GET READY, STAY READY
Southern Leadership Summit & Organizing Intensive
Mobile, Alabama
May 9-11, 2019

OVERVIEW & REPORT
COMBINING FORCES

For the last decade, two Southern organizing anchors – the South Alabama Center for Fair Housing and the Southern Movement Assembly – have hosted different, but allied, gatherings to explore the intersections between housing justice, disaster recovery, community economic development and civic participation; and to connect community leaders through regional trainings aimed at advancing the Southern Freedom Movement.

In 2019, we are coordinating strategies to:

- protect and defend our unique Southern communities,
- build a new social economy rooted in liberation, rather than extractive industries,
- and practice a true people’s democracy through broadened civic engagement rooted in #SouthernPeoplesPower.

"WHEN THE BODY GETS SICK, THERE ARE SYMPTOMS. IF WE TREAT THE SYMPTOMS WITHOUT IDENTIFYING THE ROOT CAUSE OF THE SICKNESS, IT REMAINS OR HARMS A PART OF THE BODY. THERE IS A SICKNESS HAPPENING IN THIS WORLD & SYMPTOMS THAT WE SEE EVERY DAY. SOME ARE ACUTE, SUCH AS WHEN THE POLICE SHOOT AN UNARMED MAN. SOME ARE ONGOING, LIKE A LOW FEVER, A RISING TIDE, A CHANGE IN VOTING PATTERNS, A STAGNANT MINIMUM WAGE FOR 40 YEARS."

Steph Guilloud, Co-Director of Project South, Atlanta
We welcomed dozens of Southern freedom fighters to Mobile, Alabama, a Gulf Coast city rich with the legacies of our enslaved ancestors.

Mobile is the last known U.S. port where a ship was commissioned to steal Africans from the Continent. The captain of the Clotilda enslaved 110 people who had been captured by the Dahomey (now Benin) army, and snuck them into Mobile after dark in 1860. It had been illegal since 1807 to import enslaved people, so he sank the ship.

After Emancipation, many from that ship built their community in the Plateau area of Alabama, long known as Africatown.

Cudjoe "Kazoola" Lewis (born Kossola in 1840) was the next-to-last survivor of the original group. He died in 1935.

"THE DREAM WAS TO MAKE MOBILE WHAT IT SHOULD LOOK LIKE. THIS ROOM BRINGS CHILLS TO ME BECAUSE THIS IS THE MOBILE I ENVISIONED. I NAMED IT KAZOOLA TO CELEBRATE AFRICATOWN, WHERE I GREW UP WITH A SINGLE MOM WITH EIGHT KIDS. THERE’S A LOT OF KNOWLEDGE HERE."

Marc Jackson, Owner of Kazoola Eatery & Entertainment, Downtown Mobile Descendant of Cudjoe "Kazoola" Lewis

Cemetery photo courtesy of Nikki Brown, SpiritHouse Inc., N.C.
The Elders' Circle was a time to cultivate wisdom for the next generation of leaders, honor the history of South Alabama grassroots leadership, and connect Alabama frontlines to national and international struggles.

Four longtime Southern leaders spoke of closing the gaps between generations and reclaiming the village – the friendships, unity and collective action – that carried our communities to liberation through self-sufficiency for so centuries.

“We have to believe what we’re doing is right, and we have to do it together; I hold your hand, and you hold mine.”
- Ana Maria Sawyer

"It’s the elders’ responsibility to reach out to young people – get to know them, ask them what their dreams are, where they want to go. That will bridge the generational gaps."
- Rev. Tonny Algood

“A lot of what we’re trying to accomplish is based on a playbook that isn’t valid anymore. If we follow the playbook, they know how to stop us. If we take a nontraditional approach, they can’t stop us.”
- Dr. Raoul Richardson

“To honor us, continue the work; don’t let our neighborhoods be taken away. Without control of the land, we have no future.”
- Hubert Brandon
Three community-centered tracks allowed for hands-on training with the intention to build a crew, practice a skill and advance the Southern Freedom Movement.

Each began with an "I am from..." exercise that challenges us to think deeply about how we define ourselves, home and community, beyond the surface. People left with more clarity, commitment to use the tools, and deeper relationships with each other.

20 folks participated in the Community Organizing track, diving into the history of the Montgomery Bus Boycott as a primary example of movement-building cycles. We explored the phases of Consciousness (what is happening), Vision (what we want), and Strategy (how we will achieve that vision) that evolved from rearranging the segregated seats on the buses to a vision and plan to desegregate downtown Montgomery.

We identified tools and practices that we can apply to our current organizing goals on multiple frontlines and shared a planning tool based in Before/During/After. We also workshopped a variety of real-life organizing scenarios, strengthened our facilitation skills through a fishbowl exercise, and discussed diverse facilitation styles and techniques for Peoples Movement Assemblies, an organizing methodology to deepen local participation, governance, and action plans.

This session focused on skill-building around the power of social media, including benefits and effective use of Facebook, Twitter and Instagram; storytelling, with an emphasis on defining our communities on our terms, producing our own content and building relationships with news media to shape and control our narratives against the misrepresentation that dominates the mainstream; and making concise videos with a smartphone.

The track included a social media writing exercise, and, after a tutorial, participants paired up to shoot 30-second promo or reflection videos about the intensive. We also synthesized a survey of digital and non-digital tools, and explored ways to combine them for the sake of decolonizing communication, given generational differences and lack of access to digital outlets for many. We wrapped up with tips on best practices for websites and the understanding that communication weaves through each part of the Southern People’s Initiative.

As the loads are heavy, the problems deeply rooted and the fight against them often personal, the Community Survival track focused on centering as a way to preserve mental and spiritual health, and make good decisions rather than decisions out of fear. Breathing exercises and a focus on the dimensions of length, width, depth and height pushed folks to find their center. A "Who You Gonna Call?" exercise helped the group map out allies for legal counsel, conflict resolution (other than law enforcement), medical help and other emergency needs, creating Harm-Free Zones in their local communities.

Participants left with an understanding of their rights during traffic stops, home visits and other encounters with the police/FBI; an awareness of the Surveillance State and how our digital devices can work against us; and a new outlook on the importance of mental, spiritual and physical balance in movement work.

"WE ARE THE CHILDREN OF THE ONES WHO DID NOT DIE. WE ARE THE CHILDREN OF THE PEOPLE WHO COULD FLY. WE ARE THE CHILDREN OF THE ONES WHO PERSEVERED. WE ARE FEARLESS, WE ARE STRONG — AND WE'RE READY TO CARRY ON."

Nia Wilson, SpiritHouse Inc., Durham, NC
100+

111 people registered and more than 100 people participated in the leadership summit and organizing intensive, creating new connections, reigniting old relationships and nurturing kindred alliances.

35

35+ organizations were represented — from the frontlines of housing justice, disaster recovery, reproductive rights & more, to those defending Black lives, queer folks, voting rights & rural communities.

10

Folks traveled from AL, CA, GA, KY, LA, MS, NY, NC, OH & TN. The weekend fused the diversity of our region — bringing together Appalachia, bustling cities and the bayous — and amplified the reach of our social movements beyond the South.

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The three-day gathering included three interactive skill-building tracks, centered on strategies for community organizing, community communications and community survival.

SATURDAY, MAY 11, 2019

FREEDOM SUMMER & BEYOND

The Southern Leadership Summit & Organizing Intensive ended with a discussion and mapping out of our road to Southern Movement Assembly 8, which is Nov. 15-17, 2019, in Hazlehurst, Mississippi!

Folks were energized to return to their communities with long-term plans ranging from creating farm co-ops and buying property to reclaim the village; to pushing for more hiring of minority enumerators to ensure fair Census 2020 counts that will properly fund our neighborhoods; to programming and resource centers that will combat generational poverty and racism, and build infrastructure to support our communities before and after disaster. We also discovered similar problems across frontlines and committed to working together to solve them.

When we know what threats are coming, we can put our minds together to stop them. Let's get ready, and stay ready, to protect our people's democracy and build toward our liberation.

"THERE ARE A LOT MORE OF US HAVENOTS THAN HAVEVS. WE BETTER RECOGNIZE AND USE OUR POWER."

Teresa Bettis, Director, South Alabama Center for Fair Housing, Mobile