRouche ambassador.” The United Nations diplomat who said this was one of many with whom she spoke during a series of meetings sponsored by the Schiller Institute in its buildup toward an Oct. 7 rally against genocide at the U.N., at which she was a featured speaker.

“What good is it to have a seat at the United Nations if the only thing you are allowed to participate in is genocide against yourself?” she queried these diplomats, referring to the U.N.’s promotion of the genocidal International Monetary Fund conditionalities policy. “Every race—Haitians, Croatians, Germans, Arabs—must join together for the genocide of the new world order to be defeated.”

She posed a similar challenge in Chicago to the Chicago Historical Society’s premier panel of “I Dream A World: Portraits of Black Women Who Changed America.” The keynote speaker, she was introduced by the program director with the following words: “For sure, Mrs. Amelia Boynton Robinson should be included in this national celebration of African-American women’s achievements, for without her efforts, spanning over five decades, there would not have been the many others we are paying homage to in this traveling show. Such nobility is rarely found. Such determination is rarely found. . . . Join with me in greeting this grand lady.” She told her audience, about 50 civic leaders: “We must unite against genocide. What else is AIDS, but genocide? What else are drugs and gangs, but genocide? What else are unemployment and starvation, but genocide? Illiteracy is nothing but genocide. The only way to do this effectively is to join Lyndon LaRouche and the Schiller Institute.”

Youth, the locomotive for change

In Milwaukee, Wisconsin, Mrs. Robinson addressed two high school audiences, in both cases at the first all-school assembly in recent memory. On Oct. 16, speaking at North Division High School, the oldest and most important black senior high in Milwaukee, she told more than 1,000 students that they are “the locomotive for change in America. I’m so very proud of you all,” she said. “I am inspired by you, just as I was by the youth of eastern Europe, France, and Tiananmen Square.” Challenged by the youth to tell them what they can do to change their lives for the better, she said: “Don’t you know that drugs and gangs are created so that you don’t realize your own potential? This is the issue. You have to develop your minds and souls and morals such that you can eliminate these evils, which are robbing you of your true heritage and future.”

Later that evening, she spoke in the chapel of “The House of Peace,” where she was introduced by Mrs. Vel Phillips, the former Wisconsin secretary of state, who was one of the leaders of the Milwaukee NAACP Youth Council civil rights movement in the 1960s. She told the audience, largely civil rights



Amelia Robinson, veteran of the civil rights movement, is working with Lyndon LaRouche and the Schiller Institute to build a worldwide movement, in the footsteps of Martin Luther King.

activists, students, and educators: “I have introduced three Presidents of the United States: John F. Kennedy, Gerald Ford, and Jimmy Carter. When you introduce a President of the United States, you say just what they give you to say—no more than 11 words. I view Mrs. Amelia Robinson as just as great, if not greater than any President of the United States. . . .”

‘Bridge Across Jordan’

At a public meeting at the University of Illinois campus on Oct. 19, she told her student audience how she came to choose the title of her autobiography. Her motto had always been, she said, “A voteless people is a hopeless people.” With that in mind she had dedicated herself to mobilizing people to act in the face of adversity. “From the old spirituals, we learn that ‘the Jordan River is chilly and cold, it chills the body, but not the soul.’ This is where I got the title. When your body is chilled, it makes the soul more lively. This is the idea.”

She elaborated on the necessity of mobilizing today. “What it’s going to take to reinvigorate the movement is to replace hate with love. As badly as I would like to hate Bush, I feel sorry for him, because I know he can’t sleep at night. The biggest thing that holds people back now is fear.” If we can overcome that fear, she said, “the same kind of fear that people had in associating with Dr. King,” then we can overcome any obstacle to victory.

This leg of her tour concludes on Oct. 28, after swings into Missouri, Michigan, and Iowa. She will resume her travels after the new year, with visits in January and February to the West Coast and Southwest.