The United States Social Forum: Perspectives of a Movement

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For those who struggled through Katrina
and continue to this day;
and for all of us who together are building another world

Katrina is both a reality and a symbol. It is of course the most egregious human right violation that is ongoing right now. But it is also a symbol, that basically what we heard today, what we are reminded of, is that there is Katrinas all over this country. That if you are workin' in the field of criminal justice, you are talkin' about Katrina; if you are workin' on healthcare, you are talkin' about Katrina; if you are workin' on housing, you are talkin' about Katrina; we are living a Katrina nightmare here in this country.

All of us who are living this Katrina nightmare we have to name the source of it. And the source of it is this backward, racist capitalist system.

Understand this my friends, we have to remind ourselves to understand, it's really about us the people, we have to organize ourselves, we have to affect a shift in power, because the only way to have human rights accountability is when the people are organized. We're talkin' about a transformation of society. Look, Katrina reminded us that we cannot chose the historical conditions we find ourselves in but we can choose how we respond to those conditions. And for many of us we have chosen to fight, we have chosen to build a movement.

What Katrina has also done, has reminded us of our historical mission, our responsibility now is it to build a new people's movement. Katrina and the US Social Forum, is to tell us and remind us, that we have the responsibility to build a new revolutionary movement here in this country.

—Mwalimu Johnson, Capital Post-Conviction
Project of Louisiana
28 June 2007,
Gulf Coast Reconstruction in the Post-Katrina Era,
USSF Plenary Acknowledgments

The USSF Book Committee respectfully acknowledges the contributors to the volume. Most if not all authors are full time activists and so we appreciate the additional work it took to "write up" something for this collectively constructed project. We hope by presenting the voices of the grassroots to capture the organizing process of the first USSF in text for the betterment of the movement. The editors have been careful to maintain the diversity in the authors' expression. We thank Selah Abrams for footage of the Native American and the Gulf Coast Reconstruction plenaries and James Larry Gilbert, director of Not Me Productions, LLC, for providing us with the audio-visual of the Gulf Coast Reconstruction plenary. The Sociology Department at Florida Atlantic University hosted the first and last face-to-face meeting of the USSF Book Committee. We appreciate Arthur Kastler's generous set of eyes towards our last round of editing.

We, the organizers of the first United States Social Forum:

Believe that there is a strategic need to unite the struggles of oppressed communities and peoples within the United States (particularly Black, Latino, Asian/Pacific-Islander and Indigenous communities) to the struggles of oppressed nations in the Third World.

Believe the USSF should place the highest priority on groups that are actually doing grassroots organizing with working-class people of color, who are training organizers, building long-term structures of resistance, and who can work well with other groups, seeing their participation in USSF as building the whole, not just their part of it.

Believe the USSF must be a place where the voices of those who are most marginalized and oppressed from Indigenous communities can be heard–a place that will recognize Indigenous peoples, their issues and struggles.

Believe the USSF must create space for the full and equal participation of undocumented migrants and their communities.

Believe the USSF should link US-based youth organizers, activists, and cultural workers to the struggles of their brothers and sisters abroad, drawing common connections and exploring the deeper meanings of solidarity.

Believe the USSF is important because we must have a clear and unified approach at dealing with social justice issues, and meaningful positions on global issues.

Believe that a USSF sends a message to other people's movements around the world that there is an active movement in the United States opposing US policies at home and abroad.

Believe that the USSF will help build national networks that will be better able to collaborate with international networks and movements.

We believe the USSF is more than an event. It is an ongoing process to contribute to strengthening the entire movement, bringing together the various sectors and issues that work for global justice.

Nosotros, los organizadoros del primer Foro Social Estadounidense:

Creemos que hay una necesidad estratégica de unificar las luchas de comunidades y pueblos oprimidos dentro de los Estados Unidos (especialmente las comunidades Afro-Americana, Latina, Asiática, de las Islas Pacificas e Indígena) a las luchas de naciones oprimidas en el Tercer Mundo.

Creemos que el FSE debería conferirle la mayor prioridad a grupos que actualmente están organizando a nivel de base con personas no blancas de clase obrera, que están entrenando organizadores, que están construyendo estructuras de resistencia de largo plazo, y que pueden trabajar en colaboración con otros grupos, considerando su participación en el FSE como la construcción de la totalidad y no su parte solamente.

Creemos que el FSE tiene que ser un espacio donde se escuchen las voces de aquellos más marginalizados y oprimidos en las comunidades indígenas – un espacio que reconozca a las gentes indígenas, sus temas, y sus luchas.

Creemos que el FSE debería vincular organizadoros, activistas, y obreros culturales jóvenes a las luchas de sus hermanos y hermanas en el extranjero, enlazando conexiones comunes y explorando el significado más profundo de la solidaridad.

Creemos que el FSE es importante porque nos urge tener un enfoque claro y unificado al lidiar con temas de justicia social y posiciones significativas en cuanto a temas mundiales.

Creemos que el FSE comparte con los movimientos populares a través del mundo el mensaje de que hay un movimiento activo en los EEUU que se opone a las políticas estadounidenses tanto en el interior como en el extranjero.

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Creemos que el FSE ayudará en la construcción de redes nacionales que podrán colaborar mejor con redes y movimientos internacionales.

Creemos que FSE es más que un evento singular. Es un proceso continuo que contribuye al fortalecimiento del movimiento entero, unificando a los varios sectores y temas que obran hacia la justicia social.

National Planning Committee

of the First US Social Forum 2007

50 Years is Enough Network (International)

AFL-CIO (International)

AlternateROOTS (Regional)

American Friends Service Committee (National)

CAAAV Organizing Asian Communities (New York City, NY)

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People Organizing to Demand Economic and Environmental Rights, PODER (San Francisco, CA)

Poor People's Economic Human Rights Campaign (National)

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Task Force for the Homeless (Atlanta, GA)

The Praxis Project (National)

Third World Majority (Oakland, CA)

TOPS: The Ordinary Peoples Society (Dothan, Alabama)

TransAfrica Forum (International)

Union de Trabajadores Agricolas Fronterizos (El Paso, TX)

UNITE-HERE, Midwest Joint Board (Chicago, IL)

United Students Against Sweatshops (National)

Women Watch Afrika, (International)

Contents

Part I

The Political Moment:

Movement Building, Structures, and Processes of the First United States Social Forum

"Another world is possible. Another United States is necessary." This was the call to the first United States Social Forum in Atlanta, GA, June 27 to July 1, 2007. It speaks to the energy, excitement, commitment, passion, and power of those of us who organized the USSF and of the 15,000 (approximately 12,000 registered and about 3,000 joined in events) activists, organizers, and movement builders who gathered there to make change. The USSF was and remains grounded in the realities of the early twenty-first century–the crises of global capitalism, war, and oppression–that require a global bottom-up movement to vision and create another US and another world.

The World Social Forum (WSF), first held in Porto Alegre, Brazil in 2001, created a convergence space and process for social struggles and movements around the world. Hundreds of local, national, and regional forums have burst onto the scene over the last eight years. In 2003 the International Council of the WSF asked grassroots organizations in the US, who were participating in the WSF, to hold a US Social Forum. These organizations, which came together as Grassroots Global Justice, said we needed time to make sure the voices, struggles, and visions of the grassroots sector were central to a US Social Forum.

In April 2004 we convened a consultation in Washington, DC with a broader grouping of social justice organizations. We made a collective decision to hold a social forum in the United States that set in motion a powerful and historic process that culminated into the first USSF in Atlanta, GA in summer 2007. We came together in all our diversity of history, experience, and perspective. We sang, shouted, laughed, cried; and, most importantly, we struggled with each other to deal honestly with our differences and to move our movement to a new place of convergence and solidarity.

This volume tells the story of how we did it–in our own voices. The incredible organizers and participants in the USSF carved out time in our super busy schedules to document what we did. We share our stories, analyses, visions, challenges, pitfalls, tensions, and triumphs.

This first section lays out our overall political goals, assessment, and lessons learned. It is about the nuts and bolts–developing capacity and infrastructure for

the USSF process. We created a "city within a city," a space and process that was grounded in a moment and place, Atlanta 2007. It was grounded in the realities of the US South, especially the history and struggles of oppressed and exploited peoples. We bring from the USSF 2007 collective knowledge to forge new paths and visions for building the second USSF in Detroit, June 22 to 26, 2010.

Section one opens with "Pass It On: On the Occasion of the First United States Social Forum," a poem by Alice Lovelace, USSF Lead Organizer and an incredible poet.

Michael Leon Guerrero, Jerome Scott, and Walda Katz-Fishman, members of the National Planning Committee (NPC), share the goals and outcomes of the USSF in their chapter. In this section we also hear the story of the USSF from the perspective of Project South: Institute for the Elimination of Poverty & Genocide, the anchor organization on the ground in Atlanta.

Allison Budschalow, Colin Rajah, and Maria Poblet, Program Working Group Co-Chairs, document how we created a program of 1,000 self-organized workshops, six powerful plenary sessions, and a dynamic film festival. Alfredo Lopez, Co-Director of May First/People Link and a member of the Technology Working Group, shares the realities of connecting the USSF to the wired world. Michael Leon Guerrero, Chair of the Resource Mobilization Working Group–known as the "Resource Mob," lifts up the critical importance of grassroots fundraising for our movement.

The important stories of language access, volunteerism, the culture program and the powerful experience of creating a social forum for our children at the USSF are included in this first section that takes on the practicalities of organizing the first social forum in the US.

Chapter 1

Pass It On

Alice Lovelace, USSF Lead Staff Organizer 2007 USSF;
Associate Regional Director SERO, American Friends Service Committee

On the occasion of the first United States Social Forum June 27, 2007

we came hoping to share better ideas for our work.

we came to get some rest to get back in the swing
'cause the price was right. Looking for opportunities
looking for some place we might fit in

we came to learn how to pass on what we've learned
how organizing can make a difference in community
we came, southern natives and transplanted yankees
suffering from culture shock and in the end
we just real glad to be here!

we are organizers all spreading the myth of our existence
doing it all, teaching the old, mentoring the young
protesting injustices, feeding the hungry, housing the homeless
challenging the powerful, organizing for change
and we work hard for our money.

take it back and share it – the culture of struggle
take it back and share it – a knowledge of those who came before
take it back and share it – rights god given

'cause justice is creation centered in the symbols of god
'cause freedom is life, 'cause life is failure and success
two boats on the water
a bridge, a tree in winter
a red crayola crayon that captures the heart throb
social commentary hidden in the common
'cause the common can draw your attention.

life is a traffic signal
choices every second, every minute
caution, stop, go, yield, turn here
a generation passing on survival skills
these are your rites of passage.

look up
look beyond
you possess the power to change life
by changing your mind
the key is in the door and it's on your side.

first light
it is the children who must contemplate the future
living through the sorrow
throw in your pennies, wiggle back and forth
go through the process, and justice will let you in.

pass it on
justice is something elemental
like water and fire, air and earth

pass it on
teach them to fish

pass it on
'cause life is a post card
the original process

pass it on
pass it on
    pass it on.

Chapter 2

BUILDING A US MOVEMENT FOR ANOTHER WORLD:

US Social Forum Political Overview

Another World is Possible, Another United States is Necessary

Michael Leon Guerrero, Jerome Scott, Walda Katz-Fishman,
National Planning Committee Members

The Road to Atlanta

In the twenty-first century we are confronting a global, economic, and political system of exploitation, domination, and intensifying crises, so we need to have a global movement. The social forums provide a space and process for global social movements to grow, to converge, and to vision another world beyond neoliberalism and global capitalism, with its multiple oppressions, wars, and ecological destruction. Born in the struggles of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries–the Zapatista uprising in 1994, the Battle in Seattle in 1999, the first World Social Forum (WSF) in Porto Alegre, Brazil in 2001, and more, the social forum as a national movement building process came to the United States in 2007.

Fifteen thousand activists, organizers, and movement builders gathered at the historic first US Social Forum (USSF) in Atlanta, Georgia, June 27 to July 1, 2007. We marched and sang; we shared, dialogued, and networked; we celebrated our diversity; and we declared and affirmed our commitment to visioning and creating another United States as a necessary step in making another world a reality.

As organizers of the USSF, we proceeded from several important political goals:

1. To insure a bottom-up and grassroots led process;
2. To put forward and develop leadership from indigenous communities; from people of color, and immigrant communities; from youth, women, and queer communities; from low-income, poor, and working class communities; and from disabled communities;
3. To gather 10,000 participants from across the United States–to bring the social forum process to them and their work and to bring them and their work to the USSF as part of a transformative movement building strategy;
4. To locate the first USSF in the US South, the site of extreme and intense repression throughout US history, but also the site of great resistance and struggle;

5. To bring significant representation from Gulf Coast communities destroyed by Hurricanes Katrina and Rita in 2005 and abandoned by the government (and still not reconstructed);
6. To develop content and program that was self-organized, intersected, participatory, visionary, and strategic; plenary sessions addressing critical movement building moments; and to infuse culture throughout;
7. To build a more powerful US-based movement through strategic relationships, alliances, cross-sectoral work, and convergence to move a national peoples' agenda and to act in solidarity with global social movements, particularly from the global south to challenge US imperialism.

Though it was not an original political goal of the USSF process, we soon realized we had to develop a grassroots fundraising plan grounded in our political commitment to long-term movement building.

The historic moment that was the context for organizing the USSF in 2007 was deepening economic and ecological crises, ongoing post-911 political repression of all oppressed communities and activists, the destruction and abandonment of the working and oppressed peoples of New Orleans and the Gulf Coast, and four years of the US occupation of Iraq, but also a growing bottom-up movement and resistance, and new forms of alternatives, particularly in Latin America.

In 2007 we did not anticipate how rapidly the economic and political forces would unfold. In 2009 we face an even more powerful and challenging historical moment. Many participated in and celebrated the election of Barack Obama, the first Black US President. At the same time, we are experiencing the deepest economic crisis and meltdown of global capitalism since the Great Depression, ongoing social destruction of huge proportions, and an ecological crisis that threatens survival of the planet, all while war, militarism, and repression intensify at home and abroad. Working class women and children, indigenous peoples, peoples of color, and immigrants are, as always, most adversely affected. This is also a moment of broadening social struggles on all fronts and rising social movements that are questioning the viability of global capitalism and looking for alternatives, including socialism in the twenty-first century. In this moment the social forum process in the US becomes a critical strategic tool for bottom-up movement building and transformation in the twenty-first century.

Below we offer a political overview of the USSF 2007 process, share lessons learned, and conclude with our vision for USSF II in Detroit, Michigan in the summer of 2010.

Political Overview

While it is difficult to precisely measure the success of the first USSF, as organizers who participated in the planning process we view the USSF as a significant step forward in movement building in the United States. There is emerging, young leadership of the grassroots movements that is darker, queerer, more female and feminist, more anti-imperialist, and clearer about the need for systemic social transformation. People at the forum were inspired and spoke of hope and possibility for significant political changes in the US.

The National Planning Committee (NPC) for the USSF met our numerical goal of 10,000 participants. We estimate that about 15,000 people participated over the course of the five days (12,000 officially registered with approximately 3,000 more attending). But beyond this, the NPC also established and worked toward realizing certain political objectives for the USSF process and event: introducing the social forum process to US social movements; creating an understanding of the USSF as a movement building process in cities, regions and sectors, not as a one-time event; and focusing on grassroots people of color, working class and low-income base-building groups as the key constituency to organize–recognizing their critical role in creating systemic change in this country.

We were also clear that we wanted movements and sectors to intersect by creating a convergence of issues, dialogues and debates. It was important to challenge US chauvinism, so the NPC made spaces in the plenaries and other activities to acknowledge our international obligations to movement building in alignment with the Global South. Lastly, we wanted the social forum to help social movements develop strategic alliances and relationships; to make advances against neoliberalism, capitalism, imperialism, white supremacy, patriarchy, and homophobia; and to begin visioning alternatives.

Background: The Global Justice Movement and World Social Forum

Beginning in 2001, the World Social Forum (WSF) has brought together individuals, organizations, and movements committed to social, environmental, and economic justice. The call of "Another World is Possible" is a challenge to the global corporate economic system that governs much of the world. It was born in the world-wide response and opposition to neoliberal policies embodied in the World Trade Organization (WTO), the World Bank, International Monetary Fund (IMF), and the G-8 nations. Over the course of the past three decades these policies have given greater flexibility to capital and political power to multi-national and global corporations. This has led to an increase in global poverty, the diminishing rights of workers, elimination of environmental standards, and the loss of sovereignty and resources of Indigenous nations.

At the beginning of the new century mass mobilizations emerged in opposition to the neoliberal agenda, with tens of thousands of people confronting the WTO and other institutions in Seattle, Genoa, Quebec, Miami, and Cancun. The Global Justice Movement (GJM), as it came to be known, empowered political leaders in the Global South, engaged activists and organizations in the Global North, and has changed the terms of the debate.

In recent years, negotiations for the Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA) have been stopped in their tracks, as have deliberations for the WTO. Political changes have swept Latin America with new national political leaders declaring their opposition to neoliberal policies, working toward socialism in the twenty-first century, and forging new economic and political forms.

Despite these major victories, social movements of the GJM recognized that this was not enough, and that our challenge is to define proactive alternatives to the neoliberal agenda. In January 2001, under the banner *"Another World is Possible,"* the first World Social Forum (WSF) was convened in Porto Alegre, Brazil. It was held on the same dates as the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland, where economic and political elites meet annually. WSF organizers agreed that the WSF would also be held every year; and beginning in 2007, they agreed the WSF would be held every two years.

The Social Forum: A Process, Not an Event

The purpose of the social forum is to create an open space to bring social movements together across social and political lines and boundaries. It is a global process that provides the international social movements a space to deliberate, vision alternatives, strategize, and unite to confront destructive neoliberal global policies. Social forums are made up of thousands of self-organized activities–panels, workshops, debates, film festivals, art exhibits, street theater, culture and concerts, tents, rallies and marches that build bridges between organizations, movements, countries, and continents.

The social forum program is largely self-organized by the participants. Though activists and organizations cannot take positions in the name of the WSF, social movements and fronts of struggle can gather and issue declarations at the event. The concept of an open space creates a dynamic that is inclusive and pluralistic, and provides for collaboration that transcends structural and political barriers that separate us in the social movements. Organizers in Latin America and India credit the social forum process for helping to integrate social movements and being a catalyst for political changes in the host countries. Social forum organizers also convened the Social Movements Assembly at the WSF and the Peoples Movement Assembly (PMA) at the USSF as a process to move struggles, programmatic agendas, and campaigns.

World Social Forums have brought together as many as 150,000 delegates at a time. It has been held in Porto Alegre, Brazil; Mumbai, India; Caracas, Venezuela; Karachi, Pakistan; Bamako, Mali; Nairobi, Kenya, and most recently Belem, Brazil. In addition there have been several continental social forums in Europe, Asia, the Americas, as well as national, provincial, state and local forums. It is the most significant process for global social justice and movement building in the world today.

The Grassroots Organizing Sector

The driving force behind organizing the USSF was the sector of grassroots organizations largely overlooked in national politics. For the past three decades these organizations have been building dynamic community and worker institutions in indigenous nations, poor and working class neighborhoods, and communities of color. There is no unifying vision or ideology that brings these organizations together, but there are some commonalities. Many have antecedents in the political struggles of the 1960s and 70s. The leadership of these organizations generally views their work within a broader global context. They seek economic and social justice and environmental sustainability. They promote human rights and social justice. Many share an anti-racist, anti-patriarchal, and anti-imperialist perspective. They emphasize the building of a grassroots, democratic membership base as essential for fundamental social change. They build coalitions, networks and alliances locally, nationally and internationally. This developing grassroots global justice movement represents the potential for a new political direction and hope for fundamental political change within the United States.

Our critique, however, is that the grassroots sector often works in isolation from and sometimes in competition with other sectors, limiting our strength and ability to build effective national coalitions and authentic alliances with other sectors and movements. Even within the grassroots sector, we often remain fragmented by issues, geography, or historic political differences. Many national gatherings focus on a primary issue, like media policy or immigration, and attempt to build a "big tent" of diverse allies around a policy agenda. Although these gatherings can yield important short-term gains, they do not create adequate space for the long-term visioning and strategy necessary for fundamental change.

The USSF was a multi-year process where we began to break down historical divisions, untie "political knots," and promote a new vision for progressive movement building in the United States. It was generated from the grassroots and looks beyond our specific issues and local battles. In order to move forward we need to see our struggles as interconnected with each other and to social justice struggles throughout the world.

Cultural and regional diversity was a hallmark of the USSF. We came from all fifty states, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, the Virgin Islands, and Guam; and internationally from sixty-eight countries (National Planning Committee 2007). Yet, some key sectors were not represented strongly, in particular, faith-based networks, the environmental conservation movement, larger national and international non-governmental organizations, and organized labor. Much of this is due to the intention of the NPC to build from the "bottom-up," focusing on communities historically marginalized from national political processes. The Global Justice Movement in the United States was largely viewed as a white-led movement. The Battle of Seattle was identified with young, white, anarchists, and was made up of many decentralized affinity groups. Our aim was to shift the balance of the movement to those most impacted by the ravages of neoliberal capitalism; and, through the USSF process we were successful in doing that.

Place and Space: The USSF Comes to Atlanta

In early 2005, the Site and Outreach Committee selected Atlanta, Georgia, in the southeastern part of the United States, as the site of the first USSF. The committee voted to hold the Social Forum in the Southern region, where the legacy of slavery and the genocide of indigenous peoples are still palpable. Atlanta is also a symbolic location for the Civil Rights Movement, being home to Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and Coretta Scott King. Project South: Institute for the Elimination of Poverty & Genocide stepped up to the task of being the anchor organization for the USSF in Atlanta.

The choice of Atlanta broke with social forum practice in holding the USSF in a region dominated by politically conservative forces. The state of Georgia has blatantly anti-labor, anti-immigrant, and anti-gay laws. Also, because organizations dedicated to movement building in the South are less resourced, this added to the challenges of raising resources and securing logistical and infrastructure support. But, the NPC was mindful of the reality that the South is a strategically important historic and contemporary battleground between politically conservative forces and the forces of resistance and struggle.

National Planning Committee members organized regional social forums in the Southeast, the US-Mexico border, and Washington, DC building momentum towards the national forum. Other regional and local forums were organized independently including the Midwest, Western Massachusetts, Houston, Maine and Chicago. Groups came together in various cities to plan their participation and to dialogue. Key sectors mobilized, including labor, youth, LGBT, and peace and justice, etc.

NPC Organized Plenary Sessions

In the course of organizing the USSF, the weakness of progressive forces at the national level was evident in a number of key struggles and events. These presented movement-building moments or opportunities. In some instances, we missed them. In other instances there is ongoing potential to build movement around them. We explored these movement-building moments through the six NPC organized plenary sessions:

Gulf Coast Reconstruction in the Post-Katrina Era;
War, Militarism and the Prison Industrial Complex;
Indigenous Voices: From the Heart of Mother Earth;
Immigrant and Migrant Rights;
Liberating Gender and Sexuality:
Integrating Gender and Sexual Justice Across Our Movements; and
Workers' Rights in the Global Economy.

Although the plenary format did not allow us to deeply explore these movement-building moments, it allowed for a diversity of voices to provide perspectives on these questions. We got a sense of the broad range of forces that will be needed to move forward on these issues, and the complexities of each struggle along different fronts. In some cases we lacked the rigorous debate that will be necessary to forge unity, but overall the fact that these different voices were brought together in this format was groundbreaking.

Resource Mobilization

Raising resources for the USSF was both one of the biggest challenges and one of the greatest achievements of the grassroots movement. Foundations kept their distance from the process, other than a committed few who have historically supported grassroots organizing, most notably Jessie Smith Noyes, Solidago, and Car Eth foundations. Others had concerns about the politics of the Social Forum process in openly challenging neoliberal politics, or were skeptical of the ability of grassroots organizations, many led by people of color, in leading such a monumental effort. From the beginning, the social forum process was carried on the backs of grassroots organizations. They made huge political, financial, and personal commitments, often sacrificing local priorities for the effort. They covered their own travel costs to meetings, paid for conference calls and mailers. In 2006 the Atlanta office of the America Friends Service Committee donated office space, phone, copying and other services to the USSF. Registration fees covered much of the cost of regional social forums.

It was clear early on that the USSF would be built from the political will of the movement to make it happen. The Resource Mobilization Working Group devel-

oped a four-pronged strategy to raise resources: 1. grassroots fundraising, including the "pass the hat foundation," registration, and materials sales; 2. organizational support–mainly in-kind and financial contributions; 3. major donors; and 4. foundations. Throughout the process, however, the Working Group suffered from a lack of consistent participation and capacity.

Four months before the start date of June 27, 2007, barely $100,000 of the $1.5 million budget had been raised. The subsequent twelve weeks became an historic and inspiring movement effort. The NPC made collective agreements to strip the budget to its bare bones, and to prioritize what would be reinstated to the budget if the money came. NPC members also made commitments to raise money through donors, funders, and grassroots efforts. Drives were organized to encourage early registration, and groups were asked to pay at the highest end of the sliding scale. Soon creative initiatives emerged around the country for how groups, cities, and regions would mobilize resources. By June, foundations saw a moving train that they should jump on, and began to move money. The last foundation grant for the USSF arrived in December 2007, six months after the event.

Not accounting for the enormous in-kind contributions from the NPC organizations and others, the USSF raised roughly $1 million dollars. Registration fees for the USSF alone raised roughly $340,000. Fifty-four percent of the money came from non-foundation resources.

The innovations developed by the USSF NPC to address the budget shortfall are beginning to influence the practice of the World Social Forum. The WSF Resources Commission is developing Resource Guidelines, including a number of the practices implemented by the NPC.

Accomplishments and Inspiration

The USSF 2007 was a powerful expression of the developing bottom-up movement in the United States, and inspired hope in the US and around the world. The social forum created a sense of community that modeled multi-culturalism, anti-racism, anti-sexism, an inclusive environment for youth (over 20 percent of participants were high school or college age), and a welcoming space for all sexual identities. The USSF also gave national visibility to emerging movements, including the National Domestic Workers Alliance, which was founded at the USSF by domestic workers in seven cities. The Right to the City Alliance had strong representation of people being displaced from inner cities throughout the United States, and laid the groundwork for future national efforts.

Eight hundred people arrived on the Peoples Freedom Caravan, which traveled from Albuquerque through the Gulf Coast to Atlanta, promoting a dynamic South-by-Southwest unity. These relationships continue to deepen as the Southwest Organizing Project, Southwest Workers Union and Southern Echo continue

a South-by-Southwest program, bringing Black and Latino community leaders together to share histories and develop regional strategies. Dozens of organizations in Louisiana continue to meet monthly through the Organizers Roundtable to give updates on their local struggles. The Southern Regional Caucus convened at the USSF and initiated a process to define a "southern strategy" through subsequent gatherings convened by the Highlander Center in Tennessee.

Overall we demonstrated that the grassroots base-building movement is capable of mobilization on a mass scale, and of organizing a bottom-up deliberative process on a national level. The USSF was clearly not perfect. There were struggles and divisions that played out and not always in positive ways; but there was a commitment to dialogue and seeking a common ground for the future. The USSF forged a new generation of relationships that will continue to spark new movement formations and initiatives that can strengthen progressive organizing in the United States for years to come.

Joel Suarez of the Martin Luther King Center in Havana, Cuba observed: "The US Social Forum and this forum [Americas Social Forum 3 in Guatemala, October 2008] mark the closing of the loop in US participation in the Americas social movements. Now we can truly talk about a process of the Americas."

The Road from Atlanta to Detroit:
US Social Forum 2010

We are living in a powerful historic moment. A US-based movement is rising in today's twenty-first century context: global capitalism in meltdown and working people in struggle; global wars and militarism in our neighborhoods, at our borders, and across the world; and global social movements emerging and converging. We are developing consciousness of the root causes of our problems; we are visioning another, very necessary world of cooperation and collectivity, of justice, equality, and peace for humanity and for protection of the earth.

The US Social Forum is a space and a process for movement convergence and coordination across our many struggles, sectors, regions, and rich diversity. The USSF lifts up the voices and demands of working people and youth at the grassroots in building for fundamental transformation in the twenty-first century.

Through the US Social Forum our emerging movement develops and models structures and processes for inclusion, participation, self-organization, collaboration, and collective reflection. The Social Forum process creates movement infrastructure, capacity, and resources. The USSF process is a space to communicate and educate, organize and mobilize within the broader society, and with our partners in the Global South. We envision another United States and another world, and are deepening our shared political practice and strategy to make it a reality (www.ussf2007.org).

Join us on the road from Atlanta and USSF I to Detroit and USSF II in 2010. Organizing for the USSF II in Detroit, Michigan, June 22-26, 2010 is an essential next step in our long journey to liberation and emancipation.

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Chapter 3

Atlanta, the First US Social Forum, and Organizing for a New Moment

Stephanie Guilloud in collaboration with the Executive Leadership Team of Project South: Institute for the Elimination of Poverty & Genocide, USSF Anchor Organization

The outreach materials echoed our vision: The USSF is more than a conference, more than a networking bonanza, more than a reaction to war and repression. The USSF is the next most important step in our struggle. This moment demands that we build a powerful movement that disrupts and transforms this country. We must declare what we want our world to look like and begin planning the path to get there. The USSF will provide spaces to build relationships, learn from each other's experiences, share our analysis of the problems our communities face, and begin to vision and strategize how to reclaim our world.

We succeeded. We launched a grassroots-led social forum process in the United States that gathered a multitude of forces and advanced the strategic thinking and practice of movement building within our communities in the context of global struggle.

After the surprise success of Seattle in 1999, after the debilitating effects of September 11th in 2001, after the devastating crisis in the Gulf Coast since Katrina in 2005, and after the mass immigrant and migrant marches of 2006, the first USSF was a clear statement about who we are in this particular moment as social justice movements: what we bring, what we lack, and what we want. We didn't organize a conference. We organized a process to participate in, connect, and sharpen movements for racial, social, economic, and gender justice in the US and to stand shoulder to shoulder with global struggles.

The social forum process drew together 15,000 people (approximately 12,000 registered and about another 3,000 joined in the events). On the first day, the Opening March thundered through downtown Atlanta in the middle of the day, in the middle of the week. It was the kind of march that didn't feel like a protest, but more like a block party with a purpose–an invitation to something better, to something familiar yet altogether new. Flag bearers from Atlanta's disability rights movement, Alabama's ex-felon movement, Iraqis speaking out against the war, indigenous people from Alaska, and representatives from Kenya's World Social Forum local organizing committee kicked it off in front. Hundreds of Latinos and Black people in People's Freedom Caravan t-shirts marched. Moms and kids, too hot to

keep going, dunked their heads in the Woodruff Park fountain. College students from Washington State passed out water at the halfway point. And the crowd of thousands was greeted by hundreds more at the Civic Center.

The first USSF began with sweaty hugs, a reunion feel, and a tremendous energy. The combination of who came with what was offered–1000 workshops, 15 tents, six plenaries, health and healing spaces, spiritual ceremonies, fashion shows, neighborhood parties, bike brigades, art exhibits, and more–made the forum unmistakably electric. The convergence of multiple forces from grassroots communities, the distinct presence of intergenerational leadership, and the strategic alliances formed here made the USSF historic.

Predominantly attended by people of color and grassroots communities, the USSF, as a two-year organizing process culminating in a five-day convergence, shows us where our movements are positioned and indicates the pressing need to shift our practices to match the overwhelming momentum of the current moment. A process initiated within and connected to the global context of social movements, the USSF shifted our movements in the US. The efforts advanced the intersectional practices in this country and built stronger ties to global struggles through solidarity and staying true to the WSF's Charter of Principles. In addition, the USSF advanced the social forum process itself by evolving the movement convergence spaces based on US history and current conditions.

In any effort so large, there are multiple perspectives and an infinite number of activities, processes, and dynamics that should be discussed to understand the implications for moving forward. Project South offers our experience, analysis, and recommendations for the social forum process in the US from our unique perspective as the anchor organization and as participants on many levels of the work, planning, and vision for the forum. We share our work and the political and strategic orientation that guided that work. We offer recommendations so that we as converging movements, so necessary in this time, can learn from mistakes and adjust our practices so that we move forward together and more powerfully than any of us have imagined.

The process of organizing the USSF in this historical moment involves three major practices toward movement building in the twenty-first century in the United States. First, the process shows that we must build our movements with integrity and intention at every level simultaneously–locally, regionally, and nationally. In order to build movements in the US that can actually respond to regional crises of the magnitude of the Gulf Coast Crisis, resolve the economic and climate crises, or respond effectively to the ongoing imperialist corporatist occupation internationally, we must take leadership from people experiencing the effects locally, build cross-regional alliances to lift up the similarities and distinctions within experience, analysis, and practice, and create spaces to intervene on national levels.

No model that is divorced from one or another of these will succeed. The USSF is unique as a process because for it to succeed it must also function and build at all three levels.

Secondly, new organizing models must be designed and tested. In an era of massive displacement, our communities must have new ways of finding each other, building analysis, and connecting to movement. The design and implementation of innovative spaces to mobilize towards and participation in the first USSF must match people's current momentum and provide lessons about space, purpose, and method in our work.

Thirdly, we must practice building flexible infrastructures that will sustain our communities beyond the empty promises of the state or private sectors. The local organizing and coordination necessary to host the forum offers unprecedented opportunities to practice constructing that infrastructure on local levels. The local site also offers opportunities to lift up regional realities to a national scale and to evolve the forum model based on the specific political location it inhabits.

We examine those three practices from the unique perspective of the anchor organization in order to better understand the possibility of the USSF as a movement building practice in this country. We discuss the purpose and methodologies of the forum in the US to ensure that the next USSF maintains transformative processes linked to a broader vision. Southern participation not only mobilized major attendance but also created many key structures and practices. Describing the work of the Southeast as the anchor region is essential to evolve and build in the next regional site. Project South, as the original anchor organization for the USSF and the convener of the Southeast Regional Organizing Committee, recognizes our responsibility to describe these efforts so that the social forum in the US can grow and change as our movements and conditions shift. Project South, as the anchor organization, in addition to the National Planning Committee, the Youth Working Group, the Atlanta Organizing Committee, the National Outreach Engine, worked most closely in the Southeast Regional Organizing Committee and the Healing, Health, & Environmental Justice Working Group. The report will also lift up the non-traditional spaces that Project South participated closely with and that gave the forum its unique character: the Opening March, the Youth organizing, the People's Family Reunion, and–through partnership with key Southwest and Gulf Coast organizations–the People's Freedom Caravan and the People's Movement Assembly.

The USSF in Atlanta in 2007 is not an end, but a step in the long, rigorous process to build powerful massive movements tied by true relationships and sophisticated, cross-regional, intersectional strategy. When asked what came out of the Forum, as planners and visionaries of that space we answer: the practice of building authentic and sustainable movements to scale; the development of inno-

vative organizing methods that increase participation by responding to both urgency and desire; and the experience of building something together that favors visionary practice over reactive response.

I. THE PURPOSE OF THE USSF: BUILDING LOCAL, REGIONAL, AND NATIONAL MOVEMENTS

It Began in the South.

As the anchor organization of both the forum and the Southeast organizing process, Project South understood its role to connect local organizing work to regional historical relevance and mobilizing efforts for the USSF. Though Atlanta was the site of the forum, we understood the Southeast as the true host, and we committed to a regional organizing process that convened key organizations and communities within the region. We worked to represent the regional reality and organizing efforts within a national process, and we designed our specific work (including the coordination of the Opening March) to connect local struggles to the global reality from which the social forum process was birthed.

The efforts to build more regional infrastructure created opportunities to construct relationships across a wide-variety of leadership (across generations, geographies, and areas of work). The Southeast organizing process matched the vision of the WSF as an open, participatory process that adhered to key movement principles: affected leadership at the center and lifting up the most pressing issues that the region faces. The organizing process included highly attended regional meetings of organizational leaders and members, mapping multiple fronts of struggle, launching city-based committees, and identifying key point people in geographic and sectoral locations.

Project South stepped up as the anchor organization for the USSF in 2005 when the National Committee selected Atlanta as the site. After Katrina, we pushed for postponement from 2006 and settled on the summer of 2007 for the USSF. Project South, a regional organization based in Atlanta, initiated meetings to create both a local organizing committee in Atlanta and a Southeast regional organizing structure. We held Local Host Committee meetings in Atlanta from August of 2005 through the Southeast Social Forum in June 2006 (Alice Lovelace, Atlanta-based renowned poet, cultural organizer, and community leader brought years of experience to the USSF process when she accepted the position of National Lead Organizer in January 2006. She led the Atlanta Organizing Committee for the year following that). In order to build investment in the social forum process and launch a comprehensive organizing process, an initial planning meeting of over 100 people and 40 organizations agreed to convene an experimental regional forum in January of 2006–the Southeast Social Forum (SESF).

Building the Southeast Social Forum made the USSF possible

Successful convergences depend on intentional mobilizing efforts. Building the SESF in 2006 to introduce the participatory process and practice movement building potential to organizers and community members was key to the planning for 2007. We decided to pull together our Southeast partners and other significant people-of-color led organizations for a meeting in January 2006 to gauge the interest in the process, to determine the major issues facing the South, and to introduce the possibility of a Southeast Regional Organizing Committee. We hoped for about 30 representatives. 100 people showed up representing every state in the region and multiple fronts including housing rights, economic justice, cultural work, gender and reproductive justice, and human rights work.

Five months after Katrina, the January 06 meeting showed that the social forum process was right on time. We discussed the devastating effects of Katrina on the Gulf Coast and the need for more coordination, more understanding, and more efforts to join our struggles. Immigrant rights and the need for better relationships between the Latino and African-American communities was also identified as a pressing issue.

The strength of the Southern region showed itself in a unified analysis. Regardless of location, organizers articulated the crisis in the Gulf Coast as the most urgent and the most indicative of all our struggles, whether working with immigrants in North Carolina and Mississippi or poor white folks confronting the prison industry in Appalachia. This large group decided that the USSF could not be a usual conference and that it had to be an intentional process to enhance our educational and organizational efforts to build deeper relationships, to lift up younger leaders, and take the movement to the next level. We decided to host a Southeast gathering in the summer of 2006 to prepare for a major organizing push to the USSF in 2007. A participant suggested "Another South is Possible" as the theme to parallel the WSF's call "Another World is Possible." The SESF happened June 16-18, 2006 in Durham, North Carolina.

Facts about the Southeast Social Forum:

- Over 580 people registered for and attended the Forum
- 80% were people of color
- At least 50% represented low-income and working class communities
- About 20% were Spanish speaking Latinos (unprecedented for the South in a primarily Black-led process)
- Over 50 organizations submitted workshops on youth organizing, coalition building, queers in the South, Black/Brown alliances, labor and

immigration, environmental justice, health justice, New Orleans and Katrina workshops for displaced people, and more.

- 40 organizations signed on as co-sponsors. Organizations paid $100, sent a delegation, and helped mobilize their members for the forum.
- A Durham Local Host Committee pulled many aspects of the forum together, specifically through the efforts of local leadership like Nayo Watkins, Theresa El-Amin, and Leah Wise.
- The three primary themes for the Forum: 1) Gulf Coast Disaster, 2) Immigration in the Southeast, and 3) Occupation & Violence at home and abroad.
- Workshops and plenaries examined their issues through the lenses of White Supremacy, Local/Global Economic Justice, and Movement Building.

The lessons from the SESF organizing process included a deeper understanding of the strengths inside the process from the regional and local perspective. The regional forums showed us that resources could be raised on the grassroots level. We started with a budget of zero, and the committee raised over $25,000 between February and June, the start of the Forum. Over 70% of the money came from grassroots fundraising, registrations, and organizational sponsorships. The level of outreach, and specifically face to face meetings, with key leadership in the South proved that the social forum process needs a good deal of planning time to succeed in mobilizing mass numbers. Project South staff and members traveled across the region speaking with organizers and groups.

The Southeast experience also shows that building movement in the Southeast region with established and emerging Black leadership at the center is crucial to advancing national movements. A primary strength was the intergenerational nature of the leadership. The incredibly versatile and effective organizational anchors like Miami Workers Center, Highlander, Southern Echo, Mississippi Workers Center, Regional Economic Justice Network, Sister Song, and many others are a part of both the historical Civil Rights Movement, as well as today's critical organizing efforts. The Southeast convenings and organizing efforts towards the forum were productive and successful, in large part because of this existing infrastructure and new formations of younger leadership.

The Border Social Forum, organized by the Southwest Workers Union and held in Ciudad Juarez, Mexico followed the SESF in October of 2006 and expanded the Southwest regional base with over 900 participants from both sides of the Border. SWU acted as an anchor from the Southwest and greatly contributed to the Southeast organizing process by first organizing a Gulf Coast Justice & Solidarity Tour through devastated areas of Louisiana and Mississippi within two

months of the storms. The tour and subsequent efforts in the forum process contributed directly to communities rebuilding and generated relationships that established the basis for the South by Southwest alliances that emerged.

The Opening March: Local Organizing with Regional, National, and Global Significance

Just as the social forum was not a conference, the march was not a protest. It showed the strength of our movements, the numbers and the diversity of the participants, and the specific and political relevance of Atlanta. Everyone–from the National Planning Committee to the Atlanta Organizing Committee to individual organizations–had a stake in the march because everyone would be participating, and the Opening March would set the tone for the next five days.

The Opening March became a site of struggle to assert Atlanta's political significance and location. Though the local organizing committee and key organizations intended to create more deliberate activities like local tours of organizations and historical spaces, we became overwhelmed with logistical needs and responsibilities that had to be prioritized given the stretched resources. The march became the Tour of Atlanta we wanted. The Atlanta team struggled within the leadership bodies to determine the route on the local level and select the sites and targets based on ongoing campaigns, engagement, and history within local organizing. We asked to be trusted that our determinations would include political relevance, not to counter forces that wanted something different, but to tie and strengthen connections between local struggles and national/global battles.

Every march route is contested. The route defines the experience, defines the target(s), and sets the tone. The Opening March of the USSF was no different. The march reflected exactly where we are in our movement building–unified as a convergence of peoples but not unified in political direction; anxious for confrontation but not prepared to anticipate local repercussion; stuck between recognizing multiple struggles and diluting potential demands; advancing local demands without losing a national character.

The Opening March began at the State Capitol of Georgia and wound through almost two miles of downtown Atlanta. We passed the Prison and Parole Board, the Board of Education, Grady Hospital (fighting to stay public at that time), Auburn Avenue African-American Research Library, commercial downtown, and two MARTA public transportation sites. We skirted the Task Force for the Homeless building where much of the forum happened and where hundreds of people find shelter every day from economic displacement, and we entered the Civic Center to open the USSF.

These anchor points demonstrated both current conditions in the South like the death penalty and privatization of public services as well as glimpses of ongo-

ing movement resistance. The anchor points were chosen deliberately to show active local evidence of national struggles with global relevance. Georgians Against the Death Penalty lifted up Troy Davis's death penalty case as we moved past the state Parole Board offices. Well-coordinated AFSCME union workers staged a protest against the threatening, and subsequently successful, privatization scheme at Grady Hospital, the only public hospital in Georgia. The New Orleans contingent showed its strength by joining the March as we turned on Auburn Avenue, the historic street where Martin Luther King was born. A collective of queers performed street theater to mark the Stonewall anniversary and make a statement about the startling parallel of current Atlanta police violence on transgender people and sex workers.

The March Committee reflected local forces in struggle as well as the locally based tactical knowledge to set permits, ensure safety, and negotiate with the police. A small team secured the route, organized anchor points where contingents would join, created first aid teams, organized marshal teams, worked with the community to build the art, and set the look and the feel of the first USSF activity.

As the first and best moment to "see" the wild diversity of the forum, the Opening March was less a traditional protest and more an open invitation to participate, to celebrate, and to engage beyond the familiar. The design matched that vision, as teams of artists from the West Coast and New Mexico came in advance to create the art and coordinate the cultural components of the March. In order to complement the multitudes of groups representing their different issues and regions, the team led a two-week local community art process and created a cohesive feel with hundreds of silk flags, stencils, and a giant indigenous woman puppet with painted arms to represent where participants came from. 5,000 maps of the route with descriptions of the anchor points and 2,500 chant sheets were circulated. Sound trucks, music, drum bands, and chants got the crowd all the way into Renaissance Park and kicked off the USSF.

The reality of organizing such a massive demonstration was held and shepherded by the Atlanta Organizing Committee. One month before the Forum, the Atlanta City Council attempted to pass a twisted counter protest ordinance that would erase first amendment rights and allow for increased police intervention in demonstrations. Local organizers, who had been working on the forum for several years mobilized quickly and within a week defeated the ordinance. Three days before the March, a small team of Atlanta-based organizers, Alice Lovelace, Seyoum Lewis, and Emery Wright, with the forum and Project South met with Greg Pridgeon, an aide to Atlanta's Mayor, who informed them that all police leave had been canceled and police were standing by in riot gear. Our organizers, representing intergenerational Black leadership in Atlanta, assured the city that the intimidating presence of riot cops would escalate the tensions and increase the potential for

unplanned action. The vulnerability and potential attacks on local organizing given the energy and resources going to the forum reinforces the argument for local organizers to lead many of the key elements of the forum process in order to defend against backlash and build up crucial infrastructure that will last beyond the convergence. These examples of political battles show the inherent connection between local organizing and broader national processes of militarization and movement control.

The March of close to 10,000 people was the largest Atlanta had seen in decades. It happened mid-week and mid-day and stopped business through the heart of downtown. Commonly dismissed as irrelevant, inept, or unorganized, the South with Atlanta as its urban hub showed a diverse and powerful crowd that included unionized healthcare workers, the active disability rights movement, Latino immigrants living in the South, the massive numbers of lesbian, gay, queer, and transgender people living in Atlanta and the South, as well as the core strength of Black communities converging on Atlanta from across the Delta and the Southeast.

Social Forum Evolution: Tackling a National Project from the Ground Up

In order for the USSF to have a true national character and for the forum to achieve its movement building purpose, national, regional, and local formations will need to work in concert. The social forum planning process has to rebuild structural participation to include three basic lessons learned from the local, regional, and national work: 1) all committees should integrate the importance of deep community processes and plan the forum with longer timelines; 2) as movement leaders we have a responsibility to recognize political leadership within its context and place; and 3) and we should be more intentional in articulating political positions and differences with transparency. Recognizing the depth and breadth of these issues allows us to draw relevant recommendations for moving forward.

Both longer timelines and centralizing the significance of our movements' place and political context are addressed with strong regional organizing processes. Regions should self-identify and converge key forces around specific issues facing their communities. The regional anchors in the Southeast and the Southwest met the challenge of introducing the social forum process and planning for it simultaneously. They raised resources from the grassroots participants and kept the vision of a multi-level organizing effort at the center. Though in this first forum, regional work did not happen to this scale across the entire country, the blueprint has been drawn and tested.

The USSF offers an exciting opportunity to connect to the specificity of regional leadership and political context. The first USSF, successfully held in the South, showed the viability of Southern movements at the same time as showing

deep historical misunderstandings. Understanding the history of race and movements in the South is indelibly linked to our understanding of the current economic conditions in this country and the potential for national shifts in movement building. The historic weight of prejudice against the South and dynamics that marginalize Black leadership will continue to play out in movement spaces if we do not intentionally challenge all aspects of this cultural, racial, and political distrust. Trust includes articulating the principles with which we operate and discussions with movement leadership from indigenous communities, the Southwest, and the South. We recognize an opportunity to connect with people's powerful regional histories across the US and to confront white supremacy at its roots. A first step in that work is to build regional processes with local leadership at the center.

One of the primary purposes of the forum was to create a space that holds multiple movements, communities, experiences, ideologies, and strategies. A strength of the social forum process was and will continue to be wide spectrums of political differences, among both the planners and the participants. Based on our understanding of the political moment in the US, Project South and many other planners prioritized innovative spaces before, during, and after the forum to advance people's capacity to self-determine national, regional, and local movements. Other planners were building the social forum to set and advance a specific nationalized agenda for the "Left." We will be able to function together, plan together, and move forward if our positions are clear, if we make room for critical struggles, and if we listen for what we share in common and what our major distinctions are. The lack of transparency on any level of the planning leads to confusion and difficulty entering the process. As the planning committees shepherd the social forum process, we have an opportunity to build a process that integrates diverse positions without undermining or diffusing the analysis coming directly from communities.

In summary, the SESF sparked a greater understanding in the forum process both regionally and nationally, and the local leadership gained practice through the Opening March in balancing the details of organizing with the national and international significance of the social forum process. The history of the South showed itself as a strong factor in the success of the forum in terms of our existing infrastructure and movement building leaders. Within all this rich history and struggle the USSF was ignited.

II. CONVERGENCE AND STRATEGY: NEW ORGANIZING MODELS FOR NEW MOMENTS

The New Moment

When a group of 100 leaders from across the Southeast assessed the state of our movements five months after Katrina and in planning towards a USSF, we

recognized that the only way to understand the crisis was to analyze the multiple fronts of attack at the same time as we converge our movement responses. Attacks came on an unprecedented level–isolation through displacement, land grabs disguised as economic development, privatized militarization to enforce all of the above, as well as severe and frontal attacks to the cultural realities in an attempt to break the spirit of communities and families. Responses showed community-based resiliency and movement-based weaknesses. Historically and systematically strained relationships between Latino immigrant communities and Black communities were being exploited while white supremacy forced an order of economic development that included the attempted annihilation of entire communities–targeting young black men, ignoring the realities of indigenous life in the area, and exploiting immigrants as free and disposable laborers. The massive numbers of displaced people entering Southern cities, in addition to the historical patterns of the federal government practicing severe repression on Southern soil, directly affected the entire Southeast. Despite the lack of movement infrastructure to respond to the Gulf Coast crisis in August 2005 effectively, Southern-based organizers understood the significance and implications of the crisis and saw the Forum process as a way to connect and create long-term movement strength.

Purpose and Practice of Innovative Spaces:
Connecting movement vision to a movement vehicle

One of the USSF's major contributions to the WSF process was the deliberate and successful expansion of spaces that connected directly to innovative organizing strategies in this new moment. We believe that the success of the non-traditional spaces reveals essential characteristics of movement convergence needed given new sets of conditions. All the spaces of the social forum, including the six evening plenaries, deserve description and analysis to understand the full influence and qualitative reach of these spaces. Here we explore the outcomes of the non-traditional spaces: new strategic alliances and new methodologies for organizing across sectors, communities, and regions on mass scales. The following examples are some of the critical spaces that were coordinated and envisioned through local Atlanta and the Southeast regional processes.

The People's Family Reunion:
Beyond resistance, towards liberation

Pine Street & Renaissance Park was a section of the forum that was more like a five-day block party than it was a conference. The space was street level and open to the public, with or without formal registration. Cultural performances trumped lectures and speeches. The Indigenous Tent held ceremonies and strategy meetings. A memorial was built to fallen warriors in the movement. If the

presence of indigenous leaders and grassroots Black leadership was notable, then the alliances and collaborative efforts between these communities was historic. These convergence practices happened on Pine Street.

If the Gulf crisis tested the people's spirits and will to continue, reviving and expanding the cultural lives of people within the truth of our conditions is absolutely essential. Pine Street was hot; it was sweaty; and it was run by Emery Wright in collaboration with artists from the Cultural Working Group–Tufara Waller Muhammad from Highlander and Alternate Roots' Carlton Turner and members of the Indigenous Working Group. The People's Family Reunion is a great example of the open, facilitated, participatory space that the Forum engenders. The Reunion converged people not traditionally or formally affiliated with organizations in order to confront the violence of prisons, police, and criminalization and share experiences through developing regional strategies. The significance of the Reunion, the primary space dedicated to the Black experience in the US, lies in both its celebratory and confrontational positions.

Excerpt from Emery Wright's article in Project South's Fall 2007 newsletter

Project South was interested in creating spaces at the USSF that were planned and led by people who are directly affected by and working on key fronts of struggle in the US South. The People's Family Reunion was the outcome of a process led by Reverend Kenny Glasgow, Director of The Ordinary People's Society based in Dothan, Alabama and Shareef Cousin, an organizer with Southern Center for Human Rights in Atlanta. We partnered and worked with both organizations for several years, and we were in a position to support the organizing process towards the People's Family Reunion. Collectively, our three organizations, staff, and volunteers developed the concept for the Family Reunion and outlined the following political objectives: 1) to create a place for formerly incarcerated people, our friends, and loved ones to gather and be inspired by our unity; 2) to build relationships between similar grassroots organizations; and 3) to forge a platform for collective action to create fundamental change on how the criminal justice systems attacks and destroys our communities.

Hundreds of people gathered on the lawn of Renaissance Park and along Pine Street listening to activists and organizers blast the unfair and brutal treatment that many of us face within the criminal justice system from a stage set up on the edge of the street. We believe that through creating a liberated and well-functioning space, people will figure out how to use the space to advance social movement to build a stronger path towards fundamental social change. The People's Family Reunion was a large example that our belief was true.

We all know that leadership from key areas of struggle coming together to build strategies of collaboration is important to building a strong movement for

social change. Working on the USSF in general, and specifically on the Family Reunion, gave us the opportunity to practice that value. We do not always give ourselves the time or energy to put this principle into action. Furthermore, we saw the purpose of the social forum and Family Reunion to be about finding meaningful ways to engage a great mass of people in the movement building process. Many times local leadership and organizations remain disconnected from each other because of negative history or political lines, while political realities are slapping a great mass of our people in the face. We have and must continue to find ways to mobilize great numbers of people who are directly affected by issues of police brutality, criminal injustice, cruel incarceration, and cold-blooded treatment after being released. The experience of working on the People's Family Reunion and other initiatives of organic collaboration happening across the country becomes the substance for a platform to launch a powerful, unassailable force for justice.

Innovative spaces

Tents–Similar to the workshop spaces, outdoor tents were organized by participants and included scheduled content and activities. These spaces were designed and implemented by organizations and collaborations that were, for the most part, outside of the NPC and formal organizing process. The tents created a festival environment. Each one had its own organic nature, provided its own itinerary, and served as gathering spaces, incorporated rest, music, dancing, health, as well as making and showing art. The Indigenous Tent set in Renaissance Park allowed for separate but connected space for practicing ceremony and served as an organizing tool to strategize and participate in the People's Movement Assembly.

Public Space–The Design Studio for Social Intervention facilitated multiple public space explorations and reclamations. An oral history tour through nearby neighborhoods connected native leaders fighting for indigenous Hawaiian sovereignty and the cultural activists of Atlanta's Sweet Auburn section. A street party in Little Five Points created a lively afternoon space where the participants from the Skate Like a Girl workshops connected to the radical marching band to DJ's and graffiti artists. Local Atlantans were offered opportunities to connect to the Forum through these accessible entry points.

The People's Movement Assembly

The National Planning Committee asserted from the beginning of the organizing process that the forum would be a movement building process that converges social movements in order to clarify our politics, our demands, our visions, and our alliances. What happens beyond the convergence is a debate being held on the world scale, but in the US, national leadership was clear that actions, resolutions, and forward motion was critical to the success of the Forum.

The social forum included many forms of engagement, and the People's Movement Assembly (PMA) was a process and activity within the five days that advanced the movement functions of the convergence. Within the Charter of Principles, the forum is not allowed to take political positions, however, in every forum organizers and communities have asserted a space to develop political resolutions and declarations. The PMA was the USSF's response to a global debate about the political direction of the forum.

The PMA, as a participatory process and potentially deliberative body emerged from the forum organizing process. First practiced at the Border Social Forum and inspired by Social Movements Assemblies at the WSF level, the Assembly included a process that began on Saturday morning with regional caucuses. Though held at 8:30am on the fourth day of the forum, the Southeast Caucus saw over 100 people from almost every state in the region. The full USSF Assembly, held on the last day, invited groups–from the caucuses, the workshops, the strategy sessions, the tents, and other spaces–to announce resolutions for action (in two minutes or less). The first PMA at the first USSF was rocky in design and execution, and we look forward to planning more intentionally to clarify the effort and make it more accessible to participants. Over 50 groups declared their carefully crafted resolutions to a full house. The stage also held witness to an incident that felt exclusionary, to a response from the indigenous participants and people in solidarity with them, and to a healing process that is uncommon on a national stage. With more planning and a clearer engagement process for participants, the People's Movement Assembly has the potential to advance our movement strategies towards coordination and collaboration.

As we move the social forum process forward in this country, we must not default to preconceived notions of methodology, space design, and political prescription. If we collectively consider the crises of our moment, reflect on the historical trajectory, and support the creation of innovative and experimental spaces, the forum has the opportunity to expand in participation every time we converge. These spaces, though not resourced effectively in this first round, were compelling and offered glimpses of strategic convergences on a mass scale.

III. OPPORTUNITIES TO PRACTICE MOVEMENT BUILDING: ATLANTA AS THE SITE, THE SOUTHEAST AS THE HOST

The WSF started and was held in Porto Alegre, Brazil three times in a row and was hosted by the very progressive Workers Party that, within a few years of the WSF beginnings, launched Lula into the presidency. With hundreds of thousands of people attending the Forum and integrating into the city and advancing the progressive agenda of the governing Workers Party, one could easily argue that the WSF was a key factor in the election of Lula as president. In the case of

the US, the USSF and the fractured but growing movements that it represents is not in a position to be that kind of springboard. However, the relationship between the significance of location and the opportunity to practice structural movement building on multiple levels cannot be ignored.

The site of the Forum is chosen because of historical significance and current political relevance. It is chosen based on the will of the leaders in that place, as well as the regional will, that surrounds, strengthens, and informs that place. It should be chosen and held as a strategic location to launch and advance national movement building from the historic origins of an imperialist economy, a racist society, and a legacy of fierce resistance and resilience. The site should be an opportunity to activate two distinct processes: 1) to galvanize that region's movements to provide ongoing infrastructure for sharing and mobilizing together and 2) to inform, strengthen, and cross-pollinate movements that live outside that region based on historical connections and current realities. If both processes are achieved, we advance the possibility for true nationally based movements in the US.

A key lesson from the Gulf Coast Crisis has been an acute understanding of the weaknesses of movement-based response. As U.S.-based movements, we do not have enough shared or sophisticated experiences of mobilizing and taking care of massive numbers of our people. As governmental support gets sold off to private contractors and social agencies are systematically weakened, the social forum offers a contained time and space to practice structural development in conjunction with politically and culturally relevant principles.

We built a city within a city

We highlight the achievements of the Atlanta Organizing Committee in order to understand how we begin, in concrete terms, to build the necessary infrastructures for mass movements. This examination provides an opportunity to re-evaluate and adjust our protocols to enter communities, and create more principled entry and exit plans for communities that host the social forum. These examples highlight tensions in the planning process that should be articulated and resolved as we move forward.

Let's be clear: Atlanta stepped up. Atlanta organizations signed on; Atlanta organizers volunteered time, resources, and skills, and Atlanta volunteers came out of the woodwork to ensure that the Forum was a success. With only one paid staff member for a year and half of a two-year organizing process, Atlanta built the Forum with grit and determination in order to welcome people from all over the country and the world as well as to participate in a historical opportunity to shift the political landscape of this country in the wake of devastation and displacement. Atlanta, with Alice Lovelace and Project South at the helm, built an impressive infrastructure of coordinators and logistical structures that operated

smoothly for a week, and Atlanta withstood the descent of thousands of folks from all corners who often did not come with an understanding of the South or how to engage with leadership on the ground.

The shadow of a national decision-making body loomed without the necessary investment of finances, grunt work, or organized numbers. The local and regional organizers knew that we were planning for over 15,000 people and made decisions and plans from that understanding. The core national planners were estimating 5,000 people as late as May 2007. This low expectation and clear disconnect from the organizing process landed the full responsibility of the details on the one paid staff member and the Atlanta Organizing Committee.

The infrastructure for the Forum, built on so few dollars and so many shoulders is probably one of the few case studies within U.S. experience about what our communities are capable of building at that scale. Long-term work on the local and regional levels led to an incredible first-aid and health care system for participants. Local doctors (primarily young Black and South Asian doctors) were organized to work in shifts. Alternative healers provided free services for over 300 participants in a corner of an AIDS prevention organization near the Civic Center. Water was accessible and available for 15,000 people for five days of the hot, humid Atlanta summer. Volunteers were organized and deployed before, during, and throughout. Food, though not plentiful in vendors, was found and shared. Bike brigades of local and out-of-town bikers assisted lost participants, provided water at far-off locations and interrupted a deeply embedded car culture.

The local logistics team, facilitated and led by USSF National Lead Organizer Alice Lovelace, represented many different communities and struggles throughout Atlanta. This group of civil servants reflected leadership from the local Black communities of Atlanta and became close to a liberated local government in all areas taken over by the USSF for those five days in Atlanta. In contrast, though organizations from the NPC were all but begged to contribute to the volunteer numbers, the response and investment in supporting the infrastructure was primarily from individuals on the NPC rather than organizational mobilizations.

The flexibility of the forum's infrastructure and its ability to provide so much to so many with very little hard cash speaks volumes to our movements' ability to resource our own spaces and take care of each other. However, the collision of ideology and political orientation on the national planning level affected the resources and planning for this large-scale, five-day logistical monster. If you are not organizing in mass numbers, then you do not plan for mass numbers. If you don't trust people (the local organizers), then you do not support the needs they bring to the table. If you expect low turnout to an event and a process, you don't build flexible structures to expand and contract. If you are more interested in political prescription than building capacity and making connections across skills, sectors,

and political lines, then you don't prioritize the infrastructure design until the last minute. These misunderstandings and lack of connection to both the mobilization process and the structural design manifested in a local-national tension but points to a deeper division around the potential purposes of the forum in the US. What cannot be quantified but should be recognized is the significance of Atlanta leadership's experience to build the forum as an act and a practice of building that other world we speak of in the social forum's slogan.

The Politics of Place: Entry & Exit Strategies for Movement Building

Within the context of achieving the goal of regional realities informing one another, the South as the site of the first USSF offered an opportunity to connect US based movements to our national historical realities of racial and economic oppression, to the specific sites of one of the few mass-based resistance movements in the last half of the twentieth century, and to the current Gulf Coast crisis, one of the most severe manifestations of white supremacy, displacement, land acquisition, and domestic militarization in the last thirty years. Atlanta and the Southeast prepared to put forward our Southern legacies and current calls to action. Other regions and their leadership prepared to engage that legacy and connected to struggles on the ground as a tangible method to inform their own and strengthen them all. The Southwest, with its Caravan from Albuquerque to Atlanta, met these opportunities, but overall, this opportunity was not fulfilled.

The site of the Forum–whether it's the borderlands between Texas and Mexico, an Indian reservation in South Dakota, the industrial neighborhoods of Detroit, or the streets of Atlanta–is a place to be held, understood, and lifted up. You're coming into someone's space, meeting people who have built movements, engaging with people who are struggling on the frontlines. These are the people who have risked a lot to make it happen and are in the best position to direct the ground plans before, during, and after the Forum. Our relationships to these spaces should reflect our basic principles. Our plans should also prepare to take advantage of the opportunity to show our collective strength.

Recommendations to the national planning bodies

We believe that US movements hold an opportunity to build the social forum in such a way that proves (with direct and local results) that when social movements converge, power shifts. We also believe that local leadership should be supported to determine where those shifts can and should happen. Though the logistical needs and introductory process of this first USSF outweighed our ability to capture significant opportunities and truly advance strategic struggles in Atlanta, the next USSF can continue to build on our lessons learned. We can advance the process, the structures, and the outcomes with each forum, if we learn from the

last. One key lesson is paying closer attention to the local and regional movements in addition to the attending participants in order to develop comprehensive plans to anticipate opportunities and vulnerabilities.

No one organization or body holds the key to the success of the first USSF. No one of us knows exactly how to move forward, but many of us on all levels–local, regional, and national–remain committed to the social forum process as a movement building vehicle. If we don't examine our weaknesses, at the same time as celebrating our successes, we will repeat our mistakes. At the same time that the planning of the USSF showed our strengths, the weaknesses of white supremacy and elitism must be recognized in order to intervene on those historical patterns and ensure a more principled process moving forward.

As the Atlanta Organizing Committee and Project South moved hundreds of people over two years into positions to ensure the success of the forum's five days, we were consistently second-guessed and our recommendations dismissed on the national level. Though the antagonism to the South showed up early on in the selection of Atlanta, in December 2006, six months before the Forum, organizations on the NPC refused to sign a basic Memo of Understanding outlining investment–both fiscal and volunteer. At the same meeting, to ensure affordable hotel rooms for participants, two contracts needed to be signed by two individuals on the NPC, and the financial risk was clear. Jerome Scott of Project South and Loretta Ross of Sister Song, both Atlanta-based, signed the contracts knowing and counting on the mobilizations of thousands to fill the rooms. Though Black leadership was often dismissed and disregarded throughout the process, the NPC depended on the risks and organizing efforts of these same leaders.

Our recommendation to anybody that assumes a national character is to examine carefully its purpose, structure, and criteria for participation. We also recommend a rigorous process of re-organizing the relationships between local bodies and national bodies to counteract power dynamics that will inevitably surface. Each site of the Forum offers the opportunity for an evolution of our movements and should be supported in key ways to do that. Designing more intentional entry and exit strategies is one resolution we offer.

Movements and communities converge at the Forum, and then those communities move back out, into what we can assume is a generally hostile environment. How do we prepare for that–both in the host site as well as the outside communities who participated? Where do people go with all the energy? Where are the movement infrastructures to hold the excitement, the advanced political analysis, the newly forged relationships? In addition to providing spaces for participants to reflect on and advance their work in their home communities, organizing plans must include thoughtful exit strategies to respect, lift up, and strengthen the local site within a national context.

On the front end, local organizers should have room and resources to design ways to harness the numbers, the momentum, and the skills of people coming to town.

And on the back end, all participants should leave with a greater sense of the place they lived in for five days and how that context connects to their home communities.

Entry strategy =
Community protocol

Entry strategies should include thoughtful preparation, plans to connect with local groups, and a compassion for the great numbers of people who make sacrifices to build something meaningful and on such a large scale. Volunteers work on principle and from dedication to a larger purpose; at least Atlanta's did. Basic respect for work and commitment must be a principle of the forum and its organizers at all levels for it to be a different model than a traditional conference. The opportunities were lost on both sides. Organizers on the NPC did not connect to the histories and present struggles of Atlanta and the South. And local organizers were so bogged down with details, we were barely able to participate in and bring our perspectives to the Forum we built.

Protocol is not just good manners, protocol is a set of practices that activates your principles and respects the communities you enter. It is a set of expectations and assumptions on all sides; the visitors and the visited. Leadership entering communities from other localities and regions should come prepared. Know where you're going to be. Research the history and current conditions of the place in order to connect their struggles to your struggles. Examine ways to build relationships. A key call out to participants was to "Bring what you make"–bring something to reinforce and support local struggles; contribute your strengths so that the forum will succeed. Instead of falling into the entitlement trap of professionalized conferences that provide comfortable but sterile environments, ask: What organizations do we relate to? What struggles do we support? What can we bring to further our relationships and make this a worthwhile venture for everyone involved?

On a more tactical level, we recommend coming to the Forum holding key assumptions about the ground level work that people and organizations in the host city have put forward. Volunteers are working 40 to 50 hour weeks and not getting paid. Any and all staff is stretched beyond capacity. Trust that experienced people have been organizing for several years to make it happen and have exhausted every resource they could find. And in the last days of the push, work directly with the local organizers to identify gaps–there always will be gaps–and initiate appropriate ways to fill them.

Exit Strategy = Preparation & Support

What can we do, as planners on all levels, to ensure that the social forum is a positive movement building experience for the place that hosts it? How can we build the next one so that every city and town wants the Forum to converge on its streets and in its homes? The social Forum plans must also include an effective exit strategy that protects and strengthens what can be assumed to be a depleted and potentially vulnerable site.

After so much work and investment to make the USSF happen, the Atlanta community got left holding the bag. There was no concerted effort, nor was there space or time to design anything on the local level, to support and rejuvenate the volunteers, staff, or participants. The social Forum did not, in the end, strengthen Atlanta organizing and there was very little to hold our movements as we left the spaces we had helped create. Two months after the Forum, the Task Force for the Homeless, a site of the Forum came under direct attack, and the city has systematically reduced state and federal funding options for the Task Force because it sits on a four-acre plot of land worth more than the hundreds of citizens receiving basic services there. Grady Hospital, the only public hospital in the state, has since been diced and co-opted into a privatization scheme that will leave uninsured and underinsured people with even fewer options.

Even if the local organizations are sustained and healthy–national planning should assume that the organizations and communities will be closely watched, and potentially targeted before, during, and after the Forum. We have to build the entry and exit plan with that understanding. The last day is not the end–energy depletion makes local community vulnerable, we need a process to support the community afterwards, as well as follow up on all the connections that happened, strategies built, and alliances developed.

Perhaps resolution is as simple as anticipating a collective exhaustion and building a plan so that a team from other organizations and regions will join up over the last few weeks and stay on for a few weeks after to tie up logistical loose ends, to support the leaders and workers, and to follow up with the people who came and were inspired. Follow up strategies around the database and communication with participants and supporters needs to be prioritized in order to connect people's Forum experience to their ongoing work.

Recommendations for the local anchor

Just as the national planners should be more intentional about these critical practices to build locally, regionally, and nationally, the locally based anchor should be intentional about how it builds infrastructure, relationships, and entry points for organizations and organizers. The position of anchor is where our political will meets practical implementation on a scale that we often struggle to imagine. Bal-

ancing the logistical needs of the Forum with an expansive sense of the possibilities the forum can engender is crucial.

- Know the community intimately. Introduce the Forum to the surrounding neighborhoods and key communities.
- Build directly with local organizations and regional or national organizations based in your city through the Organizing Committee. Build direct investment and strong communication structures.
- Assert the purpose and function of the Forum. At the same time, allow for flexibility and input into the process from the many committees working regionally and nationally.
- Hold small assemblies or neighborhood social forums in hard-pressed communities so folks can participate in the culture of the Forum and also infuse the process with the history and context of the place. Create entry points for people to commit to participating in the national Forum.
- Build volunteer pools from existing organizational bases. Organizing volunteers as unaffiliated individuals was difficult, tedious, and ineffective.
- Seek out existing opportunities to build with sectors not already active in movements, but looking to be engaged in community work (i.e., medical students and the Grady doctors).
- Include a comprehensive campus organizing plan (with representatives on the Local Organizing Committee) to activate and inform the local colleges.
- Engage strategically with the NPC and work to bridge the inevitable distance between the two bodies.
- Stay connected to the regional building. Create communication structures and recruit strong anchors in other locations or sectors to help coordinate.
- Building and holding the infrastructure of such an unwieldy and untested (in the U.S.) forum should be supported, not as a logistical necessity but as a key practice and outcome of the forum process. At the same time that we challenge the national process, Project South takes responsibility for missteps throughout the process. Tensions between the organizing forces are inevitable within a broad and long-term process like the social forum. All political differences do not necessarily need to be resolved, as the Forum process and our movements should be wide enough for a diversity of tactics and practices. We argue that for the

sake of transparency and equal distribution of resources, positions should be articulated and discussed early on within the broader context of the purpose and planning of the Forum. The political will and risks that organizations commit to in order to move the forum to new heights of effectiveness must be recognized and resourced.

IV. Conclusions and Visions for the Forum

The social forum succeeded in introducing U.S.-based movements to the open processes, its participatory nature and the opportunities to share and develop sophisticated politics relevant to the current moment. The response was overwhelming, the results have been far reaching, and the energy to build a second one is present. Despite the minimal resources, every working group and committee pulled together its ingenuity and amassed the people it could. We are holding an urgent opportunity to build on what we know about movement building inside the social forum process.

In a historical moment when displacement ravages our communities, we must shift the shape of our organizing to match the moment. People are displaced from our homes through the destruction of public housing; people are displaced and removed from communities into prisons. The lack of healthcare and livable jobs displaces us from any semblance of a quality life. A financial system threatens our earned retirements and savings and puts us all at risk of increased impoverishment conditions. In this moment, facilitating mass convergences and organizing specific local efforts from within those convergences is a critical method to address issues that can no longer be resolved in isolation or through minor policy changes. The convergence strategy, if held with enough principle and integrity, will spark stronger movements in local communities, across regions, and through national platforms.

No political party or singular alliance is prepared to truly act on our behalf. The social forum process, if taken seriously and invested in on all levels, provides a productive space for leadership to stay connected and relevant to popular movements. The Forum provides a space to discover and amplify our collective demands. Each social forum could be seen as a benchmark to examine how far we've come and re-assess our directions to align, collaborate, and coordinate. We can learn what's happening, inform the political edges, support the skills, and provide the flexible, accessible infrastructure that people need to move.

As Project South, we are committed to our responsibility to share our lessons and recommendations with those invested in the process including organizations and groups considering anchoring the next forums–whether regional or national. We are committed to moving with the Southeast and examining ways to connect to the forum and movement assembly process as methods to build more

social justice infrastructure in the South. We are committed to experimenting with and designing social spaces to mobilize forces, articulate demands, and launch actions.

The process of building and launching the first USSF was an achievement that should both excite and humble our movements' leadership. Our goals are ambitious and our vision strives to reflect the depth and breadth of what we imagine for our communities. This is no easy task, and we will make many mistakes. We have no other choice but to continue this process and evolve it to match the momentum of people rising up in the streets in Jena, voting in their first election for a Black president, or standing with immigrants and migrants demanding visibility and power. We have no other choice but to keep experimenting with our methods and strategies so that we can capture and move political opportunities, not just from the perspective of a U.S. movement standing in solidarity with global movements, but as movements of peoples affected by the same crises that the US creates both domestically and internationally.

Project South entered this process not knowing answers. How would it happen? How would we find the resources? Is the Forum relevant to our work and strategic directions? Along with the organizers and planners at all levels, we took major risks and absolutely believe that the achievement was worth the work. We also believe that no process improves without serious reflection and evaluation, and that we must articulate the vision and purpose of the social forum in order to build it to an effective and powerful scale. We are determined to show to our people and the world that the USSF did not just mark a moment in time. It marked a forward step for wider, broader, more expansive, more effective movements for real transformation of our lives.

Our strength lies not in knowing exactly how to move forward but in our commitment to do so.

We offer this reflection as the anchor organization of the first USSF. We hope that it provides deeper understanding of the process, the practices, and the potential of the social forum in the United States.

Chapter 4

Plenaries, Workshops, and Films:
The Program of the US Social Forum

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The program of the first U.S. Social Forum was a wonderful, complicated undertaking, at the heart of the Forum itself, and reflected the breakthroughs and challenges of our movement as a whole.

We asked ourselves, and each other: What ideas and what analysis do we need to make another world possible? What organizational forms, what campaigns, what demands? How can different sectors and areas of progressive work link together to challenge the root causes of oppression and exploitation? What social forces are positioned to engage deeply in this conversation, to build these movements, to lead our struggles? What is the situation in the US and in the world right now, and how can this gathering intervene? What is to be done to re-build a radical progressive movement in the United States?

We set out to challenge ourselves, as a progressive social movement, to both critique the political and economic system that we live under, and to begin to articulate the 'other world' that we know to be necessary and possible.

We set out to have a process broad enough to include many political tendencies, ranging from veterans of national liberation movements in Central America, to leaders of the Civil Rights movement in the US, to the current protagonists of the social movements in the US: day laborers, domestic workers, students, and survivors of urban displacement from New Orleans to Big Mountain.

We set out to create a structure where grassroots organizations could lead the Forum, while engaging other organizational and individual activists, as well as other types of progressive formations in the shared project of building a movement.

After hundreds of committee meetings, endless conference calls, exciting debates, and much hard work, we carried out a huge political experiment: the program of the first USSF. This is our account of that fabulous and flawed experiment.

Creating the Program Committee

During the initial formations of the USSF's Planning Committee and Coordinating Committee in 2004, a Timeline Committee was also created to delineate the key benchmarks for tasks and processes, particularly for the first half of 2005. It also established the necessary deadlines for various aspects of the Coordinating Committee's decision-making and other external events that were to be utilized for outreach purposes.

Included in this master timeline was the creation of a Program Committee. By early 2005, the initial Program Committee was meeting regularly by conference call with a core of around four to six committee members. The critically important August 2005 face-to-face meeting that became the National Planning Committee (NPC) in Atlanta significantly boosted the size of the Program Committee.

One of the primary accomplishments of this committee during this period was the extensive brainstorming and grouping of 18 "tracks" encompassing almost 30 issue or thematic areas. This was considered to be a work-in-progress, with ongoing development of tracks and additions of issues or themes for each that was already listed to be continued indefinitely. However, much of this shifted at the August 2005 Atlanta meeting and as we came closer to the USSF itself.

August 2005 Atlanta Meeting:
The Infamous "Clusters"

At the landmark August 2005 face-to-face meeting in Atlanta, the original committees were dropped and the Planning Committee created 10 Regional Committees, a Local Organizing Committee, a Logistics Committee and 6 Working Groups, one of which was the Program Working Group.

The Program Working Group, boosted by more than triple its original size as the Program Committee at the Atlanta meeting, attempted to identify missing themes, prioritized finding ways to intersect and integrate issues, and brainstormed program development criteria. Most significantly, the group agreed that the 18 or more tracks that had been established earlier were not useful for programming purposes and instead decided on grouping the various issue and thematic areas into 7 "clusters": Body; Earth; Community; World; Work; Power; and Spirit.

While the clusters were initially conceived to be more "holistic" and "positive" and divergent from the tracks that some folks were familiar with through previous social forums proved to be a contentious issue as many could not relate to, nor fully comprehend, them. They were critiqued as too "touchy-feely", or lacking political clarity. In the end, due to the absence of universal appeal, the clusters were dropped and transversal axes and cross cutting themes were introduced.

Another initial creation at the Atlanta meeting was the concept of "Pre-Institutes", where key themes would be taken up by plenaries and convenings prior to

the USSF-proper, in the format of pre-conference events. These "Pre-Institutes" were: History of the South; Immigration; Indigenous Rights; Youth; Racism; and Related Economies/Globalization/War/Trade.

Again, these evolved into another guise later on because they were deemed too important to be relegated outside of the USSF core program. They were later developed into the main plenaries of the USSF, and the notion of Pre-Institutes was ultimately dropped.

Transversal Axes and Cross-cutting Themes

The idea of using "axes," or more specifically "transversal axes," came early on in the Program Working Group's process. Committee members who were familiar with the World Social Forum (WSF) programmatic structure introduced it. In the WSF structure, transversal axes are used to highlight systems of oppression that are important to all of the themes within social forum organizing, such as gender, race, patriarchy or capitalism, so that each group who organizes programming for the social forum is conscious of lifting up how these intersect with the issue they are putting forward.

From the experience of some members of the Program Working Group at the WSF and the Americas Social Forum (ASF), we learned that transversal axes were quite confusing in practice at each of the actual forums. The Working Group tried to reconcile with this fact and remedy the situation by changing the name from transversal axes to "cross-cutting themes" with the hope that a clearer name may better inform and lead folks as to what we were referring to. The change in name only, however, was not enough to convince all of us that the cross-cutting themes made sense either, especially those who had no first-hand experience and familiarity with the original transversal axes in the first place. At this point we were beginning to feel like Goldie Locks searching for the perfect porridge.

Based on our difficulty in reaching consensus on how to organize and structure the transversal axes or cross-cutting themes, and the advice that they might not even be the most useful way to categorize the programming of the USSF, we decided not to use them. Despite countless hours, days, weeks, and months spent on trying to nail-down transversal axes for the USSF, the group was eager to be free of them and move on to the next tasks of the Program Working Group, not the least of which included the drafting and finalizing of the application for programming at the USSF.

Growth: People Power! or The Power of the People
…on the Program Working Group

Of important note was the development of size and composition of the Program Working Group. By the end of 2005, core members of the work group had

embarked on "recruiting" additional members to the group, out of the necessity to increase capacity and of desperation. However, many also intentionally focused the outreach and recruitment on grassroots sectors and community-based organizations that were under-represented within this key building block of the USSF and would add to the political dimensions of the group.

By mid-2006, the group had grown to a regular conference call attendance of around six to ten members (although significantly more were listed on paper as members of the work group.) However, this core group was able to work cohesively, efficiently and embarked on a mammoth project of programming in hundreds of workshops in coordination with other committees and working groups.

By this time, the Coordinating Committee was created to carry out all of the primary work for the USSF. At the same time, each working group was also commissioned to nominate additional chairs (beyond the singular one from 2005) and all chairs were given seats on the NPC. The Program Working Group faced the enviable situation of having three persons willing to share the chairing roles and responsibilities. It was easily and unanimously agreed that all three of them would serve as co-chairs, and this remained in effect through the USSF. This appointment included the following persons:

- Allison Budschalow from the American Friends Service Committee
- Colin Rajah from the National Network for Immigrant and Refugee Rights
- Maria Poblet from Comite de Vivienda San Pedro / St. Peter's Housing Committee

Aside from the chairs, the Program Working Group also enjoyed the dedication, hard work, and political abilities of a number of key group members from Atlanta, the NPC, other working groups and volunteers-at-large. Without these core organizers and activists, the vital heartbeat of the USSF–namely its program, would never have been as successful as it ultimately was.

Organizing the Plenary Dialogues: The Collective Voice of the National Planning Committee

One of the essential qualities of the social forum space and process is "self-organization." This means that the hundreds and thousands of activists organizing and educating day-to-day at the front lines of a multitude of struggles create the workshops, the tents, the conversations, and the relationships that make up the social forum and the larger bottom-up movement building project that it is. This idea of self-organizing was paramount from the moment that folks around the US and in Atlanta began planning for the first USSF.

There are a few spaces where the organizers of the social forum are able to put forward their collective voices–their analysis, vision, and shared practice. In the USSF these included the opening march, the morning opening sessions, the concert and some of the cultural spaces, and the evening plenaries. Here we share the story of how the NPC organized the plenary dialogues.

When, What, Who: Schedule, Movement Moments, and Voices

In the overall scheduling of the social social forum programming, the NPC wanted to insure that self-organized workshops would have the time they needed, so we settled on three blocks of workshops for two hours each. We decided to organize opening sessions on the first two mornings to help frame each day and to allow time for regional gatherings leading up to the People's Movement Assembly (PMA). This left evenings for thematic plenaries. This prompted an important question of, "Would people come to evening plenary sessions after a long and intense day of workshops and more in the hot Atlanta sun?" Since there was precedent at other social forums, we decided to go with it and scheduled the plenaries during each of the three evenings of the USSF.

Movement Moments–Key Struggles & Visions

Now, the NPC had to come to a collective decision about the number and content of the plenary dialogues. Two options were discussed and sometimes hotly debated. One option was to organize the plenaries as convergence dialogues, with diversity of sectors and viewpoints. This option lost the vote–it seemed a stretch for where we were. Instead, we opted for a more familiar methodology of organizing plenaries around various "movement moments" and fronts of struggle. There was also the question of fewer and longer plenary sessions and going deep, or more plenary sessions covering broader sets of struggles, but having less time to go deep in each. We decided on the latter.

Right away we brainstormed four plenary sessions lifting up four movement moments–moments we seized and moments that challenged us and demonstrated our movement's weakness. The first, and most obvious, was the plenary on Hurricane Katrina and what it exposed about America and our grassroots movement. The NPC had moved the USSF from summer 2006 to summer 2007 in the aftermath of Katrina so those most devastated–the survivors and internally displaced–could fully participate at the USSF. This plenary would tell the human stories of the government's abandonment, and the devastation and destruction of New Orleans and the Gulf Coast. It would also focus on the demand for the right to return, and for reconstruction of the region so all women, children, elders, African Americans, indigenous, immigrants, workers and the poor could live healthy and safe

lives. We knew our movement had not been able to respond and protect the most vulnerable and this was our challenge.

The NPC also identified three additional plenary sessions as a start. One was on immigrant struggles. It would highlight the increasingly repressive post-911 environment for immigrant communities, the powerful May Day 2006 and 2007 immigrant rights marches, and deepen our understanding and vision for building unity across race and nationality among working people.

Another was on war and militarism at home and abroad. Under the bogus banner of the "war on terror" US militarism is on the rise across the globe with the repressive wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, the ongoing struggles of the Palestinian people, increased military recruitment of our youth, and the war at home–a growing prison industrial complex and National Guard call-ups. This plenary would connect these many expressions of war and militarism and our locally grounded social and economic justice struggles with the global justice movement around anti-militarism and anti-imperialism.

It was also decided that Indigenous participation and leadership, especially in resistance to historic and ongoing genocide and colonialism and in raising the voice of social, economic, and environmental justice in the face of intensifying ecological crisis, would also have to be the focus of another of the first four plenary sessions. This plenary would lift-up indigenous struggles around climate and the earth, and the vision and possibility of global well-being and energy sustainability in the place of destruction rooted in a carbon-based fossil fuel energy regime and intensifying political repression.

After much discussion, the NPC added two additional plenaries to our original four as we moved forward. The powerful participation of women, particularly women of color and young women, on the NPC and in the USSF process generally, along with the dynamic Women's Working Group and Queer Visibility Working Group gave rise to the inspiring plenary on gender and sexuality. It brought diverse voices together in a liberatory vision and challenge to infuse struggles around gender and sexuality throughout our social justice movement.

We all know that the grassroots are a key part of the working class. But the NPC had not yet crafted a plenary session to look specifically at workers' struggles. In the midst of a deepening economic crisis and repressive environment for working people in the US and global economy, the NPC realized we needed to create a space for dialogue among those engaged in the many forms of worker organizing–trade unions, workers centers, domestic workers, etc., and to lift up the emerging forms increasingly widespread among the grassroots sector. This would happen at the workers rights plenary.

The NPC now had affirmed six plenary dialogues to be scheduled over three evenings during the USSF. We looked at the math, scheduled the allotted time for

each plenary, with two occurring each night with a small break in between. And hoped it would all work out.

WhoseVoices? Whose stories?
Whose struggles? Whose leadership?

The critical and political next step the NPC had to deal with was the question of whose voices, "Whose stories, whose struggles, whose leadership were we going to lift-up?" We decided, after some discussion, that there would be no big names, no superstars as plenary speakers at the USSF. This was our grassroots bottom-up movement, our struggles, and our voices. The plenary dialogues would feature "us"–ordinary people doing extraordinary work. We affirmed: "We are the leaders we have been waiting for."

The Program Working Group had the awesome task of reviewing the over 1,000 self-organized workshop proposals and organizing them into the overall USSF program. Identifying and selecting the speakers and moderators for the six plenaries was another distinct and huge task. So, the NPC organized the Plenary Working Group to coordinate the six plenary dialogues and six plenary subgroups that we came up with above. Like all of the other working groups, the subgroups related to the Plenary Working Group, which in turn related and communicated with other working groups as needed, attempting to ensure communication flowed.

Our work was cut out for us. The main task of the Plenary Working Group and its subgroups was to finalize the content and flow of the plenary dialogues and to come up with the most powerful, inspiring and diverse speakers and best facilitators to keep each plenary grounded, moving, and on time. Through this process the NPC worked very hard to insure diversity on plenary sessions–age, gender, sexuality, class, race, nationality, ability, and region of the country–and to bring some convergence across our many struggles.

Weekly conference calls allowed us to work out every detail about content, speakers, multiple perspectives and voices for all the plenaries at the subgroup level, then at the Plenary WG level, and finally at the NPC level. This often came with heated discussion and debate. Plenary Subgroup organizers went through each plenary as it would unfold and many had several conference calls with the speakers and moderators to do a "walk through" by phone. We presented grids with the demographics and composition of the plenary speakers and moderators for each plenary to show the diversity of voices across all six plenaries.

The USSF was finally here and it was the first night. The lead plenary dialogues were *Gulf Coast Reconstruction in the Post-Katrina Era* and *War, Militarism and the Prison Industrial Complex*. Night two featured *Indigenous Voices: From the Heart of Mother Earth* and *Immigrant and Migrant Rights*. And last, but certainly not least, were *Liberating Gender and Sexuality: Inte-*

grating Gender and Sexual Justice Across Our Movements and *Workers' Rights in the Global Economy*.

Each night the auditorium at the Atlanta Civic Center was packed and anticipation was in the air. The speakers were passionate and powerful. They brought a grassroots eloquence–speaking from lived experience and the heart of the struggle, but offering promise and vision for the way forward. Many of us in the Civic Center were moved to tears, moved to our feet, with people power rocking the house. We were affirmed that indeed our grassroots global justice movement is on the move here in the US

Lessons Learned on the Plenary Process

The entire plenary process was intensely negotiated and vetted by the NPC. All that withstanding, "shit still happened." On the *War, Militarism and Prison Industrial Complex* plenary, one of the speakers, not herself Palestinian, presented her analysis and opinion about the internal struggle among Palestinians between Hamas and Hezbollah. Participants from the Palestinian community objected and the NPC agreed that this went against our principle that those most adversely affected speak on their own behalf. The NPC drafted a statement to the affect that we read at the beginning of the Indigenous Voices plenary the next evening; and we invited a representative of the Palestinian struggle to speak on their own behalf as well, which they did and we were grateful for.

We understood this as a mistake, but that through collective self-criticism we could own our error, and correct it in the moment in the spirit of openness and transparency. Overall, we felt this was a sign of taking seriously the lessons learned from the last upsurge in social movements, and of a maturing in how we deal with the inevitable struggles and errors that we confront in our movement building work.

We learned many additional lessons and carry many goals for 2010 forward. Especially critical is thinking about how to create dialogues, conversations, relationships, and shared practice to really get to a deeper level of convergence, and collective analysis and vision for our bottom-up movement so we can move forward with a coordinated strategy to transform the United States and the world. History demands nothing less.

Review of Over 1,000 Applications for Workshops: Oh My!

The Program Working Group began drafting the actual application to submit proposals for the program of the USSF early on in our process. Each conversation we had–from discussing whether or not to use the transversal axes, to the length

of each session, to the accessibility of language translation for workshops–influenced the final "Call for Proposals" that was made public in mid-January 2007. The Call was posted to the USSF website and forwarded to all of the USSF email listserves in an effort to cast the net as widely as possible in order to ensure a diversity of programming. The original deadline for submitting the application for programming at the USSF was pushed back a number of times, for a number of reasons–technical difficulties, lack of clarity from instructions for how to submit, and of course, just a critical number of groups who did not get their applications in on time. By the end of May 2007, we had received more than 1,000 applications for programming.

No one in the Working Group had previously been a part of anything where a submission of over 1,000 applications had come in. So we decided to pool our collective wisdom to develop a system for reading through and approving–or not–all of the applications. We had a subcommittee of the Working Group that started out with about 6 people and, quite obviously due to necessity, grew to double that in a matter of weeks. These 12 committed (and crazy) people, from organizations that were local Atlanta-based, national, as well as grassroots, community groups from around the US, diligently read through each proposal, with the main focus being to ensure that the content of each was in line with what the USSF and other social forum processes–such as the Charter of Principals–stood for. We also sought some form of equilibrium within the approved submissions, such as ensuring that there was not an overwhelming amount of national organizations versus community-based organizations, and that there was gender, race, US regional, age and issue balance as much as possible.

Since the applications and proposals were being submitted electronically, the Program Working Group worked closely with the Tech Working Group of the USSF in order to ensure that we were getting the correct information in a timely manner, and also to create a function where we could let folks know that their application had been approved. Negotiations like this between different parts of the organizing infrastructure of the National Planning Committee and staff of the USSF helped to yield solutions to many of the issues and problems that came up during the application process. These instances of communication across work areas helped to make the overall programming of the USSF move forward, from June 27–July 1, 2007, seemingly without great fault to the untrained eye. Behind the scenes though, it was clear how much hard work, heavy lifting and rolling-up of sleeves it took to successfully plan the program of the USSF 2007.

No Axes or Themes, Just Tracks

Grouping the workshops was another heated discussion that brought us back to our earlier debate on cross-cutting themes. This time, however, we ended up

with a much easier solution. The idea of trying to categorize and group together each of the workshops was important to the Program Working Group. We knew from our own personal experiences of going to large events and gatherings that being able to see all of the workshops related to one area, such as immigration or war and militarization, would be extremely helpful for folks as they navigated through the USSF. This would allow them the opportunity to follow the track that they worked on, to see what other "new" tracks of information were available, and therefore to see when and where they were scheduled for.

After much back and forth about how we could group issues together, and after coming to the understanding that we would never be able to account for all of the issues that attendees of the USSF were bringing with them, we decided to settle on a list of tracks used at the World Social Forum in January 2007 in Nairobi, Kenya. A formidable list of tracks, we pared down the list and altered some of the terms so that they were more pertinent to US-based organizing. In the end, we created a workshop index that would allow participants of the USSF to flip to the back of their printed programs in order to see all of the programming related to things listed on the index and better make their way through the entire Forum.

Scheduling and placement of workshops:
Where is my magic wand?

Figuring out how to schedule the programs and where to locate them around the various venues that were being offered to us for workshops, training, plenaries, and more was quite a challenge. Not only did we feel the pressure to consider such things as size, timing, or nature of workshops, but we also had to be aware of whether or not an organizer of a workshop occurring in the morning in one location of Atlanta did not have another workshop to lead at the opposite side of town directly after their first workshop.

The placement of each of these programs was a precarious juggling act that included members of the national Program Working Group, but relied heavily on the actual placement and final tweaking that was carried out by local Atlanta organizers working on the USSF. The balance between the politics and the logistics of the programming were helped along by instances when a national organizer flew into Atlanta from Philadelphia for one day to work with local organizers on the initial synthesizing of workshop scheduling.

Final touches to the schedule were made by devoted local Atlanta organizers who poured over the schedule hour-by-hour in the days before the Forum began, with one unlucky yet committed individual locking himself in an office to get it done. The thousands of workshops, plenaries, trainings, films, presentations, cultural events of the US Social Forum would not have happened without these dedicated (and crazy) souls.

The Open Space Debate

The World Social Forum and other social forum processes have often been associated with the idea that they offer "open space" for organizing. Within the USSF, the questions related to open space organizing–what exactly it is, how best it is used–were difficult to answer. The Program Working Group grappled with this question continuously throughout the building of the program for the USSF.

One of the main issues for us around open space was whether or not having a planned program negates the intention of open space. This includes whether the planned program be organized in a way that is still open to alterations or natural changes by some people, or whether or not to have a very structured program, or one with absolutely no structure to it at all. At the heart of the discussion within the Working Group on open space organizing was the focus on allowing for the people at the USSF to construct the program for themselves, as much as possible. This happened through an open call for people who were rooted in and representing a community or organization to apply for programming at the USSF, including enough logistical information and background on their program.

The fact that the Working Group did not accept only about 40 of the over 1,000 application submissions for programming, speaks volumes to our commitment to making the first USSF as open a space as possible to allow for the many varied ideas, opinions, discussions, and information to be exchanged. Among the reasons why we did not accept the 40 or so applications was that they were submitted without enough information, such as a contact person, description of the workshop itself, or preference for day, location, or size. A handful of proposals dealt with elements that our pool of venues for programming could not accommodate–I'm specifically speaking of those that required an open flame for either a ritual or performance, or a large enough space to accommodate aerial arts (read: a trapeze, which would have been nice). Because of fire codes at most of our venues and their size, we recommended these programs to be unscheduled and part of an actual "open space" that we ended up designating, which meant that the person who submitted the application would have to work with others, be flexible and in short find a place to hold their event somewhere that did not interfere with what others at the USSF were doing.

As we move to the next United States Social Forum, the question of open space remains. Do we follow a process similar to what we used in 2007, noting the lessons learned? Do we structure the entire program ourselves and suffer the consequences later? Or do we toss it all aside and decide that to have a truly "open space" we must have NO pre-planned programming? While the answer is not yet clear, we do know that as organizers who participated in the planning of the Program of the first USSF, we have much lived experience to draw from that

will ensure that the next USSF's program will be just as good, if not move beyond the expectations that folks have in programming towards another world.

Programming in 2010 and Beyond

Among the many lessons we drew from the experience of organizing the program of the USSF, the deepest one was that there is a growing movement in the United States. The first USSF presented the need of another US and raised the question of whether or not we could create one. The people who showed up and participated in Atlanta answered that question with an astounding YES WE CAN!

While our government was busy managing the violent occupation of Iraq and the corporate pillaging of its resources; while our government was busy dismantling what little social safety net exists for poor people in this country; while our government was busy spending the money that could fix the levees in New Orleans on militarizing the border with Mexico, the people of this country were also busy–busy taking politics into their own hands, working together to make a different United States and to take our place hand in hand with the movements in the rest of the world demanding something better and more beautiful for ourselves and the generations to come.

This was neither the beginning of the social movement in the US nor its pinnacle. It is one bold step on the complicated collective journey that we are all on together. It is our hope that these reflections will help us all continue to chart our collective path towards the world that all our communities demand, and deserve. One that we've come to learn IS possible.

Chapter 5

Networking 'Another World':
Internet, Technology and the Social Forum

Alfredo Lopez, Co-Director of May First/People Link

...to get folks to think about technologists as a
part of the movement and not a means to an end."

–Josué Guillén (The Praxis Project)
Co-Chair, Communications Working Group

An event as remarkable and complex as the US Social Forum (USSF) was sure to present enormous opportunities and daunting challenges for all its organizers and participants. We at May First/People Link (MF/PL) knew that from the start. And as technology organizers, we knew that the USSF would inherit both the already complex and nuanced relationship our movements in this country have with technology and the dependence on technology that the social forum movement has had world-wide.

As Director of the Brecht Forum, Liz Mestres, who's been to other social forums, including the first in Brazil, put it: "The social forums could not have happened without the Internet and the technology. It would have been impossible."

In fact, in an important way, the social forum movement and the internet are the same development. Battered by decades of social, political and economic dysfunction and repressed in our attempts to carve out an antidote (often by ineffective or unwilling governments), humanity now returns to its roots. We are doing what we have always done since our inception as a species and doing what makes us distinct and successful: reaching out and collaborating.

We reach across the boundaries of nations, over the seemingly insurmountable walls of culture, across the deep and often treacherous oceans of conflict and pain in our specific histories. We turn our backs on all that to focus on what's important and what's at stake: our survival.

And we have built the Internet. We built this technology ourselves: nurturing and using it, making it popular, improving and growing it...massive networks of people (many of whom have never met) in every continent, working together often without pay or compensation of any kind other than to have done it.

And we use it–1.4 billion of us–and in the process of using it we communicate in ways we never have up to now. We are able to tell each other more about ourselves, to show ourselves, to report on our lives every day, to share our ideas. We are able to listen and to share the lives of others: a greater number of others than ever before in places we have never seen.

And it has changed our lives and it is impossible for us to return to the way things were before it. We are, all of us, part of a huge movement thrusting forward into this "other world" the social forum talks about and trying, clumsily, chaotically and inconsistently, to do it together as a world. The Internet is, among so much else, clear proof that "another world is possible."

So it's easy to understand the immediate relationship between the USSF and technology: from the very start, USSF organizing relied on the now accepted protocols like email and mail lists and websites. The reliance on those tools to reach out, announce intentions and begin planning was automatic; at this point in our history, our use of these things isn't a choice, it's an automatic response.

But the challenge for technology organizers at the USSF went much farther than those activities. The real issue was how our movements would incorporate the use of technology, not only to realize this event, but to enhance it and imbue it with the fundamentally democratic culture that on-line technology represents.

Less than a year before the Forum, May First/People Link attended one of the early northeast regional US social forum meetings in Massachusetts. Inspired by what we experienced, we reached out to our network of progressive techies, inviting them to the first NYC meeting about the USSF in October and after the meeting we discussed ways to support the organizing effort.

Several weeks later, when Josué Guillén became Communications Committee Chair, we learned that very little had been done to prepare the technology for this social forum. The website was under-developed. One person was in charge of all of it and little thought had been given to how to integrate basic functions like registration and program scheduling into the website.

While it was clear to us that technology would be critical to this event and would help define its character and democracy, the leadership had given precious little attention to this area of the forum. Given that much of our movement doesn't see that communications technology itself represents a struggle for control of our society and culture and therefore needs to be addressed politically, that didn't surprise us. But it was grounds for concern.

There was a vacuum and we wanted to address that problem in the best way politically. Josué Guillén puts it best: "We didn't move to fill the vacuum; we organized into it."

Once the commitment was made, the challenge was clearly defined: how do you organize the technology of a social forum?

Organizing the Tech Team

> "It was an amazing experience, actually. It was totally collaborative. I learned a lot and helped others learn. It was a bit high pressure at times, but that was actually a good thing–it really fostered and fueled that collaboration."
>
> *–Michelle Murrain*

There are progressive technologists all over this country. They work individually or in small collectives, often isolated from each other and always grappling with the problem of how to provide our movements with the technology they need to do their work.

The normal reaction of a provider or shop would have been to take on the entire task–like a project or job. But that approach would have cheated us of the opportunity the USSF provided us: to unify those technologists into a coordinated team that would not only serve the technology needs of the social forum, but would influence and help guide its planning and use of the technology so that the event would be as open and participatory as possible.

At the same time, that kind of "team approach" would enrich techies' politics and provide a different Internet experience, which contradicted the normal isolation and would bring them into the movement as organizers.

At that point, this was no longer a May First/People Link effort; it belonged to a committed and involved network of progressive technologists. Responding to a call we made over the Internet, a group of techies began meeting and planning. Eventually over 30 technologists nationwide began using a series of on-line meetings and mail lists to plan an approach and work with all the teams involved in organizing the forum to discuss that approach and the forum's needs.

This group, called the Information and Communications Technology (ICT) work group, met every Sunday, for six months, on-line using chat software. Throughout the planning and development work, the group stressed the importance of using Free and Open Source Software (FOSS) as both a political statement and the most effective way of keeping these processes open and unencumbered. That was among its first decisions.

The group's first practical task was, of course, the USSF website. After some discussion, the ICT group decided to use Drupal, one of the Internet's most popular and powerful content management systems, as the website's foundation. But even at that early stage, we all realized that Drupal's default "out of the box" configuration wouldn't come close to meeting this event's needs. It was clear that the site would have to take on the awesome task of registering everyone coming to the social forum as well as most of the logistical communications and data storage, not to mention the promotion and mobilization to the event itself.

Working individually and in mini-teams, the ICT team worked to make all that happen with the development of dozens of specially-designed "scripts" (or mini-programs) for the site and as many customized displays. The site, of course, is still on-line. But where do you put a site that is going to do all that? Not only would the site be busy, but the various development platforms needed to write and prepare all that programming would have to live on some server. Sharing a server with other websites just wasn't a practical solution.

The ICT team provided the social forum with its own server (at MF/PL) and put the public site, all the development sites and all the databases required to run those sites on that server. As we saw later on, without its own server, the social forum's website would have crashed under stress and traffic.

A particularly challenging task for that website was registration. This was a lot more than just signing people up. While individuals could register simply, organizations were allowed to register large numbers of people (starting from the moment they registered to during the actual forum). This meant that the program had to be flexible enough to track who at an organization had registered, allow additional registrations, and allow for changes and deletions.

To complicate things further, registration costs money and that money had to be collected on-line during that registration process. When you realize that this was being done for over 10,000 people who needed to be confident that the data on participants and payments was being collected flawlessly, you get a picture of how daunting this was.

A team of techies from the ICT group took that task on and developed a system that fit the USSF perfectly. The source code was, following the FOSS policy, open to anyone and has been shared with several organizers who've requested it in the intervening year. Similarly complex systems were developed and put into place for event proposals. There were over a thousand of them and the program committee (which made decisions on approvals) needed an on-line system that would allow people to describe their event fully and then allow the Committee to review and approve events.

The logistics committee then needed a system to schedule those events and to display the event schedules before and during the forum. Working in teams, the ICT work group did all that and the way we approached it allowed the various other work groups to be as open as possible with approvals and sensitive to particular event sponsors' needs in doing scheduling and venue selection.

The ICT team developed other features like a ride board for people seeking and offering transportation, a section for housing, and numerous other resources. While all this work represents an impressive achievement by the ICT team, the most important achievement was its relationship with the rest of the staff and leadership of the social forum. From the start, the Techie/Organizers communi-

cated constantly with each of the special committees and the National Planning Committee (through the Communications Work Group). The team published all meeting notes, decisions, discussions and just about everything we did publicly on the web site, operating in a truly transparent way, seeking to anchor our work to the social forum's democratic culture and to expand that democracy. But the real challenges were to come and no one could have predicted how powerful they were.

Wiring the Forum

As much as the Internet played a critical role in organizing the Forum, its major role was during the Forum itself. All the organizing falls flat if the event doesn't run smoothly. When you get 10,000 people together for over 900 events in a five-day period, the array of logistical and organizational issues is stunning; and here is where the collaboration of techies nationwide paid off.

Under the leadership of Atlanta-based techie and organizer Aaron Ruscetta, the ICT team borrowed nearly 100 computers (from many different sources around the Atlanta area). Atlanta-based activist Barry Weinstock used his extensive contacts and worked tirelessly to acquire those inexpensive recycled computers, storage systems and the delivery trucks that brought them to the Center. Working with Aaron, Brian Pitts engineered a highly efficient method for installing Open Source software and Linux operating systems that allowed a dozen volunteers to prep, test and pack nearly 100 systems in just one afternoon; and then network those computers into several connected networks that were also connected to the Internet. "It was," Aaron says, "one of my proudest moments."

The on-line registration system handled over 10,000 registrations, check-ins and other interactions by participants. It's important to remember that this was happening on a server located in New York. It was all done over the Internet from Atlanta.

The program and scheduling sections of the site, used by participants throughout the event, allowed event organizers to post vital information and then edit and amend it...all on line.

Participants blogged about the USSF providing both commentary and reporting on their own activities and experiences. Additionally, since blogging started before the forum's opening, participants were sharing their local and regional activities (both on the forum and in their various struggles).

A particularly difficult challenge was the Media Justice Center (MJC). Our tech team worked for three days straight setting up nearly 40 computers for use by media people in on-line writing, video and audio storage and transmission, and many other media-related tasks. Over 350 media workers registered at the MJC.

To make this happen we had to not only connect all those computers in networks that were Internet connected, but install various pieces of special software

to make the video storage and transmission work possible. That's when the techies started flooding in. People with tech skills from all over the country began presenting themselves: stopping ICT members as we were buzzing around the venues, tracking us down in the MJC, emailing and cell phoning us–all offering their support and asking what we needed done.

There was no shortage of work and our job of assigning people in an organized way was made easier by the willingness of dozens of technologists–some of whom had actually hitchhiked across the country–to do whatever was necessary. They improved software, tested computers, wired rooms and participated in the planning and evaluation discussions that are always a major component of any wiring project of this size.

These "volunteers" ranged from progressive techie veterans like Michelle Murrain–who said "...mostly I volunteered at the Forum, primarily helping to set up the servers for the Media Center"–to young techies from as far away as Hawaii. Thanks to these people, we got everything ready. During the days before the social forum team members met, divided tasks, discussed eventualities and felt we were ready for anything. We also noticed a potential problem.

A couple of days before the forum was to launch, we noticed that the website had slowed down appreciably under pre-event registration and began a discussion of what that meant. We came to the conclusion that this site would crash under the load it was about to take on. Our tech team worked all night right before the forum to split the database portion of the Drupal installation from the site itself: a solution that returned the site to peak performance. There was no recurrence of the latency throughout the forum. If I'm an indicator, we thought our problems were over, although we were conscious that nightmares could arise. We had no idea that our worst one was about to occur.

Protecting the Forum

On the morning of the social forum, about a half hour before registration was to commence, the website went off-line. Clearly, that kind of problem would not only have crippled registration at the social forum but it would have cast the kind of pall no event of this size needs.

With cell phone communications ripping back and forth between Josué and techie Ana Willem at the registration area and several of us at the MJC (where we were still setting up), we worked against an impossible deadline to figure out what was wrong. Jamie McClelland realized that a router operated by Bell South, which was handling traffic between the social forum and the Internet server running the registration system in New York, was misconfigured or malfunctioning and was dropping all traffic. In short, Bell South blocked the computer networks at the forum and prevented them from reaching the registration system.

While we'll never know if this was intentional or incompetence, it was clear that something had to be done and we couldn't rely on this corporation to do it. Working with techie Daniel Kahn Gillmor, Jamie came with a radical idea of re-routing all Internet traffic around the faulty Bell South router. MF/PL had a server in Delaware that was reachable without going through the broken Bell South router, but the question was how to do it.

Daniel came up with the solution and worked, under intense pressure, for the next 15 minutes to make it happen. When they were finished, all traffic to the US Social Forum website stopped being sent directly to New York. Instead, it was rerouted to our Delaware server as if that server was hosting the site. That server, which wasn't hosting anything related to the Forum, transparently forwarded all requests from Delaware to New York where the site actually lived. Although the Internet was designed to route around problems such as the one we were facing, we did not have access to the Bell South routers that needed to be reconfigured to go around the faulty connection. We needed an alternative, nonstandard way to reroute traffic, one that we could implement ourselves, without relying on Bell South. So, during the first hour and a half of the social forum, registration staff in Atlanta were going to the wrong server looking for the website and being rerouted from that remote location to NYC to get to the site. We circumvented Bell South's troublesome router.

I dwell on this because this was, for me, a moment of great pride in the ICT team. We were there to make sure that the event could use the Internet and, when confronted with the power of a corporate system effectively blocking that, our people figured out a way around it. Registration opened and proceeded flawlessly and, after 90 minutes of that challenge, Bell South's router suddenly reconfigured and we returned to normal functioning. The system never had a problem after that.

Making Technology Disappear

Techies look at success in a peculiar way: a successful technology is one people don't notice.

In fact, when people notice systems most is when they fail or don't meet expectations. But at the social forum, the idea was not for the technology's seamlessness to hide it, but to reveal its power and potential and allow it to deepen the forum's democratic culture.

The key to that was to deepen and increase the interaction people had with the system. For example, if someone walked in and wasn't registered, that person was immediately sent by the registrar to one of the banks of registration computers through which people could self-register. With the help of a techie assigned to that area, people went on line and registered themselves, spending a fraction of

the normal time, avoiding lines, learning a bit about the Internet, and getting some self-confidence in its use.

"Watching the huge line of attendees move smoothly through the registration process because of an online system that *we* built was exhilarating," Josué Guillén remembers, "The tech team was amazing! So many people contributing so much of their time, their expertise, was remarkable." All participants were able to arrange their schedules, get information about events and resources and generally communicate with each other through that website and its various sections and pages.

For the first time in history, USSF participants blogged about the social forum while it was going on, providing real coverage of the event for those who were not there and sparking discussion and reflection among those who were. Critical to raising Internet consciousness was, of course, doing that among the event's organizers. There is no question that social forum organizers deepened their understanding of technology's critical role as they saw what it could do and how it was, in the end, an organizing project in and of itself. This was no small task because our movements' culture in the US continues to rely on the face-to-face work that has been the mainstay of organizing for this country's entire history. In that culture, it's easy to view the Internet as just another tool and to take it for granted. No one who worked on the USSF will ever take interacting on-line for granted again.

Daniel Kahn Gillmor intejected: "Initially, the leadership seemed to want a typical 'contractor' relationship to the tech team–while the tech team saw it as more of a mutual organizing activity. Since the whole theory of the forum was 'another world is possible,' I was pleased that the leadership seemed to mostly come around to seeing the merits of approaching tech work like they'd approach any other communication opportunity. I felt that by the start of the forum itself, the tech team got good respect from leadership and other forum participants, in spite of the tension and stress inherent in the process."

What It All Means

The USSF was a phenomenal success in many ways. Its use of technology is certainly among those. An event of this type is part of history and part of the historical development of a movement, a country and, in the end, an entire humanity. Humanity is always moving forward. It's sometimes difficult to perceive that forward movement but, in the cracks and crevices of culture, in the fabric of social relations and in the often foggy environment of our movements, if you look close enough, it's there.

Perhaps the greatest measure of success for an event of this type is how well it is able to perceive that forward movement, capture it, and create an environ-

ment that peels away those things that blind us to how well we are doing and brings our successes and our strengths into relief.

One of our greatest strengths is this thing we call the Internet, this remarkable movement we've created based on using this simple and powerful technology; and the USSF certainly demonstrated its power and importance.

By that measure of success, the USSF was among the most successful events in modern US history. As Daniel put it: "We can have a world where our ability to communicate with one another is controlled by a few profit-minded corporations, or we can work to build a community-engaged communications network that brings people together with goals of justice, equality, and liberty. That other world is possible, but if we just go with the default options offered by the large infotech corps, we won't get there. So I think the role of tech in future USSFs is a large one."

Chapter 6

You Can't Spell Fundraising Without F-U-N:
The Resource Mob, the Non-Profit Industrial Complex, and the USSF

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This chapter is dedicated to Rolando Lopez who passed away in April 2008. Originally from Guatemala, Rolando was an organizer and supporter of social movements throughout the world for decades. He dedicated the most recent years of his life on the question of mobilizing resources for the World Social Forum. He will be sorely missed. *¡Rolando Presente!*

> "By December 2006, it became abundantly clear that we were no longer fundraising. We were building community support and organizing resources... In a grassroots movement, every dollar, every in-kind donation, every voice counts as an invaluable resource."
>
> –*from* Our Grassroots Are Green, USSF Program

Among the many interesting, inspiring, and sometimes funny subplots of the U.S. Social Forum, funding and resourcing the effort turned out to be one of the more compelling stories. The USSF was one of the largest multi-racial, multi-sectoral gatherings of progressive activists in the U.S. in a generation. The organizing process took three years and was driven primarily by grassroots, primarily people-of-color-led, community-based organizations with few resources. Yet the USSF proved that it is possible for these forces to mobilize people and resources on a grand scale. There are important lessons in this experience for U.S. movements. It could also have implications for the overall practice of resource mobilization for other social forums.

Historical Context: The World Social Forum

Within the World Social Forum (WSF) process, the question of resource mobilization has become hotly debated and is approaching a critical point. Recent

WSFs (Porto Alegre 2005, Bamako and Karachi 2006, Nairobi 2007) experienced deficits. As of 2008, the $1.5 million deficit from WSF 2005 in Porto Alegre is barely at the point of being alleviated. The "Polycentric WSF" was held in 3 cities: Bamako, Mali; Karachi, Pakistan; and Caracas, Venezuela. The Venezuela SF narrowly avoided a deficit by an apparent government bailout by the state and federal governments.[1]

The debates surrounding the resourcing of the social Forum process breakdown into a few fundamental tensions:

- **Cost and scale**–WSFs grew exponentially from 2001 to 2005, with budgets ballooning from roughly $450,000 for the first WSF to a whopping $8.3 million in 2005. Income from registration fees hovered around half a million U.S. dollars every year beginning in 2002, meaning that the WSF devolved to be steadily less self-sufficient over time.

- **Funding sources**–To what extent can the social Forum process remain autonomous from governments, corporations and neoliberal institutions? A number of arguments have flared up in recent years over the sources of funds and determining which are politically acceptable. In Nairobi the role of corporations in sponsoring and managing registration and in providing costly food -services generated protests and violent repression by the government. In Brazil, groups are debating whether the state-owned oil company Petrobras should be allowed to contribute to the 2009 WSF. Private foundations Ford and Rockefeller were specifically excluded from providing funding to the WSF in India due to their political histories in that country. Organizers have also questioned the role of Left governments in financing the WSF over – concerned that of the forums remaining as an autonomous space for the movements.

- **Decision-making**–The bulk of fundraising responsibilities for each event falls on local organizing committees whose capacity is often stretched thin to coordinate the range of organizing needs for the Forum. A Resources Commission (RC) has also been established within the WSF International Council (IC) tasked with the responsibility of raising funds for the global IC process. Decisions, accountability and responsibilities are often cloudy between the international and local bodies. Tensions have also been emerging between the RC and the broader IC. The IC makes logistical and program decisions based on political considerations (not always using clear political criteria) often without considering the financial implications. For instance, the IC will

> choose the site of its meetings because of the political impact it might have on the host site, or to build relationships with areas that are under-represented in the WSF. These decisions are usually passed on to the RC, which then bears the responsibility to raise the resources for the meeting, yet is challenged by the reality of the financial limits.[2]

In 2006, the IC commissioned a report by Rolando Lopez, Theo van Koolwijk, and Nandita Shah, to explore the financial dilemma of the WSF. Interviewing organizers, funders and others, the authors concluded that "In the absence of a proper and coherent strategy, the biggest risk being faced in this period is to run the few well known sources dry, trigger donor fatigue and frustration, exacerbate internal contradictions, and fail to detect and recognize emerging capacities and opportunities."

Ultimately, all of the struggles of the global justice movement come down to the question of resources. Whether the issue is environment, housing, or workers rights, power is determined by who controls and manages resources. Yet we often find that the responsibility for raising the resources for social forums or other movement efforts are treated more as an adjunct to the overall organizing effort. RCs of social forums are usually small and, in the case of the WSF, are primarily held by a committed core of non-governmental organizations (NGOs), which may have access to resources both within their own institutions and to other donors and funders. There is very little participation from the social movement sector, opening a communication breach that exacerbates tensions among the NGOs (who focus on policy and research and often lack a base, but typically have greater access to resources) and the social movement organizations (that tend to be under-funded but represent mass bases of workers, peasants, or community constituents.)

This disconnect between political direction, organizing and the mobilization of resources is unnecessary and potentially destructive. Few issues have divided and destroyed political movements like the question of resources. Coming to grips with this question as will be critical for social movements to advance politically.

The USSF

The USSF introduced a new set of challenges to the question of resourcing social forums. The NPC broke with social forum tradition by selecting a site in a politically conservative region within a nationally oppressive climate. Historically, progressive local, regional and federal governments have donated up to 1/3 of the finances for the WSFs and often provide critical venues and infrastructure. Porto Alegre was chosen as the original WSF host city to highlight a an important model of governance and people's power that was gaining momentum in southern Brazil.

The Participatory Budget project had empowered tens of thousands of residents to participate in municipal budget priorities and redistribute wealth in the city. Porto Alegre could also count on the support of local, state (and in later years federal) governments. This was largely due to the influence of the powerful Brazilian Workers Party.

Atlanta, however, is in the heart of the reactionary state of Georgia, which has been a legislative laboratory to attack the rights of workers, women, gays and people of color. In 2007, the Mayor of Atlanta, Shirley Franklin, was progressive, and proved critical in negotiations later in the USSF organizing process, particularly around questions of security and infrastructure.

Federal government support under the George W. Bush regime was clearly not even a consideration. In the post 9/11 environment, the U.S. federal government made available huge subsidies for state and local governments to build up anti-terrorism forces, intelligence and infrastructure. Municipal police forces like Atlanta's took full advantage of these subsidies and were anxious to flex their new military muscle. Negotiations over security were constantly tense between Forum organizers and local police throughout the USSF.[3]

Furthermore, in 2005, the NPC set guidelines that would limit the sources of funding for the process. These political choices were the result of past history in the social movements of the U.S. and sought to protect the political autonomy of the USSF:

- The USSF Planning Committee will accept funding donations from foundations & grassroots sources. *(The Fundraising Working Group will develop criteria for foundation money.)*

- The USSF Planning Committee will accept in-kind donations from state or local government sources. *(If there are good reasons and no strings attached.)*

- The USSF will NOT accept the following types of funding: federal or state cash funding, federal in-kind donations, corporate funding, or corporate in-kind donations [4]

The Grassroots Sector and the Non-profit Industrial Complex

The original USSF Coordinating Committee, later the NPC, agreed that the USSF would first be built around the grassroots organizing sector. The NPC and working groups would start with organizations building constituencies in poor and working class communities of color and Indigenous communities. There was acknowledgement that these constituencies must be central to social change in the U.S.:

> {We} Believe the U.S. Social Forum should place the highest priority on groups that are actually doing grassroots organizing with working class people of color, who are training organizers, building long-term structures of resistance, and who can work well with other groups, seeing their participation in USSF as building the whole, not just their part of it...
> {We} Believe the U.S. social forum must be a place where the voices of those who are most marginalized and oppressed from native communities can be heard–a place that will recognize native peoples, their issues and struggles. [5]

Often, however, these communities are excluded from and distrustful of national, liberal white-led political processes. Most of these organizations and communities also had little or no knowledge of the WSF. The Grassroots Global Justice Alliance (GGJ)[6] organized several delegations of grassroots organizations to the WSF to build greater awareness among grassroots groups of the WSF and the overall Global Justice Movement.

Ultimately the NPC's focus on the grassroots sector resulted in one of the most racially diverse forums to date.[7] This political orientation, however, had implications in terms of fundraising. There was skepticism by funders that a process of this scale could be led by organizations led primarily by people of color, who in many cases, represented memberships of a few hundred people.

In the U.S. there is an emerging debate about the growth of grassroots, nonprofit organizations and their dependency on private foundation support.[8] Some are arguing that reliance on foundations is compromising the politics of the social movements in the U.S. and has created a competitive environment that further divides the movements. Few would argue that the foundation dependency is healthy, however, funding to social change organizations is a fraction of overall philanthropic giving, and grassroots groups are severely under-resourced in relation to charity, educational and service organizations. Even in terms of progressive causes foundations primarily support endeavors such as liberal policy groups, think tanks or national mobilizing efforts that do not help to build a sustained local base. Race and class dynamics also play a role with white-led organizations receiving the bulk of foundation funding for progressive organizing. Groups building a base in poor and working-class communities of color typically struggle to get by on small budgets and year-to-year commitments.

The grassroots sector is challenged by its own history as well. In 2002, class and racial divisions played out in the Second National Environmental Justice Summit in Washington D.C., marking the decline of one of the most significant multiracial national movements in decades. In 2004, the Northwest Social Forum was

cancelled within two weeks of the event as the Indigenous and Youth Committees pulled out of the organizing process. There was a level of skepticism about overcoming the fractured state of U.S. social movements, particularly among a largely divided grassroots sector.

The NPC also was deliberate that the global justice "stars" would not lead this event. Plenaries would feature organizers and grassroots leaders engaged in the struggles and presenting theories and analyses based on practice and organizing challenges. Funders familiar with the GJM were reluctant to invest in a process that did not include the big name international celebrities. Several funders also wanted to see the organizations and sectors that they saw as critical to making change in the U.S.–often these were policy organizations rooted in Washington D.C. "beltway" politics.

Making it Happen

Despite the many limitations and challenges, raising resources for the USSF became one of the greatest achievements of the grassroots movement in the U.S.. It was clear early on that the USSF would be built from the political will of the movement to make it happen. The Forum process was carried on the backs of the grassroots organizations, that made huge financial, personnel, and political commitments, often sacrificing local priorities for the national effort.

One of the cornerstone strategies of the USSF resource mobilization was organizational sponsorship. From 2005, organizations were asked to raise and contribute resources to the organizing effort. NPC members were asked to raise $5000 per year for three years. This strategy was rooted in the principle that raising resources for the USSF was a collective responsibility. For some groups who were considering joining the NPC, however, the organizational contribution was viewed as a "pay to play" requirement. They interpreted the strategy as an annual membership fee of $5,000, which meant that only well-resourced organizations would be able to participate on the NPC. Few NPC organizations raised the annual $5,000 contributions, but organizational sponsorships carried the USSF through its early stages. In-kind support was also a huge factor. Groups covered their own travel, costs of conference calls, translation services, mailers and staff time.

The USSF had only one paid staff person beginning in January, 2006 when the NPC hired Alice Lovelace as Lead Staff Organizer (LSO). Later that year the Atlanta office of the America Friends Service Committee (AFSC) donated office space, phone, copying and other services. Christina Repoley of the Atlanta AFSC office was also assigned to work part-time as support staff. In February of 2007, Heather Milton-Lightening was hired as the Native American Outreach Coordinator, which proved crucial to Native American participation. As resources came

in late in the process, coordinators were hired to lead some of the key logistical aspects of the forum.

In October of 2007, a number of NPC organizations committed full-time staff to coordinate the national effort including Miami Workers Center (MWC), Labor Community Strategy Center (LCSC) in Los Angeles, Praxis Project and National Jobs with Justice (JwJ) in Washington, D.C., Southwest Workers Union (SWU) in San Antonio, TX, SouthWest Organizing Project (SWOP) in Albuquerque, NM, the National Network for Immigrant and Refugee Rights in Oakland, CA, the Independent Progressive Politics Network, AFSC and GGJ. This adjunct staff was critical in coordinating the final stretch of the organizing process. Some of these organizations were already contributing a number of staff people's time. Project South had all five staff working at the local, regional and national levels. SWU, MWC and Project South were key in organizing regional forums. These groups also sent staff to Atlanta weeks (in some cases as much as two months) in advance of the Forum to function as support staff.

A solidly committed team of organizations and individuals made up the Atlanta Organizing Committee (AOC), which anchored the local effort. "Atlanta, like the rest of the South, operates on relationships," said Alice Lovelace, "Because people knew and trusted each other, they were willing to dig deep and give of their own resources, then reached out to friends to provide what else we needed. People donated time, money, office space, supplies, printing, paid for conference calls…, the list is endless. The Atlanta Organizing Committee played a heroic part in making the USSF possible."[9]

A supportive core of small progressive funders gave small grants, particularly Jessie Smith Noyes, Solidago, Panta Rhea and Car Eth foundations. Initially GGJ served as the fiscal sponsor for the event. Later this responsibility was transferred to Project South, the local anchor organization in Atlanta.[10] The two organizations anchored the Fundraising (later Resource Mobilization) Working Group (more affectionately known as the Resource Mob).

Throughout the process the Resource Mob suffered from a lack of consistent involvement and capacity. Like all of the USSF working groups, participation was open to anyone interested in doing the work. Monthly conference calls would be held, but rarely would more than 6 people be on the calls–often a completely different set of people from previous calls. This made it extremely difficult for the group to develop any cohesion or collective practice.

In January of 2006, Will Cordery of Project South introduced a four-pronged strategy to raise resources to a southern regional meeting in Atlanta, GA: 1) grassroots fundraising including passing the hat at activities, registration and materials sales, 2) organizational support–mainly in-kind and financial contributions from organizers and participants, 3) major donors and 4) foundations. Responsibilities to coor-

dinate each of these strategies were divided between Resource Mob members, but the lack of consistent follow-through limited the effectiveness of the strategies.

The Road to Atlanta: Regional Experiences

In 2006 a number of regional and local social forums were convened. Three were organized by NPC member organizations utilizing the same principles and organizing approach used by the NPC: the Southeast Social Forum (SESF) held in Durham, North Carolina, the Border Social Forum (BSF) held in Ciudad Juarez, Mexico (across from El Paso, Texas), and the Washington D.C. Metro Social Forum. Other forums were also organized independently of the national process, though efforts were made to communicate and coordinate. The NPC had decided that the national USSF would not fund the regional efforts, but that each regional organizing committee would raise resources independently.

The SESF in June of 2006 was a turning point in the overall organizing process of the USSF. Over 700 people convened at the historic Black college of North Carolina Central University in Raleigh, and the Hayti Community Center. The great majority were people of color, primarily Latinos and Blacks. Grassroots organizations turned out constituencies ranging from homeless people from urban Atlanta, to farm workers in south Florida, to taxi drivers in Alexandria, Virginia. The energy was inspiring. "We've reached a critical moment..." said Stephanie Guilloud of Project South, "What we saw is that people are willing to engage and confront the edges that have kept us apart." [11]

The SESF was critical because it demonstrated that people were ready to overcome historical divisions and to approach movement building across sectors, regions, ethnicities and issues. There was a sense of urgency and an acknowledgment that approaches to movement building needed to change to overcome our current national and international challenges. It also demonstrated that the social forum model was an effective vehicle for bringing together a broad array of forces.

The SESF was also successful because of the model of resource mobilization that organizers implemented. According to Will Cordery, "Foundations did not contribute until the end, when we demonstrated that the process was already self-sufficient." Early registration, organizational support and donor contributions anchored the organizing process through its early stages. By the time of the SESF foundation support would only enhance the program of the forum that was already in motion. This later proved to be the case for the USSF as well.

The Border Social Forum (BSF) in October 2006 was also a tremendous success, building on the momentum of the SESF. The BSF was held in Ciudad Juarez, bringing together groups primarily from northern Mexico, the U.S. South-

west and South. Very rich and dynamic dialogues about strengthening Black-Brown relations carried over from the SESF. The international character was emphasized as press came from Telesur and national Mexican newspapers. Indymedia organized a media center that would broadcast activities and interviews as they happened.

There were significant challenges to raising resources for the BSF. Unlike the SESF, the BSF drew more on outside than local sources for funds. The BSF relied heavily on in-kind support from groups on the organizing committee, particularly Southwest Workers Union, who sent full-time staff from San Antonio, TX, and ultimately the Medical University in Ciudad Juarez, which donated the use of the campus to host the event.

The significance of both of the forums was that they generated excitement and momentum for the national effort. Suddenly grassroots organizations that were unfamiliar with the social forum process or were skeptical about it began to take an interest. The NPC also expanded at that time with new grassroots organizations coming on board, bringing a whole new range of relationships into the effort. Foundations also started to take notice, as grantees increasingly approached them for support to attend the USSF.

March Madness

Despite the success of the regional forums, by March of 2007, four months before the start date of June 27, barely $79,000 was left in the bank of a total $159,000 raised. The USSF had a projected total budget of $1.5 million.[12] The bulk of the funds raised had come from organizations and early registration.

The USSF was facing a severe financial crisis. This began to heighten tensions that had been brewing on the NPC for several months. At this point, the NPC had not secured the venues and meeting spaces for the event. At the beginning of the organizing process a number of possibilities were explored as host sites, including universities and the several historic Black colleges in Atlanta. Alice Lovelace and the Local Logistics Committee (LLC) were not able to secure a site, however, as negotiations for promising options fell through. Eventually they were able to reserve the Atlanta Civic Center (ACC), but this would still not provide enough of the facilities needed for an event of at least 10,000 people. Alice and the LLC moved quickly to make agreements with as many available venues within a seven block radius of the ACC. The few remaining options with capacity at that time were the resort hotels of the Westin and the Marriott. The Westin was also the only unionized hotel in downtown Atlanta.

Each of the hotels required contracts guaranteeing that a certain number of hotel rooms would be booked. By March of 2007, it was not clear whether the USSF would be able to rent all of the available rooms. Despite the fact that steep

discounts had been negotiated and the hotels eased requirements on the number of occupants per room, commitments from organizations to attend the USSF fell far short of the capacity of the hotels.

Potential liability for the USSF was looming as a likely possibility and NPC organizations became reluctant to sign the contracts with the hotels to guarantee the meeting spaces. At one point NPC members tried to address the issue by developing a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU). The MOU was designed to encourage collective responsibility for the financial consequences of the USSF. Several NPC organizations declined to sign the document, however, interpreting the MOU as legally binding to share in financial liabilities if there was a deficit. For smaller, grassroots groups, the specter of owning a debt of thousands of dollars was daunting.

A Rallying Cry for the Movement

At the March, 2007 meeting of the NPC in Chicago, IL, the NPC abandoned the MOU and took measures that proved to be significant not just for the resource mobilization effort, but for the organizing project as a whole. The NPC adopted three critical approaches.

First was to strip the budget to its absolute bare essentials. Operating on a scenario that the NPC would not raise another dime, the budget was reduced to the amount of money that was on hand. The roughly $80,000 was prioritized for staff and basic infrastructure–venues, staging, lighting, the absolute necessities for the USSF to take place. The NPC also went through a voting process to determine additional priorities if more money were raised. Translation services were at the top of this list, followed by communications.

The second step was for each of the NPC members to commit to mobilize resources. Gihan Perera of the Miami Workers Center and Stephanie Guilloud of Project South developed a tool to facilitate this. Instead of the MOU, they developed a form that allowed each NPC member to set individual fundraising goals and identify specific sources of income. This incorporated the four resource mobilization strategies. Groups would list which funders and donors they would speak to, how much they would raise through grassroots fundraising efforts and what their overall organizational commitment would be to raise. This took the organizational sponsorship model to another level, and resulted in commitments from NPC organizations to raise an additional $186,000. The "bare bones" budget was therefore adjusted to a total of roughly $250,000.

The third approach was to agree to a "deficit resolution plan". NPC members gave a specific figure for the amount of money they would contribute to help alleviate a deficit.[13] With the collective commitment of the NPC, Project South felt confident enough to sign the contract with the Westin Hotel. Sister Song Women

of Color Reproductive Health Collective took responsibility to sign the contract for the Marriott.

The subsequent 12 weeks became an historic and inspiring effort to mobilize resources. The financial crisis became a rallying cry for the movement. The message was that foundations were not going to fund this effort and that it would only happen if the movement made it happen. Organizations began to take ownership of the process. Soon creative initiatives emerged around the country as people began to come together in cities and regions and develop their own strategies to mobilize resources. Groups in the San Francisco Bay Area committed to help raise money to contribute to the translation services. Drives were organized to encourage early registration and organizations were asked to pay at the highest end of the sliding scale. GGJ organized an early registration day, phone-banking member organizations to register online on a specific date. Others pooled resources to charter buses from Chicago, South Florida and the Northeast. The most ambitious effort was the Peoples Freedom Caravan, beginning in Albuquerque and stopping in half a dozen cities throughout the Southwest and South on its way to Atlanta. As organizations registered, they were also asked to donate volunteer time. The USSF logged over 2000 volunteer hours during the event.

By June, foundations saw a moving train that they should jump on, and began to move money. At this point they were receiving hundreds of requests from grantees for support to attend the USSF and began to make travel scholarships available. Eventually several committed general support to cover the costs for the forum itself.

End Results and Lessons Learned

The USSF raised roughly $1 million dollars. Registration fees for the USSF alone generated roughly $340,000. Fifty-four percent of the money came from non-foundation sources. Organizational sponsors contributed over $100,000 in cash (beyond what they paid in registration). The balance of income came from materials sales, rental of sales booth space and individual contributions. The last foundation grant for the USSF arrived in December 2007, six months after the event. These figures do not account for the enormous in-kind contributions of the NPC, the AOC and others. The USSF developed a form for organizations to document their in-kind support, but few groups filled it out. One organization that did, AFSC, alone accounted for $50,000. If the total in-kind support was registered, it would easily amount to hundreds of thousands of dollars.

The USSF experience raised important lessons for social movements in the U.S. The USSF showed us that there is great capacity for the grassroots sector to raise significant resources from non-foundation sources. MoveOn.org and the Presidential campaign of Barack Obama are tapping the enormous potential of

online fundraising. This potential has not carried over to national efforts organized with a particular focus for mobilizing poor and working class people of color. The USSF demonstrated capacity of the grassroots sector to mobilize on a grand scale and to think collectively about raising resources in a non-competitive manner.

The approaches developed by the NPC at the 11th hour proved critical. Out of necessity these were rooted in some basic, common sense principles:

- **Spend what we have**–be prepared to strip the budget to its bare essentials. The NPC did not establish a policy to have no deficit, but a commonly agreed to plan on how to address a potential deficit helped instill confidence and trust in the group.

- **Socializing costs and priorities**–In the Chicago meeting the NPC used an exercise in which each organization would write one priority on five separate pieces of paper. These served as ballots to define the collective will of the group. The tool that was developed to clearly articulate the resource commitments of NPC members was also crucial.

- **Creativity and resourcefulness**–the environment that was created after the March meeting sparked incredible initiatives that inspired and challenged the NPC and many others for the final four month stretch toward the event.

- **Resource mobilization is central to an organizing strategy, not an adjunct to it**–once the full NPC took ownership of raising resources, the process moved much more effectively. Resourcing the USSF became a campaign in itself and a symbol of the broader movement challenge for self-sufficiency and autonomy.

Implications for the WSF process

It was important to establish guidelines that were agreed to by the NPC early on. The USSF had fairly strict limits in terms of allowable sources. Corporations were not allowed to contribute (except through foundations), governments were only allowed to provide in-kind support. This severely limited the range of possible resources, but the clarity was important and adhered to by the NPC. There was in fact one challenge to a grant given to the USSF.[14] The USSF opened space for a more radical level of political discussion in a national gathering of this scale. This was in large part due to the political moment and need among the U.S. movement and the participants. But the character of the USSF was also a tribute to the level

of ownership felt by the participants. Despite the attempts by the Atlanta Police Department to control the physical space, ultimately, it was clear that the USSF belonged to the movements.

Being realistic about the scale of the USSF was also a sobering but critical aspect. Initial projections for the USSF were for 20,000 participants. Twelve thousand participants actually registered, and an estimated 15,000 took part overall in the event. The $1.5 million was somewhat ambitious, but covered a three-year organizing process. If in-kind support is factored in, the USSF met its fundraising goals. By the time of the Forum, the NPC and staff had established a practice of being very frugal with expenditures. This was initially due to the lack of resources, but in the end proved to be a huge benefit as the USSF ended with a surplus.

Decision-making about funding was an ongoing challenge throughout most of the organizing history of the USSF. In the absence of an active Resource Mob, implementation of the funding strategies, financial management and decisions on expenditures ultimately defaulted to the chair of the working group and the Lead Staff Organizer. Later in the process, an Accountability Team (A-team) was established to help integrate the strategies of all the USSF working groups and make interim decisions on behalf of the NPC. The A-team took up decisions for expenditures and financial management, providing a much more democratic and transparent process. The March 2007 proved to be essential, however. This is when the entire NPC participated in a collective, participatory budgeting process for the event. It proved an invaluable practice that should be applied near the beginning of the organizing process. Organizations are able to declare what their financial commitment will be based on the realities and limitations of their own resources.

The USSF is also sharing its experiences with the international process. GGJ, which chaired the Resource Mob, is participating in the Resources Commission and is helping to draft the Resource Principles and Guidelines for the WSFIC. Some of the ideas to address deficits and setting budget priorities are being incorporated in this document. Not all of the innovations developed by the USSF can be applied to the international context, but one of the key principles is that resource questions must be a universal concern of all members of the International Council and all social forum planning bodies. Political vision and resource realities cannot be separated.

Opening statements of the latest drafts of the WSF Principles and Guidelines for Resource Mobilization reflect a new sense on the IC that everyone involved must shoulder resource mobilization:

"The WSF is built on principles of solidarity, collectivity and community. These underlying principles and values equally apply to all resource-related matters. Consequently, the task of mobilizing resources for the WSF is a collective one and a shared commitment.

"The IC (and all commissions, working groups or other planning and coordinating bodies of the WSF) will ensure that mobilizing resources are integral to their decision-making processes. Collective responsibility demands this, particularly as the WSF's resources are generally limited."[15]

USSF and Foundations

The USSF also created momentary shift in balance of power with foundations. By June it was clear that the USSF was going to happen without foundation support. A political groundswell and demand from the field forced foundations to realize that the USSF could not be ignored–they then began to set aside resources for grantees. On the third day of the USSF, organizers from the NPC: including Sarita Gupta from JwJ, Tammy Bang Luu from LCSC, Jerome Scott and Will Cordery from Project South, Rubén Solís from SWU, Cindy Wiesner from MWC, and Michael Leon Guerrero from GGJ, met with a large delegation of funders and donors organized by the Funders Network on Trade and Globalization (FNTG). The dynamic between the organizers and funders was clearly different. Funders were not there to hear a "pitch" or a request for money. It was an opportunity to educate funders about what was happening and appreciate the significance of the event.

In January of 2008, NPC members met with many of the same funders in Fort Mason, San Francisco as a follow up activity organized by the FNTG. This meeting has resulted in an ongoing process of dialogue between funders and social movement organizations to help funders better understand ways to support movement building efforts, acknowledging that current funding approaches and practices do not always account for innovative and non-traditional forms of organization and movement building. Entering into this relationship between foundations and social movements is a delicate balance. Maintaining a balance of power must be maintained so that the political priorities of the social forum process do not get diluted and that the movements maintain political and financial autonomy.

Looking Ahead

The USSF is now in a much better position to be even more financially independent. The event achieved a surplus and is now investing in communications infrastructure and materials development that will allow the USSF to begin raising funds through sales and online drives nearly two years in advance of the next event in 2010.

Resource mobilization is just one of the political challenges facing the WSF process. There are many questions being debated on the IC as to the relevance and future of the WSF. The 2007 USSF demonstrated that the possibilities and usefulness of social forums has not been exhausted. But it is the local, national and

regional efforts, responding to their unique conditions that will provide the innovations to the global process. As members of the NPC, the USSF taught us a lot about ourselves. It brought into focus the challenges that hold us back as social movements, but also showed us what is possible.

Footnotes:

1. Although regional and national forums like the European SF would be a more relevant comparison, the author could not find this information readily available.
2. Lopez, Rolando, van Koolwijk, Theo, Shah, Nandita, *World Social Forum Financial Strategy: Report and Recommendations*, September 2006
3. The Atlanta Police Department suspended all leaves for police officers during the USSF and initially planned to deploy anti-riot forces for the event. Tense negotiations between forum organizers and the Mayor's staff resulted in an agreement that kept the forces out of USSF venues. Then security forces at the city Atlanta Civic Center demanded that all backpacks and purses be searched upon entry. Pressure from organizers forced them to back off of these tactics; they eventually required that all delegates display registration badges upon entering the site.
4. USSF Meeting Synopsis, August 15, 2005, notes from USSF Coordinating Committee meeting in Atlanta, GA
5. "We Believe" statement, USSF National Planning Committee, 2006
6. GGJ is a national alliance of grassroots organizations based in the U.S. GGJ was founded through the WSF process. GGJ helped to initiate the USSF.
7. Ponniah, Thomas 2007, "The Contribution of the U.S. Social Forum: A Reply to Whitaker and Bello's Debate on the Open Space', *World Social Forum website:* http//:www.forumsocialmundial.org.br/noticias_textos. See also Leon Guerrero, Michael, 2008 "The USSF, Building from the Bottom Up", *Societies Without Borders, Volume 3-1, 2008,* Blau, Judith and Marina Karides, editors, Brill Publications, Leiden, The Netherlands
8. *The Revolution will not be Funded: Beyond the Non-profit Industrial Complex,* Incite! Women of Color Against Violence, 2007, South End Press, Cambridge, MA
9. Lovelace, Alice, E-mail responses to questions by author, August 23, 2008
10. In evaluating the USSF, Project South recommended that the local anchor groups not hold fiscal sponsorship. This ended up being a huge burden to add to the organizing responsibilities of the local groups.
11. van Gelder, Sarah, "Southern Revival", Yes Magazine, Fall 2006
12. USSF NPC notes, March 16-18, 2007
13. USSF NPC notes, March 16-18, 2007
14. The India Resource Center (IRC) sent a letter protesting a grant received by the AOC from the international NGO CARE. In India CARE representatives had

made public statements supporting Coca Cola while Indian organizations were protesting the corporation for, among other things, exacerbating water shortages by mining water and pushing genetically modified foods as “food aid” . IRC asserted that CARE did not comply with the principles of being opposed to neoliberalism as stated in the WSF Charter. Members of the NPC met with the IRC and CARE. The NPC agreed to post signs on all Coca Cola vending machines at USSF venues with information about the situation in India and encouraging people not to buy Coke products.

15. Resources Commission, World Social Forum International Council, April 2008

Chapter 7

One Movement, Many Languages: Building Multi-lingual Capacity at the US Social Forum

Hilary Klein, USSF Language Access Coordinator

The first US Social Forum was unquestionably a historic moment. Ideas and strategies were shared amongst activists, organizers, and community members. Participants built relationships, developed proposals, and decided upon action steps. People left the USSF convinced that "Another World is Possible, Another US is Necessary" was more than just a slogan. And the commitment that the organizers of the USSF made from the beginning to prioritize the participation of low-income communities of color and other marginalized groups meant that, rather than academics or employees of non-profits analyzing their problems for them, oppressed communities were there speaking for themselves.

Some of the most significant political outcomes of the USSF would not have been possible without a multi-lingual infrastructure. Imagine trying to build a national domestic workers network without Spanish-English interpretation, or what it would look like to build black and brown unity if the black and brown people could not communicate across language barriers. This article will discuss the importance of building multi-lingual capacity into our movements for social justice, what language access at the USSF looked like on the ground, the organizing that went into building this infrastructure, and lessons that can be learned for the future. I was the Language Access Coordinator for the USSF and therefore speak with a great deal of familiarity, but not much neutrality, about the subject.

Multi-lingual Capacity as a Movement-building Tool

"Just as 'another US is necessary,' another model of organizing is critical to building a popular and effective social justice movement. Part of this model is transforming our orientation, culture, and practice to be multi-lingual." This statement was made by Jane Sung E Bai of CAAAV: Organizing Asian Communities.

One key reason that our movements need multi-lingual capacity is because the movements and the people who make them up are multi-lingual. As Steve

Williams of POWER (People Organizing to Win Employment Rights) puts it, "Ultimately, the people who will lead a movement for social transformation in this country are multi-racial and multi-lingual, and if the organizers of the growing movement want to build solidarity between these communities, we have to make sure that they have the tools to communicate with other organizers and activists."

Being able to participate in a movement is not enough. Building multi-lingual capacity is important so that people can express themselves freely in the language that is most comfortable to them and, as Ruben Solis of the Southwest Workers Union says, "to participate as equals regardless of the language spoken."

Roberto Tijerina, who coordinates the Highlander Research and Education Center's multi-lingual capacity building program, talks about another aspect of multi-lingual capacity as a movement-building tool: "Highlander has been working intentionally to increase multi-lingual capacity in Southern and Appalachian movement spaces for six years. This effort has focused on sharing an analysis of language as a tool of power, used either to include or exclude specific communities from fully integrating into the conversation. Creating multi-lingual spaces is more than good practice-it is a justice issue as well as a walking out of anti-racist principles." Ruben Solis adds: "English is used most of the time so it is positioned ideologically as superior to others." By strengthening our multi-lingual infrastructure, we are working against this positioning of English as superior to other languages.

Finally, building multi-lingual capacity makes our movements stronger by bringing together the experiences, voices, and wisdom of many different communities. This point is important because too often there is an assumption that language access infrastructure is only for the benefit of the people who speak limited English. We all benefit from this sharing of different perspectives, individually and collectively. This is the fundamental premise of the Social Forum, and it would not be possible without multi-lingual capacity.

With this political framework, the National Planning Committee (NPC) of the US Social Forum committed to the USSF being a multi-lingual space. As Michael Leon Guerrero of Grassroots Global Justice, one of the key organizers of the USSF, says: "The USSF being held in more than one language was significant not just so that more people would have access. The USSF has to be a multi-cultural process. It must reflect the diversity of the United States." This did not mean, however, that every event was multi-lingual or that there was interpretation into all languages spoken by the participants. Michael Leon Guerrero adds, "Unfortunately we only had capacity to provide for three languages [English, Spanish and American Sign Language]. We hope that we can expand to more languages the next time around."

Language Access at the US Social Forum

So what did multi-lingual work at the US Social Forum actually look like on the ground? How many workshops were interpreted? Were all the materials translated? Did it go well? Were there any major disasters?

All of the events organized by the NPC-the opening and closing ceremonies and the morning and evening plenaries-were simultaneously interpreted into Spanish and American Sign Language. (They were conducted primarily in English). When there was a speaker in another language, consecutive interpretation was provided from the stage.

Approximately one third of the self-organized workshops had English-Spanish interpretation. In order to facilitate monolingual Spanish speakers choosing which events they wanted to attend, the printed program indicated in which language each workshop was being held and whether there would be interpretation provided. The Language Access Team interpreted for about 10% of the approximately 1000 workshops that were held. Most workshops were held in English and simultaneously interpreted into Spanish, but some were held in Spanish and simultaneous interpretation was offered into English. Hundreds of other workshops had interpretation provided by the workshop organizers. Recognizing this-that much of the language access work was happening in a decentralized fashion, by dozens of the organizations participating in the USSF, and recognizing as well that our capacity was too limited to provide interpretation in other languages, the NPC offered to waive the registration fee of any interpreter who was accompanying an organizational delegation to interpret in any language.

Since there was a relatively small number of people needing American Sign Language (ASL) interpretation and only a few ASL interpreters, the Language Access Working Group decided that it made the most sense for the ASL interpreters to accompany the deaf and hard of hearing participants to the events of their choosing, rather than deciding ahead of time which workshops would have ASL interpretation. The Language Access Working Group coordinated closely with the Deaf and Deaf-Blind Committee for Human Rights to organize the ASL interpretation.

All official USSF materials were bilingual in Spanish and English, including the printed program, the signage and the website. Well, most of the website was bilingual. Translating all of the many, many documents on the website was definitely one of the challenges.

As the Language Access Coordinator, I was a part-time staff person starting in the beginning of April, 2007. In addition, the Language Access Team was made up of a Language Access Working Group which coordinated the planning and preparation; a coordinating team which dealt with all aspects of language access during the forum itself; a team of volunteer interpreters including a core group of

25 interpreters working full-time and a number of other "floating" volunteer interpreters; another group of volunteers who mainly helped to distribute and collect the interpretation equipment; Prometheus Radio Project, which developed interpretation equipment for the USSF using FM radio technology and was there to set up the equipment and troubleshoot; and volunteer translators who translated materials from English to Spanish in the weeks and months leading up to the USSF.

Everyone worked extremely hard. The coordinating team worked practically around the clock to ensure the smooth functioning of the language access work-organizing the final details, supporting the interpreters, responding to last minute requests for interpreters and equipment, and resolving problems as they inevitably arose. The core interpreters worked long hours at a difficult task-anyone who has done simultaneous interpreting knows that it is extremely taxing, mentally and physically. The interpreters frequently commented that they had worked so many shifts back to back that they hadn't had time to eat; another logistical challenge was that some of the venues were far away from each other. The floating volunteer interpreters and the equipment volunteers gave hours of their time and were flexible with their availability. The Prometheus team had to set up and take down mobile interpreting stations in seven different locations every day and staffed each of these stations in case of any problems. The volunteer translators often had a very small window of time; for example, when the printed program (which was an enormous document) was finished, it had to be translated and sent to the printers in a few days.

As Roberto Tijerina, a member of the coordinating team, describes it: "Working on the USSF Language Access Team has been one of the most challenging and rewarding experiences in my multi-lingual capacity building work. There were many unexpected complications; the learning curve was steep. But what a team! Besides the commitment of the NPC to creating a multi-lingual space, the other important factor to any success was the people who made up the Language Access Team. This includes both the coordinating team (Viviana Rennella, Alice Johnson, and me) as well as all the wonderful and skilled interpreters who stepped up and worked their collective butts off. It would not have happened without their selfless commitment to the work. Through moments of tension, crisis, and grumpiness, the Language Access Team held it together with grace, humor, and compassion. In shop talk, it was the hardest 'gig' I have ever had but I am grateful for the experience."

I think all of us who were involved would agree that it was well worth it, not only because the language access work itself was so successful but also because we felt that, by contributing to the USSF, we were part of making history.

For the most part, the Language Access Team received very positive feedback. We heard from many different people how skilled the interpreters were,

how well the equipment worked, and how impressive it was that everything was so well-organized. As Cindy Wiesner, who at the time was with the Miami Workers Center and was one of the key organizers of the USSF, says,: "It made a big difference for monolingual Spanish speakers' participation at the Forum, because we did not summarize, we did not dumb down the political terms, we held a high standard for the interpreters and I think it showed in the quality of experience people had. It was one of the first events of this magnitude that our translation and interpretation went as smoothly as it did, thanks to the Language Access Working Group of the USSF."

The most important feedback, however, comes from the non-English speakers who were using the interpretation services. Guillermina Castellanos participated in the US Social Forum representing the Women's Collective of the San Francisco Day Labor Program and St. Peters Housing Committee. Her first language is Spanish. She described to me her experience using the interpreting services at the USSF:

> "The translation at the Social Forum was very impressive—I'm speaking personally, of my own experience—because we understood everything that happened, from the first meeting up until the final resolutions. We followed what happened in all the workshops. We were very focused and we didn't lose any of the details. I'm speaking for myself but I'm also speaking about the various organizations that brought members who needed translation, for example Mujeres Unidas y Activas [United and Active Women], the Women's Collective and St. Peters. We were very appreciative, very comfortable; it made us feel really good. In that sense the Social Forum was a success for those of us who don't speak English because we didn't miss anything, we understood everything that happened."

The translation was really good, honestly, and it's very important because we were demonstrating that translation wasn't going to be missing from an event like this. In the plenaries I liked the translation a lot. I don't know how they did it because it was really, really good, it was great. And I'm very honest; when I don't like the translation I say so, because I want to catch everything. If the translation isn't good, you feel left outside of the circle.

I asked the other women and they said "yes", they understood the translation. There are always some things that are out of anyone's hands. They told me about one workshop that didn't have translation. Well, there was translation because they had the equipment and the official translators were there, but then they formed groups. It was an activity that was part of the workshop to form small groups and

they didn't have very many translators, so they had to ask for someone to help translate in each of the small groups. They asked other people to help and people tried to help with good intentions but Spanish wasn't their language and they couldn't translate very well. But the rest of the comments were very positive, for example:

> "Translation is a very important part of any convention, especially if it's a social forum, because people of different ethnicities, different races go. When someone translates for you, it gives you the opportunity to participate. We had the opportunity to speak, to express ourselves. We could participate and ask questions."

The interpreters also have a unique perspective of what language access at the USSF looked like on the ground. Here are some of their descriptions:

> Ninety minutes of constant simultaneous interpretation, while exhausting, made me feel on a whole new level just why language access is vital to building an inclusive movement to confront an unfair global economy. We want multi-cultural panels with grassroots panelists. That means monolingual presenters and audience members. So interpreting gives everyone access to points of view to which they couldn't otherwise be exposed. It was very rewarding, some of the most gratifying work I've ever done, because this sort of inclusiveness holds the key to unlocking the sort of US and world that we've always yearned for.
>
> *— James Ploeser,*
> *Spanish-English interpreter*

> I have learned a lot by interpreting for people fighting for justice here in the USA; from union negotiations, tenants fighting evictions in courts, political and organizing trainings, countless issues conferences, and more! It was truly inspiring to be able to participate in the USSF 2007 and be part of connecting people from the Venezuelan Bolivarian Revolution to indigenous folks from Bolivia to union organizers in Colombia to freedom fighters in the US. This experience granted me the opportunity to be in very close proximity to the global struggles that we are all dealing with and to many people that are working each day to combat them through love and justice.
>
> *—Luis Herrera,*
> *Spanish-English interpreter*

As I participated as an interpreter in the opening and closing ceremonies and different workshops and lectures of the United States Social Forum of 2007, what impressed me the most was people's passion for changing what is wrong with our civilization. Being a witness to their passion inspired me and gave me hope for the future of humanity!

—Belen Huizar,
Spanish-English interpreter

Interpreting at the USSF was a most rewarding experience. I was able to network with interpreters from all over the States and have access to places that I would have otherwise not been able to (i.e. backstage and workshops that would have been too full to attend). I feel that volunteering at the Social Forum allowed me to help jumpstart the social change that was instigated by the Forum."

—Alexis Ruiz,
Spanish-English interpreter

I think one of the most challenging (and most rewarding) moments was interpreting into Spanish for a group of Brazilian trade unionists. We were doing the best we could with the resources available, and the group from Brazil was putting forth incredible effort to communicate with compañeros from around the world.

—Martha Benitez,
Spanish-English interpreter

Being what some would call 'a baby interpreter,' which means I have less than five years experience, I found it to be so educational. I was working with interpreters from so many different spoken languages and backgrounds. It is not very often that I, a sign language interpreter, get that chance. Having those experiences in Atlanta created many memorable moments. Thanks for the opportunity to be a part of history.

—Andrea Myers,
Sign Language -English interpreter

Interpreting at the USSF was a wonderful experience for me. To beable to be part of such a momentous and coming-together was very exciting. It was really cool that the Forum was bilingual (or

> trilingual with the sign language interpreting). That was really powerful. The way it was set up mirrored what we want in our society, like the process matched the product. There was something extremely exciting and reassuring to see that progressives could organize ourselves so well. The job of coordinating interpretation for so many panels and workshops was huge and the whole thing was just very moving and hopeful.
>
> *—Isaac Evans-Frantz,*
> *Spanish-English interpreter*

Technology is often anything but grassroots; the interpretation equipment, however, turned out to be a grassroots success story. Interpretation equipment is needed for simultaneous interpreting in a large group setting: The interpreter speaks into a microphone and the people listening to the interpretation each have a headset through which they can hear the interpreter. Renting professional interpretation equipment is very costly, and from the beginning of the organizing process, our limited economic resources was were one of the biggest challenges. We did get some estimates for how much it would cost to rent the equipment that we would need; the cheapest quote was $40,000. We also explored the possibility of borrowing interpretation equipment from the organizations who own some, but most organizations only own a handful of sets, we weren't sure if the different kinds of equipment would be compatible with each other, and it is very expensive to replace should anything happen to the equipment. Given this, on the first conference call of the Language Access Working Group, I was tasked with exploring the possibility of obtaining interpretation equipment using FM radio waves.

Although I have a fair amount of experience as a translator and interpreter, I didn't know much about interpretation equipment. On top of that, I am one of those technologically challenged people; in other words, I had no idea what "interpretation equipment using FM technology" meant. Turns out that it is not that complicated. It just means having a very small FM transmitter broadcast the interpreter's voice and people can listen on regular FM radios tuned into the same frequency as the transmitter. It's like a tiny radio station.

Pete Tridish of Prometheus Radio Project explains, "Prometheus stumbled onto building interpretation equipment by accident. In our work building radio stations with farm workers unions, we discovered the practical difficulties that these groups encounter as they tried to build their movements and gather allies throughout American society. People told us that they can only afford translation equipment for special occasions, like a meeting with the mayor, but cannot afford to rent translation equipment in day to day grassroots organizing. And so working

class communities remain separated and divided, even when they can overcome suspicions and are ready to work together for their common interests." This led Prometheus to experiment with using FM transmitters and radios-its area of expertise-for interpreting.

Fortunately for the USSF, Prometheus Radio Project agreed to build interpretation equipment for the USSF. When we approached Prometheus, they agreed that it was an exciting opportunity to develop inexpensive and accessible infrastructure that could be a valuable, long-term contribution to grassroots organizations and social movements.

Of course, something had to go wrong. One of our worst-case scenarios almost came true when the radios that Prometheus had ordered still had not arrived the day before the USSF was to begin. After many desperate phone calls and the local Teamsters union agreeing to open their shipping warehouse at 6 am instead of 8 am so that we could pick up the boxes of radios, the radios were rushed to the Civic Center (where the plenaries and many of the workshops were held) on the first day of the USSF. A group of people woke up at the crack of dawn, gathered in the Language Access office in the basement of the Civic Center, and formed an impromptu assembly line to cut each radio out of its packaging, insert the batteries, test the radio, and attach the headset. We were carrying boxes of radios up to the auditorium literally minutes before the first morning plenary began. This embodied the spirit of doing whatever needed to be done to make it all happen-without which, the entire USSF would not have been possible. After that narrowly averted disaster, all the other problems that inevitably arose during the USSF (many of which had nothing to do with the equipment) felt minor by comparison.

During the USSF, we found that the quality of interpretation equipment was excellent; as one person put it, "it was better than the professional interpretation equipment." It cost the USSF less than half of what it would have cost to rent the equipment, and when the social forum was over, all the equipment belonged to the USSF.

We were not the only ones to notice the advantages of using this equipment. Again, Pete Tridish: "At the USSF, we had dozens of groups ask us if we could build them equipment like this, and we are still gearing up to be able to fill all the requests for simple, inexpensive interpretation equipment that works. We are now looking at ways to expand our group enough to be able to make language access equipment part of our work. We have learned just how much grassroots groups can do with a tiny little radio station in a lunchbox that reaches a room full of people who want to understand each other."

Another advantage to this type of equipment is that each FM radio cost the USSF about $10, as opposed to the interpretation headsets, which each cost at least $100. This meant that losing a radio or two was not too big a concern and

we only asked participants for their name and phone number to use one of the radios, whereas many events require people to leave an ID while using the interpretation headset. Guillermina Castellanos explains the positive impact of this arrangement, "I liked that one representative of each organization could get the headsets for all the members of their organization. This helped us a lot because nobody felt bad. Sometimes at this type of event they ask us for an ID to use the headset. I understand it, because they have to take care of the equipment that is very expensive, but it feels bad, as if they think you want to steal it. I really liked that a representative could pick up the headsets for the whole group and just write down the name and telephone number of one person. I always took three or four radios and we always collected them amongst ourselves and turned them in."

And in fact, regardless of the cost of each radio or headset, this system was very effective. Not one radio was misplaced, a fact that the Language Access Team was very proud of. The only radio that went missing turned up in Cairo, Egypt. Alice Johnson, a member of the coordinating team who prides herself on the fact that she has never lost any equipment at a big event like this, had taken it with her by accident.

Lessons Learned

Overall, our biggest limitations were due to lack of capacity and lack of experience. As mentioned above, the lack of economic resources was one of the biggest challenges, and it was a constraint for the entire social forum. From the outset, the NPC recognized the importance of multi-lingual capacity and at the same time, the limitations of its current capacity. One goal for future Social Forums should be to commit more resources to the language access work so that we can expand capacity to include more languages and to cover a higher percentage of the events taking place at the USSF.

And like everybody else who was organizing a USSF for the first time, the Language Access Team had a lot to learn along the way. In addition to the many practical things that we learned, the most important lesson for the future was that language access has to be part of the conversation from the very beginning of the organizing process and treated with importance at every step along the way. Cindy Wiesner says,: "We have to figure out before hand and not as an afterthought: the resources, the team of qualified interpreters, the necessary equipment, the time to translate documents, and overall the commitment of the organizers to equalize the space, as best as possible, by creating language access for the participants."

If we increase the financial resources devoted to multi-lingual capacity and integrate language access into the organizing process early on, we should be able

to provide high quality translation and interpretation in more languages and in more spaces.

One of the most significant impacts of the language access work at the USSF was to demonstrate that it's necessary and possible to build multi-lingual movements. As Jane Sung E Bai says,: "As a movement, we are still experimenting on a localized level. The 2007 USSF was the first attempt to take on this challenge on a national level. We may have fell short of where we need to be, but we definitely set a strong foundation on which to build." Cindy Wiesner agrees,: "We had some shortcomings, but overall I think it created a standard for movement-building spaces."

The real success of the USSF will only be seen with time: in the ripple effects created in the individuals, organizations and communities who participated. Guillermina Castellanos also spoke to me about what she and other members of her organization took away from the USSF:

> "The translation was also very important to me because I had to come back here, to my community, and share what we had learned. That was why it was so important to take in as much as we could: all the resolutions, the plenaries, all the most important points. At the end of each day, after the evening plenary, we would go to the hotel and get together, those of us from the Women's Collective and the Day Labor Program and we would share what we learned in all the workshops that we had been to that day. The information was very clear because the translation was so good. This helped us in organizing the workshops that we gave when we returned: we could do it in our own words, our own language.
>
> "We learned about borders, about walls. It's amazing how much you can learn from the Palestinians. There are other borders besides the border between Mexico and the United States that we didn't even know existed. We identified with them. Since it was [translated into] your own language, you can identify with these people.
>
> "We learned that there are many things that affect all of us, people of different races and also sexual orientations, at all levels. We left with a different perspective. I say this because I heard it from other people. There was one woman who used to say bad things about lesbians and gays. In one workshop I heard this same woman say, 'Oh, I didn't know that they suffered just like we do. I'm going to change my way of thinking.'

> "We covered all of this in the workshops when we got back home. We did workshops in the Women's Collective and in St. Peters. Of the four organizations that I know well, all of them organized workshops within their own organizations when they returned. Since we understood everything, we could bring back good information.
>
> "The women that went learned a lot. It also opened up space for personal empowerment because they came back with more desire to work in our community. The Social Forum raised a lot of consciousness and we arrived with more energy to continue the struggle."

Perhaps that's what Steve Williams meant when he said, "Translation and interpretation helped the USSF to achieve its political objectives."

Chapter 8

Volunteers and the USSF

Alice Lovelace,
Lead Staff Organizer, USSF

Mary Babcock,
Volunteer Coordinator, USSF

Wendy Goff,
Volunteer, USSF

> "It is when you have done your work honestly, when you have contributed your share to the common fund that you begin to live."
>
> —*Eugene V. Debs*

Introduction
Alice Lovelace

Some events run on money, which provides the power that makes things move and buys what you need. This is not true for the first US Social Forum; it ran on volunteers. The core of organizations and individuals that volunteered and comprised the National Planning Committee, Regional Committees, Work Groups, and the Atlanta Organizing committee were worth more than money; they bought relationships, political connections, movement history, and connecting struggles. Those who worked in advance and those who showed up on June 27th to serve the many needs of the Forum on the ground were the fuel that will allow our movements to grow.

You are going to hear about the USSF through the eyes of two very special volunteers. Mary Babcock was a volunteer who worked on the Atlanta Organizing Committee and on the Youth Camp before taking up the challenge to coordinate volunteers for the USSF. We were four months out and were not pulling the volunteers we needed for the day-to-day work of hosting 15,000 people. I turned to Mary and asked her if she would take on the challenge of creating some excitement around volunteering, develop a plan and work to recruit enough folks to fill the massive need. Mary worked seven days a week, traveled wherever there was a group of potential volunteers. She made these tasks her priority and a success.

Then there was Wendy Goff who called me one day while I sat at my desk overwhelmed by the depth and breadth of the work before me to ask if I needed a volunteer. Wendy was my first office help and she stayed with me throughout the process and into the Forum. Wendy began her volunteer service while she was an undergraduate and throughout her graduate studies.

Both women performed important services on behalf of the social forum and in return they gained wisdom, insight and skills that will serve them as they served us all.

"Service is the rent you pay for room on this earth."

—*Shirley Chisholm*

The Importance of Volunteers

Mary Babcock

Personally I don't think that anything could have stopped the first USSF from happening. But the Forum wouldn't have been the same without the hundreds volunteers-locals in Atlanta and people from coast to coast-who stepped up time and time again and brought their talents to make the social forum happen. Throughout the entire process the Social Form was forged from the raw energy of "people power." The forum only came to realization because of the passion and determination of an amazing group of individuals and grassroots organizations, despite the minimal financial resources and lack of corporate sponsorship.

And it is funny to me now that I questioned whether there would be enough volunteers for the social forum. In Chip Smith's The Cost of Privilege, Ella Baker described the movement as "building the road while walking it." And the culmination of the first USSF Atlanta witnessed countless volunteers walking side-by-side to create a critical space for continued movement building. It seemed we bound together to make the social forum happen even when we weren't a hundred percent sure of what the Forum would look like when we got there. But "people power" always seems to run on the fuel of optimism. The social forum was no exception. Volunteers knew that the Forum was possible, that another world is possible even while the road ahead always isn't that clear.

For a long time the struggle for social justice has been behind in money, behind in resources, opposed by the powers in charge. But we all know the struggle has never stopped because good people refuse to give up and dig in harder when things may look doubtful. Don't get me wrong, I know things didn't always go as planned with the volunteer crew of the Forum, but the sheer desire and determination to make "another world possible" helped us cross most obstacles. And a year later there is no doubt we can do it! Another world is possible when we work

together. And we know that while another US is necessary, it is also possible to change our nation.

In the process of coordinating volunteers for the Forum, I was continuously reminded of some simple truths. We have to hold each other sacred while working to make another world and during the process we have to keep focused on the goal but create the space to honor our unique talents and gifts that we volunteer. We know right now that this world easily marginalizes and disrespects people each and every day, but as a people walking the road towards another world we must all join and bring our ingenuity and enthusiasm as volunteers working side-by-side.

Dedicated to the late Moshe "Moe" Hale,
who was instrumental in helping us reach
our volunteer goals for the first USSF.

Volunteering for the Social Forum

Wendy Goff

I received a Bachelor of Arts in African-American Studies from Georgia State University in December 2007. I volunteered with the social forum to fulfill a class assignment. My Introduction to African-American Studies class required the completion of at least fifteen volunteer hours. From a supplied list of sites, I choose Project South because of its proximity to campus and my appeal of its mission. Having already researched Project South for a previous class, I knew it was a short drive from campus and it had as its mission, "The Elimination of Poverty and Genocide." What I didn't know was that Project South was hosting the first ever USSF and that choosing Project South as my volunteer site would lead to an experience that would have an extremely significant effect on my life.

Jerome Scott, co-director of Project South, paired me with the social forum's lead organizer, Alice Lovelace. I was pretty excited about that because I knew Alice Lovelace as a major African-American poet. My first assignment was to compile and update the list of organizations participating in the social forum. In the course of working on this assignment, I became aware of the vast number of organizations addressing social issues in Atlanta, the United States, and the types of issues they are working on.

When the social forum's office moved to American Friends Service Committee building, just a few blocks away from campus, I became the site manager for Auburn Avenue. In this position I was responsible for securing space for some of the Forum's workshops. I secured sites such as the Ebenezer Baptist Church, the King Center, and Prince Hall Masonic Lodge. In the process, I was able make valuable contact with members of the Atlanta's historical civil rights organizations.

As time progressed and the date of social forum drew nearer, I met and worked with people from all over the US and around the world. I met Iraqis, Palestinian, Venezuelans, Kenyans, etc., and began to gain knowledge of their histories, cultures and social issues.

On the opening day of the USSF I became keenly aware of the value of volunteers. I had four sites to manage. Workshops were being held simultaneously at all four sites for three days of the forum. Facilitating these sites would have been impossible without volunteers. Thankfully, I had volunteers that were as enthusiastic as I was about the forum. We were able to coordinate our interest and time to make facilitation of the Auburn Avenue sites a success.

I had a lot of fun volunteering with the USSF. I was able to connect by course work in social movements, social issues and Diaspora studies to a real life application. I became passionate about broadening my knowledge of social issues in the US and abroad. I chose to continue my studies by pursuing a Masters of Teaching in Social Studies.

Chapter 9

Together We Make Change

Dreaming and Implementing the Children's Social Forum

Kate Shapiro, Project South: Institute for the Elimination of Poverty and Genocide and the Atlanta Local Organizing Committee

Jillian Ford and Keisha Green, Ph.D. Candidates–Social Justice Education, Division of Educational Studies, Emory University

Karen Lopez, Casa Atabex Ache Regeneracion Childcare, NYC

> In my lifetime, young people have changed the world. From Little Rock to Greensboro, from Selma to Soweto, in Tien An Mien and Seattle, it was the young who dared to act in the face of the overwhelming certainty that nothing could be done. It was their direct action that educated, opened doors and minds, shattered the taken-for-granted. It will happen again. It's happening now.
>
> —*Bernardine Dohrn*
> *from the Preface of*
> Letters from Young Activists

The organizers and participants of the first-ever US Social Forum (USSF) sought to create a space to learn from others and engage in collaborative analyses of local and global struggles, as well as strengthen alliances across sector, geography, and identity. Atlanta activists responded to the WSF's call, knowing it was high time to carry out the social forum process in the belly of the beast. The USSF's stated goals were to "help develop leadership and develop consciousness, vision, and strategy needed to realize Another World." Decidedly generative in nature, the Forum was a vehicle for deepening our struggles and positions within a global tradition of people's movements that envision and work toward justice and equity. Like the WSF, the purpose of the USSF was both ideological and pragmatic; it was a space to dream freely about creating a just world, and to strengthen our capacities to actualize our dreams.

In this chapter, we seek to describe the trajectories of the dreaming, planning, and implementation of myriad components of the Children's Social Forum (CSF). We critically reflect and report back on stages of the CSF's creation, in the hopes that we may inspire folks to start and continue building these spaces. Our intention is to offer insights that allow people to engage in area-specific and geographically crosscutting initiatives.

Importantly, the CSF was successful because we dreamed big and followed through. But we began this dreaming and scheming with several logistical constraints; the scope and format of the childcare portion of the USSF were not finalized until the spring of 2007, when Alice Lovelace first hired a "child coordinator." This left just three short months and a limited budget for organizing and planning what would erupt into the full-blown CSF. Though these restraints were familiar to several of us from our local organizing efforts, it was our relationships to each other and the work cemented our ability to facilitate a convergence that many thought could or would never happen. Despite the obstacles, we recognized early on the *necessity* of transforming the USSF childcare program into a unique type of movement space that really recognized the vision of young people, while upholding the truth that the consistent availability of childcare in itself is fundamental throughout all stages of movement building processes. In creating this political space for young people, we hoped to deepen the political questions being asked around intergenerational spaces.

This chapter is not offered as a blueprint for success, but instead as an attempt to add our voices to this ongoing conversation by sharing our visions, our successes, and our shortcomings. We also do not offer our dreams and implementation as a linear timeline, but instead we organize this chapter around themes that emerged as we reflected on the process. We present both our vision and concrete logistics, therefore, as one model that should be adapted and augmented to fit particular contexts. We look forward to participating in the ongoing dialogue.

We organized this piece around the three foundational principles that we used to guide the CSF. First, we envisioned redefining childcare in inclusive and intergenerational ways. Second, we celebrated the notion of creating liberatory spaces for young folks that would be defined by alternative socialization. And third, we dreamed of the possibilities open to us as an educational entity not bound by state and federal mandates. In what follows, we describe the dream and practical application of these three principles, situated in a theoretical framework–that we realized in retrospect resonated deeply with the USSF and CSF organizing process–termed "*nepantla*."

Chicana/o scholars present the idea of *nepantla*, which is an Aztec word that means "in the middle." Geographically, the term was used in ancient Aztec culture to refer to the land between two mountains or volcanoes (Franquiz 1998). In her

book *Nepantla: Essays from the Land in the Middle*, Pat Mora (1993) appropriates the ancient use of the term to describe her cultural and linguistic "in-betweenness" as a "Texican"–an identity label coined by the writer Rolando Hinojosa-Smith for Texans of Mexican ancestry. Similarly, Gloria Anzaldúa (1987) describes this space as "borderlands [that] are physically present wherever two or more cultures edge each other, where people of different races occupy the same territory, where under, lower, middle and upper classes touch, where the space between two individuals shrinks with intimacy."

Much Chicana/o literature conjures the concept and lived reality of the "in-between." As Mexican and Mexican American history of the 19th and 20th century deals directly with the notion of the US policy of Manifest Destiny, Mexicans living in Mexico became (albeit unwelcome) "immigrants" in the US without ever having moved from their original land. This "in-between" space is not always comfortable, but it is reality. Taking on both geographical and cultural connotations, *nepantla* is thought to be an advantageous space in which the people can excel and engage in transformative experiences. Spaces like the CSF ideally support all participants in safely navigating this "third space."

Proponents of *nepantla* allocate much responsibility to educators and point out that it is a stage where creativity and self worth can be nurtured or destroyed (Franquiz 1998). The fundamental principle of utilizing *nepantla* is the educator's recognition that it is a fertile space of growth for all. Acknowledgement allows topics of race, class, and religion to enter students' understanding and analysis. If, for example, the young people coming to participate in the CSF were given space to grow–and the educators understood that they would also grow–everyone would be more likely to develop a healthy self-concept. Further, we realized in retrospect that the entire CSF experience was one of "in-between-ness." Because it was the first ever, because young people came from all over the country, because we had no guide, and because we sought authentic growth, we were subconsciously situated within *nepantla* as we consciously tried to create it for the CSF participants. This realization, along with the recognition that our collaborative reflection and writing process was in uncharted space, led us to choose *nepantla* as a guiding framework for this chapter.

As the four authors of this chapter, we were honored to have been a part of the creation, implementation, and reflection on the CSF. Kate Shapiro, the USSF Childcare Coordinator, is a youth worker and organizer in Atlanta who is building on CSF momentum to start an ATL Childcare Collective. Karen Lopez is a community organizer, healer, and trainer/educator currently working with Casa Atabex Ache in the Bronx. Keisha Green and Jillian Ford are both doctoral students at Emory University in the Division of Educational Studies. Keisha is an educator and community activist, with a research interest in critical literacy studies. Jillian is

a former high school social studies teacher with a research interest in political activism among queer youth of color. We arrived at this project from multiple spaces and subjectivities, and utilized this diversity as an asset. The four of us share a vision of "Another World," where young people are honored, trusted, and celebrated. The CSF was our attempt to move toward that goal.

The Dream, Writ Large: Childcare Redefined

> "What I took [from the CSF] was a fighting spirit and a spirit that hungers for justice."
>
> *–Dante Luna (age 9)*
> *CSF participant*

We define family broadly, as that which describes connections through blood, choice, or circumstance. In this vein, the CSF was truly a family affair. Participants, volunteers, educators and family members embarked together on what initially seemed like a cruel joke: "Keep 100 young people between the ages of three and twelve in one medium sized room all day long for four days." But by the time the first sleepy, nervous, excited young ones arrived on Wednesday morning, the previously dingy Civic Center conference room had been transformed by educators and volunteers into a multi-use space, divided with curtains into nine breakout rooms surrounding a large central area. The walls were covered with posters; there was a stage, a huge art space, couches, games, puzzles, tricycles, and a "cuddle puddle" replete with mattresses, blankets, stuffed animals, and 100 great books just for young people. With break dancing, peer-to-peer interviews and movie making, stilting, political education, and anti-oppression relay-races, participants and educators alike immediately claimed the space, both in and outside the boundaries of the room. Despite major logistical constraints and a lack of resources, a dedicated team manifested a rich and gorgeous program: participants rotated through simultaneous political education, physical, and cultural activities for four days, affirming and demonstrating the true revolutionary nature of young people by providing a young-people-centered, overtly political movement space.

The first ever CSF was an example of making the world we want and need to live in. The basic premise was to create a space where young people could begin to realize that they are central to building "Another World," that their lived realities deserve to be shared, and that we all fit into these larger matrices of struggles, hopes, and dreams. The political implications of prioritizing childcare resonate across all movements and geographies. As CSF organizers, we confirm and centralize the belief that childcare, collective childrearing, and family must be at the center of our movements for justice and liberation. For us, the CSF became an arch-example of continuing to struggle with walking our talk. It was an opportunity to

put forth a vision and map, and to create movement spaces that support everyone (young people and parents/guardians alike) in participating fully in political processes. It was also a chance to dream really, really big and build on existing, inspiring models to redefine childcare and education as inherently political acts.

If we are building "Another World," we recognize that the movement towards that world must be intergenerational, must value childcare and childrearing as work, and must be led by all types of families, especially those living at sites of multiple oppressions. In building the CSF, therefore, we repeatedly asked ourselves, "What could and should this movement look and feel like, and what concretely do we need to get us there?"

Families Front and Center

It is clear on all accounts that low-income women of color, including immigrant women, are those most negatively affected by a lack of affordable and accessible childcare. Across justice struggles, internalized notions of heteronormativity, nuclear family values, and undertones of patriarchal political leadership often further isolate and marginalize those that fall outside these valuations. Currently, lack of childcare and intergenerational movement spaces severely diminish our capacity to build broad-based momentum in our work, often excluding those directly affected by a lack of childcare options from positions of leadership or full participation. We must systematically push through that separation between political work in the public sphere and the family affairs in the private sphere to create a process that enables everyone to choose how they will participate in movement building work. Only then are we recognizing and utilizing the full scope of resources and knowledge society contains: from elders, heads of households, mothers, guardians, and young people. Only then do we see and acknowledge the true potency and possibilities of both radical spaces for young people and the full involvement of family in political processes.

Undeniably, building this process fully and deeply will require a larger power shift. But if this cultural and political shift does not occur, talk of building "Another World" is all empty rhetoric.

How we did it: Intergenerationality, Childcare as Work, and Generating Culture

> "I loved that connections were made between the USSF and the CSF, but most importantly, having the CSF enabled me to participate in the USSF"
>
> *–Susan Wefald, parent of Jamie and Eric (both age 9)*

Fostering intergenerational connections

One powerful component of the CSF was a firm commitment to intergenerationality. It is easy to see, and something we have all experienced in our own work, that women or mothers are often directly asked or indirectly forced to choose between family and the movement. The dream of the CSF was to affirm that we must be able to have both: our movement work and a supported family life. The CSF enabled parents, guardians and allies to engage fully in the USSF knowing that their young family members were also fully engaged and supported in their work and play. Intergenerational work supports collective responsibility for youth of the movement and contests the implied perception of childcare as a private or personal problem. Finally, the team of full-time, hired educators who provided the primary grounding for each day's programming ranged in age from 23 to 60, with the leadership of the CSF primarily being under 25. This in itself was a phenomenal growing opportunity for all, both before and during the CSF.

It was our further intention to hold a space where CSF participants of all ages were engaged, challenged, and safe, and to foster activities that cross-cut age divisions to bring together folks who are so often rigorously segregated from one another in institutional educational spaces. While there were parts of the day when participants were broken up into age specific break-out groups, there was also time in the morning and afternoon when we were all together (sometimes 100+ strong.) A huge amount of 'cross age' interactions were visible in all of these spaces, with older participants often assisting or supporting younger participants (especially with afternoon art activities). The large amount of storytelling and story sharing that occurred throughout the CSF program helped us all invoke, listen for and lift up the wealth of knowledges, histories and experiences in the room. We are all teachers and we are all learners, and this duality was reinforced as volunteers, parents, and guardians participated in daily activities alongside younger ones. Often, these folks came to just hang out with children and younger people long after the official programming for the day was complete.

Finally, while we believe in the importance of having young people centered spaces that welcomed folks of all ages, we also sought to build bridges so that young people were also seen and heard by the entire social forum. We sought to create bidirectional interactions, so that young people could engage with others outside of the one room of the CSF. One of the ways that we attempted to manifest the conviction that we need all voices together to create our vision for a new world was by trying to connect between the CSF and the USSF at large; we had hoped to have been able to open every evening plenary session with a short theater piece/skit so that the CSF participants could demonstrate and share their knowledge and perspective on the nights themes. This only happened one night for the Gender Justice and Sexuality and it was a smash success.

Childcare as work

While none of the core organizers/authors of this chapter are parents or guardians, it is apparent that parenting, educating and raising healthy young people is some of the hardest and most important work imaginable, and that it is so often undervalued or not valued at all. One decision of note was the decision to pay the CSF educators. The roles of the educators effectively were to "hold the space", meaning we needed a core crew of folks to be in the space the whole time, know the landscape, schedule and processes to not only ensure that everyone was safe but that there would also be folks to help ground the program and be responsible for a certain chunk of the programming, the political education.

The other major piece was the fact that we never had any idea how many young people were going to come or how many volunteers we were going to have. The need to have at least 10 consistent, reliable folks in the space was critical to our success. Little did we know that we would be overrun with volunteers during the program, something we will discuss later in the chapter. While the whole USSF was organized on a shoestring budget, in the beginning the hope was that we would find educators to volunteer their time for the four days.

Of course, no one did. We immediately recognized the assumptions embedded in this hope, that for folks whose livelihood or life's work is based in education or childcare this effectively invisibilized their work's value. Additionally, it seemed a difficult and irresponsible task to piece together a schedule of educators that could volunteer only part days or just for one day. What would the impact of this be on the CSF participants and on the whole vibe of the space if there was not continuity? How might fragmentation, caused by multiple volunteers, affect the political education and tone of the space envisioned? Additionally this decision to not rely solely on volunteer participation to "staff" the CSF took pressure or expectations off of parents and guardians to staff the space.

We hired two public school teachers, two alternative school teachers, three early childhood educators, and three youth cultural workers and organizers. The decision to hire paid staff for the CSF is highly politically charged, but the short amount of time we had (three months) to put this together enabled us to bring in 10 local educators who would not necessarily have been able to donate their time, all of whom were women with a wide range of ages, educational and cultural backgrounds. This completed the CSF team, ultimately extended the reach of the USSF process overall and strengthened the capacity of the CSF.

Creating Culture

The need to create our own culture within the CSF was a fundamental and powerful priority. How do you create a sense of continuity, joy, care and political development for all folks involved in the process, especially over such a short and

overwhelming period of time? For us, this began with cultivating a tone of culture-sharing and collaborating between all the educators, even though we only had time to meet twice before the CSF began. The CSF culture was manifested through a Morning Mantra and the Children's Bill of Rights and Responsibilities, intentional political education and multiple modes of learning. These came to fruition activities such as the Morning Mantra, political workshops, "I Am From" poems, and preparation for youth participation in the general USSF general plenary on Gender Equity (for documentation of these examples, please see Appendix A). Together we created a collaborative process that incorporated different styles, philosophies, and backgrounds. The teams reviewed and discussed each other's activities, and our process opened up a space to exchange deeper political and cultural understandings. Together, we all created a collaborative process of curriculum development and political education.

This was a challenging process, and took a lot of folks out of their comfort zones, but resulted in folks feeling as though they more thoroughly grasped what they were facilitating and that we were all engaging in a process of political education together. At the first full educators meeting we had, we proposed the idea of each educator coming up with a group name that invoked and honored other revolutionary social movements, both in the US and globally, from the Black Panthers and the Brown Berets to MST and the Zapatistas we attempted to infuse the social forum with homage to other struggles. At this point in the game (one and a half weeks before the Forum) the atmosphere was high stress at the USSF office so folks kept coming up and sticking their heads in the door wondering what all the talking, laughter, hootin' and hollerin' was about. We stayed at the office long into the night, researched revolutionary movements to name the age-groups after and worked on political education lesson plans.

We affirm and believe in the revolutionary nature of young people. We can build communities of individuals that both support and challenge us. Young people know how to politic with one another, and are hungry to engage meaningfully with one another. And this is further how we can make this dream fly…

Childcare Redefined: Guiding Questions

The development of Movement infrastructure, the infrastructure that supports our full selves, mind, body, spirit, family and community is central as we continue to build movements connecting struggles, geographies and sectors. Infrastructure is what sustains us for the long haul. It is how we take care of ourselves and our loves. In addition to childcare, how can we concretely support families in the context of building movement infrastructure? How do we continue to re-conceptualize, expand and support all types of family structures?

With an eye to history it is clear that the question of 'bringing the next generation into the Movement' is paramount to movement and momentum building. In your community, how does the culture or power shift that centralizes families, young ones and intergenerational exchanges look? What are the steps we can begin or have already begun to take us there?

Outside of massive gatherings like the social forum, once we all go back home and back to our work, families, and communities: How can we create more political processes, inside and outside of organizational structures, which involve people of all ages? How does this culture shift look?

Pre- and post-USSF some folks talked about how "next time" maybe the childcare should be done as all volunteer co-op and not organized by the USSF. Would a Childcare Co-op have worked in this situation? Would it have been more successful? What are the advantages and disadvantages? Who is expected to volunteer? How can we support/validate skills and class status of educators outside of monetary compensation?

> "Being a revolutionary, a radical, an anarchist, a rebel requires imagination, now more than ever."
>
> *–Bernardine Dohrn*

Today, where can youth go to express their full range of humanity? Where are young people freely expressing themselves without fear that their words, thoughts, and ideas might be silenced, "corrected," marginalized, or reduced? Where do youth gather to build an ensemble in spite of the potentially divisive forces of age, race, gender, socioeconomic status, sexual orientation, height, weight, or language? Where will young people from various regions across the country meet to learn from each other, to form new relationships enriched by differing perspectives, background experiences, and geographic distance? Such revolutionary spaces are possible and necessary to realizing a world that is inclusive, diverse, empowering, and democratic—where playing imaginatively and thinking critically are not opposites—and where our world is changed, made better by the passions and ideas of our youth.

The Dream, Writ Large: Liberatory Spaces for Young People

Understanding that there are so many spaces that young people are a part of in their daily lives that do not trust their insights, experiences, and voice, we wanted to be really thoughtful about counteracting that experience. More often than not, emancipatory spaces for young people occur outside of traditional childcare centers and schools where authoritarian principles rule the day. Out-of-school peda-

gogy has enabled liberatory learning spaces for youth whose needs are not always met in traditional classroom or daycare contexts. The economization and standardization of childcare and public school education has in effect worked to deskill mainstream childcare workers and teachers, who are less likely to be trained to engage in open-endedness or supported to practice inquiry driven pedagogy, nor prepared to build community and critical consciousness among young people in progressive environments. Prescriptive or scripted teaching and learning seldom, if ever, leave time to investigate social inequities or challenge power. As critical literacy scholar, Ernest Morrell (48:2004) indicates: "Within this climate, it becomes increasingly difficult for teachers to function as activists and intellectuals even though that is what is needed most". Our dream for the CSF educators was to invoke their "activist labor" experiences embracing what critical pedagogue Joe Kincheloe (2007) describes as critical pedagogy or teaching that involves more than "acquiring teaching methods, teachers and leaders steeped in critical pedagogy also understand the social, economic, psychological, and political dimensions of schools, districts, and systems in which they operate" (p. 16).

The very notion of a CSF where learning and activism were one in the same is the embodiment of our dream to create a liberatory and critically conscious space for young people during the USSF. Our dream was to create a safe space where the voices of young people were central and prioritized. We believed no youth was too young to learn about some aspect of the formative struggles or political issues of the past and present. In our dreams, even a toddler was able to assess principles of solidarity through play. And we are convinced that one is never too young to learn about history—whether through images of social movements, defining key terms, or memorizing songs and poems inspired from the struggles. Additionally, the four of us believed in the dialogical nature of the teacher-student role. Therefore, we imagined a space where youth taught us and each other—where emergent themes and interests were embraced and taken up for consideration. We thrived in *nepantla* where teaching, learning, and action planning were collaborative and organic.

HOW WE DID IT: LIBERATORY SPACES FOR YOUNG PEOPLE OPERATIONALIZED AS THE CHILDREN'S SOCIAL FORUM

Pedagogy of Freedom

As the four of us conceived of and organized the CSF, we aimed to enact what the late Paulo Freire, Brazilian teacher, philosopher, and activist calls "a pedagogy of freedom." Because we wanted the CSF to be more than a "daycare," we, like Freire, created opportunities and space in our curriculum and instruction for youth to "develop a critical reading of the world." During the weeks leading up

to the CSF, we—CSF co-coordinators, community educators, and volunteers—intentionally worked collaboratively to construct an educatiional experience that would contextualize the critical components of the USSF and encourage critical reflection and inquiry about the status quo, as well as engender viable solutions for an alternative socialization for the young and old. Our pedagogy was about more than the technicality of literacy learning, rehearsing alphabets, tracing prescriptive sentences, or reading nursery rhymes. Rather, our dream of having young people name and claim for themselves their own realities, honor and express their imaginations and agency to take on their future was actualized several ways.

Our morning circle time, during which we collectively recited our mantra, was an opportunity for young people to converse and play with each other across race, ability, and age. In this space, teachers and students were free to discuss power and oppression without fear of being labeled unpatriotic. Instead of top down or teacher implemented rules and regulations connected to punitive consequences, youth were invited to create a Bill of Rights and Responsibilities—these youth-determined expectations served to set the parameters for respectful and safe interaction within the space of the CSF.

In contrast to the dwindling presence of art in public schools, several of our political education sessions involved art-based activities that were not benign craft modules, but rather connected to larger political issues or opportunities for critical reflection about identify and geography of space. For instance, a group of youth completed identity panels featuring their abstract and realistic interpretations of themselves on canvas. Other youth created colorful paper mache´ masks and still others painted patches for a unity quilt that was later displayed in one of the main entrances to the USSF exposition halls. Additionally, clay was used to build homes during a workshop on gentrification and more paint was used for an ongoing mural project featuring our interpretation of the world, also hung in a high traffic area. While we tentatively assigned these particular activities to particular age groups, CSF youth and their parents were free to choose from a variety of afternoon arts and cultural sessions.

During our planning phase for the CSF, we envisioned the youth participating in a final showcase. Time constraints deemed otherwise and, as a result, we ended our four days by printing our own revolutionary T-shirts. The T-shirts featured fists and artistic renditions of political struggles. Together, youth and facilitators printed and dried our own shirts as part of a culminating celebration just in time for the young folks to participate in one of the USSF plenary sessions. Youth from the CSF, wearing their revolutionary T-shirts marched down the aisles of the auditorium toward the stage where they gathered waving protest signs—one of which was about not having to choose their gender based on societal norms. To the larger USSF audience, the youth shouted their rights and realities. Through "peda-

gogy of freedom," the CSF nurtured the young people's innate ability to be expressions of liberation and love. We understand how necessary this is toward building strong, loving and sustainable movements.

Politics of Space

For many young people, their lives revolve around adults and it is rare when they have a chance to have true, honest and creative dialogue with their peers. We tried to be as intentional as possible about creating time and space for young people to communicate with each other without adult mediation. Again our morning circle, lunch time, and end-of-day rituals were opportunities for us to witness community building where young people across age, race, and ability shared completed projects, extended their discussions about the political education sessions, or conversed about their families and home towns.

Each day, the CSF space was constitutive of a multigenerational, multiethnic, multilingual, multitalented group of coordinators, teachers, volunteers, and young people. Our dynamic room was a sight for activity among and between children of caramel, dark brown, beige, and honey skin tones. Spanish flirted with English; blue eyes and freckles adorned an Asian teenage girl's face; and one adolescent boy claimed pink as his favorite color. In creating a space about liberation, we made sure our speech acts and body language communicated openness and genuine interest. The atmosphere was fluid, as we refrained from forcing youth to participate in individual and/or whole group activities. We allowed youth to take their own time to warm up to the new surroundings and people. Monolingual and bilingual speakers were welcomed and supported with access to translators. Young people responded to the liberatory space that we attempted to create by confidently voicing their opinions and caring for each other in ways not usually seen or permitted during traditional school spaces. For instance, youth comfortably—without ridicule or marginalization—swapped stories about being children of same sex parents or having been conceived nontraditionally. With intrigue and acceptance, youth listened to each other's diversity of experiences.

Regarding the physical arrangement of the space, we grouped young people loosely according to age. Brothers and sisters were free to engage with their own peer group or spend quality time with their older or younger sibling. For many of the learning models, groups participated in activities within areas that were partitioned into sections by colorful curtains. These curtains were not rigid barriers, but instead functioned more to allow the youth to carve out a variety of distinct spaces within this large multi-purpose room. Workshops were often team-taught or facilitated and were not confined to the indoor space. In fact, a few workshops took place outside or in the hallway. Snacks and lunches were sometimes eaten within groups or as a whole CSF community. Building on our imagination and flexibility,

we transformed a previously sterile Atlanta Civic Center conference room into a space for which it was purposed—a center where community members, specifically youth, gathered for social, political, and cultural activities.

We affirm that to learn from a young person is to be humbled by their knowledge and to accept that we never know where we will next learn a lesson that will influence our lives. We knew we had to synchronize this space with the larger political questions that the rest of the movement and he USSF was trying to explore. From start to finish, this process has further politicized all of us as it challenged us to dream a space that had never been created before.

Reflections and Guiding Questions for the Future

Traditionally, there are tensions between in-school and out-of-school contexts, authoritarian and permissive principles, rules and freedom, and chaos and order. When working with youth, do social justice activists or progressive youth workers have a tendency to reject all structure as necessarily problematic? How might we construct the physical space of a room intended to be anti-oppressive?

How do we continue to work collectively to conceive of and implement liberatory spaces? Saying we created a liberatory space assumes everyone has a similar philosophy about the nature and appearance of that kind of space. Perhaps a place to start might be to ask all involved: How is "liberatory space" defined and is the definition shared among community agents from various perspectives? Do all stake-holders agree that young people deserve a liberatory space?

Within the social justice movement, alternative socialization for young people is an issue. What are the ways in which youth are "normally" socialized? Through our work with the CSF, did we contest such notions?

The four of us expressed our concern that young folks were not equal partners at every level of the USSF and CSF planning table, taking part in the conceptualization of the purpose, objectives, and responsibilities. Can we generate a truly liberatory space for young people when young people are not at the table or a part of creating the liberatory space? Will there be a need for a Children's Social Forum if youth are one day interwoven throughout all levels of the USSF?

The Dream, Writ Large:
Exposure to Ideas for Creating a Just World

For public school teachers in the United States, there exists a consistent requirement to adhere to local and state curriculum guidelines. The extent to which students learn required district and state standards is assessed by statewide tests and then by federal standards under No Child Left Behind (NCLB). There is virtually no room for curriculum development, therefore, for teacher creativity, student input, or family and community influence. Though teachers are still able to

make pedagogical decisions–in places that lack a scripted curriculum–the content is completely pre-determined and often ill fitted for promoting socially conscious concepts and action. This same curriculum is often culturally inappropriate at best and racist at worst.

As social justice educators, we dream of the day when we will be able to dismantle the harm that has been inflicted on students for generations in public schools. We dream of rebuilding a curriculum that centers marginalized experiences and instills critical thinking skills. Our vision entails thinking critically about how and what subjects are commonly taught in public schools, and thinking of ways which these or other subjects would move students and educators toward a liberatory education. Often, history in US public schools is organized around major wars in which this country participated. It is too often taught from the perspective of those who held power; those who imposed oppression on others.

We dream of history as told from the perspectives of the people who struggled to resist oppression. Science is frequently taught without critical connections to our environment and without attention to ways that we might counter the destruction and toxification of our earth. We dream of science as a necessary tool for educating young folks about their agency in our world. In an era of pre-scripted curricula, English Language Arts is commonly taught as a collection of "the classics," as defined by a European or White American cannon. We dream of a collection of readings that intentionally draws from a cannon of non-Western people and people of color generally. In many public schools in the US, math is routinely taught in a non-rigorous manner that fails to prepare students for our highly technological society. We dream of a math curriculum and pedagogy that intentionally focuses on the social causes and implications of inadequate mathematical instruction. Having critiqued what exists and offered alternative visions, we also assert that our imaginings are not simply developed in reaction to what we oppose. We continue to dream larger by thinking about education as a holistic practice.

Holistically, our education for liberation–unfettered from externally imposed curricular mandates and within movement struggles and lived experiences–entails incorporating criticality, activism, and newly formed interdisciplinary content areas. It necessarily entails blurring the lines between currently distinct subjects, so that students and educators can recognize the larger picture. Fundamentally, our vision of holistic education relies upon creating space for students and educators to dream of "Another World."

Childcare and the State

Federal Mandates played a significant and particular role in the organizing of the CSF around questions of legality, liability and safety. It was almost impossible to find a space to house the CSF. There were days and weeks leading up to the

social forum where we were planning on busing the participants to other locations in Atlanta. Why? All of the confirmed USSF programming sites we approached would not allow any type of children's programming (much less childcare) to occur in their buildings. As we know, young people are generally described as society's most precious resource, which consequently causes them to be perceived as one of the greatest liabilities in society. While in our minds young people are the heartbeat of society, our ability to actually build transformative spaces alongside them is fundamentally altered when this value is quantified in terms of lawsuits and legal threats. While safety was one of our biggest concerns and priorities, it was clear from the beginning, when Kate started researching Hold Harmless Waivers and Bright From the Start regulations, that our ideas of care and safety diverged wildly from State imposed regulations. Duh, you say. But this is an important piece, especially as our movement grows and we become more visible. For how long can and do we fly under the radar? How do we live our transformative politics while also making folks sign waiver forms? It is not that those two things are mutually exclusive, but again it is this concept of *nepantla*- arriving in this "third space"- where we are building movement in resistance to repressive and supremacist state policies, but see are still vulnerable to legal action.

In Atlanta, every parent/guardian had to sign their young person in or out, sign photo release waivers, and sign permission to go outdoors. How do we create our own structures of safety and accountability that neither endanger events in their entirety nor participants who have a variety of relationships to the state–be they undocumented folks, previously incarcerated folks, or otherwise? When do we stop providing waivers that are seen to protect the interests of both families and organizers? With events as large as the USSF, is it reckless to not have release forms? What if the Civic Center hadn't agreed to pretend they didn't know we were doing childcare? Thankfully, nothing disastrous happened, but what if it had? Would our Emergency Protocols (pretty much: Go find Kate!) have been sufficient? Movement security folks volunteered their time and energy to the CSF, most of them coming back the next day to just hang, helping us monitor the flow of people in and out of the space. But the red tape remains and the fear of being sued remains terrifying. The bureaucracy, the fear, and the liability specifically regarding young people was a sobering reminder of the rest of the world beyond the doors of the CSF.

How we did it: Aligning with USSF agenda,
Using Alternative Curricula, and Tapping Into Community Resources

The opportunity to create a politically aligned curriculum for the CSF without local, state, and federal mandates was itself a liberatory experience. As described above, we acknowledged this sense of freedom and decided to intentionally move

away from childcare as traditionally defined. While casting off the notion that the CSF would simply be babysitting, (while we chose to create a political space for the children, we do not want to diminish the importance of babysitting in its own right) we reminded each other and ourselves that the space would be defined by *political education*, aligned with the themes of the larger USSF. Drawing from our own awareness and use of alternative education curriculum development, we utilized several curriculum guides that center social justice and critical pedagogy. We sought to incorporate multiple learning styles and planned lessons that allowed youth to paint, dance, sing, read, run, eat, work together, write, build, and dream. Finally, we drew on the local and regional community to create a rich experience for the children, parents, and educators.

Aligning our agenda with the larger USSF agenda

The organizers of the USSF intentionally structured the Forum around what they termed Key Movement Building Moments. The idea that energy for change is born of particular moments around which people can gather, six such "moments" were chosen as a framework. The moments were Gulf Coast Reconstruction in the Post-Katrina Era; War, Militarism, and the Prison Industrial Complex; Indigenous Voices: From the Heart of Mother Earth; Immigrant Rights; Liberating Gender and Sexuality: Integrating Gender and Sexual Justice Across our Movements; and Workers' Rights in the Global Economy.

We chose our political education segments in light of these larger themes, and developed workshops that were age-appropriate interpretations. Specifically, we developed lessons that exposed the young people to concepts of gentrification and community-based development, militarism and peace struggles, law enforcement and solidarity efforts, land abuse and restoration, xenophobia and immigrant rights, gender oppression and liberation, and worker exploitation and collaborative movement for better conditions. In one lesson about the Post-Katrina era, we encouraged students to think about "home" and to reconstruct their images of home using clay. We situated this lesson in a larger discussion about displacement and the young people discussed the implications of Hurricane Katrina and like disasters that move people away from their homes. In a lesson about immigrant rights, the youth aligned a set of thirty events in immigrant history into a pictorial timeline and posted the timeline on the wall. This served as a great way for the youth to talk about specific and more general aspects of immigration history in the United States.

Utilizing alternative curricula and multiple modes for learning

Many of our lessons and activities came out of a collection of progressive curriculum materials that share principles of criticality and creativity. Specifically,

we used the National Network for Immigrant and Refugee Rights' BRIDGE curriculum, Rethinking our Classrooms One and Two, Rethinking Globalization, Brother, Sister, Leader: The Official Curriculum of The Brotherhood/SisterSong, and Popular Education for Movement Building: A Project South Resource Guide. We also used a plethora of online resources, including curriculum materials from New York Collective of Radical Educators (NYCoRE), School of Unity & Liberation (SOUL), and Indy Kids.

Three of the most memorable lessons we did with the students were :

- Land Reclamation Lesson: The three to five year olds acted out a land reclamation outside on the grass. This was facilitated by a storyteller who told the recent story of an Indigenous community in Canada moving back to and recommencing to work the land.

- Gentrification Lesson: The six to twelve year olds built their dream city out of clay and then demonstrated with clay how folks in the city get displaced and land/housing prices go up.

- Prison Industrial Complex Lesson: The nine to twelve year olds talked about policing, who gets arrested and locked up, and prisons in general. They then wrote letters and drew pictures to political prisoners from around the country.

Pulling from these resources and the wealth of information that the educators brought with them, we generated our curriculum in several ways. Importantly, our process of curriculum development for the CSF was itself an example of *nepantla* enacted. Because we did not know what we would create collectively, and because we all worked toward development without a pre-determined end, we grappled with the material and with one another's ideas in that fertile space for authentic growth. Together, we compiled three-ring binders of lesson plans, Internet resources, schedules, teachers' ideas, and space for free thought.

Tapping into community resources

We were particularly excited that the first USSF was held in Atlanta, as we believe wholly in the strength, resources, and potential of progressive movement building in this region. Unfortunately, there exists a profound and devastating historical amnesia that has soaked into common (mis)understanding about the lack of activism in the South. The revolutionary moments of the mid-Twentieth century in the United States played out largely on Southern soil, though the oppressive back-

lash to the movement and its gains drew activism away from this region. As a region, therefore, there are ways that that the South's progressive political activism looks different than it does in the northeastern and west coast cities.

Some of the particular battles fought in other regions are just now being fought in the South. There are myriad implications of this, both on national and regional levels. First, it means that organizational ties that may exist between groups in the northeast and the west coast may not extend to like groups in the south. Indeed, like groups may or may not be yet developed in the south. The organizing that we do here looks different than in many other parts of the country, resistance rooted in survival, culture, song and sharing food in ways that spring from the communities rooted in this landscape. This uniquely Southern landscape centers our social, kin, and faith networks instead of non-profit structures. These networks have historically been underfunded and often top-down chapters of National organizations not representative of or relevant to grassroots folks.

Overall the reason Atlanta was chosen was to acknowledge the histories of struggle and resistance here and recognize the role the South plays in movement building. Did the USSF strengthen Atlanta organizing? Maybe; it's hard to say. But it was in events like the CSF and People's Family Reunion (The People's Family Reunion was a gathering at the social forum for formerly incarcerated people, their families, and their friends) where local folks were pulled in and welcomed and the reach of the USSF was extended significantly. We provided free USSF registration for the cultural workers who facilitated workshops at the CSF. We put a call out nationally cultural workers, which was only responded to by two or three organizations, which encouraged us to look deeper within our own community, and the wealth of knowledge contained within. It also means that conferences and movements that are crucial for all parts of the nation (and often the world) are often not held in the South, and that southern organizations are often left out of larger conversations for national and global social justice movements. On the positive side, it means that some of the institutions for social change are "younger" and that as activists who work within them, we have the ability to shape the change we want to see.

With varying lengths of time in the South in general and a range of connections to organizations in Atlanta specifically, we were able to pool our knowledge and resources in productive ways for the CSF. We tapped into multiple businesses and schools for donations, and found dozens of people who could work with the young folks over the course of the four days. We had donated the majority of the food, art supplies, puzzles, games and books. Folks also came through and shared their talents with the youth in the form of multiple workshops. Drawing on the strength of the local community, we were able to incorporate workshops including art, storytelling, Capoeria, yoga and dance, silkscreening, and theater.

We affirm that this work takes time and incredible amounts of energy and risk. While ultimately transformative, collaborative processes can be messy endeavors. We recognize that we had a unique opportunity to create curriculum and assert that powerful transformations can occur when educators and students are given this freedom. We elevate out-of-school learning settings for their ability to supplement traditional classrooms with the goal of creating a just world.

Exposure to Ideas for Creating a Just World: Guiding Questions

Young people are increasingly experiencing schooling in the context of "emergency." There is a very real ethos to most low-performing public schools that students need to memorize and regurgitate large amounts of material to pass the tests. How might curriculum look if it is not constrained by state and federal mandates? In an era of excessive accountability, how might we alter the curriculum and standards to reflect social justice?

Classroom teachers and school administrators are increasingly stretched beyond their means as accountability measures tighten and freedom is diminished. There are multiple ways that we can participate in young peoples' education outside school walls. What are our responsibilities as community members to work with young people and create change? How might we broaden our conception of "family" to those outside our own nuclear families?

We know from our own time in the classroom that there are many teachers who are tapping into alternative curricula and resisting the narrow, mainstream curriculum materials supplied by private companies and purchased by the state. We were encouraged that many of our applicants also used alternative methods and materials in their classrooms. Recognizing that using materials other than those supplied by the school takes time and energy, how do we build more networks of support for educators? How do we help teachers contest isolation, alienation, burnout, and disillusionment? How can we more effectively share curricula and consolidate materials?

Increased regulation and accountability often has the attendant misfortunes of decreased creativity and risk-taking. While not wanting to put young folks (or anyone) in danger, how do we continue to redefine safety and accountability outside of reliance on the legal system? What would it take?

OUTRO–Reflections and Recommendations

> "How we reproduce our movement is a key question, especially when so much of our struggle is around the terms and conditions of social reproduction... education, housing, reproductive justice, juvenile justice, etc. I believe any serious long-term movement strategy must be about

the shorties, otherwise we are being short-sighted and/or narcissistic. The CSF was an excellent step forward in seriously and lovingly addressing the question of how social movements get maintained and strengthened across generations. "

–Ryan Hollon, Urban Planner and CSF workshop presenter Chicago, IL

The USSF and CSF were built on not knowing. Were folks going to show up? How many kids would there be? Would we have enough volunteers? How many of us thought, said, or heard ourselves and others say,: "it can't work, it won't happen, we'll never 'succeed,' no one'll show"? Our fears about capacity, vision, and practical constraints represented (and were) real obstacles, but this dynamic 'unknowing' in the organizing process also created opportunities for truly transformative growth. This was another example of *nepantla*, for as organizers we stepped into an uncharted landscape, building carefully on what we knew for sure but walking a largely unknown path.

Much of what was dreamt didn't happen. Which doesn't mean it won't. And much of our creative energy was diverted or directed towards the sheer logistical magnitude of the task before us. The CSF was often a raucous chaos– how could it *not* be, with 110 people of all ages in one room, doing Capoeira, storytelling and political education on top of one another? None of us had ever been in a space like this before, nor had there ever even been a space like this before, so no matter how 'prepared' we attempted to be, there was much that went down over the course of our four days together that resulted in stress or tensions for the educators, organizers, and participants. Sensory and energetic overload, lack of clarity around education philosophies and space-holding tactics, short term volunteers engaging with activities without sufficient orientation, and issues of visibility and representation for youth and young people within the larger USSF process were some of the challenges we faced.

Logistics and Volunteers

As youth workers engaged in the construction of politicized, youth-centered spaces we were constantly reminded of how critical the traits of resiliency and adaptability are, in both planning and execution of events like the Children's Social Forum. Early on in our planning, we were concerned about not having enough volunteers to support the CSF process. We were delighted, therefore, when folks started showing up to help and participate on the first day of the Forum. Much to our surprise, we were soon overrun with volunteers and found that we hadn't developed a clear enough system for bringing folks up to speed on our intentions and methods. Consequently, many tensions arose between the educators and vol-

unteers, with the educators often feeling disrespected and unsupported by the volunteers who were sometimes disruptive or more interested in hanging with a particular young one than participating fully in the activity at hand.

As community educator and dance director/choreographer Akilah Issa stated, "We worked very hard to make sure that the children had a productive program. Often however, there were outside elements (too many volunteers who wanted to do their own thing with the children) that caused quite a bit of distraction". At the same time, we recognized that if there hadn't been so many volunteers around we would have been less equipped to give some participants the one-on-one time that they needed when upset or frustrated or confused. Ultimately, what case-by-case, minimal volunteer training we *had* planned for became obsolete as volunteers poured into the space. By the time the Forum was underway in earnest, it was beyond our capacity to do much improvisational planning around volunteer orientation.

The reality of cultural and racial tensions resonated deeply here, as young white volunteers often challenged how the educators–all women of color–would handle conflict or interact with participants that were not engaged in the activity. It became clear that there were also generational differences in styles and belief systems around care, as well as a tendency for *all* of us to default to familiar forms of organization and problem solving under stress. Institutions like schools or camps that many of us have found repressive personally and problematic politically nonetheless remain an early blueprint that even those of us who are attempting to build deeply transformative educational spaces can find difficult to shake. The question remains that as organizers we must find better ways to transmit and build the vision and culture of transformative spaces like the CSF with one-time volunteers. How can responsibility or accountability among the volunteers become better debriefed and incorporated into the culture at large?

Educational Philosophy

The external chaos of the space also reflected some of the internal chaos we as educators were feeling. To better actualize our dreams of liberatory spaces for young people, we must create more space for all educators to discuss and craft the CSF's philosophy of education. For while we were able to build a culture of collaboration and trust centered around political education, we fell short of effectively generating collective conversations around the highly personal and tricky questions around care, conflict resolution and educational philosophies.

When interviewing educators prior to the Forum, we asked applicants, "are you familiar with the term 'popular education?' " We would then give brief examples of what popular education is, and folks would say, "Oh! *That* is popular education?! That is how I go about *everything*." It was, of course, im-

mediately clear that while no one could initially 'define' popular education, all the educators we hired essentially live their lives by popular education principles.

Yet we did not engage in deeper cultural or political discussions, aside from a short conversation around conflict resolution and those which happened informally when workshopping political education curricula. Part of this was a function of time, as we did not have the capacity to meet more than twice before the CSF began and so much of that time was devoted to logistics. The other part of it was that we didn't take the time to get clear with each other or ourselves on what our explicit models were, outside of the principles of non-violence and popular education. Even within these two principles it is clear that non-violence means a lot of different things to different folks. We didn't really know how to effectively address the big questions ourselves or with the educators, but these are the questions that must be addressed if we are to continue to build genuinely collaborative educational praxis:

> How do we more effectively generate collective agreements around philosophies of education and care? How do we have these conversations about this spectrum between authoritarian and permissive childcare? How do we have these conversations with young people? Where do we fit on this spectrum, in many ways ranging from 'authoritarian' to 'permissive' (thank you to *Regeneracion NYC* for the concept of this continuum)? How do we navigate these spaces with transformative politics? How do we live in action our transformative politics?

Childcare must be guaranteed to all social forum participants, free of charge, from the beginning. But centering families cannot be only about having childcare at the 'event' itself, but must also include having childcare/age-appropriate activities at all of the planning meetings leading up to the event. To achieve these ends will require a commitment from the National Planning Committee (NPC), but both are an utter necessity for really moving forward to shift power and the culture around families and young people within the movement. Additionally, we feel strongly that there needs to be a political commitment made to have young people (not necessarily 8 year olds but 20 year olds and younger) on the National Planning Committee. In Atlanta, young people's voices were problematically absent from the plenaries and most every other workshop and cultural event that was not specifically "youth" programming. We need *more* speaking, *less* speaking for. For it is clear that this is not only a question of childcare, but so much more. We recognize, ironically, that this is indeed what we are doing ourselves at this point, again talking about young people and for young people.

As the organizers of the CSF, we pushed and pushed and pushed to attempt to build these bridges and others between the CSF and the USSF at large, so that young people could participate fully in the broader processes of movement building and not be relegated to the sidelines or 'young people's space.' As we look ahead, we are calling for a USSF in which all are welcomed, acknowledged, and engaged with the process overall and then *secondarily* supported with age-specific programming. We also see our work with the CSF as a micro-level example of a larger effort to first center young people in the movement generally. We believe, though, that we must push further than that.

We assert that to live our transformative politics and continue to struggle to walk our talk, young people cannot remain central to 'our' politics. They must be the politics. Young people need to be at the 'table' the whole time. We cannot just 'provide' a space and program for 'them;' it must be more dialogical than that. That is the concept of *nepantla,* where boundaries and relationships are reconfigured, where we all meet in the space between. This is the process of walking our talk.

Lookin' Forward

The CSF 2007 was another step forward along the path of this movement building process, as we all (parents, guardians, educators, youth workers, community members, allies, childcare workers) continue to work towards manifesting the movement we know we need. A movement that not only centralizes young people and families but also organizes around culture, cultural workers and political education. A movement that recognizes that young people are not exempt from the pain and trauma that we all carry and experience and that young ones have viable solutions and ideas worthy of considering and implementing. A movement that is always built with an eye looking forward and looking back, and engaging critically with the world and each other, offering critique and love all at the same time…because there doesn't seem to be any other way.

The dream of the CSF was based on allowing ourselves—the whole movement—to trust young people in their own liberation. For many of us who are fighting for justice, we believe that oppressed people know exactly what they need to be free; it is no different for a young person. We all need to be heard, we all need to share and express our stories and realities. We all need to let our imaginations guide and inspire our present so that we can be in action about creating our future. In order for this to happen, young people need to have space, which means that the rest of us need to take a step back and work harder at becoming authentic allies.

This dream that we had for the space was also in direct response to how young people are generally and traditionally incorporated, dismissed, left as a last

concern or a soft (and in some cases silent) voice in social movement building over all. For us, it was not enough to just have the adult activists' "Another World is Possible." Young people are capable and must be present in the creation of this world. Young people aren't just the leaders of tomorrow but have answers now to many of the questions we ask of each other.

Now we have a base from which to build, yet the conversation is just beginning. The questions still exist, and across the nation communities in struggle are grappling with these questions, from New York to New Mexico. We are all still making the road while walking it. The CSF process of coordinating, organizing and staffing highlighted key questions in movement building: questions of family, parenting, childcare, and young people's contributions to political discourse as well as how to bring up and bring in the next generation. Perhaps the 'best' way forward lies somewhere in the middle–for it is this middle, *nepantla* way of existing that may lead us to this 'better world.' We know we've sure got a long way to go, and much to learn and improve upon, but we also know that the CSF *was* a mirror of the USSF, with similar raucous chaos, uncontainable energy, song and dance, innovation and a wealth of models, trials and errors, engaging, sharing knowledge, play and relationship building. We're building it, across geographical boundaries and borders, age, language, race, and class. Parts of it were, and remain, hard, overwhelming, tricky, and confusing. No one said it would be easy. And if it had been easy, it wouldn't have been half as gorgeous. We invite you to join our rebellion by birthing these spaces of liberation in your communities so that the future generations just see them as natural/normal/important/consistent part of our movement culture.

Morning Mantra

Facilitators/Volunteers: Who are we?

Youth: Revolutionaries

Facilitators/Volunteers: Why are we here? (Ife Muhammed's remix: Why we here?)

Youth: To create a better world for everyone (to make a betta world)

Facilitators/Volunteers: Why else?

Youth: To fight for Human Rights

Facilitators/Volunteers: How will you do it?

Youth: Through social justice education (through social justice and education)

(*Remix: Repeat)

Facilitators/Volunteers: Will you succeed?

Youth: Yes!

Facilitators/Volunteers: And when you succeed what will you do?

Youth: Live in peace

All: Rise, up, Rise up, Rise up! Rise up my people, rise up!

"I Am From"

I am from old ways and new beginnings
strong backs and soft hands

I am from Archie who became Onaje
Sheryl who became Latifah

I am from a place called love born in a shot gun house on Ogelthorpe Ave.
Summer Solstice born

I am from rainy days
Movement born
I still hear/still sing freedom song
lullabies to my little ones

I am from the pit of the south
I am a southern peach

Ayo

I am from…
preachin' folks and jump ropes
chilly bears and double dutch

I am from…
geechy rhymes and clothes lines
Sticky fingers and skinny switches chasin' britches

—Keisha

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Chapter 10

Introduction to the Healing, Health & Environmental Justice Process

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To understand the true success and power of the US Social Forum 2007 is to understand the process that created this monumental event. In our 18-month journey towards the USSF, the Atlanta-based Healing, Health & Environmental Justice (HHEJ) Working Group partnered with volunteers and national collaborators such as the Red Web Foundation, the Southwest Network for Environmental and Economic Justice, stone circles, Spirit in Motion, Indigenous Environmental Network, Healthcare NOW and the Rhizomes Collective to focus on intersectional analysis and movement-building relevant to the well-being and safety of our environment and selves. The members of the HHEJ Working Group and our collaborators continuously learned through months of struggle, dialogue and strategizing to build a tight and trusting bond with one another. Our strength and willingness to bring together the seemingly different approaches of healing, health and environmental justice into inclusive and effective movement building still holds potential to last beyond the social forum itself.

> 'Collaboration and open hearts were an integral part
> of creating what happened with the HHEJ...'
>
> *–Anna Yang, Red Web Foundation*

The HHEJ Working Group was initially tasked only with providing first aid for forum participants. However, through an intentional process, we expanded our efforts to bring about a deeper consciousness of what is possible and necessary to

*Acknowledgements: We did our best in the writing of this chapter to honor the same collaborative spirit of the HHEJ process by interviewing co-organizers and co-collaborators to gather a range of insights and experiences. Gratitude to the interviewees for their stories.

continue in our healing, health, and environmental justice movements. By January 2007, we had adapted the vision and principles of the World Social Forum and set out to achieve three interconnected goals:

- Creating mechanisms for wellness during the USSF.
- Initiating critical outreach to healers, medical practitioners and health workers, and environmental and health justice activists who could build networks that would drive our movements and strategies beyond the USSF.
- Creating spaces for practices embedded in history and models of healing, health and environmental justice from varying traditions and models.

We created three spaces at the USSF that best reflected these goals. They included: 1) the Comfort Aid Stations, 2) the Healing & Spiritual Practice Space, and 3) the Healing, Health & Environmental Justice Tent & Fair. Although logistics and ideas organically changed and evolved throughout the planning process, we constantly returned to our vision and objectives to guide our decisions. Firmly believing the WSF's mantra that 'Another World is Possible', we developed an open platform for discussing strategies of resistance to neoliberal globalization as well as honoring alternative paths to sustainable development and economic, social, health and environmental justice. We established guiding principles early on that included mutual respect for the diversity of various health and healing practices, and environmental justice streams in our movements.

As the dates for the USSF approached, the HHEJ component expanded to include healers and spiritual practitioners who could contribute to ceremonies and rituals that would collectively respond to the well-being and environmental conditions of our communities. Shortly into the planning process we recognized our need to develop a common language in order to bridge themes and questions, which included: What are the pros and cons of health systems and what are our communal legacies of health and well-being? What does the concept of 'healing' include? What are the underlying principles of health justice and environmental justice?

Collectively, we wanted to lay down the groundwork for deconstructing practices and models that have targeted many of our communities based on ableist, racist, classist, gender-exclusive, homophobic, and white supremacist assumptions. We came together with our various ages, genders, sexual orientations, geo-

graphical locations, and ideological paradigms to create a multi-racial and cross-disciplinary response to the state and conditions of our health, and environment. We all desired to explore new models that would value the needs and wellbeing of our bodies, land and natural resources. This was manifested in our goal to understand the historical moments of healthcare reform; the implications of the medical industrial complex; the chronology of environmental and reproductive justice; and the legacies of low-income, rural, people of color, and indigenous communities' approaches towards safe environmental and physical conditions as a human right.

> 'In this historical moment of our movements and work we've become urban, and we have become disconnected from the land. What people called organic food, we used to have every day when we lived off the land. …that was part of our cultures and we have lost it and it's been stolen…'
>
> *–Encinias, Southwest Network for Environmental and Economic Justice (Co-lead collaborator of the HHEJ Tent & Fair)*

As a team we were vulnerable to one another, taking opportunities to recognize each other's strengths and skills. We encouraged and challenged each other and most importantly, adopted a dynamic leadership model in which each individual was, at one time or another, a leader for our working group. This strategy allowed our group members to learn different leadership and communication styles from one another. As Sherine, a graduate student and lead co-coordinator of the HHEJ Tent & Fair stated, "I learned the importance of teamwork and organization."

We identified that no matter what our institutional, professional and/or communal experiences were, we had all witnessed inequality and injustices that pushed our desire to be a part of a process that would not only reveal these injustices, but also give us an opportunity to plan, imagine and transform them. Many hopes and possibilities were expressed by our collaborators that helped to mold and shape our bridge-building between healing, health and environmental justice work.

> "We all brought different analyses and perspectives to the table which allowed and required an opportunity to name and identify current and historical interplay between these movements and ideologies… and we began or continued a much needed dialogue while also putting new forms of analysis into practice."
>
> *—Kate Shapiro, HHEJ co-organizer and lead organizer of the USSF Children's Social Forum*

"We kept asking for what we needed and women kept finding the resources for us, so there was a lot of collaboration and willingness to step into the unknown."

–Anna Yang,
Red Web Foundation

WELLNESS SPACES FOR HEALING, HEALTH & ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE

Our goals and the visions of the USSF drove the creation of three spaces of wellness that were essential to all participants.

The Comfort Aid Stations

Two Comfort Aid Stations staffed by volunteer physicians, nurses, medical assistants, street medics, health care workers, and Forum participants, were organized to provide a place of rest and basic medical care. Beginning with the USSF March, these caregivers met the physical health needs of all at the USSF so that everyone would feel assured and empowered to experience the Forum without unnecessary limitations.

An extension of the comfort aid stations was the provision of water throughout the forum for the participants and the community of homeless people living in the public spaces where the USSF was held. From a conservationist and environmentally friendly perspective, we specifically eliminated the option of providing water via thousands of wasteful plastic water bottles by strategically placing large water drums throughout the Forum and encouraging participants to bring their own reusable water containers. Water became a central need and theme not only from the perspective of preventing dehydration from the Atlanta summer sun, but also spiritually, politically and culturally.

Knowing that inequitable access to clean drinking water is part of the struggle of people globally as local governments yield to corporate privatization of water systems, the importance of supplying abundant drinking water at the USSF was monumental. Water was honored also by the 'Water is Life' ceremony organized by and hosted at the Native Peoples/Indigenous Tent.

"The success of the water ceremony is that 200-300 people showed up for it and it was early morning on a Saturday. People really felt it…"

—Heather Milton
Lightning Co-organizer for the
USSF National Program Committee

The Healing and Spiritual Practice Space

For centuries, movements for justice and liberation have always included ritual, reflection and creative practices as well as healing & spiritual traditions. How do we honor and uphold these traditions within our social justice movements?

As our natural resources and healing & spiritual practices are being decentralized and diffused based on economic conditions, geographically forced re-location and de-legitimization, it is critical to honor and remember our practices and traditions as integral parts of our survival and resiliency. Under the guise of capitalistic notions of individualized care and wellness how do we resource and create models of collective wellness that sustain our emotional, physical, spiritual, and mental well-being amidst oppression, violence and injustice? These questions guided the creation of a communal space for healing & spiritual practice as a visible part of our liberatory work towards shaping a new possible world.

> "One thing I would say was the importance of doing this across the lines of traditions and that is vital and it is very challenging. It is very important to open space that is cross-tradition, cross-cultural and cross-pathways…"
>
> *—Claudia Horwitz, Director of stone circles (co-lead collaborator of the Healing & Spiritual Practice Space)*

The Healing & Spiritual Practice Space was designed for reflective, healing and meditative practices for participants to experience while attending the USSF. The group of spiritual and healing practitioners creating this space was a consortium of intergenerational, cross-disciplinary, interfaith and multi-racial organizers as well as healing arts and spiritual practitioners. We provided many modalities including: a silent area that was used for prayer, mediation, ritual; an area that could be used for collective work in healing, reiki, massage, yoga, etc.; a space for quiet conversation, dialogue, writing and art as a reflective practice; small break out spaces for individual healing work; and interfaith public ritual and community altars created by USSF participants at indoor and outdoor public spaces throughout the forum.

The Healing & Spiritual Practice Space collaborators generated a statement defining the context and protocol for this space highlighting the following guiding principles:

- We believe the work of revolution, liberation and transformation is integrally connected to art, creativity, nature, prayer, ceremony, ritual and healing.

- We are supporting each other as we build this work, developing both programming and a network of spiritual activists, artists, healers and practitioners.

- We place great value on sharing community, traditions and practices from many different paths and we realize the potential risks in creating this kind of cross-cultural, multi-traditional context. We commit to having at least 50% people of color in roles of leadership, and as practitioners and healers.

- We remain conscious of how spiritual and healing practices–particularly from indigenous traditions and peoples–can and have been misappropriated. We have great respect for the roots of all traditions and ask that people embody this respect in their offerings.

Healing, Health and Environmental Justice (HHEJ) Tent & Fair

Another invaluable space provided was the HHEJ Tent & Fair designed to 1) hold a space for alternative thinking and practices, 2) build dialogue and strategies, and 3) illustrate our environmental and health struggles and legacies of organizing against oppressive conditions through popular education tools, testimonials and the arts.

The HHEJ Tent & Fair had three guiding principles:

- Demonstrate mutual respect in communicating with one another

- Respect the diversity of various health and healing practices

- Be flexible with users of the space without losing the essence of the HHEJ Tent & Fair

The HHEJ Tent & Fair represented national and local women's health and environmental justice organizations and served as a multipurpose space for programming throughout the five days of the USSF. Various groups utilized the space differently but the focus was always to maintain a sense of cooperation and integration of the overarching goals of justice, healing and health for our bodies and

the environment. Some of the programs included women from the Red Web Foundation leading everyone in yoga, Healthcare NOW holding a three hour training on advocating for Medicare for all, and testimonials on community-based responses to environmental and health injustices.

> "I imagined all kinds of people from various grassroots organizations trying to exchange information and build relationships to build opportunity, ideas and follow up…"
>
> *—Yomi Noibi,*
> *Executive Director of Eco-Action*
> *(co-lead organizer for the HHEJ Tent & Fair)*

Also at the HHEJ Tent and Fair was the placement of the Red Tent which celebrated and honored the history of women and provided a space for women to rest, regenerate and deepen our analysis of the importance of women's roles within the framework of health, healing, environmental justice and sustainability.

> "At the forum many organizations came together to speak about a more responsible, respectful and sustainable way of living together on this planet earth. An integral piece of such living, which can be overlooked, is to respect…those who carry life within their bodies."
>
> *—Anna Yang,*
> *The Red Web Foundation*

The Charleston Rhizomes Collective, a group of artists, educators and activists from South Carolina also added significant breadth to the tent and fair by contributing their indigo batik installation that paid homage to the recent social forums with the signatures of hundreds of attendees from the WSF in Nigeria and the Southeast Social Forum in Durham, NC. In addition, they simultaneously held video interviews between participants of the USSF, engaging individuals that had never met before to have spontaneous conversations about their experiences about the social forum.

> "Any type of collaboration for healing, I think artists can bring a lot. Artists can bring their own tools to be used for increasing communication… and an understanding of wellness. The arts can be used as tools for communication. At the Forum we recorded conversations between people passing by and maybe one person was homeless, and another person was a woman supporting an association and

> she had never talked to a homeless people. So that could not have happened without that interaction… It does good for mental wellness, to be able to meet people outside of their own worlds, family neighborhood and place of work. Less fear of the other… that's something I think we can bring; take a little bit of the fear away… it takes some stress out, if you know how to deal with that fear and relativize it."
>
> *—Gwylene Gallimard, from the Rhizome Collective of Alternate ROOTS (co-collaborator of the HHEJ Tent & Fair)*

A Deeper Dialogue

All three HHEJ spaces allowed for strategic discussion on how different paradigms of healing, health and environmental justice intersect. The local working group and the national collaborators explored common themes and linked our political and creative desires for sustainability. We identified connections between health care reform, healing & spiritual practices and environmental justice, and envisioned ways to share ideas and spaces together. In our applications of varying practices and principles, we came to a deeper understanding and consciousness of how we need new directions that pull us together to explore political, cultural and social landscapes. We also came from this experience with more questions. What would we ask each other about next steps? What infrastructure exists between us that would enable us to work together to achieve common objectives? If global capitalism is the problem, what is the solution and how do we get there? Is there an 'end game' or are various groups just circling around each other temporarily making our experiences better?

For many of us, this type of collaboration was unprecedented and pushed the boundaries of language, practice and strategy building in our streams of thought and movements. Our commitment and adherence to our principles in how we worked together was integral to how we visualized organizing further and deeper in our political movements. We demonstrated a purposeful and respectful process in our organizing to succeed in our achievements.

> "The HHEJ working group and collaborators had a whole conversation on what defines 'healer' and developed something like a spiritual and healing protocol that was respectful of the native people, their land and their history."
>
> *—Heather Milton-Lightening (lead co-organizer for the USSF National Planning Committee)*

> "Historically state models and practices of health and environment have colonized, marginalized and targeted our communities based on class, race, gender, sexuality, physical and mental ability… and our Southern geography for centuries. We have reached a critical moment in our communities and conditions to reassess, redefine and transform the models of how we take care of our own, within and outside of the state. The HHEJ collaboration really tried to model this in practice…"
>
> *—Cara Page, Project Director of Kindred southern healers organizing collaborative (co-lead organizer for the USSF Healing & Spiritual Practice Space)*

Post Reflections

In the end, over 20 organizations were represented as vendors in the HHEJ Tent & Fair and hundreds of participants either attended programming or visited in order to have dialogues with collaborator group members and/or rest in the Red Tent. Over 500 USSF participants visited the Healing & Spiritual Practice Space, including healers and spiritual practitioners who donated their time and services because they were inspired by the space themselves. The Comfort Aid Stations, staffed by at least 30 volunteers, serviced over 100 people and responded to three emergencies. We also provided free water for all participants during the five days of the social forum. In short, the HHEJ collaboration created and sustained a semblance of an honorable infrastructure to take care of 15,000 plus individuals. This was no small feat, but the measure of success is not necessarily in the numbers. Success was the collective action it took to create and organize these models, and the engagement of critical thinking and dialogue on how to sustain and resource prototypes that intersect healing, health and environmental justice for our communities' physical, spiritual, and emotional safety and well-being.

> "It was the unwavering spirit of the USSF that 'we can do this'. If there is a problem, 'we will solve it' and that absolutely nothing was going to stop us from reaching our goals. The question becomes how do we implement the USSF process and spirit into our day to day battles? New Orleans is teaching us about this and has become an inspiration. Abandoned by government, the people of the Gulf Coast had to make their own institutions to survive. We are learning that we did and can create some of the necessary infrastructures for survival and sustainability through this struggle. But we are not there yet…Another World is necessary! "
>
> *—Rita Valenti, Registered Nurse (Co-organizer of HHEJ Working Group)*

How did the USSF experience translate to building the necessary infrastructure for survival and defense? This is a multi-focal answer: by intentionally engaging in a collective process as a group; by scrutinizing how the perspectives and traditions of healing, health and environmental justice have played out often alongside each other, sometimes intersecting and sometimes diverging wildly; and by lifting and centralizing practices that rely on both *historical* and *new* visions of healing, health and environmental justice.

Despite our successes, there are, of course, some things that we may choose to do differently the next time around. One major concern was that in organizing our local HHEJ team, we defaulted to the Internet as our main source of outreach, both nationally and regionally, and we recognized this cost us potential voices from our communities. We also recognized that in organizing across strategies and movements, mobilizing a more integrated cross-regional collaboration would have been more powerful in identifying what is working and not working for our regions.

Yet, through this process, using limited and creative means, we truly sought to honor and build community-based holistic models that did not rely on the state for our well-being. The ideas generated from the many different perspectives and protocols evolved into shared lessons and the knowledge of a shared need to promote models of sustainability and wellness not only at the USSF, but also in our communities and movements at large. Although we have more questions than answers, we have learned that we can rely on each other and that we initiated a process of learning, asking and trust-building in our dream for the possibility of 'Another World'.

Chapter 11

The Art of Movement:

Culture and the United States Social Forum

Carlton Turner,
Alternate ROOTS and
USSF Culture Working Group

Omari Fox,
Alternate ROOTS

Jean-Marie Mauclet,
Artist

Imagine a future where artists from all communities are a part of creating a new world where human rights are respected and the earth is valued. Artists at the USSF have come from around the country to share their vision of another possible world. Join them as they share their performances with you at multiple venues throughout the city of Atlanta. It is our hope that cultural spaces will also be important places where we can meet, discuss, network, create, and plan our future!

This was the introduction in the Official Cultural Guide to the first ever USSF 2007 in Atlanta, Georgia. It was an introduction to an aspect of the Forum that for many was overlooked. The art and culture became a fringe event that had to be sought out and if and when you did find them, you were usually in small company. This was not the vision of poet and USSF lead organizer Alice Lovelace. Her intention from the outset of the planning was to infuse art and culture into every aspect of the Forum.

As we planned for this historic event, the questions that met us were familiar. What is the role of Art & Culture in coalition building between artists and activists? How do we use art to affect public awareness and policy change on important issues? How do artists and activists begin to work more closely together in the framing and messaging of these important issues? We, the handful of artists that accepted the charge of cultural organizers for this aspect of

the Forum, were challenged by these questions; questions that many of us attempt to answer in our daily work. For us, the Forum was center stage to tackle these sensitive issues.

What is culture and why is it important to the creation of another world?

Like many residents of the United States, I had never experienced a social forum until the USSF in Atlanta, GA in the summer of 2007. Because of my strong ties with Atlanta artists and activists, I was brought into the organizing effort for this event in the early stages. My level of excitement grew as I found out that Alice Lovelace, a woman that I admire as both an artist and community activist, would be the lead organizer for the USSF, I was convinced that art would be central to the organizing efforts of the Forum.

Culture is described as the art, social institutions, customs, and achievements of a particular people, nation, or other social groups. It is important for us to make the connection between art and culture and the movement for progressive social change. This is imperative because artists have the ability to bring clarity to issues with a spirit that speaks to people where they are. Artists break the linear models of sharing information by using music, movement and visual arts to bridge the multiple ways of learning. Artists feed on creative energy; they have active imaginations and are not bound by in-the-box thinking. This is important because as we begin to create that necessary other world, we must create from a place without inhibition. Artists help to stimulate and create free space with their work, whether it is a song, a painting, a video, or dance, this exercise of creative expression offers a certain amount of liberation. This liberation becomes the inspiration for new thoughts, visions and dreams of a new way of life. We must first dream the dream before we can build the vision.

The members of the Culture Committee, responsible for the planning and programming of the cultural events of the Forum, were all cultural workers. We were charged with three things:

(1) setting up a structure to review and curate the cultural arts programming at USSF;

(2) create mechanisms for outreach to the various cultural sectors; and

(3) identify point people within the committee to connect with the NPC and the Program Committee to keep them abreast of our progress.

Among the various members we were able to build a competent network of artists across genres and disciplines to participate in the USSF. Through the Internet, we created another portal for artists and cultural workers to get engaged in the Forum, when the official USSF website proved confusing to some. We communicated heavily through email and conference calls and were able to get a great deal of work done, even though the communication from the main body was sometimes insufficient. My perception is that the NPC, excluding Alice Lovelace, supported the cultural work in theory but not in application.

Who will lead?

Needless to say, organizing the USSF was a gargantuan task. It pressed many small organizations to the max with an exhausting workload. Organizing the USSF was hard work, but social justice organizations are not strangers to pushing themselves to the limit. Organizing the social forum while trying to keep your own organization afloat became a dynamic challenge. There is not doubt that this work needed a full-time organizer to meet the challenges of full art infusion.

I, like many of the other members of the NPC, work full-time for a non-profit organization. I work for Alternate ROOTS, which is a coalition of community-centered artists working on social justice issues in the South, and we consistently operate at levels that exceed our physical capacity. This does not make us unique in our field. What does make us unique is that the coalitions of artists that participate in ROOTS are dedicated to using art to address oppression in all of its forms. This attribute made ROOTS the perfect vehicle to help lead the charge of incorporating culture into all aspects of the social forum.

A lot of work to be done to make this effort successful and without compensation; it was hard for many to make the time commitment to planning this event from beginning to end. Also, both of the chairpersons that ended up taking the lead were both outside of Atlanta, this proved especially challenging because having someone on the ground to handle logistical work is imperative in making sure that all bases are covered. Because of the high turnover, communication became a real issue; things were not clear as to how individual artists could get plugged into the application process. We were also unclear about our ability to alter the design of the process to fit our specific needs.

ORGANIZERS VERSUS ARTISTS?

Omari Fox, Alternate ROOTS

I was surprised to find—while working as part of this process—that there are very few activists who understand the relationship between culture and progressive social change, and even fewer who consider themselves artists. However, it is evident that most advocacy campaigns utilize art in various

forms–slogans, chants, songs, puppets, visual art and street theater–to actively promote their cause. This fact made making the case for integrating artist voices into plenary and panels a difficult task. Throughout the organizing process culture, art and artists were constantly relegated to the periphery, looked upon as mostly entertainment. There seemed to be a general disconnect between art and culture and how we use it to communicate progressive social change.

Art and culture was synonymous with the social change movements of the 60's and 70's. Art is a part of any holistic movement. Building a unified movement calls for organizing to simultaneously happen on all fronts. What would the Civil Rights legacy be without the Freedom Singers? Can you imagine the peace movement without song? In the south, organizations like the Free Southern Theater and Radio Free Georgia, direct descendents of the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) were and still are institutions that are intimately connected with the movements for social change. This sense of connection seems to be missing in the current movements.

We were successful in contacting, scheduling and supervising cultural presentations at the USSF, managing venues and staffing the sites. However, we feel that we were not successful in integrating culture into all aspects of the USSF. Cultural workers were relegated mostly as entertainment and not viewed as important voices in the dialogues that were at the heart of the Forum. At the NPC meeting right before the start of the Forum, I found myself asking where were the artists' voices on the plenary and panel sessions? The response that I got was, "Would you like to host one of the final sessions on the main stage?"

As we move forward

In the future, how are artists represented at the USSF? Past the performances of singers and dancers, and the visual art exhibits, where is the unique voice of the artist in the process? How is this voice used as a uniting force and not as just a break from the rigors of organizing? These are questions that were left on the table post the first USSF. As we move forward to 2010, how do we ensure that art and culture are central to all efforts?

Art and culture are part of the holistic movement towards social change, it is essential and it is the responsibility of artists and cultural organizers to educate and inform the organizing process of the USSF to be more inclusive of art and artist in all their forms. Alternate ROOTS will continue to be a mechanism of support for the USSF through the diversity of the organization's members. Having gained a dynamic experience from the 2007 USSF, and having an intricate connection to more than numerous artists and cultural workers through various networks, my contributions to the 2010 USSF will be united in its ability and purpose. I am excited about the future and I look forward to seeing everyone again in 2010.

HOMEWORK HEAL: THE BEAUTIFUL STRUGGLE?

Jean-Marie Mauclet

Visual arts at the USSF, an artist's view

Attending all the various South Carolina regional meetings and rhizomes particularly in Charleston, (May at the Library, Dining with Friends on Aids Day, 3 Rhizome gatherings) this on-going think tank and infrastructure of activity permeates the collective to habitually bring to fruition a thought or idea. As we sat back and watched the raw footage from the WSF in Nairobi and Southeastern Social Forum in Durham, NC I was visually taken there by the video as well as the various personal recounts. The sentiments that we gathered from the World Forum were many but the main ones that struck me were the effects of the United States presence or influence on the world and on our brothers and sisters in the broader sense of all of humanity descending from a common African ancestry; and how education is valued and perceived outside of the United States particularly in regard to how US influence for better or worse is reported and people's sentiments about it. I still don't believe I have a true sense of these implications but the opportunity to hear citizens of the world speak on their ills and hopes for possible healing is my personal backdrop to my participation in the USSF. The South Carolina caravan ultimately brought thirteen other people from our region to the Forum.

Although my predominant artist persona is for poetry my first love is visual arts. To piggyback the earlier sentiments of "world ills," further analysis of a dominant theme that emerged from the WSF is health and healing. Even before the WSF, following the Southeastern Social Forum the seeds of support emerged for that theme. Alice Lovelace, a poet and lead organizer of USSF, planted them. Rita Valenti, a nurse activist on the board of Project South and Marilyn Clement from Healthcare NOW. As collaborating artists of the Charleston Rhizome we thought to do a multi-layered theme for the USSF as the United States issues are equally layered and as complex as the world issues.

The primary targeted issue was Healing, Health, and Environmental Justice and we were blessed with Rita Valenti as our contact for that Local team of the USSF who responded positively to our goals particularly being a community activist working with health organizations and causes. We got a spot within the tent space of the Healing, Health & Environmental Justice (HH&EJ) Team of USSF where we organized and filmed each day conversations based on questions we developed together, following the diagram of USSF. Thursday was "Consciousness, health injustices and justice, children health and aids". In addition we also had the opportunity to collaborate with fellow Alternate Roots artist Bailey Barash and screened excerpts of her documentary "The AIDS Chronicles" at the Task

Force gallery followed by discussion. Friday involved "Visioning, environmental injustices and justice". Saturday turned around "Strategies, nutritional issues and stories of healing and recoveries." We also filmed conversations next to the large water stations on Saturday, taking advantage of the homecoming events organized by families of formerly incarcerated members.

As our conversations are not interviews, the participants often abandoned the subject and talked about their reasons for being at the Forum or any other subjects. Many homeless were part of those conversations, which would prove to be an awakening coincidence since it tied into our work at the Taskforce for the Homeless. We recorded 52 conversations. At the same time and same place, under the leadership of Arianne King Comer we continued our endless batik banners. About 24 feet of fabric were used this time. Some of them were shown at Alternate ROOTS Annual Meeting in August.

Our first film "You Comin," with recordings from the Southeast Social Forum was selected as the opening film for USSF film festival at the main Library. We were so pleased. The filming done at the World Social Forum is now on a website www.youcomin.org. There, anyone can access the conversations they participated in. After many discussions with Rita Valenti, Cara Page and the HH&EJ team we are processing our filming as a patchwork of conversations (two DVD's). And our Rhizome will continue to work in 2007-08 on an edited version of what was done at the three forums.

The next issue was to continue the wave of support for the role of arts and Alternate Roots Visual Artists with the theme "Cultural/Social Possibilities." With visual artists and educators permeating the group, once we decided on our themes it was a matter of mapping our in-house resources, making an artists' call, and plotting the course of collaboration with our respective networks and communities. After several showings and discussions of "You Comin," and some buzz for USSF attendance the artists roster began to form including some from a call by the USSF planning committee. Youth participation was hard to generate due to administrative constraints, vision, and focus on standardized test scores. Although school mission statements speak to developing citizens of humanity and the visual arts curriculum standards encourage exhibition opportunity and generation of broad ideas and practice, most of our efforts in the schools where some of us (Lasheia Oubre, Pam Gibbs, Arianne King Comer and myself) teach garnered some interest, but we were limited to the statistical priorities of increased test performance. We also attempted to link our work with the tent and program of the youth group of Project South. Finally during the Forum we were blessed by a large participation of young people.

The Culture group of USSF had planned two shows. Earlier contacts with Alyson McLetchie, Lynn Linnemeier and Kevin Sipp were very encouraging.

However, Alyson and Lynn dropped their leadership in the USSF Culture workgroup. We felt that there was a burden and an opportunity. We decided to take the leadership for a show in the cafeteria space at the Task Force for the Homeless on Peachtree and Pine right up the street from the heart of USSF activity in the Convention Center. I have mixed feelings about it particularly because of our intruding presence, though well intentioned it was the space and sanctuary of the Task Forces' residents and of one special artist that I will never forget. Considering the themes that we approached visually the power of art was at hand and one of the artists at the Task Force who was not pleased with the "artsy imperialists" eventually came around to us and even presented his work in a Show and Tell evening. With the artists and themes emerging from a wide variety of locales, sensibilities, and mediums the eventual display that developed was one that showcased artists that might not ordinarily exhibit together in a space that was fitting for the issues raised at the Forum.

I have decided to call the show "Homework Heal: the Beautiful Struggle?" due to the setting, partners, and multi-layered issues on display. Homework because with so many educators myself included, the work we need to do is at home in the United States and our local community, the broader world community, the environmental work for the earth, the exhibition space at the Task Force for the Homeless, and the meaning of healing it's the perfect title but perhaps more importantly and personally a wake up call for all of us to do our homework assignment. Heal, by definition, means to cure, restore, repair, or to set right. How can that not be the world's homework assignment? Because of my hip-hop roots the "Beautiful Struggle" is homage to MC Talib Kweli's album title, but moreover another loaded statement speaking to the personal journey that we took to get to the USSF. It was truly beautiful to see the convergence but thinking about how to build an infrastructure to deal with what we wanted to overcome was a grander struggle and still is. Then the immediate struggle of beautiful art being juxtaposed with homeless human beings in the next room and the backdrop of the Forum passing people along the way to the convention center and no instant means to assist the situation but hoping that the videos and messages would eventually spark consciousness that would lead to change.

The ability of the artists to adapt to the setting of the stretched venues surrounding the Forum, the variety of what was presented around health and social possibility, and the opportunity to display at the Task Force all made for a unique showing and what I know as one of the few visual arts cultural contributions, as the USSF was dominated with after session performances. The highlight for me was finally not performing at our Open Mic & Show and Tell, just being a visual artist speaking to my first love and motivations behind my work, which has plenty

of written words for people to see and hear. A host of Rooters and on the spot artists came to perform at our gallery walk including our friend at the Task Force. In the heat of the sweltering Georgia night, balancing and interspersing singing, dance, and poetry between each visual artist's discussion further raised the temperature of talent. Like creativity often does the extemporaneous sign in forged a perfect blend of energy that seemed to compliment the image and content of the visual artists and performers. Other performers included Brooks Emanuel, Vanessa Manley adapting her dance to a batik created at the WSF, poetry and drama by Ratsak, and the vocal talents of Etta Purcell. After extensive promotion and street team hustle, local forum attendees and the Alternate Roots faithful alike all came out to our art affair.

Returning to the world outside the Forum in South Carolina, our Charleston Rhizome and Hip-Hop Institute hasn't missed a beat. Post-forum think tanks and planning sessions have lead to the continuation of sentiments inspired by the USSF Another World is Possible theme and we have since held monthly male and female empowerment conferences, youth outreach performances and have plans for performances and food/ supply drives at our local homeless shelters and organizations. The efforts of "Homework Heal" and "You Comin" are still ongoing with work and outreach efforts with South Carolina public schools, communities and DJs. Several ideas spawned from relationships and ideas generated by this artistic effort have filtered into our personal creative work or will manifest in shows pending in 2008. The homework hasn't stopped before or since the USSF.

In conclusion, the opportunity to exhibit in our Roots home base of Atlanta and have a visual arts presence at the USSF wouldn't have been possible without the grant. That chance coupled with the opportunity to showcase our visual and performing artists to raise awareness to difficult situations was a blessing that will be honored with the continued work of our region. Obviously determined artists, like our rhizome, who often work in underserved communities will find a way to make our presence and message felt, but having financial latitude to fund these aspirations often make possible opportunities that appear impossible and the Charleston Rhizome and Hip-Hop Institute is beyond grateful to be recipients of one of the 2007 CAPP Grants.

USSF Art show at the Taskforce for the Homeless

I heard Alice talk about the USSF as early as August 2006, at the Alternate Roots annual meeting. Her main idea–as I recall–was to have an artist present at each Forum event to show that our future is predicated upon how creative we the people must be for another world to be possible. Maybe, artists could, creatively and experimentally, influence the USSF workshops and plenary sessions in their

form and content. The process was to be organized by volunteers. Then, the Forum format and web-related registration process proved hard to decipher.

For many decades now, artists of all disciplines seem to have well understood how they could be part of a competitive market but they still have trouble understanding their benevolent, civic role within our open society. In fact, like any other individual or group, artists were expected to register and propose ideas to the Forum organizers.

Anita Beatty, the Director of the huge Task Force for the Homeless, an artist herself, proposed a space for a visual art show. The space was converted, from a room full of rubble to a clean room with recycled rubble, an art space: 3000 square feet at the corner of Peachtree and Pine, two blocks from the USSF Civic Center.

Actually, in the middle of the rubble, there were already resident artists and photographers at the Task Force. One of them was not very happy to be invaded, but in the process, offered the first proof that the spirit of the USSF was well at work. He became, for me and others, a facilitator and a guide, an inspired example of patience, goodwill and open mindedness. His work became necessary for the show to be.

Were it from from-the-hip or professional photography, fine art, installation work, hip-hop, video art, two of the six altars present at the Forum or the mix was a perfect reflection of what the USSF is all about: the temporary, composite, unexpected gathering of folks who share a huge dream, work hard together to clarify it and go back home to anchor it. The crowning moment was Friday evening where all participants had an opportunity to present their work in a show-and-tell situation. Then, poets, dancers, singers, spoken word artists could interfere, react to the work. Let me say, it was hot… and warm.

Altogether, maybe 250 people only visited the space, a space that may soon give way a cafeteria for the Task Force. But, speaking for myself and some others, I am sure, the whole experience helped us grasp that, if another world, another art world, is indeed possible, it will be one where diversity and tolerance are the obligatory filters of all aesthetics and all ethics, upon which our homogenized, consumerist cultures are founded. A severe blow to "values" as guarantee of our social position, our stability, our predictability and that of our social groups. After all, art is just an exudation, a secretion, a natural, renewable product of human creativity. In Atlanta we sweated it out and the experience sheared the grid of our expectations.

Now, I need to thank all participants, volunteers, and supporters. Mostly Grant, Leo, Jules, Lynn, Gwylene, Luke, Alice, Arif, Steve, Arianne, Bailey, Anita, Aboukar, Latonnya, Omari, Cara, Egypt, Kia, Malcolm, Chelsea, the Women Warriors, the Peace Women and all others. Thank you so much.

Part II

Creating Convergences:
Building a Movement from the Bottom Up

The cluster of articles in Section II are all connected to the issues of building and converging movements in the US and globally. In these pieces, the writers bring to the forefront the critical issues in movement convergence. These issues can be posed as questions: How might our movements link together for social transformation given historical divides? What must occur within the USSF process as well as on the ground for bottom up movement convergence to occur? What are examples of movement convergences?

The opening article, by Lara Cushing and Jill Johnson makes the movement convergence case boldly and with clarity, offering lessons worth emulating from the People's Freedom Caravan. The organizers moved with a clear vision of building from the bottom up. The Caravan started from Albuquerque, New Mexico, moving through Texas and other sites in the South, connecting in Mississippi with Black freedom fighters from the anti-racist organization Southern Echo. It was understood that if Brown people from the Southwest and Black people from the South made authentic connections, linking struggles, the US could be fundamentally changed. And what glorious images the Caravan cast, rolling into Atlanta, into the social forum. The Caravan organized in honor of the 1961 Freedom Rides and with a vision of the world we want to create.

How we build movement unity and convergence from the bottom up is worth considering. This is the bottom-up convergence that the USSF puts at the center of its praxis. The multiple movements in the US must come together in deep connection for transformatory change to occur. Linking communities of color, working class and poor, LGBTQ, women, disability is at the heart of this process. Fundamentally, this convergence entails the intersection of movements to build strategic alliances and relationships. Labor and grassroots community groups have begun to make these connections. For example, the student movement has begun to build with organized labor. While the labor presence was weaker than it should have been at the USSF, the articles, "Workers' Rights at the US Social Forum" and the "UE Participates in the Social Forum Process," are good examples of how these processes are unfolding.

Clearly the struggle for convergence is not outside the forum process. There was a good deal of struggle within USSF organizing and illustrating that conver-

gence is often difficult. This is powerfully articulated in the voices of the women from the Women's Working Group. In their chapter, "Women's Working Group Organizing Gender Justice for the US Social Forum," the nature of their struggle within the USSF is presented. There will be tensions and contestation in building alliances. This has certainly been true in the struggle against patriarchy and the erasure of women's oppression in the context of radical struggles for social change. Even still, the Forum was an important point of connection for those activists involved in women's liberation and LGBTQ struggles. Members of SONG recount the history of LGBTQ in another chapter. Likewise, the significance of the USSF process for immigrant communities is articulated by Colin Rajah, of the National Network for Immigrant and Refugee Rights.

Finally, in this section, there are three powerful examples of convergence through alliance building in the context of the USSF. With these alliances, we gain insight into answering the last question: Are there examples of convergence we can learn from? The National Domestic Workers Alliance (NDWA) and the Solidarity Economy Network (SEN) formalized and The Right to the City Alliance further instituted itself at the USSF. The exploitation of domestic workers and the gentrification of US cities connect powerfully with the gender, class, and racial inequalities of neoliberal globalization central to building the USSF. The development of economic exchange that goes beyond profit-seeking capitalism ultimately makes another world possible. Bringing together diverse sectors of grassroots organizations so that they can build within and across movements lies at the heart of the USSF. As one activist notes, "We are many in the same fight." This section demonstrates our struggles and accomplishments in creating convergences.

Chapter 12

The United States Social Forum:
Igniting the Kindred & Each Other

Alexis Pauline Gumbs, Atlanta-born,
Southerners on New Ground (SONG) member

atlanta done laid me down
heat painted pavement to stay

taught me
that to be alien
was to be here
so to be queer
must be hip hop
(beat beaten but beaming still)

atlanta taught me
music could war
and if drop-kicked hope
landed and landed
in Bankhead
it would bounce

atlanta remains
a city brazen enough
to kill me and keep moving
but I would STILL tattoo OutKast lyrics
on my grave

what I am trying to tell you is
love is a sin
that at best trains me up
in the everyday art of not being a slave

but this is how much i want you

i would cringe into asphalt
fuck the compromise of sidewalks
if it meant you could stand in the middle and sing
i would shelter
the highest pedestrian deathrate
if it made the craziest among us
more likely immortal

would drawl down secrets
melt your sneakers
and name every pathway after what I can't afford

if it meant you would
never forget me
i would be the place
spread open
divided
for the queer and fly to multiply

Chapter 13

Milestones of a Movement:
Reflections on the People's Freedom Caravan

-Refineries, prisons, and demolitions.
-Tacos, BBQ, jambalaya, crawfish, and collards.
-Workers, families, youth, Native Americans, and immigrants.
-Conjunto, Second Line, and Blues.

Lara Cushing and Jill Johnston, Southwest Workers Union

The People's Freedom Caravan (PFC) to the US Social Forum brought together over 80 grassroots organizations from the South and Southwest on a six day journey of bridge building, solidarity, and self discovery. A social forum on wheels, the Caravan built convergence between low income communities from Albuquerque to Atlanta by breaking down the barriers of class, race, issue and geography that too often divide us. Through action and exchanges in 13 communities along the way, the riders created a common experience and realized the power of connecting with and simultaneously creating history.

For Southwest Workers Union and many organization in the southern half of the US the social forum was more about the *process* of getting there than merely the participation in the event itself. We used this opportunity as a way to build upon the movement in the region and bring grassroots leaders together–young and old–to share their stories, to hear and see first hand the history and the realities in the southern US.

By the time we arrived in Atlanta, the Caravan was over 500 strong, with eight buses and numerous vans and cars, and had touched thousands along the journey. It would be impossible to capture the diverse perspectives and experiences of all those who took part here. Instead, we offer these reflections on the Caravan from our viewpoint as one of the primary organizers, and in the words of many of our members who made the journey.

This is what movement building looks like

In a system where social justice is chopped into different fundable "program areas" with measurable "outcomes", movement building is an abstract idea that is

People's Caravan, Albuquerque, New Mexico, June 22, 2007 (courtesy of SouthWest Organizing Project)

hard to connect with our local work. It is hard to see how it will empower communities, or further goals or campaigns, and it is even harder to get funded. In the day-to-day struggle of challenging head on that which is hardest to face–the demoralizing reality that people exploit and oppress each other–sometimes it becomes overwhelming to think of taking on any more work than is absolutely necessary.

Why then, after many sleepless nights pulling together the Border Social Forum in Ciudad Juarez in October of 2006, did we start talking about organizing a week long, multi-city, grassroots caravan through the Southwest and South to the first USSF in Atlanta? How did the caravan bloom into the focus of many of our organizing efforts towards the USSF, and a deeply transformative experience for many of the participants? And what have we advanced as grassroots organizations by spending six days on the road with hundreds of other people?

"We were already heavily invested in the process of putting together the USSF, with the goal of helping us think differently about how we do movement building in this country," reflected Robbie Rodriguez of the SouthWest Organizing Project (SWOP) in Albuquerque. "There are books that are written by academics about movement-building, lifelong activists that have been a part of it, but what does it really mean? For us part of the meaning is the feeling of being a part of something much bigger than ourselves or our community. The People's Freedom Caravan was a moment where we created the opportunity for our members to experience that."

Too often, we see the same faces of professional activists again and again at national and international "movement building" events. The USSF itself was an attempt to counter that, and provide a space more accessible than the World Social Forums for grassroots people to come together to share stories, struggles,

strategies and build solidarity and convergence towards another world. The PFC was really an attempt to ground that same idea in the logistical challenge of getting 500 people from communities with few resources to Atlanta.

The idea for the Caravan emerged out of a collaboration between Southwest Workers Union, the SouthWest Organizing Project, and Southern Echo in Mississippi. We had been sharing our regional histories as oppressed communities through a series of organizational exchanges with the goal of building black-brown solidarity through dialog and the construction of a common understanding of the impacts of slavery, colonization, and migration. "But once we decided we were going to do this caravan, the question very quickly became who else needs to be rolling with us on the bus?" remembers Genaro L. Rendón of Southwest Workers Union.

"The caravan is a rebirth of grassroots politics that will include hundreds of members from community organizations that share a common vision for a more just world," says Brenda Hyde of Southern Echo. "This is a world where education and healthcare are valued over war, incarceration, and corporate welfare; where worker and human rights are respected; and where families live in a clean environment."

Movement building has to encompass raising consciousness amongst people who do not already consider themselves part of the struggle for social justice. Most of our members had never left the state before. From infants to great grandmothers, the Caravan was intergenerational and rooted in family. Rather than involving the usual suspects, the Caravan became a vehicle for bringing regular folks–workers, immigrants, youth–as well as veterans from the Civil Rights, indigenous, and Chicano rights movements to speak for themselves in Atlanta and deepen their own understanding of the movement for social change in the US and their role at the center of it. We carried the stories of the communities we visited along the way with us to Atlanta, and also brought a piece of the USSF to those at every stop along the way who were not able to go. "It was the mix of folks that really made this special, unique and powerful. We become very fragmented in the work that we do, and we need to break out of that paradigm. That is what the People's Freedom Caravan lent itself to do–shift your thinking. You felt it in the way the communities opened their doors, their hearts, and their arms to us at every stop," Genaro added.

The Caravan also made dozens of organizations work together. One person or even one group could not have pulled off the logistics, nor organized events in each city that had the impact and local resonance that they did. Rather it was our collective effort, our collective power that created the experience. The organizing process itself fortified relationships and trust between organizations in a way that a mere conference could not. The Caravan was a concrete way for us to harness the excitement of the USSF and root it in our regional organizing to mobilize more

grassroots power and solidarity amongst disenfranchised communities across the US South and Southwest.

The power of experience

One of the biggest challenges to movement building work is overcoming barriers between our communities–cultural, language, geographic and generational divides. How do we build the collective understanding to transcend the negative messages we are bombarded with about each other–that we are criminals, illegal, poor because we're lazy, stupid because we're young? How do we break down the forces that try to put us in competition for the basic human rights to health care, education, housing, food, and meaning in our life? As organizers from diverse communities trying to build multi-racial and intergenerational solidarity, that is our ongoing struggle.

The People's Freedom Caravan took on that challenge through the transformative power of personal relationships and shared experience. Too often we suffer from a race to the bottom to vie for the position of most oppressed. The Caravan changed that dynamic by allowing us to define ourselves by that which makes us proud: our food, our leaders, our history, our culture, our resistance. Sharing and celebrating our distinct histories and traditions lets us better recognize the common threads that tie our struggles together. In a polarized society where working class communities are pitted against each other, the simple act of sitting down to a meal together becomes revolutionary. Rooted in our unique cultures and communities, we can then forge a new way forward based on hope and vision.

One Mossville resident said "We've been waiting a long time" for this type of convergence that overcomes the barriers that divide us. "This is about making our voices heard, bringing together our power and constructing a better future for our children based on human rights and justice."

History and present-day struggles were highlighted at each stop of the Caravan through testimony, witnessing tours, and action. It is one thing to read about the Civil Rights Movement. It is another to stand with Hollis Watkins, civil rights veteran and founder of Southern Echo, as he describes young people being jailed in livestock pens for civil disobedience. Similarly, there is nothing like hearing the first hand testimony of Residents of Public Housing, day laborers, and residents of the Ninth Ward about the tragedy of Katrina and the reconstruction of New Orleans, or communities in San Antonio, Houston, Port Arthur, TX and Mossville, LA, describing the health impacts of living in the shadow of the Air Force, refineries, and chemical manufacturing facilities.

"Some of the things Hollis told us were just heart-breaking," wrote Genevieve Rodriguez about her impressions of the Caravan stop in Jackson, MS. "It would

be comforting to hear that such things don't go on in the United States today. But adjacent to the infamous livestock sheds is the Jackson Coliseum, where evacuees from Hurricane Katrina were housed. At first, there were about equal number of blacks and white, Watkins pointed out. But after a few days, it was mainly black people waiting for a place to go."

Diana Lopez of SWU said of her experience, "It changed me in the way that I now see. I got to experience the front lines of organizing by talking to community members who are affected by oil companies, Katrina, racism directly instead of seeing it from the outside. You realize how different it is."

Members also echoed the inspiration and hope they took from the resilience and commitment of the communities we visited. "You never hear about the reality. I saw the power of the community here and I am excited that we could help in some small way," said Jessie Weahkee, 13, from New Mexico who spent three hours hauling furniture, clothes and possessions. The Caravan work brigade composed of young and old left the C.J. Peete housing complex in New Orleans drenched in sweat and dirt but filled with hope and satisfaction.

Bineshi Albert of the Center for Community Change and SWOP reflected, "The Caravan gave me an opportunity to have my family participate. I wanted my children to be a part of what I think will be history. We connected across issues, built relationships and partnerships all along the way. I bring back a lot of inspiration to support each other and each others' work."

"I'm very proud of the youth coming on this bus, the stories they are telling, talking from their heart … I see hope from all the young people on the bus," said Viola Casares, a grandmother and co-coordinator of Fuerza Unida.

We have lift off! Creating convergence in New Mexico and Texas

On Friday June 22nd, two buses full of 100 New Mexicans pulled out of Albuquerque, NM. The delegation, rolling in the most stylish buses, included residents from Pajarito Mesa fighting for basic services, immigrants fighting for just immigration reform, Indigenous people protecting sacred sites, African Americans preserving historical traditions and culture, and policy organizations fighting for working families. Families and the Martin Luther King Dream Team hosted the Caravan in Carlsbad, NM before getting on the bus themselves.

"Our primary mission is to bridge the nation's democratic divide," Jo Ann Gutierrez-Bejar said at the send off. "We live in a country with structural inequities. Low income people of color are divided amongst each other. We need to bridge the gap between us with this tour and realize we're all fighting the same struggles and seeking the same opportunities."

In San Antonio, Caravan participants got a toxic tour of the communities surrounding the former Kelly Air Force Base and heard testimony from residents

struggling with cancer and exclusion by the government agencies. Later, tourists at the Alamo got an earful when we marched hundreds strong through downtown for migrant rights. An evening of dance, conjunto music and *comida* followed. *"We are really trying to make positive changes in the world today,"* Lydia Williams, 41, of Carlsbad, N.M., told reporters.

Three buses strong, we met our fourth in Houston, in the shadows of refineries. A quarter of the world's oil is refined in the Gulf Coast region, and Houston is in the center of the dirty oil industry causing cancer, asthma, smog as well as climate change. Welcomed with a barbeque, we joined one of the biggest environmental actions in the city's history, even catching the attention of the mayor. "Thanks for being here," said one mother from the Manchester community, standing with her children. "We're trying to clean our air."

"The people in Houston filled me inspiration," said Victoria Rodriguez of SWOP. "I don't know how they live next to those refineries. You can smell it. This is truly an environmental injustice. We heard about children having heart surgery, families dealing with high instances of cancer, yet the community is still filled with hope."

Building a better world through strength, resilience, and courage in Louisiana

The Caravan continued to Lake Charles, LA, in the parish that is home to the highest juvenile incarceration rate in the country. Across the river is Mossville, originally a free black settlement that is now surrounded by petrochemical plants that kill. Change is happening now. The Caravan helped bring two strong grassroots organizations, Friends and Families of Louisiana's Incarcerated Children and Mossville Environmental Action Now, together in solidarity across many issues. FFLIC and MEAN welcomed the Caravan with a hearty meal and great conversation. "I felt the suffering of the community here, dealing with health problems from contamination just like in my neighborhood in San Antonio," explained George Valdez of SWU. "We must unite our struggles to ensure that everyone in this country has a safe, clean environment for their families." "We know what a better world would look like," said Grace Bauer of FFLIC. "It has air and water that nourishes rather than poisons, it has schools and parks not prisons, it prioritizes social programs and health care instead of corporate welfare. Let's build that better world."

Our next stop, New Orleans moved everyone on the Caravan in so many ways. From tears to laughter, from tragedy to dancing, the spirit of the place had a lasting impact on all. "I thought this only happened in poor countries, I couldn't believe what I saw," said Carlos Herrera, a 32-year old immigrant from Mexico, about the devastation of Katrina. "Let us come together to overcome the barriers set up to keep us divided. As hurricane season is upon us, we must join together to

People's Caravan, CJ Peete Public Housing Complex, New Orleans, Louisiana, June 25, 2007 (courtesy of Southwest Workers Union)

a just rebuilding and reconstruction of our city. The other US that's possible, it starts here and it starts with us," shared Kimberely Richards of the People's Institute.

Rooted deep in history and struggle, we witnessed the power of people to recreate their lives, rebuild their city, and keep their culture vibrant. From community run health clinics to immigrant workers getting organized, reoccupation of housing units, and celebration with food and music, the Caravan got a glimpse into the Gulf Coast.

"The rooms were full of debris and we saw personal belongings that were left behind such as photo albums with pictures dating back to 1977. In that same room there was also a letter that had a check from FEMA in it for $188," remembers Jason Lerma of SWU's Youth Leadership Organization about helping residents of the CJ Peete public housing unit clean through the wreckage of their homes from which they had been locked out by the federal government. "Residents that had lived at the complex before Katrina hit were telling us what happened that day and how they had to be rescued by helicopters. They tried to go back about a month after the hurricane and they were forced out because the government had taken over and said they were trespassing onto their property."

"This whole experience left me even more inspired to help communities like the lower 9th ward to fight the system and demand that they be treated fairly. I hope to put all my energy and effort into helping people that our government

chooses to ignore." added Debbie Moschak, SWU, 21. The afternoon was spent with families of Liberty Bayou in Slidell, at a church destroyed by the hurricanes to share in a crab boil. Local folks offered lessons on how to break apart the crab while learning about the social movements happening across the country. Surrounding the sacred grounds, the group wrapped around an ancient oak several times to join in unity with the community and offer hope and smiles in the face of hardship. "The people have united and not let go of their land, their pride, their roots, their culture. It gives me that strength to continue" reflected Monica Garcia of SWU, 31.

Freedom on our minds
in Jackson, MS and Selma, AL

Received with warmth by civil rights veterans of Southern Echo, the People's Freedom Caravan saw the Jackson that is rich with struggle, resistance and songs of a movement. In the city where the original freedom riders were jailed, we heard the truth of the inhumanity of racism, a legacy more subtle but still alive today. We learned of the fight just to get recognition of the civil rights leaders and of the power of history.

Humbled and inspired by the courage and conviction of the freedom fighters of Mississippi, the Caravan descended on Wal-Mart to unite with local organizers in their campaign for a workplace with dignity and justice. Chanting "What do we want? Living wage! When do we want it? Now!" our spirited demonstration showed Wal-Mart that the struggle continues in Mississippi today.

"Wal-Mart is eating the flesh off the bones of the workers, stealing benefits from workers and families," said State Representative Jim Evans who came to support the demonstrators. "To unionize Wal-Mart, we need a spark. Today, you are that spark."

"Those working inside this store right now are the ones making the buck, creating the enormous profit, for the Wal-Mart Corporation," Latoya Davis of Mississippi Workers Center for Human Rights told hundreds. "Meanwhile they are only given crumbs to live off of."

"I can really relate to the Wal-Mart workers struggles for a living wage because, as a server at Chili's, I only earn $2.13 an hour," said Dominic Reyes, 22, from San Antonio.

Chavel Lopez of the SWU explained, "Wal-Mart succeeds in exploiting workers, paying poverty wages, all around the world. We need to repeal the free trade agreements that allow this corporate globalization to happen." Joined by yet another bus in Jackson, the Caravan also created a strong showing of black-brown unity, as immigrant, Latino, indigenous, and African American youth and organizers came together around common objectives. "It doesn't matter if you came off

the Mayflower or crossed the border last night. You still have human rights," said Evans.

In Selma we converged with buses that had traveled through Biloxi and along the Gulf Coast. We gathered over another great meal to remember how we got here, the violence of the past and the sacrifices of those that stopped at nothing to work for freedom and towards a new vision and another world.

Rollin' deep into Atlanta, GA

Rolling into Atlanta the next morning, we were united and together. The Caravan had traveled well over 2,000 miles in six days. Building that trust and common experience set us on firm ground to realize our visions. Getting off the bus to the excited faces of the USSF organizers, a rush of energy revived all of us on the bus. We were met with a brass band and joined over 15 thousand people committed to creating another US as we marched together under the hot sun.

"My most memorable moment was getting off the buses in Atlanta chanting 'we can change the world, yes we can, we're the People's Freedom Caravan' and taking over the street," remembers Diana Lopez, 18 of SWU. "It changes how I do my work now. You know how to trouble shoot during day to day organizing. You feel more connected because people know what you are going through here locally."

"There are not many opportunities in life like this one," remarked Sandra Garcia of SWU. "It was a good experience for the youth because you see the whole US struggle and then you localize it to your city. We were inspired to start the Bill Miller's campaign when we came home." This youth-led campaign caused a citywide uproar over the unequal pay of young workers at the San Antonio fast food chain, and more equitable pay practices.

"I came on this tour as a mother. I'm leaving committed to social justice," shared Renee Rodriguez of SWU. "You don't really get what other people have been through until you actually see it. I have seen the struggles, and I have felt the spark of hope. The community is making change and it is all run by the people."

So was it worth it?

The People's Freedom Caravan was a transformative movement building experience and in many ways did what a conference could never do. As the Caravan brought together thousands along its journey, it carried the spirit of those unable to get on the bus; it brought those voices, those struggles and those stories to Atlanta. And as we returned to our communities, it brought the experience and knowledge back to our base across the South & Southwest.

The act of sharing and giving, something deeply rooted in all of our cultures, created many bridges and relationships. We came home with a fired-up member-

ship with a broadened analysis and powerful shared experience. The Caravan provided our youth with a profound sense of history and what is possible. It helped us develop deep connections with allies across the region ready to stand with each other. We carried home the joy of being recognized as kin by someone who had never met us before.

"It may be one thing at a time, but we are all going to get everything accomplished… those who plan to get poor people out, out of their houses so the wealthier can get wealthier, they will come down," said Eloy Contreras, 49, school worker and Board President of SWU.

"Another world is truly possible. We felt her pulse on the buses. We felt her pulse when each town received us with such warmth. And we felt her pulse in each hand shake and hug from the many people we met along the way," expressed Karlos Schmieder, Youth Media Council and lifelong SWOP member. Genevieve Rodriguez, 16 of SWU added "We took Atlanta by storm. Just think of what we can do next."

The People's Freedom Caravan was made possible
by the commitment & corazón of:

- Action for Community Education Reform (MS)
- Activists with a Purpose, Grenada (MS)
- Advocates for Environmental Human Rights, New Orleans (LA)
- American Indian Movement (National)
- Ashe´ Cultural Center, New Orleans (LA)
- Bayou Liberty, Slidell (LA)
- Bayou Paquet, Slidell (LA)
- Brown Berets, San Antonio (TX)
- Capital Post-Conviction Project, New Orleans (LA)
- Catalyst Project, New Orleans (LA)
- Centro de Igualdad y Derechos (NM)
- Chicano (NM)
- Children's Defense Fund, New Orleans (LA)
- Circle of Love Center, Selma (AL)
- Citizens for Education Awareness (MS)
- Coalition in Defense of the Community, Houston (TX)
- Committee for Environmental Justice Action, San Antonio (TX)
- Community In-Power Development Association, Port Arthur (TX)
- COMPA (Americas)
- Concerned Citizens for a Better Tunica County, Tunica (MS)
- Concerned Citizens of Greenville, Greenville (MS)
- Creole Sans Limites, Slidell (LA)

- Enlace Comunitario, Alburquerque (NM)
- Elwood Community Church, Selma (AL)
- Esperanza Peace and Justice Center, San Antonio (TX)
- Fourth World Movement, New Orleans (LA)
- Friends and Families of Louisiana's Incarcerated Children, Lake Charles (LA)
- Fuerza Unida, San Antonio (TX)
- Georgia Stand Up, Atlanta (GA)
- Grassroots Global Justice (National)
- Gulf Coast Fund (National)
- Houston Indy Media Collective, Houston (TX)
- INCITE! Women of Color Against Violence, New Orleans (LA)
- Indianola Parent Student Group, Indianola (MS)
- Institute of Women & Ethnic Studies, New Orleans (LA)
- Just Be Inc., Selma (AL)
- Latino Health Outreach Project, New Orleans (LA)
- League of United Latin American Citizens, Houston (TX)
- Left Turn, New Orleans (LA)
- Lower 9th Ward Health Clinic, New Orleans (LA)
- Mary Queen of Vietnam Church, New Orleans (LA)
- Millions More Movement, Houston (TX)
- MLK Dream Team, Carlsbad (NM)
- Mossville Environmental Action Now, Mossville (LA)
- Moving Forward Gulf Coast, Slidell (LA)
- National Alliance of Vietnamese American Service Agencies, New Orleans (LA) (National)
- Native American Church (TX)
- Neighborhood Partnership Network, New Orleans (LA)
- New Mexico Acequia Association/Sembrando Semillas (NM)
- New Orleans Women's Health Clinic, New Orleans (LA)
- New Orleans Workers' Center, New Orleans (LA)
- Nollies Citizens for Quality Education (MS)
- One Torch, New Orleans (LA)
- Parents and Youth United for a Better Webster County, Webster (MS)
- People's Hurricane Relief Fund, New Orleans (LA)
- People's Institute for Survival and Beyond, Houston (TX), New Orleans (LA)
- People's Organizing Committee, New Orleans (LA)
- PODER, San Francisco (CA)
- Project South, Atlanta (GA)

- Safe Streets Strong Communities, New Orleans (LA)
- SAGE Council, Albuquerque (NM)
- Saving Our Selves Coalition (AL)
- Somos Un Pueblo Unido, Santa Fe (NM)
- Southern Echo Incorporated, Jackson (MS)
- Southern Human Rights Organizing Network, Houston (TX)
- SouthWest Organizing Project, Albuquerque (NM)
- Southwest Workers Union, San Antonio (TX)
- St. Vincent de Paul Society, Slidell (LA)
- Students at the Center, New Orleans (LA)
- T.E.J.A.S, Houston (TX)
- Texas Death Penalty Abolition Movement, Houston (TX)
- Vietnamese-American Young Leaders Association of New Orleans, New Orleans (LA)
- Welfare Rights Organization, New Orleans (LA)
- World Can't Wait, San Antonio (TX)
- Youth Innovation Movement Solutions (MS)
- Youth Leadership Organization, San Antonio (TX)
- Youth Media Council, Oakland (CA)

Chapter 14

National Domestic Workers Alliance

Ai-jen Poo,
Domestic Workers United

Andrea Cristina Mercado,
Mujeres Unidas y Activas

Jill Shenker,
La Raza Centro Legal

Xiomara E. Corpeño, Director of Organizing at the Coalition for Humane Immigrants Rights of Los Angeles (CHIRLA)
National Domestic Workers Alliance

Allison Julien,
Domestic Workers United, New York

> "Domestic workers contributed an atmosphere of hope [to the U.S. Social Forum], the fight for better labor standards, dignity, unity, strength, and courage. Being in Atlanta, we were able to make the connections between our struggles and those of our ancestors. Many domestic workers from all across the USA were able to connect, meet, build and strategize and this unity was felt throughout the USSF. We were able to educate the broader public about the many plights of domestic workers (and farm workers) and the invisible workforce."
>
> —*Allison Julien,*
> *Domestic Workers United, New York*

In June, 2007, over fifty domestic workers from Bangladesh, the Philippines, Barbados, Haiti, Mexico, El Salvador, and other countries of the global south, representing thirteen organizations in four US cities from California to Maryland, met in Atlanta, Georgia for the National Domestic Worker Convention, as part of the first United States Social Forum. We came together as part of a natural evolution of our local organizing, and the understanding that we needed to reach out beyond our communities in search of models, strategies and a larger context for

our struggles. The first USSF was a key moment for the social justice movement in the United States and presented a unique opportunity for us to come together to build the power of our sector as domestic workers, while helping to build the broader movement.

Echoing the USSF slogan "Another world is possible, another US is necessary," Tomasa Sanchez, a member of the San Francisco Day Labor Program Women's Collective and participant in the Forum said, "We need change. We are tired of abuse and discrimination. Together we can find solutions to these problems to create a better world."

We represented thousands of childcare, housecleaning and eldercare providers who are organizing across the country for dignity and justice. Over the course of the four day convention, we shared organizational models, engaged in joint education sessions on the history and context of domestic work in the United States and the global economy, discussed campaign victories and challenges, and presented our struggles to thousands of USSF participants. Across language barriers and cultural divides, women shared experiences about organizing in our corners of the country, laughed and cried together, and developed lasting relationships. On the final day of the gathering, we voted to form the National Domestic Worker Alliance.

This chapter will highlight some of the conversations we had during the US Social Forum, including the history of domestic work in the United States, contemporary domestic worker organizing in the US, and the decision to form the National Domestic Worker Alliance. Throughout the article, you will read the voices of some of the domestic worker leaders who attended the USSF and the Domestic Worker Convention.

History of Domestic Work in the United States

Domestic workers have played a critical role in the development of economic and social life in the United States. Historically, this work-force has its roots in the transatlantic slave trade and the plantation economy that provided the resources and materials for industrialization in the United States. Enslaved African women worked in the fields growing food and cotton, and they also worked in the homes of plantation owners, caring for their families and children.

Poor European immigrant women also did domestic work as indentured servants.

Over time, European immigrant women gained privilege in this industry through dual wage systems that provided higher compensation to white women, employers' growing discriminatory interest in hiring only white women to do childcare, leaving housework to women of color, and an earlier shift to live-out day work versus continued live-in work for women of color. In the early 20th century, new

immigrant women from Europe moved out of domestic work when factory work became an option.

In the period leading up to industrialization, Native and Chicana women in the West and Southwest worked as domestic workers while on the west coast, Chinese and Japanese new immigrant men and women made up the domestic workforce. African American women, who were often shut out of the "public" workforce, continued to work as domestic workers and the work came to be seen as "Black women's work." The image of the "mammy" came to represent African American women in the mainstream media through the early part of the twentieth century.

The work that was seen as "women's work," whether in the home or in the "public workforce," was and continues to be considered as less-skilled and less valuable. Women's work in the home, in particular, has never been recognized as work—it is regarded as "help." Therefore, by extension, women working in others' homes for wages have never been recognized as workers. It is important to note that the gender norms that define much of how the labor market values labor have never been challenged. As a result, to this day, women in the United States earn only two-thirds of what men earn for the same work.

This history has been an important part of the leadership development work of at least two of the organizations at the convention. Learning the history of the workforce has helped us understand the roots of exploitation and oppression today. For this reason, joint political education was a major focus of our time together in the Domestic Worker Convention.

The Day Labor Program Women's Collective of La Raza Centro Legal led an interactive workshop on the history of domestic work in the US. A centerpiece of this workshop was an activity looking at history through the eyes of domestic workers from different eras. Small groups created skits to share particular stories with the rest of the group. In acting out the experiences of past generations of domestic workers, our members felt connected to a long line of powerful women workers and saw themselves as participants in creating history.

The skits also allowed members to work together directly across language barriers. Interpreters enabled us to communicate without speaking the same language. Guillermina Castellanos, one of the Women's Collective members who facilitated this training said, "This workshop has served us and many women feel proud to be domestic workers and we were proud to bring this contribution to the Convention. (Este taller nos ha ayudado a muchas mujeres sentirnos orgullosas de ser trabajadoras domesticas y nos sentimos muy orgullosas por haber contribuido eso en la Convencion)."

In addition to the sessions targeting participants of the domestic worker convention, we also held two public workshops for USSF participants to attend. The

first highlighted the various organizing efforts among domestic workers in the four regions represented at the convention, and the second, titled "Organizing in the Shadow of Slavery," brought together farm workers, domestic workers and Black workers in the South to discuss the impact of slavery on our three groups of workers who remain explicitly excluded from collective bargaining rights and recognition as workers.

Allison, a nanny and member of DWU, reflected on this session, "The personal stories and struggles of the workers from different organizations and ethnicities validated the commonalities of our experiences, missions, organizing goals and a deeper understanding of our exploitation and struggles. Sharing with the farm workers I was impressed with their hard work and the excellent alliance network that the Immokalee workers were able to share." Domestic workers and farm workers today face exclusion from many labor protections, including the right to organize, anti-discrimination laws, over-time protections, and health and safety regulations. And even where the law does provide protection, domestic workers, as isolated workers, have little power to enforce or assert their rights. As Domestic Workers United say, "Tell dem slavery done!"

Neoliberalism and the Global City

In addition to the historical context, we also sought to provide the current global economic context for our work as domestic workers and as agents of social change. With the advent of neoliberal globalization international financial institutions (in particular, the World Bank and International Monetary Fund) and US driven foreign economic policy have compelled former colonies of the global North to open their markets; lower or remove any barriers to capital, including basic labor and environmental standards; and promote the privatization of land, resources and the few remaining industries that serve the needs of the people. These conditions have led to widespread migration, and as women often serve as primary caregivers and providers for their families, they are often forced to leave their countries to fill the expanding service demands of nations of the North in order to send money home. These immigrant women enter the domestic work industry by the thousands.

Furthermore, these same elite international financial institutions stand to gain from the underground service economy, profiting from the vulnerable position of the immigrant workers it employs. The restructuring of production under neoliberal globalization—which in the past took place primarily within national borders and now extends to countries all around the world—has led to an increased need for cities that will act as "global command posts" or places where the process of production can be coordinated. Cities like New York need CEO's, corporate lawyers, and financial managers, and they also need nannies, housekeepers, restau-

rant workers, deliverymen, doormen and security guards to meet the day-to-day needs of the corporate workforce. Domestic workers play the role of providing the necessary labor in the home that makes all other labor possible, both in their own families and the families for whom they work.

Despite the critical role that domestic workers play in the current global political economy and in the United States, they have remained excluded from most basic labor protections and live and work essentially at the whim of their employers. Domestic workers in the United States are predominantly immigrants and women of color who work long hours for low wages, without overtime pay, and under extremely isolated conditions. The vast majority of domestic workers struggle to defend their most basic human rights. In New York, for example, 33% of workers surveyed in 2005 face some form of abuse from their employers:

> "We are verbally assaulted and we have to stay quiet. Often we end up leaving these jobs when we can't take it anymore. What is sad and difficult is that sometimes we are not paid a single penny for the work we've done. In my case, I have had good, considerate employers but in these years I have also experienced difficulties, which I never thought I would have to endure—discrimination because of the color of my skin and for being an immigrant. They've made me sleep in a basement with no heat in the dead of winter. They've denied me food during the time I was living in and also forbid me to bring food for myself from outside. I've also been yelled out to the point where I was becoming sick with depression and nervousness. I left my last job so exhausted and destroyed I could only think of hurling myself in front of passing cars because I was made to feel so bad I wanted to die. I felt worse than a worm after the way they told me how poor I was and that's why I was worth nothing." [9]

There are no standards in the domestic work industry, and the few basic laws that do apply to domestic workers are not enforced. Two workshops led by Domestic Workers United on "Neoliberalism" and the "Global City" placed the current conditions and struggles in a global context and as part of a global struggle against neoliberalism. It became clearer over the course of the convention that domestic workers have been left with no choice but to organize, against all odds, and the fight must extend and connect to others beyond our national borders. In the context of the US Social Forum's slogan, "another world is possible, another US is necessary," as working-class immigrant women of color, working in the Global City, in the "shadow of slavery," we have an important role to play in the creation of another world and another US.

Contemporary Domestic Worker Organizing in the US

> "I have learned that the work that we do as women should be recognized. I don't feel like my work as a mother and wife or as a domestic worker in other people's homes is valued. Sometimes I feel like I am seen as just another piece of furniture in the house. But this injustice motivates me to struggle so that our voices are heard, our work is recognized, and our rights are respected. The work has to begin with us as women. We have to respect ourselves and our work first and then demand that respect from everyone else."

Domestic work has been one of very few options for immigrant women. In the mid-1990's this was particularly true with the flight of manufacturing in the United States as global capital searched for cheaper labor abroad and the softening of immigration laws in 1965. At the same time, labor unions had not addressed the changes in the structure and character of the workforce in the United States.

Since the 1980's the social justice movement in the United States has been in a low period. Left movements were hit hard by state repression, and just as neoliberal ideology began to take hold, grassroots organizing was at its weakest. Mostly dominated by nonprofit organizations that resisted a deep analysis of the political economic system that they were fighting to change, organizing groups were narrowly focused on issue-specific campaigns, rarely making connections with one another across communities and issue areas.

Domestic workers in the United States have always resisted the oppression and exploitation they face. There have been several documented cycles of organizing since the abolition of institutionalized slavery. The most recent round of organizing started in the late 1980s and early 1990s, when community organizations began to see a rise in the exploitation of low wage immigrant workers who were impacted by the employer sanctions implemented through the Immigration Control and Reform Act (IRCA, or Amnesty bill) of 1986. As immigration began to increase across the nation, there was also a rise in service industry jobs such as construction, restaurants, garment work and domestic service—with a significant fall in wages in these industries. Workers in different sectors, including domestic workers, approached community-based organizations about increased abuse and exploitation in the workplace.

Immigrant community organizations, independent workers organizations or "workers' centers" emerged out of community organizing initiatives that attempted to meet the needs of the new immigrant working-class population. These organizations do not necessarily always focus their organizing on their members' experi-

ences as workers, nor do they always organize at the point of production; they have different starting points including domestic violence, immigrant rights, and state violence. In 1990, for example, a few years after the inception of a Women's Committee, the first Domestic Workers Association was initiated by the Coalition for Humane Immigrant Rights of Los Angeles (CHIRLA) in order to develop strategies to address the issues and challenges facing them.

Organizing tactics include direct action campaigns, legislative initiatives, lawsuits and other creative tactics to mobilize and win justice for their members. Many of these organizations also prioritize an "intersectional" analysis of race, gender and class, and promote the leadership of worker members.

In the last 10 years, through the slow and deliberate growth and diversification of grassroots membership organizations that have prioritized movement building, a shift has begun. Many of the founding members of the National Domestic Worker Alliance have sought to see and analyze the "intersectional," root causes of the oppression facing our members, which has led us to take on and prioritize building relationships that broaden the base, power and perspective of the movement as a whole. We have supported the development of coalitions of domestic workers, as well as immigrant rights organizations, working-class membership led organizations, and grassroots organizations with a "global justice" movement-building perspective. Our work has also extended on outreaching internationally, with organizations connecting to global domestic worker leaders like Casimira Rodriguez Romero, former President of the Bolivian Domestic Workers Union and the General Secretary of the Confederation of Household Workers of Latin America and the Caribbean who also served as the Minister of Justice in Bolivia after the election of Evo Morales.

Our participation in the USSF helped us push this work forward by deepening our members' experience and in bringing the intersectional struggle of domestic workers to the broader social justice movement present at the Forum. Allison, of DWU reflected, "Domestic Workers United gained a deeper understanding of the importance of alliance building that transcends race, gender, religion, class, and many other divides."

"Whether you are documented or not in this whole wide world there are human rights. And once you know this, no employer can bullshit you. If you don't walk that dog, if you don't shovel that snow, and they say they will call immigration. Look them in the eye and tell them, 'I'm not afraid of you. I'm not an alien. I'm a human being."

By 2006, many domestic worker organizations were already working together to advance domestic worker rights. In New York, organizations joined forces to pass city legislation compelling employment agencies to educate domestic workers and employers about their rights and responsibilities in 2003. California house-

hold worker organizations fought for a state bill to grant overtime protection to nannies that was vetoed by governor Arnold Schwarzenegger in 2006. There was also information sharing from coast to coast on strategies to move forward pro-worker legislation that related to legislation. Currently, New York domestic workers groups are working to pass a statewide NY Domestic Worker Bill of Rights to establish labor standards including an annual wage increase, health care and basic benefits. Maryland domestic workers recently won a contract for domestic workers in Montgomery County.

The National Domestic Worker Convention during the US Social Forum was the first time these organizations were able to come together and one of our top priorities was to share organizing strategies with each other and with others at the forum. Before coming to Atlanta, we understood that to build the power of the sector and to make the kind radical change in the industry is necessary. We would need to work together strategically over a long period of time. The USSF in Atlanta provided the perfect opportunity bring together workers in order to explore the possibilities.

Atlanta also held a specific historic significance as the location of our first national meeting. In 1881, African-American washerwomen organized, went on strike and shut down the laundry industry in the city. Also in Atlanta, in 1968, Dorothy Boulden, an African American domestic worker and civil rights organizer, helped organize the National Union of Domestic Workers. We were proud and honored to carry forward a powerful tradition of domestic worker organizing from such a historically significant location and moment for the US movement.

Domestic Worker Organizing and the Broader Social Justice Movement

The US Social Forum as a whole infused our conversations as domestic workers with excitement and inspiration drawn from the many other communities and struggles represented. The forum helped deepen the connections between the struggle for domestic workers rights and the fight for justice and respect for all oppressed communities. Maria Fernandez shared in a SF Day Labor Program and Women's Collective member newsletter after the Forum:

> "I am very excited to share about the USSF. From beginning to end, it was an incredible personal experience, and full of learning as a member of an organization. So many organizations meeting for a common cause, exchanging relationships, ideas, and strategies to fight against imperialism, which hurts each of our communities and the whole world. For me it's important to mention that the forum took place in an important

Indigenous area, home of the Cherokees, who once again, requested respect for their culture, for their sacred sites, for their people. Enough with land theft and the destruction of their traditions. As a Latina with indigenous roots I am filled with pride seeing these groups continue fighting for their culture and their rights in this country. "

"Me emociona mucho al hablar del FSEU. Fue de mucha experiencia personal de principio al fin, y de aprendizaje como miembro de una organizacion. Al ver tantas organizaciones reunidas por una misma cuasa, intercambiar relaciones, ideas, y estrategias para luchar contra el imperialismo que tanto dana a nuestra comunidad y al mundo en general. Para mi es importante mencionar que el foro se realizo en una zona indigena muy importante como es el de los Cherokees, que tambien pidieron una vez mas respeto a su cultura a sus sitios sagrados, y a su pueblo. Que ya basta de toma de tierras y de destruir sus tradiciones. Como Latina de raices indigenas me llena de orgullo como estos grupos siguen peleando por sus costumbres y sus derechos en este pais."

While full of challenges and in its initial stage of development, domestic worker organizing in the US has already impacted the broader social justice movement politically, practically and culturally. Politically, the analysis of the impact of neoliberal globalization on women in the global South, and migrant women in the north, has helped many to understand the more invisible effects of the brutal economic system we live under. In addition, the analysis of domestic workers' essential labor, and its role and value in the global economy, is helping bring about an understanding of the strategic importance of the leadership of this sector of workers. Similarly, the analysis of the history of slavery in the United States and its lasting imprint on modern day society is a crucial grounding for any future social justice movement. In fact, domestic worker organizing exists at the intersection of the labor movement, the racial justice movement, the women's movement, the immigrant rights movement and the global justice movement.

Practically, domestic workers have built organizations, support groups, cooperatives, alliances and cultures of resistance in their communities. Domestic worker leadership has already challenged a culture of patriarchy, classism and racism in society at large and particularly within the social justice movement. This sector of the larger social justice movement has opened the door for hundreds of working class immigrant women of color to exercise leadership—organize, inspire and mobilize entire communities for a better future. They are precisely the leadership that the US movement has been waiting for.

Out of necessity, domestic workers have innovated models of organizing workers outside of the collective bargaining framework. In the domestic work industry, the workplaces are unmarked and scattered in wealthy neighborhoods throughout urban areas and wealthy suburbs. Isolated, without any negotiating power or leverage, domestic workers risk losing their jobs every time they ask for a sick day. Given the changes in the economy that seek to expand the informal and underground sectors, these models of addressing worker exploitation will prove to be important innovations for the rebuilding of a strong labor movement.

Significantly, domestic worker organizations have proven that there's no such thing as "unorganizable" people, communities, or workforces. Although there are extreme challenges, particularly organizing in the United States where workers are working around the clock under enormous economic and social pressures, domestic workers are organizing. Thus they have forced us to ask many important questions about why certain populations are characterized as "unorganizable,"—who is saying this, why and who benefits from such a notion. The Domestic Worker Convention and the USSF was also a leadership development experience for our members, who came back to each organization strengthened by new ideas. Maria shared that one of the clearest take-away messages she had was from one of the plenaries, where someone said, "Leadership is an opportunity to serve others so that the people walk past you and find freedom. (Liderazgo es una oportunidad de servir a los demas para que el pueblo camine sobre ti y encuentre su libertad.)" Allison, of DWU, said, " I have gained the ability to stand up and demand respect." And Guillermina stressed, "My organization gained more leadership, more confidence, trust, and faith that together we will achieve more rights for domestic workers. (Mi organizacion logro mas liderazgo, mas confianza, y fe que juntas lograremos mas derechos para trabajadoras domesticas.)"

At the intersection of movements, domestic workers are able to bring different dimensions and experiences to all the movements it is part of. For example, in commenting on women's organizing, Guillermina reflected on her time at the forum and in the Convention:

> “Meeting other groups in Atlanta I realized the immense power we have as women. I met very strong women with immense power to create change in the world. It was incredible how in the conferences in Atlanta I got goose bumps seeing women sharing intense experiences but also with a huge commitment to make change and desire to motivate more women to take up that leadership. Each one of us has a critical role to realize to make the changes we want-to have a dignified life inside our homes and outside our homes. “

> "Conociendo otros grupos en Atlanta me di cuenta la inmensidad de poder que tenemos las mujeres. Conoci mujeres muy fuertes con un poder inmenso de hacer cambios en el mundo. Fue increible como en esas conferencias en Atlanta me ponian la piel chinita de ver a las mujeres compartiendo experiencias muy fuertes pero tambien con un compromiso muy grande de hacer cambios y querer motivar a las demas a llevar ese liderazgo. Cada una de nosotras tiene un papel muy importante que realizar para hacer cambios que queremos, para tener una vida digna dentro de nuestra casa y fuera de nuestra casa."

On a daily basis domestic workers are demanding that "women's" work be recognized and valued, and they are asserting their right to make their own decisions and live with respect and dignity. A powerful example of domestic workers transforming the social justice movement occurred recently when domestic worker leaders led the National Day Labor Organizing Network (NDLON) to recognize female day laborers; proposed and won a resolution on gender equality at NDLON's national assembly; and have stepped up to leadership roles within the organization.

Culturally, domestic workers organizing has forced the social justice movement to value the many roles women play, as primary income earners for families at home and abroad, and caregivers for their employers and their own children. Domestic workers have compelled people of all walks of life to recognize the invisible labor that makes other work possible, and the importance of respecting and protecting this work.

Domestic workers have the potential to challenge the labor movement as a whole to see itself as necessarily part of a broader movement for social and global justice. As Ai-jen Poo, of Domestic Workers United stated in her address at the "Workers Rights in the Global Economy" Plenary:

> "We hope to build our movement to a place where, when we call for a strike, it will be for domestic workers rights and for global justice, legalization of undocumented workers and an end to the war in Iraq. Or maybe it will be a strike of all informal sector workers, or better yet, a strike of all workers —union and non-union, the entire working-class—against gentrification and displacement, from Brooklyn to Iraq, from Chinatown, to the Philippines, from El Barrio to Botswana. We want to be a part of a labor movement that brings the power of workers to bear on the system in a way that lifts the entire working class, both here and abroad."

Significantly, the first USSF was organized and heavily attended by member based "movement" organizations rooted in working class communities of color, many led by women. In many ways the USSF was a manifestation of a profound shift within the social justice movement in the United States. It was the product of many years of groundwork, community organizing, leadership development, and alliance building. Domestic worker organizations are proud to be part of this growing worker led force. "In numbers there is strength and when we all come together and unite we can achieve anything!" The domestic worker rights movement was strongly represented throughout the USSF, and at a time when many are asking what will come of the historic gathering, the formation of a National Domestic Worker Alliance was one of the USSF's major successes.

> "I gained a lot of hope and energy to continue organizing and a lot of enthusiasm to never stop fighting for what we want to achieve."
>
> "Logre mucha esperanza y energia para seguir organizando y muchas ganas de no parar de luchar por lo que nos propongamos."
>
> *—Tomasa Sanchez, Women's Collective*

The Formation of the National Domestic Worker Alliance

Because of the relationships built over the last several years, organizers had initially conceived the meeting of domestic workers at the USSF as a space for worker exchanges. The formation of the National Domestic Workers Alliance came out of a six-month planning process in preparation for the US Social Forum. As we began planning our exchanges, it was apparent to organizers and members that there was the potential for something more long term to come out of this convergence. Before arriving in Atlanta, organizations had internal conversations about the benefits and challenges of forming a National Alliance. Organizations also thought about what different types of roles a national alliance could play.

After four powerful days of dialogue, learning, relationship building, marching, and singing, "we learned that we are not alone and that together we can have more success in organizing the base and building leadership (logramos saber que no estamos solos y que juntos podemos tener mas exito de organizar la base y tener mas liderazgo)." On the fifth day we gathered once again to ask ourselves what's next, what steps did we want to take together to push our work forward? We knew we wanted to stay connected, and we considered the great potential for organizing in cities across the country, as well as at the national level. In a collective discussion among all participating organizations, we voted to form the National Domestic Workers Alliance. Tomasa explains, "We formed an alliance to

work together and be stronger and achieve changes. (formamos una alianza para trabajar juntos y ser mas fuertes y lograr cambios.)" Allison adds, "This was the beginning of many meetings, exchanges and conversations with so many other domestic workers across the USA. Domestic workers were united in strength, spirit and struggle, and we made it official."

The goals of the newly formed alliance are to collectively bring public attention to the plight of domestic/household workers; to bring respect and recognition to the workforce; to improve workplace conditions; and to consolidate the national voice and power of domestic workers as a workforce. The coming together of these organizations has exponentially increased the capacity, visibility and influence of domestic workers as a sector in the social justice movement. Organizations in Miami, Chicago, San Antonio, Denver, Houston, Seattle and Baltimore are reaching out to begin a process of organizing domestic workers locally, and seeking the support of the National Alliance. In addition, other sectors, including trade unions, are beginning to recognize the strategic role this workforce plays in rebuilding the labor movement.

Following the USSF, representatives of the organizations that participated worked together to draft the Alliance's mission statement. The mission of the Alliance is to organize to improve the living and working conditions of domestic workers; win respect and justice from employers and the government; challenge the racism and sexism that has led to the persistent devaluing of this labor so that workers, their children, and the general public honor the dignity of domestic work; end the exclusion of domestic workers from recognition and protection as a workforce; and continue a brave legacy of resistance by supporting organizing efforts among all workers and communities for justice.

The National Domestic Worker Alliance is composed of grassroots organizations that work towards advancing the rights of domestic/household workers. Founding member organizations include the Women's Collective of La Raza Centro Legal, Mujeres Unidas y Activas, and People Organized to Win Employment Rights in the San Francisco Bay Area of Northern California; the Coalition for Humane Immigrant Rights of Los Angeles (CHIRLA) and the Philipino Workers' Center in Southern California; the Women Workers' Project of CAAAV Organizing Asian Communities, Damayan Migrant Workers Association, Domestic Workers United, Haitian Women for Haitian Refugees, Unity Housecleaners Cooperative of the Hempstead Workplace Project, and Las Señoras de Santa Maria in New York; and CASA de Maryland.

Since its founding, the National Domestic Workers Alliance (NDWA) has developed an initial work plan, executed worker and organizational exchanges, and held the first National Domestic Worker Congress in New York City in June 2008. Over 100 household workers representing 16 organizations in 10 cities

gathered in order to further develop our long-term vision for the alliance as well as a structure for the Alliance. Our current work includes continuing to support domestic worker organizing at the local and regional level, particularly new organizing efforts, while beginning a process of documentation of domestic work conditions around the country, in search of opportunities to exercise power toward a common vision for respect and recognition nationally. At the same time, we are looking towards building on our work at the international level.

In 2010, for the first time, the International Labor Organization will be discussing a new convention on domestic work. Internationally, domestic workers' organizations will be working to influence the development of this new international labor law. It is an opportunity to work together and connect with domestic workers around the world. And it is an indication that the evolution of this sector of organizing in the US mirrors a parallel process in countries around the world. As we look toward the next US Social Forum in 2010 as another opportunity to build the social justice movement in the US, we also look forward to continuing to build the power of domestic workers in the United States and around the world. "We are one people struggling and searching for answers and demanding respect and recognition of our work." And the struggle continues.

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Notes

1. Tomasa Sanchez, member leader of the SF Day Labor Program Women's Collective.Originally from El Salvador, Tomasa has been doing patient care and domestic work and as been a member of the Women's Collective. She is currently an elected leader ofWomen's Collective focusing on job development.
2. Guillermina Castellanos, member and organizer with the SF Day Labor Program Women's Collective of La Raza Centro Legal. Originally from Jalisco, Mexico, Guillermina immigrated to the US, is a mother of 9, and grandmother of 3. She has been organizing women in San Francisco for the past 17 years and helped found the Women's Collective in 2001.
3. From Domestic Workers United report, "Home is Where the Work Is: Inside the Domestic Work Industry."
4. Luz Sampedro, member leader of Mujeres Unidas y Activas in San Francisco.
5. Nora Hamilton and Norma Stoltz Chinchilla (2001). Seeking Community in a Global City.
6. Narro, Victor (2000) Ford Foundation Report: "CHIRLA Workers' Rights Project, December 11.
7. Joycelyn Gill-Campbell, organizer, former nanny, Domestic Workers United, NY.
8. Maria Fernandez, member leader of the SF Day Labor Program Women's Collective. Maria immigrated to the US 5 years ago from Yucatan, Mexico. Her first year was spent in complete isolation as she worked as a live-in caretaker for extremely low wages. Since then, she has found strength and dignified work through her participation and leadership with a the Graton Day Labor Center and the SF Day Labor Program Women's Collective. She currently leads a women's empowerment support group in Women's Collective and is a peer- trainer in the Safe and Dignified Cleaning training program.

Chapter 15

Right to the City:

A Cry and a Demand for a New Urban Struggle

Harmony Goldberg,
Resource Person, Right to the City Alliance and
a Founding Director of SOUL: School of Unity and Liberation

Rickke Mananzala,
Executive Director, FIERCE and
Steering Committee Member, Right to the City Alliance

> "In 2008, for the first time in history, more than half of the world's population will be living in urban areas."
>
> *–United Nations*
> *Population Fund Report 2007*

On the eve of the transition to an urban world majority, the struggle in the cities of the United States took two important steps forward. The Right to the City Alliance, a national network of grassroots organizations fighting against gentrification, was launched in January 2007. Then in June, thousands of grassroots organizers form around the country came together for the first United States Social Forum. These two gatherings represent the maturation of the generation of organizing that began in the era of neoliberal globalization.

Transformations of the global economy shifted the role of nation-states, the lives of our communities and the terrain of our struggles. Although capitalism has always been international, most of its production work used to take place within specific nation-states. In response, most social movements primarily took place within particular nation-states. But today, the ground on which we're fighting is shifting. Neoliberal globalization has increased the importance of the *international*, in everything from production to policy decisions. As capitalism has changed, social movements also need to change and develop new forms of organization that will allow us to fight on new terrain.

The Right to the City Alliance and the social forum developed out of this moment of transition to address the changing needs of social movements. The World Social Forums have played a crucial role in that process by providing a

transnational space for movements to come together and envision a new world, and the US Social Forum provided a crucial gathering space for grassroots organizations to build analysis and power. The Right to the City Alliance was founded to provide a space for urban movements to build power in our rapidly changing cities.

The Right to the City Alliance (RTTC)–founded in 2007–is a national alliance of grassroots organizations dedicated to the fight against gentrification. The Right to the City Alliance made its public "launch" at the first United States Social Forum in June of 2007. "There couldn't have been a better place for Right to the City to 'come out' than at the USSF. Our member organizations are deeply committed to movement building, and many Right to the City member organizations were helping to build the social forum at the same time as we were building Right to the City. We decided to publicly launch the alliance at the social forum because we thought that we had an important analysis about urban struggle to contribute to the conversations. We wanted to share our stories, and we wanted to learn about the work of other organizations," said Helena Wong who is an organizer with RTTC member organization, CAAAV: Organizing Asian Communities.

According to Dawn Philips, Co-Director of RTTC member organization, Just Cause Oakland, "The US Social Forum pushed the grassroots movement to be clear that our fight is larger than our daily struggles in our different communities, that our fight is against neoliberal globalization. We prioritized the social forum because we share that commitment to linking theory with practice." The Right to the City Alliance is united not only through the practical work of campaigns against gentrification; its member organizations also share an analysis that places the contemporary dynamics in US cities in the broader context of neoliberal globalization. RTTC has a vision for change that goes beyond stopping the process of gentrification; we want to reclaim our cities and reshape them to be truly liberatory and democratic spaces.

What's Happening in Our Cities?

Neoliberal globalization has transformed the nature of cities in the world economy. Cities in the United States used to be primarily sites for industrial production and trade. The globalization of production has meant that corporations have shut down most factories in the United States and moved production to the global South in search of low wages and fewer regulations. Many of the former industrial cities in the United States–like Detroit and Buffalo–have gone into economic decline, facing high rates of unemployment and fiscal crises. Other cities have transformed into a new kind of city: the "global city" (a trend best described by Saskia Sassen, 1998). As production has become increasingly decentralized, its management has become increasingly centralized into "global cities" which serve

as "command posts" for the corporate heads that manage the world economy. In the US, this includes cities like New York City, Los Angeles, Chicago and Miami. The cities that have taken on this role are growing and gentrifying at a rapid pace. Large numbers of middle and upper class workers have moved into city centers to be close to their corporate jobs. The same urban communities of color that were abandoned by the government in the middle of the twentieth century have now become ground zero for gentrification. Private developers and banks are making huge profits from land speculation. Although the industrial economy has declined over the past several decades, the service industry has boomed, particularly in big cities where the elite demand labor-intensive personal services to maintain a "world-class" lifestyle.

What does this mean for our communities? These transitions have meant that our neighborhoods are being torn apart by gentrification in order to make space for the new layer of corporate workers. We are being pushed out of the urban cores to the peripheries around the city. It has meant that well-paying, stable union jobs are disappearing and being replaced by low paying service jobs. As we are forced to move out of our homes in the city centers, many of us now face long commutes to maintain low paying jobs in the city. It has meant that publicly owned institutions–like parks and water companies–are being sold off or even given away to private developers. It has meant that the governmental services that our communities need in order to weather these difficult transitions are disappearing; instead, we are facing increased policing as the government's solutions to the problems in our communities. While urban communities of color have historically faced the challenges of segregation and exclusion, they have also served as sites for survival, spaces for cultural connection and bases for community power. Gentrification has meant that the social fabric that our communities have built over time is being torn apart, and as many of our neighbors are forced to move out of their homes in search of cheaper rent and as our cultural institutions and community businesses are being driven out by high rents and big retail stores.

David Harvey (2003) has pointed out that capitalism simultaneously makes profit through the exploitation of working class people in the production process (accumulation by exploitation) and through the dispossession of peoples from their land (accumulation by dispossession). We can use this framework to understand capitalism's new urban strategies. It is no longer adequately profitable for capitalists to exploit industrial workers in the United States, but they have found new ways to profit from the exploitation of workers in the service industries. This strategy relies on the superexploitation of people of color and women of color in particular. Gentrification is the one of the most important fronts of accumulation by dispossession in the current period. Echoing back to the original theft of land from Native American people, this new wave of gentrification and land specula-

tion is giving super-profits to the wealthy off the backs of poor and working class people of color.

These political-economic processes have changed the terrain of the city, and social movements have had to change to fight on this new terrain. The past decade has seen the emergence of many new urban struggles in communities across the country, including campaigns against gentrification and intensified policing, urban worker organizing among day laborers and domestic workers and fights to defend governmental services like welfare and public transportation. The Right to the City Alliance represents one crucial front in this growing urban movement.

The Right to the City Alliance is Born in 2007

Initiated by the Miami Workers' Center (MWC), Strategic Action for a Just Economy (SAJE) and Tenants and Workers United (TWU) in 2007, Right to the City brought together organizations from across the country that were organizing against gentrification in working class communities of color. Convening organizations from Boston, Los Angeles, Miami, New Orleans, New York, Oakland, Providence, San Francisco and the Washington DC metropolitan area, RTTC's founding conference provided a space where grassroots organizations could reflect on the conditions in their cities and their organizing practices. These groups are not only united because of their shared struggles against gentrification; they also share a deeper vision for urban social change: "We all have the right to remain and return to our cities, to take back our streets and neighborhoods, and to ensure that they exist to serve people rather than capital. We all have a right to the city. We believe the right to the city is the right for all people to produce the living conditions that meet their needs."

The French philosopher Henri Lefebvre first developed the call for the "Right to the City" in 1968. Lefebvre was not engaging in an isolated academic exercise. He was putting forward a liberatory "cry and a demand" for a new urban order. The "Right to the City" is a banner that has been taken up by urban movements around the world. Lefebvre argued that the right to determine the future of the city does not belong to private capital or to the state. The right to the city belongs to all people who live or work in the city. This right cannot be limited to people who own property in the cities or to legally recognized citizens; instead, it belongs to all urban residents: working class people, poor people, homeless people, youth, women, queer people, people of color, immigrants, all of us. The people of the city have the right to remain in their cities and to benefit from what the city has to offer. Perhaps even more importantly, they have the right to democratically determine the future development of the city. Lefebvre was clear that, in order for this right to

actually become a reality, power relations would have to be fundamentally transformed. Power would have to be redistributed from the power elite into the hands of the people.

This framework reflected the struggles that we had been waging in our communities, and it spoke to our vision for a radical transformation of power relations and for a real practice of democracy and justice in our cities. At our founding conference, The Right to the City Alliance built on this framework and developed principles of unity that reflect our vision for our cities today. Our vision includes a challenge to the market based approach to urban development and support for economic justice, environmental justice, immigrant justice, racial justice and democracy. We do not think that our fight for the city can be isolated from broader social dynamics. We know that we need to link our fight to the struggles of rural people and indigenous people against environmental degradation and economic pressures, and we believe that our struggle for cities in the United States is connected to international struggles.

RTTC is made up of grassroots organizations working against gentrification, but we use the "Right to the City" framework to help us maintain a broader vision for our struggle. We don't just want to end gentrification; we want to fundamentally reshape our cities. We believe that our communities, who have been pushed out of traditional democratic practices, have the right and the power to determine the future of our cities. We believe that community friendly development is necessary and possible: it can be democratic; it can produce jobs; it can keep people in their historic communities to preserve culture and to protect families. But in order to get there, we are going to need a powerful and strategic movement. The "Right to the City" is helping us to build that movement by providing a framework that strengthens our work on three levels: the level of analysis, the level of strategy and the level of demands.

Deepening Analysis

The Right to the City helps us to understand the reasons why gentrification is happening in our communities. By coming together with grassroots organizations fighting in different cities around the country, we have been able to realize that the dynamics of gentrification that are happening in our individual communities are happening everywhere. Together we can play the role of a grassroots "think-tank" to identify the problems and to start to shape solutions.

The Right to the City provides a left framework that reflects our daily lives and pushes us to go deeper. The idea that our communities have a "right to the city" forces us to ask: Who do our cities serve today? Do they serve the ruling class, or do they serve the people who live and work in them? It forces us to realize that our cities reflect the interests of global capitalism and neoliberalism,

and that, if we want to win real power in our cities, we are going to have to fight on national and international levels.

Strengthening Strategy:

The Right to the City framework helps us to envision the kind of movement that we need to build to win the level of change that we need. Real estate developers and urban planners should not be the ones shaping the future of our cities. Our communities built these cities. We live in these cities, and we are the ones who are being directly impacted by gentrification. We should be able to have a voice in shaping the future of our cities. But it's going to take a powerful movement to make that possible.

The Right to the City Alliance brings together people who have been excluded from the political process: communities of color, youth, immigrant communities, homeless people and LGBT people. And we plan to do what seems impossible: to bring together our so-called "powerless" communities and build the power we need to take back our cities. No one organization can win this fight alone, and no one community can win that level of change on its own. Right to the City's member organizations represent many different communities, fighting on many different fronts. We need each other to win this struggle.

Amplifying Demands:

The Right to the City helps our demand development on two different levels. Because the RTTC Alliance gives us a space to reflect on the strengths and challenges of our organizational campaigns, it helps us to develop more effective demands for winning concrete, material changes in the lives of our communities. But it also pushes us to develop demands that go deeper and to challenge the dominant ideology that the market has the right to shape our cities. The Right to the City encourages us to advance our own ideology that places people over profits and to incorporate our long-term vision into our concrete demands.

Laying the Groundwork for a Broader Movement Against Gentrification

In order to achieve our vision for cities that reflect the needs and the dreams of our communities, we need a powerful movement to resist gentrification. This movement needs to incorporate struggles to defend low-income housing, but it cannot be a narrow housing movement. Gentrification transforms much more than just housing; it also reshapes public space, undermines local businesses and increases repressive policing.

The Right to the City Network includes many organizations like Just Cause Oakland, St. Peter's Housing Committee and the Miami Workers' Center whose

primary work is to defend public housing and low income renters and homeowners, but none of these organizations organize narrowly on housing issues. They are also working to preserve and expand the community based businesses and cultural institutions that are so crucial to the survival of their communities. For example, Just Cause Oakland (JCO) is a membership-based organization building a powerful voice for Oakland's low income tenants and workers. Their mission is to create a just and diverse city by organizing Oakland residents to advocate for their human rights to housing and jobs. They work to mobilize their communities for policies that produce social and economic justice in low-income communities of color.

In 2005, a luxury condo development in West Oakland threatened to displace hundreds of residents and to demolish a train station that had historical significance for Oakland's African American community. This train station had been an important site for the migration of African American people to Oakland and for the organizing of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters' Union, one of the country's most significant African American led unions. Just Cause connected its fight for low-income housing units in the new development with a campaign to preserve the train station and to build a museum to honor its legacy. This enabled Just Cause to unite with other community forces that might not have worked on a housing struggle, and it broadened the nature of their fight. By combining the fight for housing with the struggle for cultural preservation, Just Cause demonstrated the importance of the broader Right to the City frame for effective struggles against gentrification.

The Right to the City Alliance also includes organizations like FIERCE and Safe Streets / Strong Communities that fight on other crucial fronts of the gentrification process: public space and policing. FIERCE is a grassroots organization for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender (LGBT) youth of color in New York City focused on stopping gentrification, police brutality, and homelessness. FIERCE's anti-gentrification work has concentrated on the privatization of public spaces in New York City, particularly the West Village.

Since the Stonewall Rebellion in 1969, the West Village has been a well-known cultural hub for the LGBT community, especially people of color and homeless youth. For many young people who have been kicked out of their homes for being LGBT, the West Village has served as a safe haven where they can develop new support systems. They may not live in the West Village, but it is a different kind of "home" for them. In 1998, New York State created a public-private partnership to redevelop the dilapidated piers along the West Side of Manhattan and turn them in gentrified quasi-public parks.

The redevelopment process started with the closing of the Christopher Street Pier in the West Village. The Pier was fenced off in 2001; it reopened in 2003,

complete with manicured lawns and a 1:00 a.m. curfew. For the past 8 years, FIERCE has organized to prevent earlier Pier closing times, to curtail police harassment of LGBT youth of color and to prevent upscale private developments on the Piers. The struggle for the Piers in the West Village has positioned FIERCE as a legitimate force in West Village politics, even though FIERCE's members do not own property or rent in the West Village. Their fight to preserve the Piers for LGBT youth is a unique model of the fight for land use for the public good instead of land use for profit. FIERCE's work gives a solid example of the way that the Right to the City frame expands the traditional focus on housing in anti-gentrification organizing to incorporate broader urban dynamics like the right to public space.

The Right to the City Alliance has an intentional focus on New Orleans in the aftermath of Katrina. The tragedy of the hurricane demonstrates why the devastation of social infrastructure in our cities is so dangerous. It was not "nature" that hurt the people of New Orleans; it was the government's refusal to invest in building adequate levees that devastated the city. Now corporate developers are using this tragedy as an opportunity to empty the city of the people they consider to be "undesirables," mainly people of color and poor people who don't fit into the profiteering plan.

Right to the City member organization Safe Streets / Strong Communities is a grassroots organization in New Orleans working against repressive policing and for community based safety. Repressive policing strategies play a crucial role in the process of gentrifying New Orleans. Public space has been a crucial site for New Orleans' world famous cultural traditions and for the everyday social life of New Orleans residents. The people of New Orleans have traditionally built community in the streets, but they are now being treated as "trespassers," facing police harassment and arrest. Safe Streets connects the call for the right of New Orleans residents to return to their city with the criminalization of poverty and of blackness. People have the right to return to their homes, and they also have the right to stay in their communities without the threat of harassment and arrest.

According to Safe Streets Co-Director, Rosana Cruz, "Safe Streets has documented many of the ways that law enforcement agencies have helped to block New Orleans residents' right of return. Police repression criminalizes the very presence of our communities in this city." By combining the fight for the right to return to New Orleans with the struggle against repressive policing, Safe Streets demonstrates another way that the Right to the City frame enhances our ability to resist gentrification in all of its forms.

By combining the fight to save and expand housing for working class communities of color with the fight for cultural preservation and public space and the struggle against repressive policing, Right to the City is laying the groundwork for a powerful movement to resist gentrification.

The US Social Forum:
Showing Us that Another Movement is Possible

But even a powerful and diverse movement fighting gentrification on its many fronts will not be enough to achieve our vision for a city that reflects the needs of the people. The Right to the City Alliance has a vision of a broad and deep urban struggle that includes the struggle against gentrification with worker organizing and fights for better public education, transportation and environmental protection, but we are currently a network focused primarily on gentrification. That's why the USSF was such an important moment for our network.

The social forum gave us a taste of the urban movement that we imagine: where community people fighting gentrification can come together with other urban struggles and with rural movements to talk about our campaigns and to share our visions for new cities and a new world. The USSF transformed the consciousness of the leaders of the Right to the City member organizations. Seeing all of the organizations and movements represented at the social forum made our broad vision more real to people. According to Helena Wong, "The US Social Forum had a huge impact on our members. We organize immigrant tenants in New York City's Chinatown, and it's easy to feel like New York is the center of the world. But our members kept talking about how their eyes were opened by all the interactions they had at the social forum. They built relationships with Asian organizations around the country struggling to build power in their own communities. They felt unity with the Immokalee Workers in Florida. They made connections between gentrification in Chinatown and the racist displacement of Black people from New Orleans. The social forum gave us hope that there is a real movement for social justice in the US and that we can work in solidarity with communities abroad."

We saw *all* the fronts of the urban struggle at the social forum: from the historic founding of a national alliance of domestic workers organizations to the power of the National Day Laborers Organizing Network and youth movements fighting to improve public education. We felt the potential power of this growing movement most clearly during the social forum's opening march. It was the first time that our network members had a chance to be in the streets together, but we were not alone. Many other urban based organizations rallied behind the Right to the City banner calling for us to "Take Back The City!" Grandmothers marched with queer youth of color while nannies chanted alongside union workers. The fact that so many people were drawn to march side-by-side with us shows the power of this political framework that connects a transformative vision with our daily lives.

"Many of us had gone to previous World Social Forums, and we learned how social movements were supposed to use the open space of the Forum. We saw

that social movements had to come to the Forum with an agenda; the potential of the social forum can't move forward unless organizations have something they are trying to move," said Gihan Perera from the Miami Workers Center. "The Right to the City is the kind of social movement that the social forum was built for. We had network business we had to get done. We had an analysis we wanted to promote. And we had relationships we wanted to build. The social forum gave us exactly the kind of space that we needed to move all of that work forward."

"We choose to launch our network publicly at the US Social Forum because it was important to us to grow together with the broader movement. The USSF gave us a chance to reach out and dialogue with the many other grassroots organizations who are engaged in similar fights," said Jon Liss, Director of Tenants and Workers United and RTTC Steering Committee member. All of our workshops—from "Gentrification in Global Cities: Working Class Communities' Right to the City" and "Race, Gender, Nationality: A Fight for the Right to the City" to "Best Practices in the Struggle for the Right to the City" and "Right to the City: Urban Struggle from the Philippines to South Africa"—were packed to overflowing. The workshops gave us a chance to share our framework and our practical organizing, getting feedback and building relationships with organizers from around the country. These conversations gave us a real sense of our movements' potential to fundamentally transform power relations in this country and to be a viable part of the global movement for justice.

"We knew it would be important for us to launch the network at the social forum, but we had no idea what a powerful experience it would be," said Gihan Perera. "It was like we were birthing our alliance in a public ceremony with the rest of the movement. We had technically launched the alliance in January, but the Right to the City Alliance was really born at the social forum because that was where we had the witness of our peers and our community."

Closing

The growing importance of cities of the global economy is not just a reality for the United States; it is a global phenomenon. According to the United Nations Population Fund, "[In 2008], for the first time in history, more than half [the world's] human population, 3.3 billion people, will be living in urban areas." The fight to take back the city from the forces of neoliberalism will be a crucial front of the fight to make another world possible. René Poitevin, a professor at New York University who is affiliated with the Right to the City Alliance said, "In the 21st century, the city will play the role that the factory did in the 20th century; it will be the main site for capitalist accumulation and the main site for class struggle. Figuring out how to build the revolution from the city is the main political challenge for our generation today." The Social Forum represents the struggle of the people of

Urban Justice Struggles in the Philippines

Excerpt from paper delivered at the Right to the City Alliance Workshop, USSF, June 29, 2007

Kalipunan ng Damayang Mahihirap, KADAMAY

The Filipino urban poor are mostly composed of workers and so-called semi-workers wheeling under extreme poverty. Many of them are presently unemployed or have no regular employment. They include factory workers, contractuals, jeepney and tricycle drivers, street and market vendors, construction workers, port workers, home-based workers, household helpers, street sweepers, small fishers, scavengers, the homeless, and many more.

Some members of the lower petty bourgeoisie or the lower middle class also belong to the urban poor. They are our salaried professionals, government clerks, and people with small business. They have a small amount of capital, own a limited means of production and acquired skills and talents. But due to the economic crises, they are on the verge of losing their livelihood and towards being workers and semi-workers.

A few of the urban poor belong to the lumpen proletariats who are forced to engage in anti-social activities such as theft, prostitution, illegal drugs trafficking, begging and scammers, in order to survive due to lack of job opportunities.

The urban poor may be multisectoral or comprised of different sectors and classes in the Philippine society, with each class carrying its own interests and demands, but together, as one group, they have a common issue to face, and that is landlessness. They do not own the land where they are settling.

Urban poor are mostly concentrated in more that 600 "slum and squatter communities" throughout the country which are deprived of government services and facilities. Many of them are found living in the most inhumane conditions on so-called "danger areas". Because government has been grossly neglectful of their right to decent shelter, livelihood, and social services, many of them are forced to live along railways, rivers and other waterways, under bridges, on garbage dumpsites and on vacant public and private lands.

According to government statistics, 40 percent of urban population lives in these "slum and squatter communities". Nationwide, there are 261,717 urban poor families living in danger areas, while 426,517 urban poor families "illegally" residing on government lands which are mostly target for development projects, and 299,122 urban poor families settling on private lands.

the world against neoliberal globalization. The Right to the City Alliance hopes to represent the beginning of a united struggle of communities in the United States against the impact of neoliberal globalization on our cities.

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Chapter 16

Workers' Rights at the US Social Forum

Sarita Gupta,
Jobs with Justice

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Introduction and Context

The USSF was an inspiring gathering of organizations and individuals committed to building an effective social justice movement in the US and around the world. In attendance were the strong leadership of working class people, organizations rooted in the working class, broader workers' rights organizations, and labor unions. In the US, key pieces in any strategy for transformative social change in this country would include a strengthening of the capacity of unions and independent worker organizations to organize more effectively at the grassroots level; a re-definition of the labor movement to include and connect all forms of worker organizing; a growth, mobilization, and activation of workers and members; and the development of strategic alliances between labor unions, community organizations, and independent worker organizations. The Forum provided a unique space for labor unions, community organizations, and independent worker organizations to gather and learn about one another's issues, and approaches–and ultimately acknowledged the importance of intentional, new collaborations across unions and working class organizations, to build the power we need to win real victories for working class people.

We are in critical times for the labor movement and the working class. Workers and their families across the world are suffering under the impact of neoliberal globalization. Corporate interests are reflected in government policy with little or no regard for workers' rights and environmental impacts. Neoliberal policies of deregulation and privatization are designed to concentrate power and wealth in the hands of multi-national corporations and employers who know no borders and respect no national laws. As a result, a permanent underclass is being created by pitting US workers, immigrant workers and workers in the Global South against one another. Outsourcing and offshoring are forcing global

wage levels down, and cutting health and safety protections for workers and the environment.

As a result, 175 million migrants around the world have been displaced as they seek to survive in this global economy. These corporate policies are designed to free multinational companies from international or national regulations while restricting the mobilization of workers except under conditions that are favorable to employers. An example of this control of migration is the failed guest workers programs that have been much talked about in the immigration debate. Workers who migrate to the United States in search of work are treated as criminals and are forced to live and work in fear. We have seen this with the ongoing worksite raids across the country.

As unions attempt to organize in the US economy, we are confronted with a broken immigration system as well as corporate driven US labor laws. When these two systems meet at the worksite, it is no wonder that it has become extremely difficult for workers to organize for their rights as workers.

Our national labor laws have been weakened to the point where they have become tools for employers to use to deny collective bargaining rights for a broad section of the US workforce.

There has been a concerted war on workers and their organizations driven by the same corporate interests that drive the oppressive immigration and globalization policies. Weak as the National Labor Relations Act is, a growing number of sectors of our working class are being denied even this coverage. Farm workers and domestic workers are not covered under the NLRA and are therefore denied the right to organize unions. Independent contractors are also not covered and so, employers misclassify workers in order to shed their responsibilities to their workers and our communities. Recent decisions by the National Labor Relations Board have taken away the collective bargaining rights of graduate student employees in private universities and have broadened the definition of a supervisor, thus reclassifying potentially millions of workers as supervisors without the accompanying pay, benefits, and responsibilities.

Under these difficult conditions, workers in the US are devising new and creative strategies to organize and build power through labor unions and independent worker organizations.

Changes in the Labor Movement and New Developments in Working Class Organizing

Historically, trade unions have been the voice of workers in this country. At their height in the 1920s and 30s, trade unions innovated powerful, new models of organizing and building working-class movement, eventually yielding some of the most important reforms impacting the working class in the history of the US. Over

the years, many changes have taken place in the global political economy and in the United States that have shifted the impact of these gains for workers today.

In the last 30 years in particular, we have seen a significant decline in the labor movement. The percentage of workers with collective bargaining rights in the US has dropped to 12% and less than 8% in the private sector. Neoliberal globalization has shifted production and economic relationships in a post-colonial world. The flight of manufacturing and the distribution of production to countries around the world have meant changes in the labor force that threaten the very means by which labor is organized. Increasingly part-time, contingent or contract labor, increasingly informal, labor no longer fits the profile or the model of organizing that built its ranks decades ago.

The workforce conditions that were once considered marginal to the economy such as the conditions of day laborers and domestic workers, increasingly define conditions of the working class as a whole. The numbers of working poor are increasing dramatically every year. Undocumented immigrant workers number nearly as many as the total number of unionized workers in the US. The trade union movement, which has traditionally been rooted in more formal sectors, has become increasingly aware of its own crisis and decline, and has sought different strategies to address this crisis. In fact, the recent split in the labor movement is an indicator that drastic measures are needed to rebuild the labor movement.

In the meantime, new forms of worker organizing have begun to take shape. As many populations and struggles of the "new working class" were not being addressed by labor unions, new organizational forms emerged to address them: workers centers and working-class community organizations. Rooted in immigrant communities and poor African American communities, workers' centers and working class community organizations were born out of a need to address worker exploitation in the context of new political economic conditions. Such conditions included the mass migration from the Global South (particularly into urban centers); the increased demand for service labor (informal, underground service work in particular); brutal immigration policies which sought to criminalize immigrants and maintain a highly vulnerable population of workers; and deepening race and gender divisions of labor.

These organizations also tend to contextualize the workers' experiences of exploitation as part of increasingly harsh conditions for the working class and communities of color in general. They take on police brutality, gentrification and affordable housing, environmental racism, immigrant rights as they talked about wages and occupational safety and health — all as workers' struggles, or working class struggles. And, they generally prioritize the leadership and engagement of members, and organize deliberate programming to develop this.

While decidedly smaller in scale than trade unions, these independent forms of organizing have produced some of the most inspirational workers' rights campaigns in recent times. And by making the connections across issues and communities of workers, they have helped to sow the seeds of a more integrated social justice movement in the United States that is struggling to develop. Unions have also sought to rebuild strength and power through organizing, particularly in the service sectors. And they have always sought to build power through electoral campaigns and organizing. They have scale, resources, access to workers, and the influence that makes a difference in policy debates and the public consciousness has a whole. However, collaborations across sectors, or with workers centers around common interests have been few and far between.

Unions have at times dismissed the independent efforts as insignificant or in some instances attempted to consume them. Workers centers and community organizations have often resisted collaborations due to these experiences or due to ideological, cultural and political differences with unions. Most recently, this has begun to shift. More unions are seeking to learn from workers centers, and more workers centers are seeking to collaborate with a broader range of organizations and unions. While the difference in power and influence is still great, opportunities for collaboration are opening.

As the working class is increasingly squeezed by global political and economic power brokers — forced to fight in wars that don't serve their interests, laid off or downsized from jobs with benefits, displaced by gentrification and forced to send children to downgraded public schools with little hope for economic opportunity— the stakes are higher and higher every day. The country has been in need of a working class movement that brings to bear the strength and power of the working-class, in the interest of the working-class, for generations. The USSF was the first opportunity where the grassroots movement, largely led by independent worker and working class community organizations, organized a national forum that included unions. It was an unprecedented moment of strength for the working-class movement, and one that will open doors to deeper collaboration for years to come.

Labor Participation in the Social Forum

Jobs with Justice (JwJ) was involved in the planning of the USSF from the beginning. As a national network of local labor and community coalitions, JwJ understands the importance of the labor movement and the potential of its involvement in building a strong social justice movement. To that end, JwJ worked to involve unions in the social forum process, and proposed workers' rights as one of the themes of the Forum. Acknowledging the important role that workers' centers and independent worker organizations were playing in the planning process from

the start, JwJ saw the involvement of unions as an opportunity to expose these sectors to one another and help develop a dialogue from which a stronger workers' rights movement can be built. Realizing that these types of dialogue and relationships need to develop nationally and locally, JwJ also worked hard to recruit over 340 activists and leaders to attend the Forum, including local labor leaders and rank and file union members, in addition to community and faith leaders and students.

Once the national planning committee of the USSF was established, the Service Employees International Union (SEIU), the American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organizations (AFL-CIO), and the Union of Needle, Industrial, and Textile Employees–Hotel Employees and Restaurant Employees (UNITE-HERE) Midwest Region joined. They helped recruit their members to the Forum, engaged in outreach efforts to other unions, and helped develop the program for the workers' rights plenary and workshops. The local central labor council in Atlanta played a supportive role of the Forum, especially as logistical needs began to arise around the Opening March. And, the AFL-CIO played a very active role in providing on-site logistics and program support. In addition to the AFL-CIO and SEIU, there were a number of other unions in attendance including the United Electrical, Radio, and Machine Workers of America (UE), Communications Workers of America (CWA), American Federation of State, County, and Municipal Employees (AFSCME), United Food and Commercial Workers (UFCW), and the United Steelworkers (USW). A few months before the Forum, JwJ, AFL-CIO, and SEIU began organizing "labor work group" calls to assist with outreach to other unions and to brainstorm potential workshops and other gatherings for labor activists at the Forum. JwJ produced flyers for labor activists listing workshops on workers' rights and gatherings for people to meet up. This "labor work group" agreed to march together in the Opening March to demonstrate unity.

Many of the unions organized workshops and tabled on important issues and campaigns. There were workshops on specific organizing campaigns and subsequent actions organized to support some of these struggles during the Forum. For example, there was a workshop on organizing immigrant workers that highlighted the Justice at Smithfield campaign. During the Forum, UFCW and Atlanta JwJ organized an action at a local grocery store that carries Smithfield pork products from the Tar Heel plant. JwJ and CWA educated and signed up over 2000 people who agreed to switch their cell phone carrier from Verizon Wireless and other non-union carriers to Cingular.

Some key labor leaders spoke at a couple of the general sessions. The Workers' Rights in a Global Economy session included Stewart Acuff, organizing director of the AFL-CIO, and Laphonza Butler, Secretary-Treasurer of Service Work-

ers United, SEIU. Ed Ott, President of the NYC Central Labor Council, spoke on the Immigrants' Rights panel. It was important to have labor perspective on these panels, which helped labor activists at the Forum see the inter-connectedness of workers' struggles with the five other key themes of the Forum. For many, the social forum provided an important space for discussions and connections to be made around the war, immigrants' rights, Gulf Coast reconstruction, gender and sexuality, and environmental justice.

Participation of Independent Worker and Working-Class Organizations in the Social Forum

A large number of workers' centers, independent worker organizations, and independent working class organizations also participated in the Forum. Many of them were key organizations involved on the national planning committee from the start, including the Southwest Workers Union and Labor Community Strategy Center. As the Forum planning process progressed, more organizations joined in providing important leadership, including the Miami Workers' Center, People Organizing to Win Employment Rights (POWER), and Domestic Workers United. At the Forum itself, other organizations like Black Workers for Justice, Coalition of Immokalee Workers, Chinese Progressive Association, National Day Laborer Organizing Network, Tenants and Workers United, and members of the Asian Movement Dialogue were in attendance.

There were a number of workshops organized by some of the organizations within this sector, including "Excluded Workers Unite–Farm Workers, Domestic Workers and Black Workers in the South Organize." Two highlights from the Forum were the launching of the Right to the City Alliance and the founding of the National Domestic Workers Alliance. Both of these alliances demonstrate a level of cooperation and coordination toward long-term change within this grassroots sector, which creates new opportunities for a different level of movement building.

The Forum created the space for dialogue amongst many of the organizations which did not come into this process with already established working or political relationships. They were also able to expose their work, their bases, and their issues to a broader audience, which inspired many of the USSF participants to know that there is a growing working class movement in this country.

Accomplishments and Missed Opportunities

The "Workers Rights in the Global Economy" plenary was an important and unique dialogue among representatives of trade unions from both federations and independent workers organizations representing different sectors, with different organizing models. The panel included Stewart Acuff from AFL-CIO, Laphonza Butler from SEIU/Change to Win, Francisco Pacheco from the National Day

Laborer Organizing Network, Lucas Benitez from Coalition of Immokalee Workers, Ai-jen Poo from Domestic Workers United, and was moderated by Sarita Gupta of Jobs with Justice. Each panelist discussed the opportunities and challenges to building a strong workers' movement in the US today. They provided us with not only their strategies, but their visions of how their individual campaign work is building power for the entire working class and all oppressed communities. They discussed ways that we can have an integrated movement that is more powerful and makes gains at a much larger scale.

This panel articulated the real impacts of neoliberal globalization on workers, and the organizing opportunities and challenges these impacts present for building a stronger workers' rights movement in the U.S. and around the world. It was important to facilitate this dialogue through which these very different sectors within the workers' rights movement could hear and learn about one another's ideas, strategies, and concrete work. The panel opened up communication channels amongst panelists, which helped to establish and/or deepen future collaborations.

The USSF brought together a diverse range of unions and organizations committed to workers' rights in a broader context of movement building. It was especially important for the broader social justice movement to experience and see the growth of independent worker and working class organizations in the U.S., which presents new opportunities for more coordinated strategies in the future. The Forum not only facilitated new dialogues and relationships, but also numerous opportunities to educate and engage participants in the issues impacting working class people today. With workers' rights as one of the themes, the Forum was also successful in demonstrating the interconnectedness of issues and movements and the need for us to build a much more integrated movement for long term change.

Among the many accomplishments, there were also some missed opportunities. The "labor working group" should have begun meeting much earlier in the planning process to assist with outreach efforts that could have brought many more rank and file workers to Atlanta and a larger diversity of unions to the Forum. In the planning process and at the Forum itself, we could have created more intentional spaces for unions and independent worker organizations to engage with one another to promote more learning across sectors within the workers' rights movement. This could have also resulted in newer and more creative ideas on how to better integrate the workers' rights theme with the five other themes at the Forum.

Ultimately, the promotion of workers' rights necessitates the expansion and protection of the workers' right to organize as a basic human right. The fight to expand and extend the right to organize will be a key unifying fight for workers in

the US and around the world for years to come. It is a long-term campaign that has the potential to unify unions, independent workers organizations and community organizations toward a goal that will lift the entire working class. The USSF provided and will continue to provide a venue for broadening the discussion about this and a host of other key fights for workers. Now with the Employee Free Choice Act campaign in motion, it seems a real missed opportunity that the USSF was not more centrally utilized as an organizing vehicle for this campaign–both to build power to win, and to expand the conversation about the right to organize for the long term. This is but one example of the type of movement-building that is possible through the USSF, that we hope will take place in the future.

As long as organizations in the United States focus narrowly on the struggles in their particular workplace or in their community–without connecting those struggles to those of the working class more broadly–our capacity to create change will be limited. The USSF provided a unique opportunity for any worker leader to expand their field of vision to include communities and struggles that they had not been exposed to nationally and internationally. A key leadership development moment, the USSF allowed for rank and file leaders to experience the energy of movement, where lots of people representing thousands of communities and workplaces are in motion and moving towards a common agenda. The synergy of connecting struggles not only raises awareness and consciousness, but it expands the realm of what's possible for organizers and activists on the ground by providing a broader context for the work that takes place on a local level.

Dialogue and Collaborations Moving Forward

The USSF provided important dialogues and inspired hope in participants that we can build power to scale to change the conditions facing the poor and working class, communities of color, immigrants and other marginalized groups. The value of the social forum is that it is a vehicle for building the relationships that are necessary in building a movement with real, transformative impact.

There are exciting strategies being developed by community based organizations, workers' centers, independent working class organizations, and unions to win important gains for workers. With the growth in worker organizing outside of the trade union movement, there are new opportunities for strategic dialogues and collaborations amongst the different sectors within the workers' rights movement.

Since the USSF, some of the dialogue that had begun has continued both locally and nationally. Around the country, there are a growing number of collaborations and cross-learning spaces that are being organized between unions and independent workers centers. For example, in NYC, several unions and the Central Labor Council have become deeply involved in the Domestic Workers Bill of

Rights campaign to establish fair labor standards for domestic workers for the first time nationally. Because of the importance of these relationships and the potential for new strategies, the AFL-CIO has staff dedicated to deepening relationships between independent workers' centers and unions, and to seek collaborations on local organizing efforts. At the Jobs with Justice National Conference in May of 2008, a number of independent workers' centers, JwJ coalitions, and unions continued learning from one another at a Low Wage Workers Organizing Issue Forum. There were over 150 participants that attended with the intention of deepening the dialogue and beginning to explore real collaborations. These are all hopeful signs of building a stronger working class movement in the US.

As a result of the global economic crisis, the problems working people face will intensify in the coming years. We have entered a recession with growing unemployment, a steep rise in foreclosures and increased homelessness, rising health care and education costs, the threat of major manufacturing sectors imploding, and a federal government safety net that competes with a growing military budget. This economic crisis requires a response at a much larger scale than where we are currently. We must build a more powerful, visionary, and connected movement at a new scale. The social forum provided an important space for these critical relationships for the working class to develop. These relationships are essential to transforming the economy into one that is based on respect and dignity for all work. The USSF 2010 presents an enormous opportunity to continue the dialogues that have begun and to strengthen relationships that are necessary to build a more powerful workers' rights movement and a more integrated social justice movement in the US and around the world.

Chapter 17

UE Participates in the Social Forum Process:

Building a Movement in the US and International Solidarity

Robin Alexander,
Director of International Affairs,
United Electrical, Radio and Machine Workers of America (UE)

Jonathan Kissam,
Local 221, UE

Alan Hart,
UE News Editor

"The ongoing crisis that our members face every day on health care and retirement ultimately needs a political solution. We need to bring our troops home now, and we need to restore the right of workers to organize. To achieve these solutions, we will need to build a movement throughout American society, and the US Social Forum will be an important step in building that movement. There will also be important opportunities to meet and share experiences with other trade unionists, and other activists, in the various sectors where UE members work: manufacturing, state and municipal workers, workers in educational institutions... the US Social Forum... will provide an important gathering place for rank-and-file, grassroots activists," wrote the officers of the United Electrical, Radio & Machine Workers of America (UE) in a letter to UE locals encouraging their participation.

As one of the organizations that founded Grassroots Global Justice (GGJ) and as an active participant in the WSF process, UE had made a commitment to send a sizable delegation to the USSF. However, both the enthusiastic response within our union and the experience itself far exceeded our expectations.

In writing this article, we were asked to reflect on the significance of the USSF for our union, so we will begin by describing who we are and why we became involved in GGJ and the social forum process, then turn to our participation in the USSF, and conclude by describing some of the ways in which the USSF helped us to build stronger international relationships.

UE: History and Political Perspective

UE is an independent, national union which was founded in 1936. We are one of the few US unions which has always combined aggressive organizing and a progressive political vision. In our first decade of existence, our union grew to become the third largest in the CIO, representing over one half million members primarily in industrial manufacturing. Unfortunately, during the Cold War we suffered serious losses as we were viciously attacked by management, the US government and by more mainstream unions. Virtually the entire left wing of the US labor movement was destroyed during this period. Although our membership was vastly reduced, the UE survived and has continued to set an example for democratic trade unionism. Recently, many other types of workers have joined our union, and our largest area of growth is in the public and service sectors.

Among the hallmarks of UE is our democratic way of operating. Our constitution limits the pay of our officers to that of our highest paid members. This helps to ensure that the lifestyle and perspective of our officers coincide with that of our members. It is also helpful during organizing campaigns, as companies cannot credibly accuse us of wasting the dues of our members on high officers' salaries. Our union's commitment to rank-and-file democracy is encapsulated in our slogan "The members run this union," and the strong identification of our diverse membership with the UE is based on working together in a democratic, rank and file union. This means that UE members elect delegates who come together every two years to draft the resolutions that will determine our policy for the coming period. Members also make all key decisions about how their locals run, and determine policy on a regional and national level.

Education is an important aspect of our work: whether it is through developing and debating union policy, through workshops, educational materials, worker to worker delegations to other countries, or discussions. And the education we have done in past years has been critical in helping our members both in maintaining an internationalist perspective and in providing rank and file leadership. That leadership is one of the things that distinguishes our union, and is a major source of our strength. When we build alliances, it is with strong connections from our rank and file leaders, not just from the top ranks of our union.

Our union engages in work in several interrelated ways. Most fundamental, we organize and represent workers in their workplaces. However, we are deeply committed to fighting for a social, economic and political program that benefits working people, especially around the issues of workers' rights, national health care and peace. In our globalized world, this also means we must establish working relationships of solidarity between workers and their organizations in different

countries and confront the power of corporations and the neo-liberal ideology, policies and structures of corporate globalization, while at the same time working to develop alternatives.

Trade Unions and Social Forums

It was this perspective that brought us to the WSF. And it was our commitment to being part of the effort to build a grassroots movement in the United States that led us to strongly support GGJ and contribute to those projects undertaken by GGJ, including the USSF. Since 2001, trade unions and other social movements, ranging from environmental and women's organizations to urban youth movements and indigenous peoples fighting for land rights, have come together at the WSF to debate and promote alternatives to the race-to-the-bottom, corporate model of globalization. While participation from US trade unions has been sparse, the WSF, and the regional, national and local social forums are taken very seriously by labor movements in the rest of the world. Brazil's powerful labor federation, CUT, was one of the initiators of the WSF, and the forums have seen significant participation from some of the most dynamic labor organizations in the world, including COSATU (South Africa), the CGT (France), the NTUI (India) and many, many others.

The social forums are designed to be a "space" to promote the integration of different movements, rather than a decision-making body. They are also a "process" that allows different movements to work together and build trust and shared understanding of the challenges we face. They consist of a wide mix of speakers, conferences, seminars, workshops, and cultural performances, with no one event dominating, and with no pressure to come to exact agreement. There are no behind-the-scenes deals on the exact wording of resolutions.

In practice, this makes them excellent spaces for informal networking, in many ways similar to the best large-scale progressive labor gatherings in the US, the Jobs with Justice annual meetings and the Labor Notes conferences, but with participation from other movements as well. They are a place where a worker employed by GE to build locomotives, for example, has the possibility of meeting not only other GE workers from around the world, but also transportation activists who fight to maintain the viability of the public transit systems that purchase the locomotives. The social forums are both a space where the "labor/community alliances" and the "movement vision" that labor activists regularly proclaim are needed can actually be built and strengthened.

Our participation in prior social forums has led us to conclude that they can serve as a useful space in which to develop or consolidate relationships, especially where we engage in advance planning, and contribute by sharing our experiences with other organizations.

Taking Advantage of the Opportunities Provided by the USSF

The USSF brought over 12,000 people to Atlanta for five days of the biggest US social justice event in recent memory. In addition to the thousands from all fifty states, there were some 400 international delegates from 68 countries. The UE had one of the largest labor delegations, with forty-seven people. This included two of UE's national officers, three other members of the national executive board, many local leaders and members, several organizers and staff, two international guests and several young people.

Although greatly outnumbered by participants from other kinds of organizations, many union members were actively involved through Jobs with Justice, their own unions, or on their own. Labor organizations that participated on the National Planning Committee for the USSF included the AFL-CIO (as well as the President of the Atlanta Central Labor Council), SEIU and the Mid-west region of UNITE-HERE! Many other unions participated to greater or lesser degrees. In addition to those mentioned above, we saw members and/or staff from AFGE, AFSCME, CWA, ILWU, UFCW and the USW.

The USSF kicked off with a gigantic march through the streets of Atlanta on Wednesday, June 27. It continued through Sunday with plenary sessions on topics like Native American environmental struggles; post-Katrina reconstruction; workers' rights in the global economy; war and imperialism; immigrant workers; and gender and sexual justice.

One of UE's national officers, Bruce Klipple, emerged from the Katrina plenary outraged: "The national disgrace of how we, as the wealthiest nation in the world, treat our citizens displaced by Katrina continues yet today! To hear about the amount of homelessness, the selling of our cities' water to foreign interests, and children going hungry in the US makes one angry and motivated for change!"

But the real work and deep discussions took place in workshops–some 900 of them–where activists shared stories, made connections, and learned from each other. The participants were diverse, but overwhelmingly working class, a majority people of color, more than half women, and a huge number of young people. Ruth Hollobaugh, a school bus driver from rural Ohio and president of her local exclaimed, "The energy is something else. To see all of the different nationalities and races come together is just awesome!" Canadian activist and writer Judy Rebick, in a web report a week after the USSF, noted that "big names" of progressive politics did not get starring roles in Atlanta. "In a culture obsessed with celebrity, the organizing committee decided they didn't need any."

UE-FAT Alliance Presente!

Since 2002 UE and our longtime Mexican ally, the Authentic Labor Front (FAT) have participated in many of the huge WSF convergences of organizations

of the working class, poor people, and others fighting for social justice, meeting in places such as Porto Alegre, Brazil; Mumbai, India; and Nairobi, Kenya.

UE worked closely with the FAT to organize two workshops, and were invited to participate in six others, giving us the opportunity to speak publicly about our work and share our experiences and to work with many other organizations. One of the UE workshops, "Breaking the Barriers to Unionization in the US and Mexico," featured rank and file leaders involved in difficult organizing struggles. These included both difficult organizing drives that ultimately succeeded because of the courage and persistence of the workers, and a campaign in a manufacturing plant that was narrowly defeated by dirty company tactics.

A second UE workshop, with standing room only, focused on public sector workers and international solidarity. In both workshops, workers from North Carolina described the continuing obstacles facing Local 150 as it organizes public employees in a state that denies them the right to bargain and the creative strategies UE pursues to overcome those barriers, including the use of international law and support from our international allies.

One of the benefits of the USSF is that it provided an opportunity for municipal workers from Connecticut and North Carolina to meet with representatives from the FAT, including the general secretary of their municipal workers' federation in Chihuahua, to discuss next steps in developing their relationship. The Mexican federation offered to assist UE Local 150 by collecting signatures on the petitions currently being circulated by the local to repeal the state's prohibition on collective bargaining for public sector workers. Also discussed was the "buck a brick" campaign initiated by UE Local 222 members in Connecticut to assist the Guerrero, Chih. local to finish construction on their union hall.

The USSF also provided an opportunity for the UE officers to engage in discussions with unions we have had relationships with over many years–such as the CGT of France–and with unions with which we did not have a strong relationship, such as the Confédération des Syndicats Nationaux (CSN), from Québec.

UE members were also inspired by how other organizations used the USSF to move their struggles forward. Jonathan Kissam of UE Local 221 in Burlington explained: "There's a lot of awesome work going on in locations and workplaces that hasn't had a chance before this to cohere nationally. For example, a lot of groups that do urban community organizing have recently formed a new alliance called 'Right to the City.' They're organized in several cities for the rights of working class people against big developers and other rich people, such as the right of public ownership of land to build housing for the poor and working people." At the USSF, Right to the City groups organized a series of workshops together. In addition, at the closing plenary, domestic workers announced that in the course of the USSF thirteen organizations had formed the Domestic Workers' Alliance!

Building a Better World

It is often difficult to quantify growth, especially in building alliances. However, a recent delegation to Chihuahua, Mexico offers several very clear examples of how we have built upon our relationships with the FAT and CSN since the USSF. Arturo Silva, General Secretary of a municipal workers federation affiliated with the FAT and USSF participant, was moved by the experience: "I was really impressed by the interest of 12,000 people in changing their country and the world. Most important to me is that there are so many young people committed to change!" His organization, which has grown to represent some 75 percent of the municipal workers in Chihuhua, hosted the delegation.

Marie Lausch, president of UE Local 222 and member of UE's General Executive Board was amazed at how much she and members of her local had in common with the municipal workers she met in Chihuahua: "The similarities were so strong that we could immediately strike up a conversation. We found we had many experiences, troubles and victories in common. We could immediately connect because it was like growing up in the same house: you know what they are talking about because it has happened to you."

Lausch' local had initiated the "buck a brick" campaign referred to earlier, which eventually raised $1,300 to aid construction of the union hall in Guerrero, Chihuahua, and our visit served as the occasion for its inauguration. The UE group was composed of three members of Lausch' local 222 from Connecticut as well as representatives of UE's public sector locals in North Carolina and West Virginia. As a direct result of the meeting with the CSN at the USSF, it also included two representatives of the CSN, from Quebec!

The inauguration of the new local hall launched a two-day training program composed of workshops and site visits. It opened a dialogue between participants who do similar types of work in different countries and allowed us to discuss topics of common interest and problems shared by workers in all three countries caused by the application of neo-liberal policies by all of our governments. It was invaluable to have the perspective of the CSN. Despite the highest unionization rate in North America, the Quebec government had imposed a contract by decree which both seriously undercut the previous contracts of public sector workers and violated their right to collective bargaining. Dominique Daigneault from the CSN observed: "Neoliberalism is not only threatening our working conditions, but it also threatens democracy. It is not elected governments who decide what to do anymore: they act in accordance with what the transnationals tell them to do."

While in Guerrero, we also had breakfast with the new municipal president (the equivalent of our mayor). Benedicto Martínez, co-president of the FAT, emphasized the importance of this meeting: "The arrival of trade unionists from other countries created the opportunity for an excellent discussion with the municipal

president in one of the cities where we represent workers. We spoke about the importance of a different sort of trade unionism in Mexico, one which is democratic, honest, and responds to current conditions. At the time we arrived, rumors were circulating about impending personnel cuts, and in the course of our conversations, the president re-assured us that he would seek other alternatives." Shortly after our return home we received word from Azucena Villalba Banda that she had met with the municipal president and that he had made a commitment to her that there would be no layoffs.

Conclusion

Following the Chihuahua trip, Marie Lausch observed: "I really appreciated all of the stories we brought to the table of victories and current struggles. You come with your view of how things are done, but this gives you a broader perspective. These workshops strengthen us as an organization because they expose us to experiences we all share and show us we are not alone. We are one family that joins together to fight for the rights of those who we represent."Building a movement is complicated, especially when it involves differences in culture, language and experience. The USSF was not perfect. However, it was an inspiring experience for the UE members who attended and provided us with a space to deepen existing relationships and form new ones. At the time we first discussed how to begin the process of organizing a USSF, it was hard to imagine that an event of that size and scope could truly be built by existing grass roots organizations in the US. However, GGJ groups had the vision and solidarity, and hard work made it a reality. In turn, the USSF provided us with a taste of what the world we are fighting for might look and feel like. UE extends our profound thanks to all of those people and organizations who made it possible!

For more information about the UE-FAT Strategic Organizing Alliance or to read Mexican Labor News and Analysis, a free electronic newsletter about labor and related political issues in Mexico, go to www.ueinternational.org For more information about the United Electrical, Radio and Machine Workers of America (UE), go to www.ueunion.org For more information about the Frente Auténtico del Trabajo (FAT), go to http://www.fatmexico.org.

Chapter 18

Immigrant Communities, the Immigrant Rights Caucus, and the Immigrant Rights Tent at the US Social Forum

Colin Rajah, National Network for Immigrant and Refugee Rights

Security Concerns: Ensuring Accessibility at the USSF

Months prior to the USSF, a number of immigrant community groups and immigrant rights organizations, highlighted the concern around immigrant communities' participation at the USSF given ever increasing ICE (Immigration and Customs Enforcement) controls and arbitrary detentions at airports, around the roads leading to Atlanta, and in Atlanta itself.

As such, the National Planning Committee (NPC) agreed to form an ad-hoc team to develop an extensive plan and documents which could be used as guides and checklists for immigrants intending to participate in the USSF. The team included:

- Hilary Ronen (La Raza Centro Legal)
- Ken Montenegro
- Monami Maulik (Desis Rising Up and Moving–DRUM)
- Rafael Semanez (VAMOS Unidos)
- Sung E Bai (CAAAV: Organizing Asian Communities)
- Susan Alva (Occidental College)
- Colin Rajah (National Network for Immigrant & Refugee Rights–NNIRR)

The team created these documents which were available to all participants on the USSF website, plans of action to deal with rapid responses if and when needed, a legal team to respond to legal issues that may arise.

These proved largely effective as most security issues concerning immigrants were prevented except for one outstanding situation. A participant who had registered for the USSF was detained at the Chicago port of entry for more than 12 hours, even though she had a visa and documentation proving that she was participating at the USSF. Fortunately, she was eventually released, but the situation also served as a wakeup call as to the risks of travel for immigrant communities.

The USSF Security Team (led by Raquel Lavina), the USSF International Committee (comprising Chris Selig and Ruth Castel-Branco) and other individuals from the National Immigration Project of the National Lawyers Guild, were all also instrumental in ensuring that immigrants could participate and experience the USSF as safely and securely as possible.

Creating a Space: The Immigrant Rights Tent

During preparatory conference calls and meetings to plan for workshops and other activities leading up to the USSF, a number of immigrant rights organizations and immigrant community groups agreed that having a space at the USSF would be useful and important.

In response, the National Network for Immigrant and Refugee Rights (NNIRR) agreed to rent the most affordable small tent available, since there was no immediately funding available to rent anything larger.

The Immigrant Rights Tent was intended as a space for immigrant rights organizations and immigrant communities to:

- gather and form an "Immigrant Rights Caucus" at the USSF
- regularly meet and debrief
- use as "open space" for workshops and other activities that were not part of the official program

In actuality, this was very effective and the small tent proved to be heavily utilized for all the above reasons and even proved to be too small to shade the often packed crowds who gathered there for its many varying events.

The immigrant rights tent began its duty during the USSF on the opening day on June 27th, with an Immigrant Rights orientation, and where the Immigrant Rights Caucus was launched and began its collective group march to the opening march alongside the Korean delegation.

Coincidentally, as the USSF was beginning, a significant piece of immigration legislation which was highly controversial and sometimes split immigrant communities collapsed in Congress. This initiated an unexpected amount of media attention, and the Immigrant Rights Caucus quickly decided to hold a press conference on the morning of June 28th at the tent. The press conference was highly attended by local and national media, as well as community organizations from around the country. Representatives of these various communities were able to raise their collective voices on this critical national debate in a cohesive fashion, and demonstrated a lot of unity, unlike popular and media portrayals of divided and conflicting communities.

Immediately following this, the Immigrant Rights tent hosted an Arab-South Asian Caucus meeting, another significant alliance development at the USSF. The tent also hosted various workshops and meetings including: two workshops on remittances and one on coalition building, meetings on popular education for immigrant communities, a household worker convening, and daily dinner debriefs for the Immigrant Rights Caucus.

After the Immigrant Rights plenary, the Immigrant Rights Tent also hosted a debriefing session where participants were able to meet with all of the plenary speakers, and debate about critical points that were raised during the plenary. Although planned to end by 10pm, this debrief did not end until almost 11pm that evening!

Overall, many immigrant rights organizations and immigrant community groups found that having a space to gather, meet and discuss as well as debate critical issues facing immigrants, was extremely valuable at the USSF. It helped build relationships among the participating immigrant communities, present often divisive issues in a safe space, and offered the opportunity for communities to meet and extend critical grassroots work being done, at a time when such space is so limited in the national arena.

Chapter 19

Youth and the US Social Forum:
A New Generation Steps Up

Monica Cordova,
SouthWest Organizing Project (SWOP)

Christi Ketchum Bowman,
Project South: Institute for the Elimination of Poverty & Genocide

Coordinated by
Rose M. Brewer and Marina Karides

We were nearly 15,000 strong, deeply rooted in grassroots struggles: black, brown, red, yellow and white, a majority people of color, of all ages with a large percentage of young people from all over the country. Yes, we were "poor people, young people, people of color, gays and lesbians, and all manner of people who believe 'another world is possible, another US is necessary' joined together by the thousands in Atlanta for the first US Social Forum." (van Gelder, available at http://www.yesmagazine.org/article.asp?ID=1845).

What was incredible about the 2007 USSF was the fact that we were heavily young. This is the powerful reality of the first ever USSF in Atlanta, GA, 2007. It didn't happen automatically. According to the youth organizer from Project South Christi Ketchum Bowman, some struggle and intense outreach to achieve the youth presence were necessary.

Youth and the USSF

The USSF has been described variously as historic, ground shifting, a US first. Youth leadership was integrated into the NPC process after discussion and work involving a SWOP intern and Christi Ketchum Bowman. In early February 2006, Monica Cordova of SWOP became the lead of the Youth Working Group (YWG) and served on the USSF National Planning Committee. This involved reaching out to youth organizations, their networks, personal relations and adult allies. Christi points out:

> "I also think it's fair to say the outreach of myself, Monica and a few others between September 2005 and January of 2006 and beyond…is a key factor in the attendance at the Forum, participation in the youth working group, and pre- and during planning" (personal communication from Christi Ketchum Bowman, July 2, 2009).

This set the context for youth led outreach and program development for peers. This reality, of young persons' participation, is especially important for movement building in the US, as we have learned from recent social movement history in the US, both Civil Rights and present day immigrant struggles. The YWG understood that youth would need to be at the center of the process and preparing to lead the process.

Youth has experienced some of the worst aspects of neoliberal capitalism. Youth resistance to these policies has been at the center of the fight back. As

The School To Prison Pipeline:

An Intolerable Burden

Excerpt from paper delivered at Education vs. Incarceration event, USSF, June 26, 2007

Constance Curry, JD, Benétta M. Stanley, MPA, Sujan Dass, EdD, and Alexandra Stanzyck

Ending up in prison is the tragedy that awaits at least one in three black boys, and today, 58,000 black males are serving sentences in state or federal prison while fewer than 40,000 black males earn a college degree each year. Millions of poor American children are condemned to prison by the time they reach their teens because they are failed at every turn in their lives — failed by their family, the child welfare system, their schools and the juvenile justice system. Between 2000 and 2006, the number of children living in poverty increased by 1.2 million to reach 12.8 million children. One in six of America's children is living in poverty. [27] Southerners–indeed all Americans–need to wake up to the resegregation of our schools, to the linkage between poor segregated schools and prison incarceration rates between majority and minority populations, and the vast and growing disfranchisement of a large percentage of minority men. No one who looks at these issues can avoid seeing the correlation between them. Unfortunately in today's partisan climate, these conditions

Monica Cordova, co-lead of the USSF youth working group pointed out in an early interview on the Forum:

> "For the Youth Working Group, two things take priority: 1) We want to make sure that youth are at the Forum and 2) That once they get there we want not only integration and intergenerational connections but involvement in every aspect –from meetings, workshops to being on panels and plenaries. This is about actually creating a space where they can grow, connect, learn from each other and gather and realize there is a movement."

The Youth Story in the USSF

As a young organizer Monica found serving on the NPC with veteran activists a valuable learning experience that helped build her skills as an organizer and

can actually benefit the politics of wealth and privilege while handicapping the politics of openness and equality.

Curry has shown the documentary *The Intolerable Burden* at workshops all over the U.S, since the "school to prison pipeline" is being replicated all over the country.

The reaction to the film has been a revelation. From New York to California, south to north, in schools, businesses, churches, black or white, very few people have any idea of the 1960s civil rights movement—only a few forty-odd years back or of the current related issues. Perpetuated by the inherent racism in the criminal justice system, we are facing the loss of an entire generation of young black/minority men. The racism is shown not only in this arena, but also in the disenfranchisement of felons in many states and the large numbers of black people who face the death penalty.

Several organizations are working to educate people on how to dismantle the pipeline, beginning with the state of public education, zero tolerances policies, and the negative impact of the No Child Left Behind Act imposed on public schools by the federal government. The American Civil Liberties Union of Georgia has put together a report entitled "Best Practices for Dismantling the School to Prison Pipeline" (available at http://www.acluga.org/schooltoprison.html)

America's Cradle to Prison Pipeline, published by Marian Wright Edelman of the Children's Defense Fund (2007). http://www.childrensdefense.org

CAN'T TAKE EVERYTHING

Clifton Carter

You could take my eyes, so I couldn't see.
You could shackle me in chains and throw away the key.
You could take my feet so I couldn't walk.
You could fill my mouth, so I couldn't talk.
You could take my ears, so I couldn't hear.
You could take my heart, and replace it with fear.
You could take my life and place it in a grave oh so cold.
No matter what you take you can never take my soul.

At the age of 15, Clifton Carter was tried for murder as an adult, and is currently serving a life sentence in Parchman Penitentiary, Mississippi (2000).

ground her understanding of movement building. Monica sums up that learning as follows:

> "One of the things I've told my interns is that there is nothing more important in organizing than building relationships, building relationships with the groups you're organizing. Building trust and building relationships with people here means now I know if I have a question about equal access campaign, I know people who have worked on that. I've enhanced my ability to talk to people about the organization and gain knowledge" (interview with Marina Karides 2007).

Monica experienced the NPC meetings as democratic and inclusive. Christi spearheaded Atlanta-based outreach and program development, working closely with the Atlanta Organizing Committee (AOC). The AOC was integral to on-the-ground outreach, organizing and attention to logistics for the USSF in general and the youth component in particular.

Youth organizations and young people from all across the United States made up the YWG. These groups represented work on a wide range of issues: labor, media, education, youth rights, immigrant rights, equal access and environmental justice. They are diverse in issues and sectors: international, national, regional and local organizations contributed. The working group had a total of 40 different youth groups participating in monthly conference calls. The YWG also had a sub-

committee that included the Student Labor Action Project, a national student labor group, Youth United for Change, a youth organization from Philadelphia, Global Action Project, a youth media organization based in New York and Environmental Health Coalition, to handle day-to-day tasks and make quick decisions when the Chair needed support.

As Youth Working Group lead, Monica points out that initiating the YWG was a challenge at first. Young people have a lot on their plate and crazy schedules due to juggling school, work, family and their work within their organization. These were young people who did not know each other and since communicating through conference calls is impersonal, the calls challenged the groups regarding building relationships and planning a social forum. It also took some time for them to understand the social forum process and then see it as key in their movement building. After the YWG addressed these obstacles, goals were set and their work moved forward.

The YWG was to ensure that the USSF would be a safe, friendly and inclusive place for teenagers and young adults from the age of 13-24. One of the main goals was outreach to assure that at least 20% of the USSF participants were young people. The group had to mount an effort to get youth to the event including both peer-to-peer outreach/recruitment, and attention to logistics and fundraising to provide travel and housing resources. There was outreach to youth organizations and to young people who are part of grassroots groups. Outreach was done through Youth Working Group Calls, phone banks, MySpace, a flyer contest with a final version to hand out on the ground. Travel stipends were awarded to 91 people; 40 distributed to those under 19 years of age and 51 to those aged 19-24. The YWG sponsored an opening breakfast that was supported by funds raised through sales of t-shirts provided by the SURDNA foundation.

Another priority was to have specific space for young people to gather, network and learn at the Youth Tent and Youth Camp. Young people lead nearly 300 workshops that were interactive and many had an intergenerational approach. The YWG also made sure that young people were included in other aspects of the Forum such as the main plenaries, in which four young people spoke as part of distinct panels.

Reflections on the Forum

The evaluation process revealed that the young people involved in planning and outreach found the opening march inspiring and appreciated the connections they made with other activists throughout the Forum. Networking was most valuable for base members connecting with other base members.

A Youth Tent was organized and during the weekend of the Forum hosted over 1,000 young people. Youth organizations submitted proposals to hold facili-

tated discussions, presentations and cultural activities. The YWG also organized events such as a kick off, opening breakfast, dance, a mural project and USSF Idol, where youth talent was showcased. The tent was one of the key gathering places on site where young people expressed themselves creatively as well as to politically network and meet with other youth leaders, the Youth Tent was the most active of the tents at the Forum where dance, artwork, music, poetry and meetings with lively discussions came together. Some events filled the tent to capacity. There were no workshops held in the tent but it was seen as a good space for strategic discussions and networking. The tent also held a table for youth to provide information on their organization and work. Youth were able to build stronger relationships with youth organizers. This was important for young people because they were connecting to other young people with a social justice framework. This allowed them to not feel isolated in their work and continue to work for change.

Youth were at work during the Forum staffing volunteers, doing clean-up, set-up and much more. The Project South Youth Council and SWOP interns committed long hours to the USSF, often missing out on many of the other activities.

Youth Camp

Another meeting place for younger USSF participants, the Youth Camp was held at the Lake Claire Land Trust-a beautiful community garden and communal green space situated in a residential neighborhood less than 10 miles outside of downtown Atlanta, Georgia. Several restaurants, a local grocery, local bus and public rail transportation were within walking distance. Twenty-five campsites were available with a maximum capacity of 75 people and no more than 4 people per campsite.

There was a community kitchen available during the duration of the camp, two solar showers, toilets, a gazebo, picnic tables, and a performance stage. Youth were able to schedule special events at the camp such as campfires, music, or saunas. A first aid tent with volunteer staff was on site as was nighttime security.

Building for 2010

Although the participation of youth was powerful, they also reported shortfalls in their evaluations. These critiques emerged from evaluations collected at the Forum and at the Project South Youth Council. For example, though there were spaces for youth, overall the workshops were not interactive enough. They had anticipated more discussion space, and cross-issue discussions but found many workshops information based; more like lectures than discussions. There also seemed to be not enough activities for young people. Youth also found it difficult to

navigate the huge number of workshops and long days. Some reported that it was difficult to take a break without feeling that they would miss something. Youth were especially concerned about missing youth presence on plenaries.

The YWG has identified many ongoing benefits from the Forum and continues connections through the listserve and through MySpace. Several youth participants are looking to help build the 2010 USSF in Detroit. While acknowledging that much of the impact of the event will be revealed over time and through developing relationships, connecting with other groups, learning how they do their work, and how to be better allies were all identified as valuable lessons to take home by members of the YWG. Concrete projects and campaigns that can build foundations with other groups were also identified as worthwhile.

Many of the youth who were part of the YWG hope their organizations play a more active role in the 2010 USSF by dedicating staff time, through planning and outreach, or prioritizing it in other ways as an organization. Another hope for 2010 is making the youth presence more visible– especially in the forefront of panels, performance, plenaries and in organizing.

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Chapter 20

What SONG Is*

Paulina Hernandez,
SONG

Caitlin Breedlove,
SONG

Alexis Pauline Gumbs,
SONG

Our work at Southerners on New Ground (SONG) is the work of sanctuary, renewal and creating political home for progressive Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender, Gender Non Conforming, & Two Spirited working class, immigrant, and people of color in the Southeast. SONG believes it is important to acknowledge the context we work in: the place we live in is the South.

SONG's work in the South is grounded in history, a belief in redemption, and a belief in those who have been left behind by power structures. History because this land is thick with what came before us– Native Peoples, slavery, the Civil Rights Movement; traditions of resilience, beauty, and pain. Redemption because we believe that while the South is a physical geography of white supremacy and poverty and of how plantations, mountain top removal, and slave labor form; it is also more than that. It is a place of redemption and hope for many–a place where folk reconcile with the past in an honest and painful way, a place where people can stay in lands riddled with pain, remember old traditions, and birth new ways. Belief in those left behind because while we have been underfunded, lacking in infrastructure, brutalized by poverty, racism, homophobia, transphobia and all manners of oppression; movement people in the South have always been fighting (like oppressed people all over the world) to keep our heads up. We have found creative ways based on kin structures to push toward liberation.

We have not turned our back on food, singing, culture, our elders, our youth, and our craftspeople and artisans. We find joy in such unlikely places. Being Southerners On New Ground to us means loving hard histories, giving thanks, making

**Excerpts from this article first appeared in Left Turn 2007 & the Third Wave Foundation newsletter 2007.*

visionary space, pushing forward, being kin, seeking wholeness and realizing there is no liberation in isolation.

SONG and The US Social Forum

Akin to that is the legacy of social forums, the idea that people from all over the world come together out of a shared belief that another world is possible, and that as folks living in the US, in a place many liken to the "Velvet Purse of Oppression" as put by political writer Dylan Rodriguez, that another US is necessary. The USSF also grew from the foundation of international and US-based movements for fair trade and the mobilizations at the 1999 World Trade Organization (WTO) meeting in Seattle and many other grassroots and national organizing efforts that followed, it is deeply rooted in the idea of redistribution of wealth, and a deeply entrenched commitment to economic justice.

From the desire of raised visibility of our full lives, and the priority of intersectionality (the place where the issues and oppressions that affect us all meet), SONG became involved in supporting the work of our membership involved in the Southeast Social Forum, which happened in one of our political homes, Durham, NC in 2006. Leading out of that work, we were able to collaborate with other national, regional and local Queer people of color organizations around the country, such as the Sylvia Rivera Law Project, FIERCE!, the Audre Lorde Project, folks who were also a part of the National Planning Committee from fierce organizations such as the Miami Worker's Center and Southwest Network for Environmental and Economic Justice, as well as countless local grassroots organizations in the Southeast (such as the Jacksonville Area Sexual Minority Youth Network) towards what become known as the "Queer Visibility team" for the USSF.

The work of the Queer Visibility Team was to raise not just the visibility of people coming to the forum, but also to create a more intersectional way of raising visibility: full of the joy and resistance of queer culture. We all acknowledged that the USSF addresses a global strategy of liberation work that is about "convergence", the gathering of *the people* towards a shared vision, of grassroots self-determination of our own political agenda, and ultimately, political unity with other people working towards a more equitable world.

Unfortunately, we also believe that the US left is often fragmented and triangulated by the idea that you can put a "hierarchy" on identities; on our own stories and narratives about oppression, and ultimately, on whose liberation takes precedent, and what is ultimately 'strategically possible'. Many of us coming to work together wanted to have the spaces of the social forum reflect our complicated and intersectional realities, as well as work towards integrating gender & sexuality as key areas of struggle, and therefore carve out space for it within larger plenary spaces of the USSF… where theory could meet practice, and we could

build in our own collective understanding about strategies, and tactics that were relevant and spoke to those areas of struggle. One of the things we struggled with as a body was operating as more than an 'identity' block of politically radical and progressive queer people, but also in our capacity as a direct organizing body throughout the USSF, and what kind of political unity we could build across gender & sexuality.

All in all, we estimate now that there were over 150 workshops that were led by queer people and/or that dealt directly with areas of struggle critical to and intersecting with our lives. Ultimately, the Women's Working Group, the Transformative Justice Caucus, the Environmental Justice Working Group and the Queer Visibility working group we were a part of collaborated to organize the ***Liberating Gender and Sexuality: Integrating Gender and Sexual Justice Across Our Movements,*** brilliantly pulling together threads of legacy / memory / joy and strategy about the longing for Gender & Sexuality to be a more central part of the discourse and political alignment to the Progressive & Radical Left.

We had a lot of epiphanies before, during, and after the social forum, during workshops, calls, during breaks in between plenaries, as people headed to actions in Atlanta's urban maze, and as people took their shoes off to enter the *Healing Space* organized by healing practitioners and cultural workers engaging in transformational justice. People spoke of experiences where someone was asked what their "preferred gender pronoun" was as they checked in to their local Atlanta hotel, and just as that organizer got over the shock of an opportunity for self-identity, the hotel clerk said, "I've been corrected so many times this week, I just decided to ask." This moment was a small example of the need to transcend movement spaces into the real world so as to be accountable for each other's survival, visibility, and self-determination.

Also, as a pre-Forum event, on June 26, 2007, 100 beautiful queer grassroots activists from 44 organizations in 18 states gathered in Atlanta, Georgia to rejoice in our collective work and plan the future our communities deserve. Queers for Economic Justice (QEJ) and SONG, both queer organizations committed to intersectional approaches that center working class communities and people of color, collaborated to make this gathering happen. The partnership was a rare and prophetic example of resource sharing across differences in regional access and organizational cultures, resulting in a dynamic process infused with multiple strategies and palpable love.

Susan Raffo, of Queers for Economic Justice (a New York based organization made up primarily working class queer people), conducted 25 listening sessions during the months leading up to the event, and she found that debilitating isolation was named as the major obstacle within left politics, as well as a repeated desire for a sustainable process of connected movement. When participants were

asked to imagine the qualities we found necessary for building the world that we want, the people spoke of "love, laughter, honesty, creativity, vision, humility, self-awareness, adventure, faith, courage" and more.

…And the Work and Joy Continue

The end of this is yet to come. Our work continues to evolve, and even now, as anti-immigration raids continue raining down in North Carolina, Georgia and Tennessee, we piece our hearts together to fight not just as queer people who happen to do movement work, but indeed as queer people who actively stand against neo-liberalism, and the separation from the beloved, our communities, and each other.

One of the things SONG learned over the course of helping to plan the social forum, as well as the countless hours we spent meeting with our comrades, our members, other folks attending the Forum, and the local community in Atlanta is the complexity of relationship building, and trust-building across identities, struggles, and towards political unity. We are strongly urged by our conditions to stay present with each other, work through conflict, and not "throw each other away" over small grievances. Thus, we affirm each other's worth by holding on to long, sometimes difficult, relationships. Often, hard relationships are even transformed over time because people grow together politically and emotionally. We are keenly aware of how much we need each other; so much so that SONG members often travel up to 15 hours by car and through the night to be in the same space as each other. The sense of needing one another nourishes and builds the organizing in countless ways.

There is great joy when the work connects people who are isolated, gives voice to those who have been denied air time, and builds folks' sense of home as a place where they can also be queer. Part of SONG's work is supporting the unquestionable right to return of all Gulf Coast people, especially people of color and poor people; and it is SONG's work to support the right to return *and stay* of all LGBTQ and gender non-conforming Southerners. For many, it is a daily fight to stay home or a brutal process of trying to come home. We love our region and our work is to make it a place where Southern queers can come home and stay home to live with self-determination, dignity, and respect. It is our hope to continue aligning with people all over the global south and the world working towards self-determination, dignity, and respect. SONG believes that work which brings people together for a common action with intention is healing unto itself… it is the work of building kindred, but as Patrisia Gonzalez says "not just about politics, or about popular history, or only about social change. It is about people's spiritual history… the recovery of their soul." SONG believes in the creation and nurturing of another world is possible... and that another South is already on its way.

Chapter 21

Women's Working Group

Organizing Gender Justice for the US Social Forum

A collective process by
Nkenge Toure, Pat Willis, Anne Olson,
Ann Smith, Loretta Ross, Beverly Yuen Thompson,
Mia Mingus, Fakhri Haghani, Jacqui Patterson
*and coordinated by Ariel Dougherty**

Nkenge Toure: This was my first opportunity to be involved with any of the social forums. Overall, I was impressed by the determination and commitment of the Women's Working Group and each of its sub-committees to move beyond all the obstacles to meet its mandate (womandate).

For me the USSF experience is one not to be soon forgotten. I say this for several reasons. First there was the honor of being involved with the Women's Working Group (WWG). Secondly, the WWG was extremely challenged to be recognized and to have its input valued, respected, or let alone acted upon.

Pat Willis: My involvement with social forums began when I participated in organizing the Women's Tribunal on Violence Against Women with the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom and 25 other feminist organizations at the Boston Social Forum in 2004. We experienced some very typical and continuous masculinist efforts to obstruct our program, which came as a complete surprise to me. I did not expect the BSF principal organizers to be anti-feminist, but they turned out to be in some very substantial ways, particularly on violence against women issues. Later that year, in October. I attended the European Social Forum in London and heard grassroots women protesting their exclusion by ESF organizers. It was echoes of the BSF.

Anne Olson: In the summer of 2005, the initial USSF planning meeting was held and as a member of the Project South Leadership Team, I was able to attend. As the result of that meeting, preliminary organization for the first USSF and the Southeast Forum were made. A variety of events occurred, but my involvement was to serve on the Program/Cultural Committee for the Southeast Social Forum, primarily working with workshop organization.

Ann Smith: I heard about the Women's Caucus of the World Social Forum in Brazil, so when the announcement came out about the USSF, I called Alice Lovelace to get involved.

Pat Willis: I was still very enthusiastic about social forums and so I attended the WSF 2005 in Porto Alegre because I, as did its over 150,000 attendees, saw it as a promising venue for progressive politics. While there, I attended a session entitled "Women's Introduction to the WSF" which was organized and chaired by feminist economist Carol Barton, then Director of the Women's International Coalition for Economic Justice(WICEJ). The 35 or so women present talked about their disappointment and frustration with the WSF International Council because of its androcentric thinking and organizational processes. I was very disappointed to discover, although not surprised by now, that patriarchy and male domination were heavily instituted into this purportedly progressive arena right from its inception, according to these leaders of global feminist movements. I asked "How feminist is the WSF?" and Carol responded bluntly, "It isn't". I had already learned first hand that Carol Barton's insightful but brief reply was too true, but I had hoped otherwise. I was becoming more crestfallen.

Anne Olson: I also served on the Atlanta Local Organizing Committee for the USSF from the beginning, doing a large variety of tasks. In preparation for the USSF, I attended the Southwest Border Forum in Ciudad Juarez in October 2006 as part of the Project South Team and also served as the Women's Working Group representative until Loretta Ross arrived at the National Planning Committee.

Loretta Ross: Right after the SE Regional preparatory meeting in North Carolina, Alice Lovelace (National organizer of the USSF) walked right up to me and specifically said: "Loretta we need you and SisterSong to take leadership in organizing a Women's Working Group." That was in July of 2006. So, I agreed, because I was going to support the USSF anyway because of my relationship with Project South and it being in Atlanta. It seemed a good way to support the USSF, because of my interest in gender issues. And it gave us a focus of how to support the Forum, because defining and controlling our support in a sustainable way was such an overwhelming task. SisterSong is still a small, struggling organization, so we couldn't take on more than we could chew. So, it felt like a win-win to take on both the gender issue, or at least the WWG, and to keep SisterSong's involvement manageable.

Nkenge Toure: I believe the WWG was one of the most organized committees focused on the Forum and in a major way this was due to the excellent leadership

of Loretta Ross, SisterSong's National Coordinator. For me this meant Women of Color were making and did make a major contribution to any success regarding women's visibility as part of the Forum's agenda and program.

Loretta Ross: SisterSong and I personally enjoy a fairly active and large mailing list of women's organizations and activists across the country, predominately of women of color. So, we began by email blasts to thousands of women inviting them to join our monthly conference calls; setting up and structuring the monthly conference calls; providing adequate and detailed documentation of the proceedings from the calls; setting up the listserve so we could have a communications structure through which we could work that was outside of the communications structure of the USSF because that was taking a long time to put into place and we needed to move a little faster than their official processes were moving. We self-financed and printed tens of thousands of postcards telling people about the Women's Working Group and the USSF and distributed these across the country. Also recruitment was by word of mouth. There were a couple of opportunities to place ads in publications of other organizations–like ColorLines for example and any other progressive organizations. If we had a chance to support the WWG of the Social Forum, we did that and we got our groups to distribute information to their other lists.

Pat Willis: When my invitation to join came from Loretta I became very hopeful, elated actually. I knew that with Loretta's leadership we would have our best chances to create feminist analysis and practice at the USSF.

Ann Smith: I was in communications with Loretta Ross who served as convener for the Women's Caucus. She facilitated our conference calls. I came to this very diverse mix of women representing over 150 women's organizations with my dream for us as a women's caucus to think and act in the new paradigm of organizing. Loretta and many others were also coming with the same dream to organize around our collective dreams instead of the problems related to all the "isms".

Anne Olson: When the NPC met in Atlanta, I participated both as a WWG contact and as an Atlanta Local Organizing Committee contact. I also worked closely with Loretta on WWG conference calls, serving in a variety of ways and did some organizing of Atlanta Women's groups, particularly Charis Books and More. In my spare time, I worked with a team of women to plan and then facilitate the only workshop at USSF on ageism.

Pat Willis: I was very involved in the work of the Women's Working Group. I was also heavily involved on several other working groups and committees, first as a

liaison from the WWG and then as a full working member, which I had not expected but which quickly became apparent when Alice said, and I paraphrase, 'we all are full working members.' I had some very feminist experiences working with these people and applaud them for their feminist organizing practices. Many of these were men, who, whether they were aware of it or not, engaged in feminist practice during the meetings. This is a result of decades of feminist principles of laterality and inclusiveness now observed as a matter of good practice in many progressive groups which have overcome standard masculinist practices of hierarchal organizational custom.

Loretta Ross: The most pleasing part of the process of working with the Women's Working Group was the incredibly high level of unity and focused purpose that we had in the Women's Working Group at the USSF. I think that we served as a model for other working groups within the social forum process that had more difficultly achieving unity, achieving and keeping focus. I think that all the working groups eventually did their jobs and had some successes. But the fact that we were able to maintain a consistently high level of unity allowed us to really spend our time much more dealing with the external factors that we had to navigate than we had to deal with that were affecting the WWG rather than dealing with internal dynamics that keep us from being more effective. It really proves that feminists coming from different persuasions and different organizations and different ages, groups, gender identities and geographical regions of the country are able to work for a common goal if we structure a process that is firmly focused but is democratic at the same time. I don't want to sound self-serving, but I like to think that my facilitation of the group was democratic. At least that was the feedback I was getting. And if I was getting any other kind of feedback, I would have changed it. People felt included, and yet we also felt focused.

Ann Smith: I don't recall exactly when Loretta led us into the new dynamic, but it was early on in one of our monthly calls. Loretta's leadership was instrumental in transforming us as a caucus to a working group. She did this by modeling the new paradigm of collaboration, cooperation, decisions by consensus, open and honest communications and shared leadership. We soon became a very cohesive group helping Loretta be a strong voice in the National Planning Council. We discussed problems but did not dwell on the negative. We used our strategic thinking and assertiveness in being a strong feminist presence in the overall planning of the social forum.

Loretta Ross: Even though we had more than 150 women's organizations involved at least nominally on paper, I would have liked to have seen more consis-

tent participation from a larger number of groups. There were a handful of women's groups and individuals who were dedicated, and they were on every call. They became the core leadership of the WWG and I grew to depend upon them in incredible ways. I wish that this core leadership had been broader. A large number of groups would be on one or two calls and then would drop out and then maybe drop in. They could see that things were being handled. Or, they didn't like the ways things were being handled. If they didn't like the way things were being handled, they never offered us that opinion. What we avoided was a lot of people with competing and overlapping priorities. And I got the sense that people thought "there is a group handling gender issues and I can just come to the Forum." And that apparently is what people did.

Ann Smith: For me our working group became an empowering place where we could be supported in our individual dreams for participating at the USSF as well as our collective programs and resources. We became a sisterhood of equals. My organization, Circle Connections, hosted a planning retreat at Cedar Hills Enrichment Center outside of Atlanta. It was here I first met in person Loretta Ross and Anne Olson. Having time together in a beautiful space was a luxury that I hope will happen in the future for everyone who wants to attend.

Loretta Ross: We were also the only working group to have our own retreat in advance of the USSF. We had to self finance it. But the fact that it took place at all was pretty significant. Ann Smith, of Circle Connections, proposed the idea because they were already scheduled to have a retreat here in GA in February 2007 during the planning time of the USSF. So what she offered was to let the WWG use it as a site to do some strategic planning around the Women's Working Group, and as a way to bring her existing retreat people into the organizing of the Women's Working Group. That is where the idea of the Red Tent came from, for example. It was a good retreat but it would have been far more successful if we could have offered scholarships for more people to participate. We simply didn't have the capacity to do that. But no other working group had a retreat. About 25 people attended the retreat and 5 or 6 of us represented the WWG. The retreat didn't represent the leadership of the WWG. But it became the only time that a few of us had face-to-face contact with one another. And the predominant focus of the retreat was devoted to the agenda of the Women's Working Group. I mean, Circle Connections literally sacrificed their agenda to ours, which was very generous of them.

Ariel Dougherty: In the second week of June 2007, with only a few weeks to go before the USSF took place in Atlanta, Jan Strout, National Field Director, Na-

tional Organization for Women, invited me to join the Women's Working group conference call. I could not attend USSF. But I had already participated with a number of women putting a panel together on networking among women's media justice organizations. So, I was primed, when I joined the conference call. "The Room" was a buzz. There were close to thirty women who joined the call. You could feel the adrenaline rush. It was the last meeting before the Forum. So, when Loretta entered this conference call, you could feel all heads turning to her attention. She outlined the agenda. We did a roll call. Numerous members stepped forward to give reports and updates on activities that would take place in just over a week. The Red Tent; The Court of Women; Feminism Race and Class workshop; the Reproductive Justice Briefing Book; and the plenary, Liberating Gender and Sexuality. It was a lot to take in, yet the reports moved smoothly. Questions raised, someone else would pipe in with an answer. Logistics were outlined. A huge amount of information was exchanged over the hour and a half. These women, obviously over months of such meetings had evolved an egalitarian process and trust among the whole. Loretta moved the agenda along to keep the process flowing at a good clip.Media was the last item. A graduate student based in Atlanta volunteered to coordinate some media efforts. I chimed in that I would assist as I could from my computer at home in New Mexico. We exchanged contact information. The call ended. I was drained, unused to the intensity, yet exhilarated.

Beverly Yuen Thompson: At USSF a media network was created to coordinate audio/visual documentation, uploading files, and distributing the media to an on-line community. I came to the USSF with the explicit interest in documenting the event and making these images available. In particular, I videotaped the major plenaries, marches, performances, and workshops. My interest in visual data is marginalized within my academic career, and relegated to the realm of passionate hobby. While writing an academic analysis of the impact of the first ever USSF may take years to research, write, and publish; videotaping the happenings can be made immediately available, on-line, to those interested, but unable to attend.

Fakhri Haghani: A few years ago I taught an introductory course in Women's Studies at Georgia State University. My major efforts during the course of that semester were directed towards debunking the widely accepted myth among students that the term "oppression" should not anymore be used for women in the United States. The US Forum was the right place for debunking that myth. The Women's Working Group of the USSF in coordination with SisterSong had organized over 70 gender-specific workshops and events, and a plenary. The Red Tent Cherokee women's ceremony was a kick off to the health, healing and environmental justice tent.

RED TENT

Ann Smith: The red tent gave women a sacred space to just be women. The red tent provided a safe place for women of all ages to share their stories and best practices It was my dream for the Forum to have a red tent. We did not have the money for a women's tent so Anne Olson helped to get us into the Healing, Health & Environmental Justice (HHEJ) Tent. Dorotea Mendoza and I represented the WWG in a collaborative process for sharing space with the representatives from the HHEJ. I had asked Anna Yang, director of the Red Web Foundation, to help me bring a red tent to the USSF. She found Midge Jolly and Marina Alzugaray, two midwives from Florida who create red tents for various events. Dorotea and Midge were on the call when we first proposed the idea of having part of the HHEJ tent be given to us for creating a red tent, a sacred space by and for women. At first it was met with some resistance wondering why we as women needed our own space. It was the men on the call who were the first to understand the importance. Because I had the support of Dorotea and Midge in this, we were able to provide convincing information to support our request.

From an article after the USSF by the collective coordinators of the Red Tent:

What Is A Red Tent?

Ann Smith: Tents, moon lodges, and huts have been used around the globe for women to gather during their bleeding or moon time to rest, release the old, restore, share stories, and teach girls about womanhood. The nurturing of simply being inside the red tent is better experienced than explained….

The tent provides an opportunity for women to connect deeply with the earth, sometimes giving their blood onto moss or the ground. A red tent is a place where the menstrual cycle of life is honored and respected. For forum attendees, it was a reminder that self-care is essential and that menstrual bleeding is part of everyday life.

Setting Up The Tent

The red tent measured 10' x 10' and was constructed inside the 40' x 40' Health, Healing, and Environmental Justice (HHEJ) tent set on the black asphalt parking lot of the Atlanta Civic Center. It took several hours in the Atlanta heat to create the tent.

First the frame was put in place then the floor was put down, consisting of a protective blue tarp over the asphalt in case of summer rains, which came. This was followed by quilts, small rugs and then red round table cloths. Burgundy sheets were clipped together and secured over the frame for the walls with bejeweled red clothespins. The ceiling was created with loosely hung sheets to allow for air circulation.

Doorways were made of sarongs and a small rug was set nearby for shoes so women and girls could enter with bare feet. Cushions upon cushions were brought in to create places to sit, lie, and lounge. Finally the tent was "dressed" with a variety of sarongs, ribbons, lace, and thin flowing fabrics with some items coming from the Atlanta volunteers, with the hope of creating their own red tent in their own communities. All was misted with aromatherapy waters.

The colors of tent items were arranged to reflect the cycle of women–one side was deeper reds for menstruation and another side featured filmy materials with sparkles, denoting ovulation. We were amazed to witness women enter the tent and move right to the spot that reflected what their body was doing.

Creating Together

The shared energy of raising the tent and manifesting a healing and sacred space is a special bonding experience. Shared work is a common thread in women's history and the raising of our red tent was no exception. Some volunteers were not able to make time to relax inside the tent and still reported having received the blessings of the tent simply by participating in the tent raising.

The Women's Working Group of the Forum, a cooperative of many women's organizations, participated with us in ceremonially opening both the HHEJ and red tents. The women were of all colors, ages and cultures, and they came together in respect for the circle and for each other. Each of the women had a moment to offer what she was contributing to the Forum and to the women in the circle. We were all pleased to be in such a group that represented the young ones, the middle-aged ones, the mothers, and the grandmothers–all together in the circle.

Women and Girls Inside The Tent

Both the tent raising and our shared woman's program opening set the space for healing, peace, and repose. Seven of us held this special place for three days in Atlanta, tending to the women and girls and to the needs of the tent itself, during rain, heat, and wind. It did become the oasis of rest, renewal, and shared experiences of being women, an anchor of calm even while out in forum activity. At times, noise and activity could be heard in the larger tent, it all dissolved after entering the tranquility of the pillows, fans and fragrances.

The tent was a new experience for many women as well as girls. A group of teens from Casa Atabex Ache in the Bronx, New York, experienced it together. A volunteer spoke with them about the menstrual cycle. Elder women came as well. They took time to reminisce about their years of bleeding–when they stopped, and when they began. Handmade menstrual clothes were available in the tent. Any that were used were kept in a bowl and then disposed of in a respectful way by one of the midwives.

Women entered with different goals — or without any—and they seemed transformed as they relaxed and slipped into the womb-like atmosphere of safety and healing. They received Reiki, education, counseling, rest and spiritual revelation at varying levels. We, the tenders of the tent, were blessed by the willingness of women to be open to the flow and to suspend the cares of life outside the tent.

By the end of this call, we were not only granted one fourth the space in the Health and Environmental Tent but were given the first day to use the entire tent for a women's ceremony. The cooperation between the three working group representatives was incredible.

COURT OF WOMEN

Pat Willis: The Court of Women at USSF which took place on the afternoon of June 28th, with three women as "judges" who sat to hear testimony in three areas. These were: Violence Against Women, the US Criminal [In]Justice system, Hurricane Katrina/Gulf Coast Crisis, with immigration issues woven throughout the three. The USSF Court of Women was conceived as an event that would help to raise awareness around women's human rights abuses

I was the WWG coordinator for the Court of Women. This was the WWG's signature event. The CoW was a very significant experience for those attending as well as for those organizing it.

Nkenge Toure: My work as part of the subcommittee shaping the Court of Women was a challenge I and others had to embrace. The lack of resources provided to produce the Court of Women is one aspect of what made it a challenge. Fortunately, the consistent and creative leadership of subcommittee chair Pat Willis, women like Ann Olson and others, we were able to collectively utilize our committee's resources to support what was needed

Fakhri Haghani: Court of Women was a tribunal session on human rights violation against women in the US and abroad in which stories of violence against women, the criminal (in)justice system, and the Gulf Coast crisis were told by expert witnesses, trailed by female judges, and reflected upon by performers for healing purposes.

Ann Smith: The World Court of Women coordinated by Pat Willis was another amazing event.

Anne Olson: As preparations continued, my work began to focus more as a local contact for the WWG, working with the team planning The Court of Women. This involvement meant that I support the idea that women need to be in all activities of

the Forum, not focusing on one day. The Court of Women did not draw so how a tribunal is framed will really make a big difference. Framing, clearly, is everything. When in Mexico, I met with Feminista Mujeres and heard of the similarities and differences that their issues might hold for North American women. Especially noteworthy was their focus on water as a human right. Creative ways to collaborate with our Canadian and Mexican sisters seems critical as a component of women's work at any USSF.

It was only a brief 14 years ago that many human rights abuses that are particular to women and girls, such as rape and partner violence, were even recognized as such by the United Nations.

Judge Teresa C. Ulloa Ziáurriz (Regional Director of the Coalition Against Trafficking in Women and Girls in Latin America and the Caribbean) on Violence Against Women: "Violence against women is not an abstraction; it cannot be reduced to an individual action of a specific person, in specific circumstances. It is much more than that: it is a mechanism designed to maintain the authority of men, to reinforce the prevailing patriarchal norms. Consequently, to track the causes of violence against women, we need to think in the wider social contexts of patriarchal power relations. Patriarchal culture is one of the main causes of violence against women."

Judge Loretta Ross (National Coordinator for SisterSong) on the Gulf Coast Crisis: "The aftermath of the Gulf Coast Crisis must be examined through a gender lens that identifies the myriad of violations experienced by women. The reality is that women live in a borderland of insecurity all the time, yet the needs of women are invisible during discussions on security preoccupied with criminals and terrorists."

Expert Witness Nkenge Toure on Violence Against Women: "Women are violated and abused in ways that serve the power of men and their need for control. It is clear that all over the world societies seek to control women and girls with extreme means which often make women complacent in their own oppression. Violence against women is an ongoing threat to women's Human Rights; and it points to the idea that either women's rights are negotiable, or that as women we are not considered to actually have rights."

Expert Witness Angela Winfrey on the Gulf Coast Disasters: "Gross human rights violations have lead to women and children bearing the heaviest burden from the Gulf Coast Disaster. The poorest of the poor before Katrina, socially marginalized women of color will be the last to escape the social control trailer encampments

and dilapidated apartments assigned by FEMA. These women were mostly elderly women, public housing residents, residents of mobile homes, and renters-often women headed households being the sole source of income. Most of the public housing developments remained barricaded with steel doors and fenced off. Housing for these women and their families with more permanency is still not a priority. Many remain displaced without adequate support mechanisms due to family and social support networks being ripped away by the aftermaths of the storm."

14 year old "Rosy" who was trafficked from Mexico: "I was kept in several security places that the traffickers had and finally they took me to South Carolina, where I was taken to a fancy brothel where I was forced to have my first sexual intercourse with a man. After that night, I was forced to provide sexual services to 50 men everyday, at a rate of US $50.00 each. I never received a single penny. I spent my fourteenth birthday, in the middle of all kinds of violence and rapes, being mistreated and humiliated by the customers, most of them American men. I was moved between South and North Carolina in trailers where I was forced to have sexual relations with violent men."

Jessica Gonzales, whose three small girls were murdered by her estranged husband: "I want to prevent the kind of tragedy that my little girls and my entire family suffered from happening to other families. It's too late for Rebecca, Katheryn, and Leslie but it's not too late to create good law and policies for others. Police have to be required to enforce restraining orders or else these orders are meaningless and give women a false sense of security. I can't lose three children and not do something about it.

Gail Phares spent three months in Alderson Federal Prison for civil disobedience for protesting the School of the Americas. She testified on the conditions and lives of the women whom she met while in detention: "Why are we incarcerating mothers and separating them from their children? What is wrong with the criminal justice system? Why are we sentencing women–many imprisoned for nonviolent offenses–to cruel and unusual punishment of death due to inadequate health care?"

Dennis Brutus read his poem, *I must conjure from the past*

I must conjure from my past
the dim and unavowed spectre of a slave,
of a bound woman, whose bound figure pleads
silently, and whose blood I must acknowledge in my own:

fanciful wraith? Imagining?
Yet how can I reconcile
my rebel blood and protest
but by acknowledgement
of that spectre's mute rebellious blood in me?

Nkenge Toure: The Court of Women was held at a church, not even at one of the two main hotels, where some of the Forum's other activities and workshops were held. The Court was not included or endorsed in the official forum materials. We were responsible for producing all of its publicity, flyers, etc. The Court of Women was not a workshop; it was a signature event examining the status of women in the US, relative to some major areas impacting American life. It should have been accorded the same status as the plenaries and panels held at the Civic Center and should have been centrally scheduled not to conflict with any other events or activities.

Pat Willis: But The Court of Women was venued too far away for most people to find, let alone to want to walk in the Atlanta heat even if they could have found it.

Nkenge Toure: Why the Court was handled in this way is a valid question that should be asked. It is the belief of some of the members of the Working Women's Group that the reason has to do with the continued lack of consciousness concerning the status of women and the issues which have a primary impact on women. Also it is a result of a lack of understanding of the interconnection and integration of women in all aspects of the world in general .

OTHER WORKSHOPS, OTHER MOMENTS

Fakhri Haghani: The Women's Working Group of the USSF in coordination with SisterSong organized over 70 gender-specific workshops and events, and a plenary.

Reproductive justice framework was also used to address the issues of rights to land, water, and body for many women living in the US as well as refugees of conflict zones of war and military devastation such as Palestine, Iraq, Afghanistan, and Sudan.

Feminism: Gender, Race and Class Workshop

Anne Olson: Twelve organizations joined together utilizing the organizing skills of Theresa El-Amin, of Solidarity. The workshop addressed the commitment of those groups to end capitalism, imperialism, patriarchy, heteropatriarchy and white su-

premacy by beginning the process of achieving a shared strategic vision to end disparities based on gender, race and class.

A presentation of the historical context of feminism along with a timeline of feminist movement started the workshop with Rose M. Brewer and Walda Katz-Fishman, board members of Project South. Then an intergenerational dialogue was held with small group participatory discussions. The room was filled to maximum capacity as each small group of seven or more discussed pay equity, reproductive rights, violence/sexual assault, and patriarchy/misogyny. Concluding the workshop, a panel of young feminists presented their vision and strategies for advancing the women's movement. Contact sheets were provided for the purpose of organizing on-going collaboration and communication after the USSF.

Ann Smith: Circle Connections held four workshops on moving into the new paradigm. My colleagues, Rhonda Hull and Isabel Baeza, joined me in presenting and helping with the numerous activities of WWG.

Ariel Dougherty: The workshop WOMEN MAKE MEDIA: NOT WAR (#4137) aimed to explore collaborations and build movement among women's media justice organizations. But it became driven by problems that befuddled the Ida B Wells Media Justice Center, how issues of poverty got lost in restrictions about access.

Beverly Yuen Thompson: During the Iraq Veterans Against the War (IVAW) workshop, their exciting ambush and capture of hostages was too fast and spatially spread out to capture on video; not to mention that the rapid switching between the thirteen speakers was hard to follow with a video camera, while I managed to make a small YouTube video of the play *Marx in Soho*. The IVAW were so dynamic in the workshop, why do they appear washed out and uninspired against the drab background of the hotel wallpaper?

Nkenge Toure: One afternoon during the Forum Loretta Ross and I sat outside, down the hill from the Civic Center across from the vendors and just watched the attendees moving about. As we sat, chatting and critiquing everything thus far, we kept being interrupted (in a good way) by numerous women who told us that they had been in attendance at our SisterSong national conference "Let's Talk about Sex". We were struck by the number of women at our conference, who were now in Atlanta for the USSF and what it said about the consciousness and worldview of women. For me this was inspirational.

Second, we connected with so many women who we had organized with and done work with over the years on various issues, some of whom I had not seen in

years. It was so reaffirming to see them still at work, still in the struggle. It made me feel sad that we still had to struggle but it made me feel pride that we were still out there struggling.

Finally, I connected with several younger sisters who shared with me that they felt that at some point I had been a mentor or an inspiration or a teacher to them and wanted to thank me. In truth, I thanked them for carrying on in the arenas that they chose. I saw them standing so strong and tall and I knew it would be OK when I needed to sit down.

Beverly Yuen Thompson: Each evening during the USSF plenary in Atlanta, about a dozen media activists gathered at the front of the plenary stage, swapping stories about workshops we'd attended during the hot afternoon. A large piece of wood was all that kept us from falling into the orchestra pit, bouncing ever so slightly during the continuous, thundering applause. *What is that?* I mouthed to the Free Speech TV videographer standing next to me, as I stabilized my wobbling JVC HDV camera with my hand. Anxiety bubbled to my throat as I looked through the viewfinder and saw the panelist speaker swaying to the tune of the audience's screams of delight—a hard lesson was learned: invest in an expensive tripod.

Jacqui Patterson: When I was asked to write about my favorite moment at the USSF, at first I was overwhelmed. There were so many awesome moments that they all collided in my head and I couldn't pick out one discrete experience. THEN, I remembered. I had just had the most consuming day with managing a delegation of women from South Africa, Puerto Rico and Nepal, and all that comes with that in terms of logistics and organization (neither of which are my strong suits!), as well as dealing with a snafu in communication regarding where our workshop was being held and all the issues with moving equipment, materials, and such. When the workshop finally happened, I just collapsed into a chair from a stress-induced combination of mania and exhaustion. Then, as the delegation began to speak and the women of color from the US (though, of course, the woman from Puerto Rico was also from the US) invited to participate also began to share, the haze began to lift and the sun broke through the clouds. As we all spoke of our experiences with violence and HIV&AIDS, we heard the commonalities in our stories, felt the bonding across cultures, languages, and geography, and shared a vision of how we could all work together to address common forces and systems of oppression. I had a feeling of YES! This is what it's all about. This is what makes it all worthwhile. This is what gives me energy, passion, and motivation, recognizing that TOGETHER WE CAN make a difference and usurp the power that is holding us down globally.

STRUGGLE

Loretta Ross: Now externally, and what I mean by externally is not the larger movement, but the National Planning Committee of the social forum itself. Our biggest problems were with the processes of the NPC. The NPC had its own structural and leadership problems and they couldn't help but have an impact of the Women's Working Group. I mean I never detected (and I will never say) that there was intentional malice towards the Women's Working Group. I mean, I didn't detect anyone being hostile to feminism on the NPC. But at the same time I felt there was the "sexism by neglect". They assumed that because there was a Women's Working Group that was all the attention that they needed to pay to issues of gender imbalances and power. That even affected looking at issues of sexual orientation. There was one really rough moment when we were negotiating for the Women's Plenary, when the NPC was challenging us to see if our Plenary had an equal balance of straight women, Lesbians and a transgender person. And they were wanting us to add more transgender people, when they had apparently not raised that question with any of the other five plenaries. This meant that the Women's (Gender) Plenary was supposed to bear the entire weight for gender inclusiveness and balance, especially when it came to transgender representation. This felt really unfair when, at the time, the gender plenary was the <u>only</u> one that proactively included a trans speaker at all. So, excuse me!! Why was the NPC expecting <u>women</u> to fix something when it had not addressed that issue in five other settings? Why do women become the political clean-up specialists? The NPC suffered from not paying sufficient attention to these issues and tried to make it our problem to fix, when we have done our job, we have fulfilled our responsibilities for our plenary in a democratic process that was agreed to by the WWG over a period of four months.

So, that was a very difficult time. I think that struggles for power and control over the Women's Plenary ended up being disguised as about wanting to help us "fix" our line-up, when it was really simply about power and control and deciding for us who our speakers would be. But no one was honestly saying that. In other words, NPC was taking the tactic of trying to identify what was wrong with our process and our line-up, rather than really looking at our line up. Well, why would the NPC have us do all this work, put our list of candidates together, get all this feedback from everybody, propose a list of candidates, and then nitpick what we do? It was really about power and control because the candidates being offered were not really any stronger than the ones we had already offered. We had excellent diversities–race, class, age, gender, geography, etc., but we had to respond to unfounded allegations that folks were making about the Gender Plenary and that was very frustrating and unprincipled.

Nkenge Toure: However, what made our determination and commitnment even more impressive was the behind the scene struggles of the WWG to sit on the National Planning Committee and represent the interest of women.

It is disturbing that during the organizing leading up to the Forum the Women's Working Group had to be represented on all the calls, continuously to advocate for the visibility and impute of women at all levels of the Forum and it's programming.

Pat Willis: The WWG had some impressive effects on the first USSF but we had to steadily struggle against those on the NPC who did not see any need for a gender plenary, or for a WWG for that matter. I continue to be dismayed, sometimes caught off guard even, at the lack of a feminist consciousness within progressive organizations. But the WWG, with our 150 member organizations from across the country, persisted as only feminists know how and know we must because our struggles for egalitarianism are ever on.

Loretta Ross: I was disappointed, and maybe again I need to be self critical, that when they were originally discussing the plenaries, that the entire National Planning Committee had not suggested a women's plenary. The fact was that the proposal had to come from the Women's Working Group, and then we had to fight for it. We won the fight. And it wasn't a difficult fight, to be fair to the NPC, once we did our homework and lobbied some important decision makers. But the fact that we had to fight it at all, says how far we haven't come!

Whereas there was no real struggle around recognizing that young people needed to be involved in this process, or that Indigenous people needed to be involved in this process, I believe women's issues were somewhat overlooked by folks assuming that issues of women and gender were going to be covered without any intentional focus on them. That was disappointing. In defense of our US allies, that is something that has bedeviled EVERY social forum around the world–the question of gender. So, I think the US one did far better than its counterparts around the world. But in a perfect feminist world we should not have had to do what we had to do. It should have been there for us in the planning of our allies. Some fights you just get tired of having, particularly within your own ranks.

For example, at one of the NPC meetings, I think it was Chicago in the fall of 2007, when we were talking about the five plenaries and I asked about a woman's plenary. And that idea got no traction. I mean no one said, no, "hell no." They said, well we have already decided which five plenaries we are going to have. So, it wasn't that they were against the women's plenary per se. It was more like, we have a process on which we have decided, and we are not changing it, for anything. That's an example of sexism by neglect, I mentioned earlier.

Nkenge Toure: Progressive ideas go only so far, recognition of gender discrimination goes only so far within this movement. The benefits of racism, economic and gender disparity often shape the extent of their opposition. Often this opposition is not recognized. It is unconscious.

Loretta Ross: There is a smugness about the progressive movement that is a bit disconcerting because we generally perceive ourselves as part of a movement that does not believe that it can be racist, sexist or homophobic. That is all a problem on the other side! When you start off with that kind of set of assumptions, it makes struggling against those tendencies within the movement a bit bizarre! For example, there was a conflict in the People's Movement Assembly plenary between the NPC, represented by an African American woman trying to facilitate the plenary, and several male Indigenous activists who were told their agreed-upon time was up and they needed to pass the microphone to the next speaker, as had been told to all the other previous speakers. I felt that all types of issues were present in that conflict–sexism, racism, ageism, ego, etc.–but it was mostly perceived as an African American woman shutting down Indigenous men who wanted to speak more than their allotted time. Also, other members of the NPC who could have supported their own facilitator trying to enforce their rules did not publicly challenge the abuse this sister received for trying to avoid sectarianism and be fair to everyone. It became one of the ugliest moments of the entire USSF, one that deeply affected everyone who witnessed it and who felt for both sides of the conflict. It was the only moment in which I felt the gathering descended into the "Oppression Olympics" in which a few folks disregarded collectively agreed upon rules and processes in order to promote their own agendas and needs while claiming to speak for all of their people, especially the Indigenous women who had been silent during this crisis that allowed folks to become even more dramatic and attacking.

I'm probably risking a lot of criticism in reporting this story, but I think it's a teachable moment for all of us who believe that we can build a united movement against the oppression of neoliberalism and neoconservatism. But we cannot do so if we permit sexism and racism to turn us against each other. Most importantly, when we see one of our leaders unfairly attacked, it is our responsibility to stand with that leader, even if the attack comes from within. Within the Women's Working Group, we have since wondered if the fact that it was a woman asking men to give up the microphone made a difference in how the conflict escalated so far out of control so quickly. Or would it have escalated at all if Indigenous women were the ones speaking during that session? I'm sure we could analyze that situation endlessly and not agree on what happened or strategies for preventing future outbreaks, but within the Women's Working Group, it confirms for us that much

more work on gender, sexism, racism and homophobia is needed within the global social forum processes.

Pat Willis: Many people with progressive politics uncritically assume that they are progressive on all issues, especially regarding gender and women, but this is not so, not at all. Regrettably, our cultural enlightenment on women's statuses in society, culture, and in personal lives has not yet reached a critical mental awareness for most people, even most progressives, and certainly not yet a critical mass in terms of numbers of people in the general population who have a feminist gender consciousness. Based on what I witnessed, on reports from other witnesses, and on conversations with our sisters, I think the attack was an attack on her as a black person and as a woman, both parameters that achieve low status in our culture. It is not at all unusual in our culture for oppressed groups to use tactics of oppression on other oppressed groups and on each other as well. Indeed, it is often the norm, as this is what we are all taught to do and we must reject our socialization into oppression strategies if we are ever to respect all women as full human beings. This episode grieved me greatly because it demonstrated to me yet another example of men who are supposedly liberated from oppression politics and who are supposed to be our allies using domination tactics on a woman. What we, particularly men, need to do is to analyze very critically and with a good amount of detachment our sexism and our racism. I think culturally, and also individually, most people are much more enlightened on race than on sexism. Sexist behaviors are readily and uncritically accepted by most people. Consciousness raising is a key tactic to overcoming culturally prescribed domination/subjugation paradigms

Nkenge Toure: The progressive/activist NPC demonstrated this with the manner in which the WWG failed to be supported. The issues of women were not woven throughout the various plenaries, which was strongly suggested to the committee by the WWG. This did not occur.

Anne Olson: My "ah ha" moments came in a variety of ways but focus on how difficult bringing and keeping women's concerns and the intersectionality of the "isms" framed so others can hear women's voices as an integral part of any conversation.

PLENARY: LIBERATING GENDER AND SEXUALITY
Saturday Night, June 30, 2008 in Atlanta, Georgia.

(selected transcriptions by Ariel Dougherty from the video produced by Beverly Yuen Thompson; additional editing by Anne Olson)

Suzanne Pharr, Southerners on New Ground: We bring to the USSF those who are women, two spirited, trans, lesbians, gay men, intersex, bisexual, queer, gender nonconforming and questioning. We honor those just named who have been leaders in every struggle for justice and liberation, often unnamed and unrecognized. And we lift up our voices for those who have been raped, beaten, killed in war torn lands, at the borders of this country, in sex trafficking and slavery, in the streets and in our home throughout the world. We lift up our voices for all of us whose bodies have been colonized and exploited for labor, sex, pleasure, money and war.

Tonight we ask questions. Why does the right deliberately choose gender oppression for the fast track strategy to ensuring domination? Why does the right create a religious arm that would focus on reproductive rights, sexuality and family? And that it would connect those to the idea of patriotism? And why does the Left without declaring it a strategy quietly use gender discrimination to collude in creating a hierarchical dominance?

Andrea Smith, INCITE, Women of Color Against Violence : How does the patriarchal family become the building block of empire? To understand this question we can turn to Charles Colson, of the Christian Right who can explain it to us. This is the same Charles Colson who explains to us that the cause of terrorism is same sex marriage. Quote: "Marriage is a traditional building block of human society intended to unite couples and to bring children into the world. There is a natural order of the family. Marriage is not institution designed solely for the individual gratification of the participants. If we fail to enact a federal marriage amendment we can expect not just more family breakdowns, but more criminals behind bars and chaos in the streets. It is like handing moral weapons of mass destruction to those who would use American decadence to recruit more snipers, hijackers, and suicide bombers. We must preserve traditional marriage in order to protect the United States from those who would use our depravity to destroy us." And World Magazine, which is the Christian Right magazine, further explains, that the cause of Abu Ghraib crisis was feminism. Because feminism causes women to become disoriented about their gender role, join the army and abuse prisoners.

So, the assumption behind this analysis is that hetero-patriarchy is fundamental to empire, because patriarchy is what naturalizes social hierarchy. That is, just as men are supposed to naturally rule over women so too should the elites of society naturally rule everyone else. This is why in the history of Indian genocide that the first task the colonizer took on was to integrate patriarchy into native communities. Because they knew we would not accept colony domination until native men started treating native women the way white men treat white women. In addition, the primary tool used by colonists is sexual violence. When we look at history of Indian massacres, it is not just that the colonists are trying to kill people,

but they are always accompanied by sexual mutilation, rape, etc. Because the goal is not just to kill native people, but kill our sense of even being a people. So, what sexual violence does for colonialism and white supremacy is render women of color inherently rapeable, our land inherently invadeable, and our resources inherently extractable.

Unfortunately, however, the response to the hetero-patriarchal Christian America in our social justice movement is often as equally a hetero-patriarchal struggle. First of all we have such an ingrained idea that social hierarchy is natural that we replicate this in our own movement. Whether that is the old colonial middle managers of the industrial nonprofits…the idea that we need patriarchs of any gender to police the revolutionary family.

Let's just look at the slogan of the USSF. "Another World is Possible, But Another US is Necessary." But the Question to put on the table is: "If Another World is Possible? Is the US itself Necessary?"

Finally, another aspect in this gender dynamic is we have a private/public split in our work. That is, when you think of the work of the revolution you think of going out in the streets, protesting, whatever. And there we are supposed to be total revolutionary badasses, and if we have a problem, we are supposed to go home and deal with it. Of course, we don't have our acts together. So we come together and screw up the movement because we actually have no place to deal with it in a public way. Finally, when we think of the work of the revolution we do collective work in the public sphere, but we don't do collectivize our child care, we don't collectivize our infant care, we don't do collectivize our feeding ourselves. So, we have built a movement that is not accessible to most people.

Mia Mingus, Georgians for Choice (now SPARK): I am here today to talk about queerness and disability because claiming my sexuality for myself, as an API woman, a disabled woman–is part of my daily life. Because it has been assumed that my sexuality did not exist or **should not** exist because of my disability. Because I believe that disability and queerness and ableism, heterosexism and homophobia are deeply connected and have many, many similarities. Because I only saw a handful of workshops dedicated to disability in the 960+ offered this week. Because even as a disabled child, I knew my gender did not fit into the traditional box of "woman" because I was not able-bodied. Because I have been stared at this past week at the USSF more times and more openly than I can recall in recent memory.

As a queer disabled woman of color, belonging to queer communities, I am here to say that my queerness does not carry any less importance than my race or disability, is not a "western" or "white" "disease," and has everything to do with my activism. As a queer disabled woman of color, belonging to disabled communi-

ties, I am here to say that my disability is not a "flaw," "burden," something to be "cured" or "undesirable." It is not the "cause" of my queerness and it has everything to do with my activism.

I am tired of ableism not being included in our analysis of oppression and in our conversations on social justice. Ableism cuts across all of our movements because ableism dictates how bodies should function against a mythical able-bodied standard of white supremacy, heterosexism, sexism, economic exploitation, moral/religious beliefs, age and ability. Ableism set the stage for queer people to be institutionalized as mentally disabled; for communities of color to be understood as less capable, smart and intelligent, therefore "naturally" fit for slave labor; for women's bodies to be used to produce children, when, where and how men needed them; for disabled folks to be seen as "disposable" in a capitalistic and exploitive culture because they were not seen as "productive;" for immigrants to be thought of as a "disease" that we must "cure" because it is "weakening" our country; for violence, cycles of poverty, lack of resources and war to be used as a systematic tool to *construct* disability in communities and whole countries.

The vast diversity of disability affords us the chance to define and claim our bodies on a long spectrum of abilities encompassing the way we look, move, think, communicate, feel and function. There is more than one way to be in the world! I believe that we can understand disability as a powerful way to exist in the world, changing how we value our bodies, how we do our work and what true accessibility can look like.

As a disabled child, my body was literally invaded by the medical industrial complex and for 18+ years white male doctors tried to "fix" the way I walked and looked–forever changing the way I felt about my body. When we talk about access to health care, **we need to not only fight for the right to receive care, but also the right to <u>refuse it.</u>**

Like those of us belonging to the Queer community, we know first hand what it is like to be a spectacle, in public and in private. We are starred at, gawked at, and harassed. We are on the front lines of disability and queer politics everyday–defining our bodies for ourselves! Resisting against the colonized default norm and choosing to construct our abilities, genders and relationships intentionally and in ways that help to create the kind of world we would like to live in. We are the ones questioning models of relationships and loving that are rooted in the ownership of other people and their bodies–because we know that the ways in which our bodies are commodified, owned and colonized by the state, the medical industrial complex, science and systems of oppression, are connected to the ways in which our bodies are owned and controlled by our intimate relationships in our communities, families, friendships and partnerships. I want us to begin to see queerness as a tool

for liberation, exposing the opportunity to allow us to define and claim who we love, how we love each other and our ability to love. I believe that the power of our capacity to challenge and change the way we love is strong enough to transform our movements.

Loretta Ross, National Coordinator, SisterSong: My remarks will focus on the colonization of our minds. No one can make a slave of you without your permission. A young high school student asked in an earlier workshop a panelist to define feminism. Right now we have too many women busting their asses to fight for your rights and you won't use the f-word. And I am a little sick of it. That is the colonized mind speaking. Feminism is about power, and it is about the power to control your own life and your own body, and to resist what Andy calls Hetero-Patriarchy. If you agree with that, then you are a feminist. Feminism is about the power to question what gender, race and class means to you and to decide if and when or whether you want to fit into those boxes other people have prepared for you. Feminism is the resisting of the colonizing of our mind even as they colonize our bodies, our families and our communities. Feminism is the resisting of the exploitation of our labor, our reproduction and our sex. And before I go on Feminism is about the right to have healthy sex and sexuality. We are the ones who talk about sex. We have always been the ones to talk about sex. And anyone having sex needs to be a Feminist.

Feminism is not only about opposing sexism, homophobia, but it fights all forms of white supremacy. All, and all, the forms of injustice that grow from that evil seed.

Rather than talking about what our enemies are doing to us, I am going to talk about, instead, what we do to ourselves. Because we can not build a human rights movement without stopping some of the dangerous eating of ourselves, and I am not talking about in a pleasurable sexual way. At the Katrina Plenary, were you all here for that Katrina Plenary? Didn't that rock. We heard the Latina talk about bringing together the old slaves with the new slaves. I thought that was a wonderful vision that they offered. But I want to say there are a whole lot of old slave/new slave combinations out here. It is not just brown and black, but it is old and new; its abled and disabled; its queer and straight; it is Native American and immigrant. There are a lot of old slave-new slave combinations that need to get over themselves.

So, I want to talk about some old slave stuff–especially as an African American women. There is this African proverb : "A new broom sweeps real well, but the old broom knows the corners. "And you have to have both. You need to beware of feeling special or privileged simply because you are oppressed. Everybody is oppressed.

We need to beware of these idea confrontational politics. Don't get so busy criticizing everybody else's work, that you forget to do your own.

Understanding the real intersectionality, just because you learned the word, it doesn't mean it was created the day you learned it. This is a concept that has been offered by women of color since our beginning of struggling against colonization and oppression in this country.

Before I stop, let's understand what leadership is, old slaves, new slaves. Leadership is not a throne. Leadership isn't everyone paying homage to you, and telling you how damn fine and great you are. Leadership is an opportunity to serve to the best of your ability. Leadership is willingness to step out there and take risks and make mistakes and be accountable for those mistakes.

So, in conclusion, if we old slaves and we new slaves come together, we can build a new movement in this country called human rights. I believe we can do that. But to do that, the first thing we have to remember, is that a slave cannot own a slave. Thank you.

Imani Henry, International Action Center: I want to talk about another case of political prisoners. It is important that we start to formalize "Political Prisoners", as we talk about the New Jersey Four. They, too, were railroaded by the US and New York State governments for a crime they did not commit. And were given outrageous sentences. What is important about the Jersey Four is that anyone of us who face oppression (people of color, women, lesbian gay, bi and trans, gender non-conforming people, young people, children, physically challenged, elder, immigrant), any of us could find ourselves behind bars like the Jersey Four.

On June 14, 2006, four African American women from Newark, NJ–Denise Brown, age 19, Jeraine Standards, 20, Patrice Johnson, 20, Renita Hill, 24 received sentences ranging from 3 and a half years to eleven years in prison. None of these women have been previously arrested. Two of them are parents of small children. Their crime was defending themselves from a physical attack by a 29-year old man who could not handle having his sexual advances rejected. He spat in their faces; ripped the hair out of one of their scalps, he choked another and threatened them with sexual assault–all because they were lesbians. This was named a hate crime against a straight man.

The West Village is the historic center of LGBT communities in New York City. Stonewall happened here. The NYC Pride parade ends here. Working class LGBT people, especially of color, have found safe haven here. The gentrification of the West Village is pushing out working class communities, the LGBT community and especially young people of color. Officials used anti-youth laws that say more than five people congregating constitutes "a gang". Anti lesbian and racist terms such as "A lesbian wolf pack", "seven angry lesbians" were used in the

media. "One butch lesbian" was reported as "growling like a dog". In particular Patrice Johnson, 4'11" and 96 pounds, took out a steak knife in the hopes of stopping this man from choking her friend. She was considered the leader. She received a sentence of 11 years.

Actually two young African American men ran up to help these women, and in the process the perpetuator was stabbed in the abdomen and sent to the hospital. No tests done on Patrice's knife. But she was given 11 years. How many times do we as LGBT and women of color end up in the hospital after brutal attack? Yet here is the case where women fought back. As oppressed people stand up and fight back, we are targeted, arrested and jailed.

The Jersey Four is one of many messages telling us not to fight back. FEIRCE is the LGBT youth and people of color political organization in NYC. They are organizing to take back West Village as a safe haven. They have been at the forefront in the defense of the Jersey Four. This verdict was just devastating for us in NYC. Who would think in 2007 that the right to self-defense was a crime? We need to build a broad-based national coalition to free these sisters, these political prisoners.

I am an organizer. All of us came here today with leaflets to promote our work back home. I think it important to recognize the demoralization within our movements. Instead, we should be building solidarity with one another. We want to see a stronger Left in this country. We want to unite across our differences. I may be a transgender man of color. You may not have an analysis of transgender but you must stand up and support trans people against the police. I may be a transgender man of color. I may be passionate about the Jersey Four. I want to make it clear that I stand here in solidarity with every issue represented in this room.

Betita Martinez: Author of *De Colores Means All of Us*: The nicey nice is that as women and queers we have made some progress. I can say this because I am older. In 1958 I was an editor at Simon and Schuster. I asked for a raise. They responded: "You don't need a raise, you have a husband." A few years later I was in a meeting, I was the only woman of color, and that was the night that Martin Luther King was assassinated and no one had a word to say about it.

Today you ask Latinas to call themselves Feminists– They are not so sure about that word. Because it is very associated with white women, white liberation. But the point is that these women are Feminists by the way they think and act. So, I have a crusade going.

It is very important to understand what happens to women coming from Latin America. It is a nasty business. If they don't get raped at the border. Women do face danger just coming here. When they do get here a lot of them are working as domestic workers. And if you have a male boss, you are lucky if you are not asked

to do certain things for that boss. So, encountering the realities here…economically, biologically, everything. Being disabled is also an issue. There is not enough recognition in Latin America about the needs of disabled people.

But I do think we have seen progress on these fronts. For example, there was a time in the Chicano movement, when as a young Latina you could not do security. That was for men. You could not make speeches. That was for men to do. You could not lift heavy things. But, you could make the coffee. You could make the food. You could do you know what with male leaders. I am glad to say, there are at last two organizations in San Francisco today of men and women both where the leadership has to be fifty-fifty men and women. And that is a victory. It may sound like a small victory. They are even combating homophobic jokes that get made at Marches, and rallies and things like that.

I am very proud to announce the good news today is that a national organization of domestic workers has been formed just today. I know a number of organizations here at the Forum are supporting it. One of the organizations is from the Bay area, immigrant women who are taking care of kids, cleaning. They are fighting for their rights. So this is a real victory. It is really clear by now that there cannot be any effective organizing in the US without the presence of women and queers in leadership positions. I am particularly talking about low income women and women of color. Like this plenary session tonight, was an accomplishment, that we took a good hunk of time to talk about women's issues.

Loretta was talking about combating our brainwashing, that is why when we talk about the colonized body we also have to talk about the colonized mind. We have to also develop a vision for the kind of society that we want– I don't mean that it is free of racism and sexism. I mean a society that is not capitalist, that is not imperialist.

I went to Cuba in 1959, three months after the overthrow of Bastista. A year later Fidel Castro gave a speech–"We're socialist." Well OK, we are still trying. We keep trying. And this movement is happening all over Latin America. I think it's time for us to take on these models. We are communists with a small c. The word communal is all there. We are talking about getting together with a lot of respect. I see so much of it in this room. Thank you.

Post Forum

During the weeks following the USSF, there was an exciting buzz on the e-list of media activists, enthusiastic about sharing and finding media images for stories aimed at the waiting global community...I edited the "Liberating Gender and Sexuality" plenary panel. I cut out a few pieces where the video was poor quality. This ignited charges of censoring the speaker's brilliant words. I shake my head in response to an angry e-mail thinking, it's not that I didn't want the world to know

she believes in the abolition of all prisons; really, it was because the visual transition from one speaker to the other would have made you dizzy and throw up.

Once I announced the availability of the "Liberating Gender and Sexuality" plenary on DVD, there was a great deal of initial interest. This lead to another hard lesson: get the money upfront, even from well-meaning social justice activists. In the rush of getting the DVD out while it was still timely, I paid for duplications and printings out of my own threadbare pocket, while only requiring people to send a check after delivery.

Beverly Yuen Thompson: As activists, we know the pain of being shut out of mainstream media coverage; therefore, on-line sharing of video and audio content is a lifeline for those unable to attend.

Ariel Dougherty: As someone who could not attend USSF, seeing the DVD on the "Liberating Gender and Sexuality" plenary was so invigorating!! The intense and thorough feminist political analysis expressed on that stage was vital to our movement. The electricity in the room was palatable. All that came searing through the video. Too bad it hasn't played on Link TV! Beverly Thompson is to be commended for getting her edit out so very fast.

Beverly Yuen Thompson: It is imperative that we document these social justice gatherings so that their impact can extend beyond one particular city, and to the rest of the world.

WWG CONTINUES

Ann Smith: The sisterhood continues, as does our WWG. We have much to offer the next USSF as well as being a positive force for support to other feminist groups at World Forums and other events.

Loretta Ross: As regards Sister Song's and my leadership, I use the word 'manageable' loosely because the timing was ABOMINABLE. According to our original planning in 2005, our own national conference was to be in 2006 and the USSF was to be in 2006, so we moved our national conference to 2007. And then Katrina happened, moving the Forum to 2007. So we had our national conference and the Social Forum occurring only three weeks apart—which really strained our capacity. Because no small organization like ours wants TWO major events within three weeks of one another!! But it was unavoidable and we coped with it as best we could. What I am especially disappointed in is that because of that unfortunate timing, we could not do all that would have been possible if the two events had been further apart. For example, we had called in all our chits for our financial

supporters and sponsors for our national conference. Well, I couldn't call in those chits for the social forum at the same time. But, if they had been a year apart I could have gone to the women's organizations that support SisterSong routinely asked them to support the Women's Working Group at the Social Forum. But we couldn't ask our same donors to donate TWICE within three weeks of each other. The same was true of having a communications strategy for the Women's Working Group. And even to have the time and attention to maximize the impact of WWG within the Social Forum.

Ann Smith: It is our dream to have a women's red tent at the next USSF, one that is air conditioned and is large enough to accommodate all women who want to share best practices, resources and to just be ourselves.

Loretta Ross: I'm no longer facilitating the WWG because I'm enrolled in school working on my PhD while working full-time at SisterSong, so I had to step down in August 2007. The NPC still meets and I have designated someone else to keep the SisterSong seat there occupied.

Nkenge Toure: Well, the 2010 USSF is coming and the same movement types with the same analysis of women and where that fits within social and political change will sit on the National Planning Committee. Sadly I speak not only of male NPC members. If this is not to be the reality and women are to be integrated and not patronized during the 2010 forum, it's our move!!!

Loretta Ross: The USSF was an unqualified success by any measure. I believe the Women's Working Group had a positive effect. The USSF ended up being the most gender balanced social forum ever. By our raising the issues and benefiting from other forums, each of the groups and the plenaries and people involved in the process were far more gender-sensitive and accountable to gender balance than they might have been without our influence. I believe that until we were organized as a force, the NPC was not consciously holding themselves accountable for gender issues and balance; at least it was not reflected in the copious minutes carefully recorded.

The Reproductive Justice Briefing Book created by the WWG was a compilation of 70+ 1-page essays on the intersections of reproductive politics with other human rights and social justice issues to build greater unity between different social justice issues. It was a great success. The Pro-Choice Education Project and the WWG raised the funds to independently publish and distribute the book at the Forum. The Pro-Choice Education Project has continued that project a whole year later by producing a new edition of the book, twice as large as the original

one we had at the Forum. So, we created a project that has legs long after the Forum. Even though we didn't have strong capacity to raise money or get grants from the National Planning Committee, that fact that we were able to independently raise the money to pay for the Briefing Book was important. Again, I just wish we could have done more. We were self financing in terms of attending NPC meetings and contributing as individuals and organizations to the USSF.

Pat Willis: I have strong hopes that the next USSF will present even more opportunities for us to ensure women's human rights in all arenas and for all issues.

Anne Olson: I continue to recommend the Reproductive Justice Briefing Book to the students in various colleges in Atlanta when I give human rights talks.

Loretta Ross: Yes, I think this was a strength of the WWG, the positive interaction of many women's organizations working together. But I also am privileged to be in a twelve-year coalition of women of color working very well together. I have as much experience of women working well together as women being divisive with one another…so I do not think it is all one way or the other. What, for example, made the March of Women's Lives organizing fairly problematic was that there had never been a march organized by a coalition before. So, all the early politics of building coalitions had an impact on the March. I think that was unavoidable. Because you had organizations that had not historically not collaborated very well together. But with the USSF, and I actually thought for all the criticisms that I am offering it and for the problems within the NPC, I still think it was itself a model of collaboration. The tensions that they had to deal with on a daily basis on power and control, issues of supremacy and stuff easily could have thwarted that process and broken it down. And the fact that those really great leaders on the NPC prevented that from happening is a real testament to them. They pulled off a miracle. And many doubted that it could be done.

Jacqui Patterson: The Women's Working Group of the USSF is a space of great promise and, indeed, has already accomplished so much. As we look ahead to the coming months/years, we envision ensuring that feminist voices, visions, and movements are at the center of our work in helping to design the agenda for the 2010 USSF. We also recognize the tensions in "feminism" with various groups feeling marginalized within the movement and seek to bridge those gaps so that we have an inclusive agenda and membership that together espouses principles that actively advance women's rights. We will ensure that representation isn't only selected by identity, (i.e. gender, race, sexual identity, etc) but that women who we put forth to sit at the deliberating and decision making tables will proactively ad-

vance a women's rights frame and content, with deliberate representation by oft marginalized groups. In the words of the motto for the Women's Networking Zone at the recently held International AIDS Conference, through intentional inclusion the Women's Working Group will centralize advancing *"All Women and All Rights*!"

An evolving Women's Working Group Leadership Circle serves as the center of the WWG's on-going activities. At the time of creating this narrative Jacqui Patterson and Ariel Dougherty were the Leadership Circle's coordinators.

OUTCOMES & REFERENCES

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*Affiliations:

• Nkenge Toure, Producer, In Our Voices
• Ann Smith, Co-Director, Circle Connections–www.circleconnections.com/
• Anne Olson, Project South Leadership Team, Georgia Minimum/Living Wage Coalition

- Loretta Ross, National Coordinator, SisterSong, Women of Color Reproductive Justice, http://www.sistersong.net/
- Fakhri Haghani, Professor, Georgia State University
- Pat Willis, Visiting Assistant Professor and Activist-in-Residence Women's and Gender Studies,Wake Forest University
- Ariel Dougherty, Initiator, Media Equity Collaborative
- Beverly Yuen Thompson, PhD, Women's Studies at Texas Woman's University in Denton. http://www.snakegirl.net
- Mia Mingus, SPARK Reproductive Justice Now (formerly Georgians for Choice) http://sparkrj.org/content/
- Jacqui Patterson, Senior Women's Rights Policy Analyst, ActionAid International US

Chapter 22

Another Economy is Possible!

Using the US Social Forum to Create the US Solidarity Economy Network

Julie Matthaei,
Solidarity Economy Network

Jenna Allard,
Solidarity Economy Network

Introduction

In this piece, we show how a group of economic activists and academics from different organizations were inspired by the USSF, and the social forum movement in general, to come together in a co-creative process. The original intent of the group was to create a block of sessions on economic alternatives at the USSF 2007. However, in the end, we also used the USSF to create a new organization, the US Solidarity Economy Network (US SEN, www.USSEN.org), whose goal is to promote progressive economic transformation in the US and the world.

We write this description as active participants in the events we describe. Julie is a professor of economics at Wellesley College who specializes in race and gender in US economic history, feminist economics, and more recently, current movements for economic transformation; she is also co-director of Guramylay: Growing the Green Economy (www.growingthegreeneconomy.org), with her husband, Germai Medhanie. Julie was a key player in the working group which got together to plan the sessions and caucuses at the Forum, and she organized, spoke at, and attended sessions and caucuses at the Forum. She is currently on the Coordinating Committee of US SEN. A few months before the USSF, Julie met Jenna, a graduating senior at Wellesley who had a passionate interest in, and considerable knowledge of, the global solidarity economy movement. Guramylay hired Jenna starting June 1, 2007, and she became involved in the last month of preparing for the USSF. Jenna attended the USSF sessions and caucuses and video-recorded them. She then joined the coordinating committee as a Guramylay representative. Allard and Mathei co-edited, with Carl Davidson, a book of papers and reports from the USSF's solidarity economy activities, *Solidarity Economy: Building Alternatives for People and Planet (2008).*

Coming Together: Bringing a Discussion of Economic Alternatives to the First-Ever USSF

The planning of the economic alternatives track of sessions at the USSF came together under the direction of Emily Kawano. Emily directs the Center for Popular Economics (CPE), a nonprofit collective of over sixty economists which works to promote economic justice and sustainability through economic education. Realizing that the USSF was a great organizing opportunity, Emily had decided to organize a workshop track at the USSF, in lieu of holding CPE's annual summer institute; she also became a member of the USSF Program Committee. The first formal meeting to plan this track happened in January of 2007.

Most of our members were enthusiasts of the social forum movement, and had participated in, helped plan, and/or studied other social forums and the social forum movement. We were inspired and energized by the prospect of helping create, finally, the first-ever USSF. Further, we were familiar with the social forum movement's statement of principles, its motto, its multidimensional focus, and its pluralism. All of these were to affect the form our organizing would take, as well as the content of our work.

First, the planning group crystallized around and was inspired by the social forum movement's motto, "Another World is Possible." This motto led us to create a group of sessions that went beyond the traditional critiques of neoliberal capitalist economics to focus on an economic way forward. We decided to showcase the alternative economic values and institutions that have been proliferating in the US. This led us to include as well the solidarity economy movements abroad which have begun to create networks of these alternatives.

Because of this focus on "Another Economy is Possible," the project brought together people and organizations involved studying and creating such alternatives– many of whom had never met or worked together before. The core group included Emily Kawano of the Center for Popular Economics; Julie Matthaei of Guramylay, TransformationCentral.org, and Wellesley College; Ethan Miller of Grassroots Economic Organizing (GEO) and the Data Commons Project; Dan Swinney of the Center for Labor and Community Research (CLCR) and the North American Network for a Solidarity Economy (NANSE); and Melissa Hoover of the US Federation of Worker Cooperatives. Also part of the Working Group, and participating in much of the planning, were Jessica Gordon Nembhard of the Democracy Collaborative; Heather Schoonover of the Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy (IATP); and Michael Menser of American Federation of Teachers (IFT) and Brooklyn College. Yvon Poirier of the Le Groupe d'économie solidaire du Québec (Solidarity Economy Network of Quebec, GESQ) was brought in by Dan Swinney in the spring to provide us with perspective and knowledge of solidarity economy organizing in Canada.

Our actual discussions of what kinds of economic values, practices, and institutions to showcase in our sessions were also influenced by the fact that we were planning and preparing for the USSF. Through bi-monthly conference call meetings, we developed a list of economic "sectors" we wanted to cover, and of groups within those sectors which we wanted to invite to present in our workshops at the USSF. These discussions required us to decide who was "in" and who was "out." Traditional Left discourse has tended to privilege the struggle against class oppression, and hence to showcase worker-owned cooperatives as the key to economic transformation because they transcend class exploitation; more extreme Left discourse dismisses even these classless experiments as reformist. In contrast, the social forum movement has coalesced around "un solo no"–a single no, to neoliberal economics–and, in the Zapatistas' words, "un million de si" (a million yeses, a million ways forward.) Also, as a movement of movements, it has brought together workers, farmers, women, lesbians and gays, environmentalists, and many others to struggle together against all forms of inequality and oppression–each of which stands to learn from interaction with one another–and affirmed pluralism, rather than one politically correct point of view.

So as our group discussed which economic processes and alternatives to include in our sessions, we found ourselves arguing ourselves out of the traditional narrow leftist boxes. We all agreed that we wanted to have panels on worker co-ops, and other economic alternatives such as community currencies, land-trusts, and community-supported agriculture. But some of us pushed to include other, more economically mainstream, practices. For example, Dan Swinney of CLCR, who was working for community economic development in Chicago through the support of "high road" local, community-based corporations, convinced the group that we should be "system neutral" in our language, rather than explicitly anti-capitalist and anti-corporate. Leftists, he noted, have often painted themselves out of the picture with their strict adherence to Marxist orthodoxy and socialist ideals, while millions of small, privately held corporations are potential allies for our movements, as well as possible targets for conversion to coops. Similarly, Julie argued for Fair Trade organizations such as the Business Alliance for Local Living Economies (BALLE), which focuses on local small business, or Co-op America, the Center for a New American Dream, and the Social Investment Forum which focus on socially responsible consumption and investment as well as for the inclusion of progressive feminist, anti-racist, and environmentalist groups. Our planning group ended up evolving a "big tent" conception of economic alternatives and the solidarity economy in the US, where an individual or group's participation was not determined by being perfectly aligned with progressive values (i.e. anti-classist, -racist, -sexist, -nationalist, -homophobic, and sustainable/ecological). Indeed, we realized that few were. Rather, we included groups

and institutions that we saw as qualitatively transformative in their values and practices in at least one of these dimensions, as well as open, at least in principle, to striving to extend their commitment to economic justice to its other dimensions. As we found out later from our foreign colleagues in the solidarity economy movement, the bringing together of groups in this way to learn from–and be pushed by–one another is a key part of the solidarity economy movement, as it is of the social forum movement.

Another important way in which our group's planning was affected by the social forum process was through our knowledge of a weakness of past forums–that they bring people and groups together for an inspiring event, but that the energy often dissipates afterwards, with little or no permanent effect. We were determined to use the USSF 2007 as an opportunity to bring together economic activists from all over the country to build an ongoing organization. Thus, from the beginning, we made plans for caucus meetings, among representatives from the different groups we were inviting, to engage in discussion of how to work together to further progressive economic transformation in the US. By April and May, we began to realize in our phone meetings that we wanted to propose the formation of a solidarity economy network in the US at these caucuses–similar to the networks which exist throughout Latin America, and in Canada, Europe, Africa and Asia.

A final way in which the social forum movement affected our planning and process was its internationalism. The social forum movement began as an international movement, a coming together against the devastation wrought by neoliberal economics. It seemed highly appropriate, therefore, that we invite activists from the solidarity economy movement in Canada and Latin America to present in our workshops, as well as to participate in our caucus meetings. Dan Swinney, who knew international solidarity economy activists through his participation in NANSE, invited Nedda Argullo (Grupo Red de Economia Solidaria del Peru, Solidarity Economy Network Group of Peru, GRESP), Chilo Villareal (Mexico, Rural Coalition), Mike Lewis (Centre for Community Enterprise, CCE, Vancouver), Ethel Coté (Economie Solidaire de l'Ontario, Ontario Solidarity Economy Network, ESO, and Canadian Community Economic Development Network, CCEDNET), and Yvon Poirier (Le Groupe d'économie solidaire du Québec, Solidarity Economy Network of Quebec, GESQ) brought wisdom accumulated through years of experience in their own social/solidarity economy organizing. We realized, with humility and appreciation, that we–in the center of the neocolonial, globalizing beast–were being "colonized," seeded, educated, and mothered into creating a vibrant solidarity economy movement in the US by these participants. We were replicating the practice of the social forum movement, with its distinctly pro-South, anti-colonial perspective, and its refreshing absence of US domination.

From the beginning, we were aware that we were going to be part of an historic moment– the first coming together of individuals and groups from across the US, inspired by and part of the social forum movement, to teach about, discuss, and hopefully create an ongoing organization dedicated to economic transformation. So we did our best in documenting what we did, through notes, sound recording, and video recording. Many of our video recordings are available for viewing on Guramylay's website, TransformationCentral.org.

At the USSF:
Workshops and Caucuses

In all, the Solidarity Economy Working Group organized twenty-seven workshops on the solidarity economy for the USSF, under the rubric, "Building Economic Alternatives and the Social/Solidarity Economy." We also listed fifty-three allied events in our program. This program is also available on TransformationCentral.org, as are a few documents concerning the solidarity economy, written for the USSF. Because of previous experiences, our group requested and was able to arrange for almost all of the workshops to be held in close proximity to one another. We printed and distributed our own programs by email and in paper form, so that participants could see information about all of the workshops, and we also organized a Solidarity Economy Tent right outside the Civic Center, which provided a gathering-place and a clearinghouse for information. All of this organizing, and the fact that discussions of economic alternatives seemed extremely resonant to many at the USSF, certainly paid off: the workshops were well-attended, and the participants were enthusiastic. The idea of an economy organized around ethical values and human needs seemed intuitive. Many participants became excited about the solidarity economy framework, and wanted to learn more and find ways to participate.

These workshops featured a diverse group of speakers and a diverse range of topics. Staff at the Center for Popular Economics presented theoretical workshops, such as "Why We Need Another World: Introduction to Neoliberalism", as well as workshops analyzing specific policy initiatives, such as "The Sky as a Common Resource: Fighting Global Warming by Asserting Equal Rights to Our Atmosphere", and "US Inequality and What We Can Do About It." David Korten, a well-known author and theorist, talked to an engaged group crammed into a small conference room in the roundtable discussion, "Beyond Reform or Revolution: Economic Transformation in the US," and also spoke on the panel, "Spirituality and Economic Transformation." A debate between Michael Albert and David Schweickart about their respective economic models filled a ballroom, and drew many questions and comments. There were multiple workshops on worker cooperatives as a prime example of the solidarity economy, and on participatory bud-

geting as a solidaritous method of surplus allocation. Many speakers focused on building vibrant local economies and also combating the injustices of globalized "free" trade. Dan Swinney, a member of the Working Group, presented his new project, the Austin Polytechnical Academy in Chicago, as a way to give underprivileged students "the technical competence and the social values to then intervene in production, and lead in its development with the values of the broader community at the core of the initiative" (Allard, Davidson, and Matthaei 106:2008). In addition, solidarity economy activists from Canada, Mexico, and Peru spoke about organizing in their countries, and everyone–the organizers included–was amazed to hear what their networking already had accomplished.

The Solidarity Economy Caucuses provided our planning group with our first opportunity to meet face to face. Our goal was to educate one another, and the other invited participants, and to create an ongoing US Solidarity Economy organization.

The first caucus, held before the workshops commenced, was by invitation only. Led by the planning group, participants began the project of defining the solidarity economy, and discussed the challenges in building the solidarity economy. One of the highlights of the meeting was the presentations of international solidarity economy practitioners. Mike Lewis, the Executive Director of the Centre for Community Enterprise in Canada, talked about the distinction between social economy and solidarity economy organizing, describing solidarity economy organizing as a "cross-cutting approach," a "cluster of shared values" that must "contend across all sectors" (Allard, Davidson, and Matthaei 371:2008). He argued that the solidarity economy framework was necessary to deal with the major crises of our time: climate change, peak oil, food security and sovereignty, water quality and access, and deepening inequality. Nedda Angulo Villareal, from the Grupo Red de Economia Solidaria del Peru (Solidarity Economy Network Group of Peru), talked about the solidarity economy in the Latin American context. There, the solidarity economy movement was galvanized by the failed neoliberal and structural adjustment policies of the 1990s. It supports the poorest of the poor, those who are excluded by the market and the state. Solidarity economy initiatives provide goods for the market, and welfare services for the community. During the discussion period, Nancy Neantam, President and Executive Director of Le Chantier de l'Économie sociale (Social Economy Working Group of Quebec), introduced herself and talked about her work. In Quebec, she is creating alliances of solidarity economy organizations based on vision and values rather than structure. All types of actors, from cooperatives, to non-profits, to territorial organizations and networks, to social movements, are engaged in the process of critiquing and building the movement. As we listened, awestruck, at all the work that had been done all over the world, we again realized that we were being recruited into the interna-

tional movement. Many of these organizers had been waiting years or even decades for the United States to finally get involved in the solidarity economy movement.

The second caucus, held after the workshops had ended, was an opportunity to reconvene and reassess, although we ended up welcoming in many new faces–people who had attended one or more of our workshops and wanted to learn more about the movement. Caucus attendees noted again and again that the USSF seemed the perfect environment in which to build the solidarity economy: presenters in workshops across the board kept relating their movement struggles back to the bedrock issues of structural and economic injustice, and Forum attendees were constantly looking for concrete things they could do to make change and to create a more just economy in the present. After discussing the workshops, the caucus participants brainstormed ways to grow the solidarity economy movement in the US. At that point, Carl Davidson suggested publishing a book on the solidarity economy workshops at the USSF, to document the historic moment (and we worked later with him to bring this idea to fruition). As the caucus attendees continued to dialogue, they realized that a permanent organization with membership could really help grow the movement. It could potentially promote the solidarity economy and develop educational material, research and map the existing solidarity economy, provide technical support, and advocate for policy initiatives. Attendees also had lots of ideas about how to create organizational structures that break down natural hierarchies, to maintain the breadth and diversity of the working group, and to consciously make educational materials accessible. The second caucus concluded with an enthusiastic consensus vote to create a US Solidarity Economy Network, and to charge the planning group with the task of structuring and developing the new organization.

As we write this, it has been almost a year since the USSF and the founding of SEN. Still under the wing of CPE, we have created a website (ussen.org) with information about US SEN, and articles and resources on the solidarity economy; developed a brochure and other educational materials; made presentations on the solidarity economy at the Union for Radical Political Economics summer conference, the Left Forum, the US Federation of Worker Cooperatives conference, and the Highlander Institute among others; and sent a representative to a Venezuelan conference on the solidarity economy.

We are planning our first conference for December of 2008 in New Orleans. US SEN has joined the North American branch of the Intercontinental Network for the Promotion of the Social/Solidarity Economy (RIPESS-NA, formerly NANSE) and, as such, is involved in planning for the intercontinental network's fourth conference, "International Forum on the Globalisation of Solidarity" in Luxembourg in the spring of 2009.

The Solidarity Economy and the World Social Forum Movement

With hindsight, it is not surprising that planning a block of economics sessions for the first USSF resulted in the creation of a US solidarity economy network. In fact, recent history has shown that the social forum movement is uniquely well suited for developing and spreading solidarity economy organizing.

Both the solidarity economy and the social forum movement share characteristics and yearnings. They both desire to synthesize the experiences, values, and visions of progressive social movements, while at the same time respecting their diversity. They both search for a plurality of answers to neoliberal globalization through participatory learning and reflection on our organizing and goals. For this reason, the social forum movement has contributed importantly to the deepening and spreading of the solidarity economy.

While economic alternatives such as worker cooperatives have existed for centuries, and regional solidarity economy organizing was happening even before the first WSF in 2001, the social forum movement has spread the idea globally and facilitated the creation of national and international solidarity economy networking. The Workgroup on Solidarity Socio-Economy (WSSE), a global network created in 1998, first began to use the Forums as an opportunity to discuss the solidarity economy, and their participation has generated numerous proposal papers. Discussions about the solidarity economy have continued to be present at every WSF to date.

In addition, the Forum movement has strengthened the growth of local and national solidarity economy practices, institutions and movements in the places it is held. A prime example is the case of Brazil, which hosted the WSF for its first three years in Porto Alegre. Solidarity economy vendors' successful efforts to convince conference organizers to live solidaritous values by purchasing their goods and services for these huge gatherings helped jump start a market and helped raise the visibility of the solidarity economy in the country. The Fórum Brasileiro de Economia Solidária (Brazilian Forum of Solidarity Economy, FBES) credits the social forum with leading to the creation of a Solidarity Economy National Secretariat within the government (2006). Knowing this history, Guramylay tried to organize a network of such vendors for the USSF, but was unable to get it off of the ground. Instead, however, the coming together of our group of activists and academics to plan sessions around the theme "Another Economy is Possible" resulted in the creation of the first US solidarity economy network.

The Solidarity Economy Movement: Another Economy is Possible

We would like to end with a brief definition of the solidarity economy framework; explain why we think it is a key component of the movement for another

United States and another world; and argue why you and your movement should join it! We are ending with this definition rather than beginning with it so as to reflect our actual planning and learning process. The members of US SEN have been learning about the meaning of the solidarity economy through our work together, through dialogues with solidarity economy activists from other countries, and through reading.

The solidarity economy emphasizes our relationships to other people, and to our environment, and inserts solidaritous values into these relationships. Solidaritous values are cooperative, egalitarian, democratic, locally based, and sustainable. It strives for an economy based on human needs rather than an insatiable drive for profit. The ultimate aim of the solidarity economy is the breakdown of oppressive economic hierarchies of all types, the development of human potential, and the preservation of our communities and environment.

There are four distinct aspects to the interconnected and organic whole that is the solidarity economy. It is a collection of existing economic practices, a network of people and organizations engaged in these practices, a developing local and global movement that informs and advocates for these practices, and a theoretical framework for understanding and analyzing these practices. It can be a way of scaling up initiatives that work, of transcending political boundaries, and even of challenging neoliberalism.

Solidarity economy practices are growing into reality beneath our very noses, pushing up through the cracks in the current economic system, building "another economy" block by block. Many of us are participating in them daily, be it by buying fair trade products, expressing our values through our work, or investing in a socially responsible way. Others are involved in collective solidarity economy efforts such as high road businesses, community economic development projects, localization projects, and many others. While there are thus many individuals and organizations in the US which could be characterized as participants in the solidarity economy, there is no comprehensive network among them yet. One of US SEN's goals is to develop and disseminate knowledge of the solidarity economy framework to help create these links.

Another key goal of the US Solidarity Economy Network is to build a solidarity economy movement in the US, by engaging progressive activists and social movements across the US in a broad-based coalition to achieve deep-seated economic transformation. The present is an extremely propitious time for bringing social movements in the US together around solidarity economy policies and vision, for two reasons: the state of our economy, and the state of our social movements. Eight years of the US version of neoliberalism under George Bush have exposed the failings of "the economy as usual" much better than any leftist critique could. The offshoring of good jobs, flood of housing foreclosures, sky-rock-

eting energy prices and profits, and denial of the global warming crisis have pulled the rug out from under the middle class, not to mention the poor. It is increasingly easy to see that our "free" market, competitive, profit-driven economy isn't working for most of us, and that structuring an economy around the values of materialism, greed, and competition is a mistake. It is time for US social movements to come together to demand what we need from our economy– good jobs, financial market reform, safe and affordable housing, health care, food, transportation and energy, a government free from corporate control, a peaceful economy, time and support to the families who are raising the next generation, and a livable world for our children and grandchildren. At this time, social movements can benefit from the vision of an economy based in solidarity, and the developing knowledge of a concrete economic way forward, gleaned from real life experiences across the world.

The second reason that this is a good time for a solidarity economy movement to develop in the US is the state of our social movements. Over fifty years of organizing along identity lines have taught us that our issues are all interconnected and also that equal opportunity and equal rights are not enough. They have also taught us to recognize and resist the divide-and-conquer, fear-mongering tactics which have, time and time again, caused us NOT to act in our collective economic best interest. Barack Obama's successful campaign for the Democratic nomination is evidence of the possibility of the emergence of such a coalition.

Finally, involvement in the US solidarity economy movement provides our social movements with a way to connect, learn from, and support a vibrant global movement. Activists and organizations from around the world are grappling with problems similar to ours, and in many cases, are far ahead of us in creating innovative, solidarity-based solutions to them. Meanwhile here, in the belly of the beast, our government's current policies have a disproportionate and negative effect on the rest of the world. Thus our domestic movements–unified in a US solidarity economy coalition inspired by the WSF and solidarity economy movements–can offer the world solidarity in the global fight against our government's current imperialistic and pro-corporate economic foreign policy.

So, we invite you to join the US Solidarity Economy Network. Share your movement-building wisdom with us, and help to create a broad-based movement for social and economic transformation in the US and the world!

References

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Part III

Voices of Resistance and Struggle:

Workshops and Reflections

The third section of the volume is devoted to the voices of participants, those who came to create a most momentous occasion in the people's history of the US. Analyses and expressions of the success of grassroots organizations abound in digital space and within organizations that attended the USSF. This section captures a very small portion of thoughts shared in and around the first US Social Forum, which provides some important documentation. Several of the section's chapters are based on the plenaries, the only events at the USSF that were directly organized by the NPC. Indigenous rights, Gulf Coast reconstruction, and gender and sexuality are three of the six plenaries represented in this section offering both analysis of the organizing process and excerpts from the plenaries themselves.

Held on the last day of the forum, the People's Movement Assembly gave groups the opportunity to present resolutions and make statements regarding issues and actions they would like to see furthered and addressed in the aftermath of the convening of the first USSF. The PMA and the resolutions presented at it highlight that the social forums are a process. The forums are a node on a longer journey towards movement building and social justice not the end in itself. We present the resolution regarding Palestinian rights in this section.

Some of our pieces are by longtime movement organizers and Left Turn Magazine provides us with interviews with participants and some key organizers to conclude the section.

Chapter 23

Knock Knock!

Mark-Anthony Johnson,
Labor/Community Strategy Center

A SWAT team is pounding on the apartment door of a
Black family in a New Orleans public housing unit like
a sick American Joke,
where the punch line is that the front door is now the front
line to the War on Drugs, Poverty, Gangs and Terrorism,
and the rules of engagement emphasize re-enslavement.
Since 1980s the prison population in the United States has
grown from 200,000 to 2.3million.
with Black folks approaching 1 million incarcerated,
500,000 Latino also in cages,
now we could do the math.
Formulate equations of cell expansions
multiplied by brothas and sistas on probation,
equals one dire the situation.
And underneath it all is a White settler Nation,
which through counterrevolution and co-optation will by any means
necessary repress a Black nation,

You see Black and self-determination,
they go to together.
They go together like The South African Toi Toi and Double Dutch.
They go together like Africans, be West Indian or Haitian,
breaking bread with Choctaw, Chicasaw, and Seminole Nations,
beating White settlers back, with Indigenous and Black united front tactics,
leaving cracked whips silent on our back,
while we washed each other in salt water libations pouring from tear ducts singing freedom for every cell in the body.
We shared centuries of ancient wisdom that broke the fall of cowry shells on the gulf coast bayou.

The Black Belt south has been bathed in the blood of Black and Indigenous enslavement,
that's why special rights like land, sovereignty and reparations is my baseline engagement.

Black and self determination go together like,
prison gaurds laughing in lynch mob like fashion,
while having picnics in Hawaii getting paid triple overtime.
Self-determination means going beyond equality,
cause in this day and age being tough on crime is
Black Code for eradication,
and our democratic rights have been long lost in the translation.
If thousands of brothas and sistas and can be left to drown in New Orlenas parish prison,
while Mayor Nagin claims the Katrina cleansed the city of crack and gangsterism,
Mayor Villaraigosa is sayin 1000 more police in LA streets is progressive public safety policy,
then we need to stop and rethink what real public safety means,
cause it aint school police choking my high school
students and spraying mace on their parents.
Peep the contradiction of Black and Latino children,
walking into class chanting one nation indivisible,
with for all justice and liberty,
then gettin dragged outta class in hand cuffs
cause anything rougher than paddy cake is gang affiliated activity.
And if 41 shots in Amadou Dialou committed quote "accidentally",
can pave the way for Mayor Giulliani presidency,
then the we gotta take the police state on fundamentally.
In a country that survived by turning plantations into prisons,
builds militarized borders and superexploits immigrants
the only things that makes me feel safe
is opening the borders with amnesty freely given
and a social welfare state to free the U.S 2 million

Knock Knock,
No time to laugh at sick jokes.
No time to wait for cold blooded ICE raids,
or SWAT teams with 12 gauges,
to throw another Black or Latino brotha or sista on the pavement
rubbing in our faces that there's no such thing as
citizenship on the slave ship,
and that our rights stay conditional under one Nation Indivisible,
one moment recognized, the next invisible.
Another world is possible.
another U.S. is necessary,
and Self-determination will write the system's obituary.

Chapter 24

BLACK ENVIRONMENTAL THOUGHT AND PRACTICE:

Working to Free the Black Body in Relation to the Land

From Multiple Oppressions toward Full Embodiment Liberation

Sam Grant III,
AfroEco

Rose M. Brewer,
AfroEco

> "The most important thing that happens in a person's life is that they be welcomed when they are born. If they are not welcomed, all their lives they experience a feeling of not quite having arrived."
>
> *—Alice Walker (2001)*
> *paraphrasing Sobonfu Some*

Introduction

As people of the earth—all of us—it is important to honor the metaphoric and real relationship of our bodies to each other and to the earth. Further, we must each learn from the embodiment of health and wealth at the personal level and then consider how to co-create a society in which all human beings are embraced by a "welcome" within our shared web of life. Two simple examples suffice to start–Hurricane Katrina demonstrated the unevenness of the welcome mat extended to Americans by both their neighbors and the federal government based on the nexus of race and class, and the recent foreclosure crisis, with its inequitable impact on poor communities of color, did as well. Finally, access to "nature" and senses of nature are different, based on the intersections of our cultural stories, our oppression stories, and our bridging stories.

Conceptualization of Black Environmental Thought

Black Environmental Thought is a story among stories about the history, present and future of Blacks in relation to the land, to themselves, to each other, and to all. W.E.B. DuBois (1903), in the *Souls of Black Folk*, talked about a double identity that blacks wear in a racially oppressive society, "we are at once beings-for-ourselves striving to self-determine livelihood, and cast within an oppressive context as beings-for-others" rather than for ourselves. We add to this double-sense of identity, a third layer–that of our embeddedness in and embodiment of nature's design. Thus, we are at once constructing our sensibilities from within, in relation to the social structure, and in relation to nature.

We strive to co-create a world in which all beings possess manifold free expression unrestrained by forces and foes that would rather take from the earth and other cultures than share healthy relations on the earth. We welcome the transformation efforts in effect, and invite their innovative connections through such forums as the WSF, where people from diverse perspectives and experiences weave their narratives and assets to create a better world.

Lifting up Black Environmental Thought, then, is critical and must be connected to the narratives, experiences and connecting points from the diverse movements around the world, led by indigenous peoples, poor peoples, queers, internally displaced peoples, and all. A movement of movements cannot be so, when certain voices have not yet been heard, yielded to, and respectfully engaged. The voices of the African diaspora have been insufficiently included in articulations of what "another world is possible" might look like–actually–so here we come, with open arms to welcome and engage all.

Fundamentally, ***we*** are a living storehouse–a generator–of cultures that continue into the present and beyond. This is not in question. The living legacy of our active expressions of black environmental thought and practice are growing in number and in connection. This essay will strive to capture some of the juice of this, and put it in historical context as well. In simple form, the story we tell here is one of hope and practice–we are weaving healing powers, and co-generating new knowledge and space for health and wealth to be sustained and shared.

I am because we are. Our sense of self is created in collective space, sustained and sharpened in this space, and returned to earth and spirit by this collective. This is the underlying ethos of Black Environmental Thought in the US, on the continent and throughout the African diaspora. It gestures toward the foundational philosophy of Black life: we are interconnected beings, deeply enmeshed with one another. This ethos profoundly shaped the practice and thinking of black environmental thought historically and it continues to today. Certainly the burning context of Black environmental thought and practice is double —the motherland of Africa and the cultural-grounded knowledge of how to

relate to each other and the earth that is transmitted through our people across the world.

We are bound in an inseparable web of relations to each other–culturally, and more broadly to all beings regardless of our differences. "Maroon communities" (communities founded and sustained by ex-slaves) were and are locations within which the articulation of culture and innovation evolves in pockets of resistance globally. The co-evolution of new modes and arenas of struggle across the African diaspora testify to the complexity of our relations within and across communities.

A number of divides wedge us apart from within (gender norms, heterosexism, classism, etc) as we witness Blacks line up with ranging perspectives on immigrant rights, welfare, environment and social justice based on their "location" (political sentiments and place) within the political economy. A number of divides, continue to structure us at the bottom of the political economy–including our location in the growing prison-industrial complex, the extension of which is reinforced by the neoliberal economic rules put in place across the world and within US borders.

Similar to our workshop at the USSF, it is important for all of us to engage about three things: a) the historic relationship between blacks and the land; b) the currents of organizing going on around the country and world that are relevant for black struggle for land, for health and for wealth; and c) what we are struggling with and need to be thinking about more broadly, more effectively to win social justice.

How we are is always defined in terms of our relation to the earth, and our level of self-authorship and collective power to determine our separate and mutual destinies. The "black body" as a collective body has experienced 500 years of consistent, structural oppression, which removed us from free embodiment and embedded us in a relationship to each other, to the land, to the political-economic ecology of globalization as a "blocked" source of energy.

What do we mean by this? When choices are made and structured that privilege one or more groups at the expense of others it inhibits the self-organization of a truly free society for all of us. Perniciously, the oppression structures protections for the privileged, which they then mythologize as naturally given, and structures limitations on the oppressed, which they also mythologize as naturally given when structured for a long enough period of time. Our "mythical narratives" become enshrined as truths and dictate the way we relate to each other over many centuries. We set a negative course of co-evolution, making the relation between privilege and oppression path-dependent. This long-standing pattern has always been challenged, but many of us are organizing now (again) to combine multiple narratives and energies of struggle to fully transcend the old pattern of domination and

replace it with a new pattern of partnership–partnership within culture and with the earth, and partnership across cultures with the earth.

Alice Walker's praise of her mother's garden bears testimony to the reality–that many of our mothers, grandmothers and more distant ancestors did continue a story of the appropriate way to relate to the earth. The struggle is to help more of us–all of us–find and live with this groove–together. Walker (237:1983) writes:

> "Whatever she planted grew as if by magic, and her fame as a grower of flowers spread over three counties. Because of her creativity with her flowers, even my memories of poverty are seen through a screen of blooms–sunflowers, petunias, roses, dahlias, forsythia, spirea, delphiniums, verbena…and on and on.
>
> "And I remember people coming to my mother's yard to be given cuttings of her flowers; I hear again the praise showered on her because whatever rocky sail she landed on, she turned into a garden. A garden so brilliant with colors, so original in its design, so magnificent with life and creativity, that to this day people drive by our house in Georgia—perfect strangers and imperfect strangers—and ask to stand or walk among mother's art.
>
> "I notice that it is only when my mother is working in her flowers that she is radiant, almost to the point of being invisible—except as Creator: hand and eye. She is involved in work her soul must have. Ordering the universe in the image of her personal conception of Beauty. "

Freeing this energy to assert new possibilities for blacks and all beings is at the heart and soul of numerous efforts across the Diaspora, including the work of AfroEco, an organization of which the authors are co-founders and cooperators and which is striving to generate a new relationship between blacks and the land. And this objective underlies work across the Diaspora to return Africans to their "source"–a self-determined relation with each other, with others and with the earth. We are not creating something new, but rather lifting up what has always been and stirring it up in the current context in which we find ourselves. We fan it forward with anticipations of possibilities, not yet here outside of our imaginations materially in the social world, yet always flowing like a river to the ocean in our cells and historical memory.

For us, the underlying ethos of black environmental thought unifies people, culture, place, and nature in dynamical relation. Living on our own terms, we see patterns within the relations that are dramatically distinct and superior to those patterns that emerge in contexts where free expression is more constrained. When blacks remain in close connection to the land on their own terms, they are healthier and they live longer.

Our organizing seeks to generate such growing spaces across the Diaspora. Building on the vision of W.E.B. DuBois as the conceptualization of the "cooperative commonwealth", we envision a combining of movements that cross scope and scale, orchestrating a new song for the world from the ground up. We see a green economy being created across the world in small interconnecting spaces of innovation. We see models of education that nourish personal and collective liberation. We see health care that truly supports health and does so in the context of a society that replaces "welfare" as we have engineered it with "wealth share" that ends the pattern of extremes of economic inequality that strip people of their right to survive and thrive, and replaces it with a new pattern that actively supports thriving for all. We see a robust multiply-centered and equitable political space in which cultures and identities across the world are able to reach and hold agreement about how to healthfully share in our abundant planet.

We are a long way from there. As we work toward a vision of a more ecologically sound and socially just society, it is of utmost importance to create and support small spaces of innovation that reconnect people to the land and their health and wealth and set the conditions for such spaces to "grow".

When that relationship–such growing space–is severed, blacks experience a relationship to the world that is externally defined. We then inhabit poor urban communities with high food costs for lower quality food locally available, high energy and insurance costs, and a poorer socio-ecological space with few, if any environmental amenities and few opportunities for livable income or wealth accumulation. In rural areas, we experience lower prices for our crops, fewer markets, less credit and capital supports for agricultural production or alternative livelihood. Whether urban or rural, the black experience in America has been indelibly marked with the consistent boundedness of apartheid relations and peripheralization in the political economy.

As an example, Dr. Robert Bullard tells in description of the horror facing the poor black community of Port Arthur Texas. Hopefully, sharing this will strike a nerve. Port Arthur Texas, a poor black community already home to far too many (one is too many) toxic waste and toxic production facilities, was selected (without concern for the people's health and livelihood) as the site for incineration of waste from the production of nerve gas (VX Hydrolysate). The first batch was incinerated on Earth Day 2007, and the community's quest for a stop to this has

fallen on mute ears, much like the call to rebuild New Orleans on the foundation of an equitable right to return fell on deaf ears.

We fought for and hoped the Civil Rights Movement would yield a new America–one that included all of us, fairly and proudly. What ensued was a re-calibration of the apartheid machine–a dynamic few claim ownership of–that self-organizes in the midst of much rhetoric from all sides to the contrary. The dumping of toxic wastes in black communities adds to the same pattern consistently perpetrated on American Indian nations within US borders. Hurricane Katrina, rather than being a "surprise" to us, was rather a painful validation of a prevailing pattern that enshrines a double set of accounting books for American ethics and practice–one for whites (and add your additions here) and another for blacks (and add your additions here). We have not yet arrived at that "beloved community" Martin Luther King, Jr. championed. Yet, on the way there, let us remember and strengthen the efforts on the ground, and organize with greater vigor the possibilities calling our attentions today.

We see a stark difference in the experiences of earth for Blacks who have sustained a relationship to the earth from the experiences of those who have had this connection severed politically, legally, economically, culturally and/or psychologically. Maroon communities, palenques, quilombos–all examples of the same thing, free black communities–testify to the multiplicity of narratives about the relationship of blacks to the land which cannot be reduced to the experience of slavery and its aftermath. We have consistently maintained "free space" where our level of self-determination was higher, even with the ever-present tension of depredations from external assertions of domination.

In these freer spaces, we developed folk knowledge systems and systems of production–always intimate with the rhythms of nature's cycles and processes. A subsistence livelihood framework was birthed, defended, and extended across the Diaspora. With enough time in freer space, we developed technologies that were also refined and shared.

Africa was a source of indigenous knowledge production and specific agricultural techniques and crops that made the Middle Passage with the people. The list of African foods that are widely known in America, came with Blacks here, along with the cultural knowledge of how to grow these food sources in a new place.

Freedom requires a freedom of expression, and the constant assault of oppressions has been a constant hindrance to the free expression of livelihood and this has served as a constraint on possibility itself. The Black body under colonial conditions never fully realizes its full potential until the colonial condition has been transcended and in history such condition is not yet transcended. Using the concept of "self-organization", we can understand the failures of realization for black

wellbeing in relation to the patterns of global hegemony that consistently dissipate disorder to non-white-male-rich-Christian-heterosexual space.

Many like to think of the problem as one of not having fully transcended slavery's impact–and that it is only a matter of time. Others, such as those in our USSF workshop session rather suggest that there is a pernicious ongoing assault against black wellbeing, and that the framing of what is happening in our educational systems and in the media serves a dissipation function as well–our narratives are consistently marginalized, just as our persons and communities are consistently violated through the multiply-interlocked dynamics of oppressions plural.

We have not been "free" to live by our own terms, in our chosen places, with our own techniques, laws and cosmology. We live doubly "within the realm of possibility" always being carved out by people practicing whatever level of freedom they can create and sustain, and "under the sun" of white supremacy, patriarchy, elitist representative democracy and a form of rich-boy capitalism that eschews all morality and pursues profits by any means necessary. As we examine the many approaches taken by Africans and African Americans to promote a new relationship to the land and to humanity we must put such activism in context of narratives about the relationship between cultures and the earth and between blacks and the political economy.

Using the yin and yang symbol as metaphor (crisis and danger balanced with possibility and opportunity), the African American community in its quest for environmental justice and health faces the twin-faced dynamic of oppressive constraint/liberation possibility. Throughout all of American history, every weave of the design, America has continued a structurally racist, classist, and sexist pattern that has particularly devastating impact on the health and wealth of African Americans and Africans across the Diaspora. Even with this constant assault, practices within our communities have consistently emerged. So we have always had "emergence" but seldom has such emergence reached the level of self-organization. The only way to explain this is to do so in the context of the dynamic relationship between structural oppression and internalization of such oppression.

A core component of good organizing work is following the model of Ella Baker in her design of collective leadership strategies and the embodiment of a popular education approach as practiced by Septima Clark in the Freedom Schools. AfroEco and many other groups apply this modality. While it is only one small story among stories, we will here use our workshop at the USSF as an example of the narratives people bring and combine in locations at which our "rivers of liberation work" meet as one (a paraphrase from the poem "The River" by Louis Alemayehu, considered a poet laureate by many in the movement to lift up and organize around Black Environmental Thought).

Perspectives in a Black Environmental Thought Workshop at the US Social Forum

In a workshop we facilitated in June 2007 at the USSF, via introductions people stated who they were, what communities they were from, how they were organizing and how their communities were being impacted by the negative constraints and constructive possibilities. We then proceeded to diagnose the diverse narratives of history in the room–how did our situation come to be so–and of course, then moved into considering what to do about it. We asked participants to name their big hopes–far out on the horizon and then to talk about the critical steps we need to take along the way to realize the vision proclaimed.

In the room, we had significant diversity–including African Americans, Asians, Latinos, American Indians and whites. We had also a broad swath of academics, grassroots activists, non-profit leaders, students and elders of struggle. Nearly everyone in the room was actively working around the intersections of cultural, economic and environmental justice–albeit from distinct vantage points.

We used a popular education approach to examine the legacy, the current situation and how to build an effective movement across communities and constituency groups to win sustainable change. Participants named several dynamics that impede a healthy relationship between blacks and the land, and shared what they are doing currently to promote environmental, economic and cultural justice. This essay will provide some historical background on the situation which has faced the African American community (including Africans) within the United States and then move on to discuss how people are organizing to win change.

From a historical vantage point, all were in agreement on four key historical forces:

1) colonialism and slavery ripped blacks from their self-determined relationship with the land and has continuing consequences psychically, politically, economically and culturally;

2) the combination of continuing racism, sexism and economic oppression result in a persistent state of exacerbation of a negative dialectic among black people in relation to the land–including the ruptures within our community by growing class, gender and racial complexities;

3) a series of constraints are currently in effect, which serve to blunt, block or drown out our efforts to realize justice across the range of our issues; and

4) the opportunity and challenge before us now is to recognize ways to network and sustain common struggle against the intersecting forces of oppression and marginalization.

People worked in large groups and small groups to name the specific "feet" of environmental, economic and cultural injustice harming the black community yesterday and today. Among the "feet" identified were:

- Lead poisoning, asthma, arsenic, mercury, PCBs and other carcinogenic and morphogenetic toxins that are harming this and future generations of blacks disproportionately;

- The rising cost of food in the inner city reducing food security, along with the rising costs of utilities due to severe weather and the non-renewable fuels crisis, and the continuing legacy of red-lining which sustains higher costs in zip codes in which blacks or browns are the majority;

- The lack of access to health care for increasing numbers of black families even while their cumulative health risks are increasing due to structural racism;

- Increasing gentrification pressures which dislocate blacks from historic communities, in which they would prefer (in many cases) to stay and continue organizing for liberation. This is exacerbated by the ways in which the continuation of red-lining practices such as predatory lending have shaped a particular experience of the foreclosure crisis impacting all of America in a uniquely pernicious way. We are consistently blocked from equitable gain in a racist economy and first and most to be negatively impacted by waves of decline besetting the whole;

- The loss of black land due to fractionated heirship, tax forfeiture, the internalization of a negative relationship with the land by descendents of slaves, and the historic discrimination of local, state and federal government to counter racism and economic oppression impacting blacks;

- The racism within the "environmental movements" that particularlize black struggles around the environment while essentializing Eurocentric notions about the environment and "sustainability movements" and more.

TABLE 1:
IMPEDIMENTS TO ENVIRONMENTAL WELL BEING FOR AFRICAN AMERICANS

Oppressions	Current outcomes from these oppressions
Environmental Injustice	Significant health disparities of asthma, lead poisoning, mercury poisoning, arsenic poisoning, etc. Higher rates of transmission of diseases due to proximity to environmental hazards (based on nexus of race and class)
Economic Injustice	Continuing classed-racial segregation in both urban and rural areas and continuing inequality in public policies–both those that extend the racism and those intended to halt it, which are "halted" by resistance patterns to the implementation of just policy were established
Racial Injustice	The "black body" is treated as unequal to the white body. It is policed on the streets; it is barred from access to health and wealth. It "festers" in communities ordered at the bottom where there are limited options for engagement in the formal economy, so people resort to the informal one available which reinforces both the prison industrial complex and the non-profit industrial complex
Gender Injustice	The continuing intersectionality of oppression against black women and men across the "gender continuum" and the persistent homophobia within the black world generate a set of constraints that shape internal limiting conditions for black struggle
Educational Injustice	No diploma = no future except the prison gate, if address is in zip code with large presence of non-whites you are less likely to get a diploma and therefore more likely to be pushed along the cradle to prison road
Cultural Genocide	If you don't know "who" you are, then where "you" go is externally defined. Repairing the historic rupture of blacks from the land is absolutely core to the processes of liberation
Political Inequality	No Political Voice in the Representative Plurality–no power to assert interests in the social contract. You are Ellison's "invisible man", or woman, or community

Debilitating impact on the black body and community

All of this adds up to "cumulative risk, threat, and disparate impact" on black bodies and livelihood. If our "bodies" are constantly in bob-and-weave, duck, shift and respond mode, how are we to facilitate the strategies and tactics that self-organize our liberation?

We get locked in a reactive state of being, rather than a fully self-authored creative state of being. When we internalize, and therefore yield, to an externally constructed force, however partially, that is energy lost to greater possibilities created only in liberated space.

The solution to the dilemma posed is multi-dimensional, and is rooted in the continuing practices and theory emerging from black base communities that have determined ways to respond.

Participants "framed" the above as core characteristics of how the past dependence of historic oppressions has landed African Americans in the particular circumstances we now face.

As stated above**,** the solution to the dilemma posed is multi-dimensional, and is rooted in the continuing practices and theory emerging from black base communities who have determined ways to respond–and from connecting these practices to those of other streams of practice that arise from both indigenous communities globally and the innovators and bio-neers actively seeding new ways for all of us to relate to the land and to each other.

Research such as that found in ***Black Rice*** (2001) unearths the indigenous thought and practice that structured the rice agriculture of the Gullahs in the Low Country of the United States, extending from the Sea Islands of South Carolina down to Jacksonville, FL. Being among the few who did actually receive land during the Reconstruction era, and organizing to strengthen their hand in access to land, the Gullah played a key role in the establishment of the South Carolina Land Commission and have maintained an enduring culture on the land–even with the onslaught of golf courses and gated communities now serving as main features of the landscape.

The foundational work of Carne (2001) opens up a space to broadly engage the idea of indigeneity. The Gullahs are the deepest example of an intact African culture arising on American land. Africans brought technology with them here, and where there was both an ecological fit and space to sustain practices, Africans embodied and embedded African practices in America.

Long before millions were transported across the Middle Passage, West Africans had refined an elaborate food production system that displayed acute knowledge of landscape gradient, soil principles, moisture regimes, farming by submersion, hydrology and tidal dynamics, and the mechanisms to impound water and to control its flow. The result was an array of rice production zones with a management portfolio more diverse than those occurring in Asia and more finely nuanced by micro environmental soil and water parameters. This was a system that over millennia minimized subsistence risks, enhanced human survival in drought-prone environments, and contributed to the dense populations of the Upper Guinea coast that were subsequently swept into the Atlantic slave trade. The knowledge and the expertise to adapt cultivation of a preferred dietary staple to New World conditions proved among the scant "possessions" remaining to slaves pressed into slavery from rice-growing regions. For those arriving in frontier South Carolina, a similar geographic setting of diverse lowland habitats and climatic conditions optimized the transfer of a crucial farming system to North America.

Indigenous knowledge and the subversion of white dominated environmental thought is a key underpinning of this discussion. There are a number of ways of knowing. These ways have largely been hidden from view, rendered invisible within the Eurocentric discourse on the environment and the political-economic ecology of globalization. While hidden from common view, numerous streams of cultural knowledge have endured. The values of cooperative and collective work and responsibility are powerfully central to these streams.

Historical High Points of Black Environmental Practice

In seeking surcease from the travesties of slavery and racism, African Americans have found succor and power in self-determination and the possibility of returning to the land and Africa. Indeed, studies of black nationalism have often focused on the theme of emigration (Cha Jua, 2000). If emigration back to Africa on black terms has not been possible, movement within America sometimes has desired and occurred–rooted in a return to the land. Maroon communities of Africans in America who fled to the hills or swamps rather than live in slavery are documented facts (Hines, Hines and Harrold 2000). Later, organized Black communities often embodied the nationalist spirit of being self-defined and autonomous in the antebellum period (Cha Jua, 2000). This spirit of self determination certainly is certainly tightly bound to understanding Black Environmental thought.

Threaded to the idea of cooperatives, the collective and the self-determining are interwoven. Indeed, the long durée of the Black Freedom Struggle is an expression of this interconnectivity.

The struggle against environmental racism has always been rooted in the fight for black humanity. And, today the struggle remains daunting. The current period expresses the interplay between white male patriarchy, economic restructuring, and racism, expressed concretely as a neoliberal agenda, which privatizes and renders for profit everything; no wonder the levees broke.

Where do we go from here?

So, where do we go from here? We asked at the USSF, and ask everywhere we dialogue.

What's the vision? Participants envision a future in which:

a) Being black connotes what it intends for itself culturally–that being born African in no way is connecting to the continuing reality of being born oppressed;

b) Humanity in its diverse cultural forms is freed of the pattern of domination, and we all are welcomed in a world the embraces us as members of one human family within one earth family;

c) Innovation and possibility are no longer constrained by structural racism–not just for blacks but for all human beings;

d) A green economy grows from the bottom up, that lifts those coming out of corrections and those locked in the street economies into entrepreneurs and living wage earners–generating new pathways for all of us to live more sustainably and justly.

e) Black people are healthy, wealthy, free, prosperous, cooperative, culturally-grounded, and so on;

f) Freedom from environmental, economic and cultural injustice for all;

g) Freedom to be as each person of African descent chooses to be with support and protection for the economic, cultural and social rights of Africans who express cultural rootedness.

h) A new abolition movement which replaces the prison-industrial complex and the many varied forms of slavery still at work today worldwide with

a genuine commitment to the highest expressions of culturally-grounded, earth-conscious embodied freedom for everyone in the world.

How are we organizing?

First and perhaps foremost are the somewhat successful and still challenging campaigns of African Americans to end environmental injustice (which includes environmental racism mixed with other oppressions). African American women were and are at the forefront of this struggle, just as black farmers are at the forefront of the struggle to change the historically discriminatory practices of the US Department of Agriculture to improve farm production in ways that exclude and limit black farmers and black land.

Black farmers are re-organizing their relationships across rural America to promote sustainable livelihood. At the same time, blacks are increasingly involved in urban gardening and the development of community-supported agriculture and urban-rural linkages to improve the well being of blacks in both the city and the countryside.

Regardless of where we are located, we face significantly greater environmental risk–including the risk of exposure to toxins at home and work, the risk of living in more socially vulnerable spaces (such as the Ninth Ward impacted by Hurricane Katrina), and the double risk of not having health insurance equitably nor equitable protection from branches of government when harm has been caused to the community by either acts of nature or acts of other human beings.

Numerous examples exist of models in generating the desired relationship of blacks, which were discussed at the workshop. Among them are:

- Deep South Center for Environmental Justice at Dillard University, led by Beverly Wright, has been in the forefront of struggle to challenge environmental racism and promote environmental justice, and has played a key role in organizing around the disaster of Hurricane Katrina and its racialized aftermath. Follow their work at www.dscej.org

- Environmental Justice Resource Center at Clark Atlanta University (http://www.ejrc.cau.edu/) is a key resource on both developing an understanding of the legacy of environmental racism and injustice and how communities are actively fighting back to promote a more just and sustainable future for themselves. The Center's founder, Dr. Robert Bullard is considered a "father" of the environmental justice movement in America. He will be the first to tell you that it was black women who sparked the movement and provided the shoulders and supports on which his excellent work stands.

- Federation of Southern Cooperatives was founded in 1967 to build on the legacy of black organizing to promote healthy productive relations on the land that has been part of our story since we got here. For more than 40 years now, the Federation has promoted cooperation among efforts of black agriculturalists, agronomists, communities and their regions, and has organized and advocated to promote equity in opportunities and resources for black farmers and blacks striving to sustain livelihood in the rural south. Follow their work at www.federationsoutherncoop.com

- Growing Power–which has become a model in the Midwest for sustainable livelihood, led by former NBA basketball star Will Allen. Within the black community this serves as a useful educational and organizational model for how to re-organize our relationship with the land. Growing Power has developed a model of efficient sustainable production that can feed 2000 people on two acres of land, and is actively training people from across the country in its model (see www.growingpower.org)

- Mo Better Foods–emerged out of the vision and organizing of David Roach, while he led the Business Academy at McClymonds High School. It started with convening people around the question of who would supply quality food in the community. Roach organized students to market and sell produce grown by African American farmers in CA. Roach went on to lead the West Oakland Food Collaborative, which focuses on food insecurity in the community–and continues to lead Mo Better Food as a national movement organization committed to improve food security and economic empowerment in black communities (see www.mobetterfood.com.)

- People's Grocery in West Oakland is a community-based organization developing creative solutions to health, environment and economic challenges. The groups envision changing the way our food system works–so that there is a self-reliant sustainable food system in the community. The organization makes the connection between the loss of food security in the black community and the health risks facing all generations of black people. "Food justice" is recognized as a keystone in ecological and equitable community development (see www.peoplesgrocery.org.)

- Numerous environmental justice efforts are, in effect, led by poor black communities and other cultural communities across the United States, and around the world. The efforts that emerged in the dialogue are too numerous to mention all in detail. In summary, people are involved in campaigns to address the relationship between segregation and poor health–since poor blacks are more likely to be the inhabitants where there are toxic waste dumps, where there are multiple health risks generated by long-standing patterns of structural oppression and political neglect.

- Ella Baker Center for Human Rights former Executive Director Van Jones has sparked a path across the country promoting the possibilities of as green-jobs based economy as a pathway out of poverty for the urban poor. His visionary leadership and a groundswell of enthusiastic endorsement across the country has led Congress (2007) to authorize a green-collar jobs program with an initial allocation of $125 million–20% of which is supposed to be "targeted" for pathways out of poverty. (see www.ellabakercenter.org)

- AfroEco was founded in 2004 to organize a healthier relationship with our common Mother Earth and to end genocide, ecocide and structural oppression in all its forms. We do this by practicing and promoting:

  - Sustainable food production

  - Healthy living and livelihood

  - Cultural knowledge bases

  - Economic, cultural and ecologically sound cooperation

Our vision is that Pan-African people organized so that we all inhabit a harmonious future in which everyone is fed well, has sustainable access to clean water, healthy homes, vibrant communities, genuine peace, deep justice, and wild and reckless joy**.** The early work of AfroEco has been on 3 fronts–building our internal sensibilities about how to be a sustainable black collective that organizes around the intersections of cultural, economic and environmental justice; creating our own strategies for food security and health including a CSA, a network of urban gardens, and an urban greenhouse/sustainable education partnership with an urban area learning academy for brilliant young minds and souls others deemed

"at-risk"; and facilitating convenings around the world at which we raise up the ideas, issues and possibilities of Black Environmental Thought and connect this discourse to our committed part of building the movement of movements until all realize full embodiment liberation.

These are just a tiny sample of the thousands of efforts in place across America. When we add to this the amazing examples in Africa and across the Diaspora, we then must consider how we facilitate a Pan-African approach to organizing around the intersections of livelihood at the micro-level with innovations that we can grow to scale, and common fronts of struggle and possibility around which we can cooperate.

Conclusion

The combinatory work that occurs in such spaces as the WSF or USSF oxygenates the creativity of our separate work while providing the seedbed for cooperative endeavors. The vision of "another world is possible" rejects Thatcher's "TINA" (there is no alternative) and calls us to remember our indigenous knowledge and production systems–and to connect them together in concert for a more just world.

In this essay we have provided some preliminary context within which to consider the depth and breadth of "black environmental thought". It is now the challenge of all of us to work in partnership to extend it, and connect it to the narratives and practices of others striving for a just and sustainable future for all humans on earth. The simple word that gained prominence in the South African freedom struggle–Ubuntu–which means the gift of finding the human being in others in the Xhosa language of South Africa provides a unifying value for all to embrace. The Zulu language in South Africa has the same meaning attached to the word Umuntu.

Alone, we continue to face the harsh winds of a robust inter-locked network of structures in the global economy that anticipate global political dynamics and protect wealth accumulation regimes at the expense of the world's poor. Together, like the "Lilliputians" we have the might to bring down Gulliver, and co-generate a new set of conditions for self-organization of society that honors, embraces and welcomes all of us "home".

We have before us the opportunity to truly practice what we espouse for all within this country, but also for all in our relations globally through a grand partnership. Let us combine our hearts, our talents and our dreams and be that better place.

We invite you, one and all, to co-create this new world together. Forward ever, backward never! Peace and courage be with you as you weave your commitment to full embodied liberation to ours. In closing, Louis Alemayehu (2006), a

great and unsung poet and healer among us says in his poem "The Holy Land is All the Earth":

"…let us touch all with kind hands blessing all that lives,
All that laments,
RISE and be robust and brave in the face of dawn.
YOU are the face of Dawn, Face it!
Water, Light and Love can sustain us now.
Touch with kinds hands and voices now.
This is the Fire the Next Time, now!
At last, real power and
The new world begins on this breath.
BREATHE
Now is the time.
As we embrace the silence of after-weeping
Resting on the breast
Of our Mother's
Sacred Heart
Beating, beating, beating…"

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Chapter 25

US Social Forum:
An Indigenous Lens

Coordinated by Alice Lovelace

This chapter is in two sections. Section one reports on the work undertaken to insure significant participation by Indigenous people across the United States in the social forum and how that participation helped to shape the forum. Section two is a record of the Indigenous plenary. The remarks are taken from a transcript of the plenary with editing by Arthur Kastler. The significance of this plenary is clear–it is a record of the contemporary thinking and political orientation within the indigenous nations from Alaska to Florida.

Introduction

The lack of participation by Indigenous groups in the United States is a major shortcoming that reveals itself in nearly every national gathering. Very often that lack of a presence of Indigenous people is explained away with, "We sent them the information. They just didn't show up." It was clear that a gathering like the first USSF could not move forward as a grassroots led effort without indigenous people and their issues as a central part. From the beginning, with the help of Tom Goldtooth and the Indigenous Environmental Network (IEN), efforts were made to let Native people know they were important to this process.

Part of the debate was the need to highlight the original peoples in North America history in particular to the Georgia area; but equally important the Native struggle from historic to present day. Clearly the Native population in Atlanta is small, due to the "Trail of Tears." The theme of "So goes the South, So goes the Nation," was very fitting to the Native struggle as the "Trail of Tears" was a massive removal of Native people from the southeast to Oklahoma in which many thousands of Native people died of illness or murder. The original Native people of the Atlanta region were relocated in this massive removal and now are in the Oklahoma area or further displaced. Many sacred sites remain to this day in the area and are not well known.

With this intention and knowledge of this history the decision was made to hire a Native organizer in order to highlight Native struggles as an important part of the USSF. This decision was groundbreaking because Native Peoples didn't have to fight to participate and have visibility.

National Native Travel Scholarship Fund

The decision was made for the fundraising arm of the Forum to work on a Native American Solidarity fund to assist indigenous people to travel to the social forum in Atlanta. The National Native Travel Scholarship Fund was instrumental in Native participation. Support came from the Panta Rhea Foundation, Center for Community Change, Solidago Foundation, Honor the Earth, Funding Exchange, Third Wave Foundation, Center for Third World Organizing, Ms. Foundation, American Friends Service Committee, and those who donated air miles.

Native Webpage

A third charge went out to the Tech work group, with their help a Native page was created on the USSF web site. The first part of the web page consisted of the historical information from a Native perspective. The web page was instrumental in outreaching and providing additional resources to Native peoples interested in attending the USSF. It contained a formal invitation to Native communities; the National Native Advisory was listed with a description of their tasks, logistical information, registration referral, Native Travel Scholarship Information, and a listing of the Native groups and organizations committed to participating. The listing was helpful in recruiting more Native peoples to attend.

Native Organizer

The USSF organizer knew it would take more than a web page and solidarity funds to create a space and make a way for Native people to participate. The will was always present within the USSF for significant participation by Native people, but it took Heather to help us find our way.

In mid January 2007 Heather Milton-Lightening was hired. Heather was a former youth organizer for the IEN and had previously attended social forums both in Canada and at the international level in Venezuela. She had experience through the Environmental Justice Summit II and the People of Color Movement here in the US. Through IEN she was connected to a large network of grassroots Native community organizations and organizers. Working with the Outreach Engine, a National Native Outreach and organizing work-plan was created.

Heather traveled throughout the Midwest, Plains, Rocky Mountains, Southwest and Southeast to promote the USSF. From discussions with community members and organizers there was clearly a need to do two things. Figure out the "buy-in" for Native communities. A lot of organizers asked the question "How is the social forum going to impact my work?" Many had mixed feelings due to the need for resources, the time away from community campaigns and the negative experiences from past participation at the national level. But one thing was clear, this gathering of social activists would be historic and native people needed to play a

significant role within the social forum but also to remind the movement of the history of this land to present day struggle of Native Peoples.

Heather made two key visits to the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians in North Carolina and to the Muskogee Creek Nation in various locations within Oklahoma. These visits were to issue a formal invitation to the members of the Muskogee Creek Nations to come and give their official welcome and endorsement as well as to provide this same invitation and opportunity for the Eastern Band of Cherokee Nations. Without the endorsement of the local original Tribes many of native people would not feel comfortable in participating. Lisa Montelongo, a tribal member from the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians, made a commitment to participate on the National Native Advisory. Ashe and Natalie Deer, members of the Muskogee Creek Nation in Oklahoma, soon joined her. They agreed to participate and bring a delegation from Oklahoma.

National Native Advisory

The Native Advisory was created to assist Heather in her work by giving guidance, to advise when making decisions, and to help with outreach to other tribes. There was a core group of Native Organizers that consistently gave their time and support to the USSF. The Advisory made decisions on the funding for the Native Travel Scholarship fund, gave direction and insight to the Native plenary, helped outreach to communities to participate and facilitate workshops. The Advisory was instrumental in providing the cornerstone of the Native organizing that happened at the USSF. With the help of the Advisory many Native people were able to participate in conference calls nationally leading up to the USSF. This offered an opportunity for an orientation and the creation of a theme as well as the initial building of an Indigenous statement. The Advisory really helped in supporting in the work of the Native USSF organizer through some challenging or "growth" moments within the planning of the USSF.

National Native Advisory Members:

Lisa Montelongo—Eastern Band of Cherokees and the Shelter of Safety
Brett Ramey–-Native Movement Collective & Black Mesa Water Coalition
Naomi Archer (Supporter)—Four Directions Solidarity Network
Tom Goldtooth—Indigenous Environmental Network & USSF National Planning Committee
Twale Abrahamson—SHAWL Society
Amalia Anderson & Priscilla Settee—Indigenous Women's Network
Carl Wassilie—REDOIL & Big Village Network
Faith Gemille—REDOIL
Cindy Domingo—LELO & USSF National Planning Committee

KEY NATIVE EVENTS

Key Native Events included the Opening March, Opening Ceremony, the Water Ceremony, the Native Nations Tent, the Indigenous Plenary, and the Native USSF process for workshops, which was slightly different from the National workshop outreach.

Opening March

Native Peoples from across North America and visiting delegations from South America led the Opening March of the USSF. Tribal members from Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians brought with them many members to participate in the march. Ms. Patty Grant, Elder from the Eastern Cherokee of the Qualia Boundary, from Cherokee, North Carolina made an official welcome on behalf of the Cherokee delegation and to recognize that they are one of the original Nations of the Southeast region. Leading the march was significant for all: Indigenous groups and everyone attending. It was a visual and physical acknowledgement of the history of Indigenous Peoples in North America. Native march participants brought their songs, banners, and local campaigns to the march to shed light on the Indigenous struggles across the country and beyond. Beyond being respectful, the frontline of the march being led by Native peoples sent a message of Indigenous struggle nationally as well.

Opening Ceremonies

From the onset, the Opening Ceremonies was clearly another area in which Native representation was key. An important protocol is that at least one of the local, original tribes welcome the USSF participants at the start of the "Trail of Tears" and the location of the massive genocide that occurred in Georgia and the Southeast. Ms. Patty Grant, Elder from the Eastern Cherokee of the Qualia Bondary, also spoke at the opening ceremonies and gave another welcome as a member of one of the original tribes of the Southeast to the USSF. Then speakers from Hawaiian Native communities spoke and welcomed the USSF. Finally, a performance was given from three Alaska Native peoples. The Native Advisory wanted to give the delegates of the USSF a broad vision of the Native delegates attending. Tom Goldtooth, a member of the National Native Advisory and the National Planning Committee, introduced all of the speakers.

Native Nations Tent

Thanks to the support of the National Planning Committee, funders and the support of staffer Alice Lovelace, we had a Native Nations Tent. The NPC agreed to a space for Native delegates to meet, hold workshops, sell merchandise, and

hang out. The tent was located in the Park away from the convention center to provide a spot that was quiet and would provide space for Native peoples for more private prayers or ceremonies. The tent became a general place for Native delegates to visit, network and share information during the USSF. Many briefings, political meetings and general sessions were held at the tent.

Workshops

The USSF had 54 Native-led or facilitated workshops, which ranged from Native Women and Abuse to the International Indian Treaty Council workshop. The workshops had a good attendance by Native and non-Native people. Workshops were a way to create opportunities for networking, to arrange additional meeting, and discussions on the joining of campaigns and/or organizing efforts. Again with all the areas organized by Native peoples, the workshop process for Native peoples took longer due to the last minute funding created to bring Native delegates and for Indigenous organizations and organizers to gain confidence in the social forum process.

Some of the workshops included:

- Sacred Sites
- Energy
- Climate Change
- Direct Action Training
- De-Colonization
- Community Organizing Models
- Community-Based Sustainable Development
- Renewable Energy
- Youth
- Indigenous Women
- Indigenous Sovereignty and Treaty Rights
- Alaska Native Communities
- Southeastern History and Impacts
- Criminal Justice in Native Territories
- Reparation, Protection and Land Reclamation
- Water

Water Ceremony

Water is sacred. Without water life cannot be sustained. Josephine Maadamin came from the Thunder Bay, Ontario area in Canada to conduct the Water ceremony in the Native Nations Tent. The American Friends Service Committee facilitated her participation. Josephine is a part of the Great Lakes Regional movement to walk around the lakes and pray for the water. Joseaphine belongs to a sacred medicine society and agreed to help the USSF Native Advisory to do the water ceremony. People in the lead-up the USSF were asked to bring their water from their home–whether pure, contaminated or from the tap, didn't matter. 300 people came together Saturday morning and prayed together for the most valuable resource water thanks to those who participated and brought water.

USSF Concert

Julian B. and his brother Marty Aranaydo, hailing from the Muskogee Creek Nation relocated to Oklahoma performed during the USSF at various venues including the Native Plenary. At every opportunity they performed and shared the story of the Creek Nations journey to Oklahoma.

Peoples Movement Assembly

In the last months of the organizing towards the USSF the People's Movement Assembly was created and added to the agenda of the USSF. In light of the People's Movement Assembly, the Native Advisory began providing weekly national conference calls to start creating a Native statement for the USSF and as well a clear message that we all would participate in voicing during the USSF. Clearly the work leading up the USSF that was done on the conference call was instrumental. Within the first two days a working committee was created from the Native Nations Tent meetings to create a national political statement to USSF for the People's Movement Assembly. A few groups also submitted individual group statements for the People's Movement Assembly.

Two delegates representing the Global North and South were chosen on behalf of the Native peoples in attendance to present the National Native statement. Time being limited to two minutes ended up causing a problem with the final Native speaker from the South. A mike was taken during his report-back. This caused a ripple affect among the participants in the audience as well as the presenter. Things escalated in the auditorium. The speaker and many supporters asking for him to finish his report-back met and tried to figure out a resolution. A resolution was negotiated between the Native speaker, Native participants and the NCP members in charge of the report-backs. Many Native people then came on stage, Tom Goldtooth addressed the situation, the

speaker finished his report-back, Duane Martin, Sr. spoke, and Bineshi Albert gave a final closing address. In the spirit of healing the hurt feelings and to rectify the situation the Native peoples did this presentation. Many that were in the audience and that participated had mixed feelings; many observers said it was good. It was a clear moment that all USSF participants present had a "learning" moment.

Conclusion

Throughout the USSF process many lessons were learned about working with Native peoples. The conflict at the People's Movement Assembly was interpreted many ways but people are still talking about it. Overall Native people were present, clearly visible and heard throughout the USSF. Hopefully, it is clear what a vital and politically important role Native people play and should play in future social forums.

INDIGENOUS VOICES: A PLENARY FROM THE HEART OF MOTHER EARTH

What follows is an edited version of the Indigenous Voice Plenary. Greetings and some text have been omitted in order to create a shortened version of the plenary that hits on the high points of presenters remarks. We apologize to our participants for eliminating greetings, but translation was not possible. We know and honor the value of greetings in Indigenous Nations.

Tom Goldtooth, co-moderator, Indigenous Environmental Network

This plenary is entitled *Indigenous Voices, a Plenary from the Heart of Mother Earth*. Good evening, my name is Tom Goldtooth. I'm with the Indigenous Environmental Network, a member of the National Planning Committee of the USSF, a member of the **Dine** Nation, and also **Bedwakiton** Dakota from the Great Lakes from Minnesota. The Indigenous Peoples Plenary will provide an understanding of the indigenous identity as developed among our rich heritage, our history, culture, spiritual relationship, our causable vision, our treaties and inherit rights to these lands called the United States of America. Speakers from Alaska, Hawaii and other areas of Turtle Island, including here within the southeastern region, the Cherokee people will provide an understanding of the impacts of colonization and neocolonialism in the United States and how these impacts are manifested in today's organizing work, in and outside of our indigenous nations and communities. The plenary will lead to a presentation on the ecological and climate crisis resulting from an industrialized society addicted to unsustainable energy and capitalist consumption that is draining the lifeblood and healing spirit from our

sacred Mother Earth. The plenary will provide models of collaboration strategies, and how we facilitate movement building and collaboration between indigenous and non-indigenous organizing.

The protection of our sacred lands is another big issue, and the repatriation of our human culture remains a major problem in this country and especially here in the Southeast, where private collectors buy and sell the human and cultural remains of our ancestors. We are a vast network of indigenous peoples participating in the USSF. We are making that link on this vote of destruction of an unsustainable energy system that depends on a fossil fuel regime. We will later talk about our future goals of an unplugged campaign in October as an alternative to Columbus Day, asking people of this country to unplug from their colonial electrical grid—stay home, do not drive. Give Mother Earth a rest. Following that, we are calling for a national day of action to support all frontline communities involved in social environmental justice and a fight for a better world. We stand in unification with indigenous people throughout the world and most especially since we are in Atlanta our Audovocy Tribal peoples of India who are fighting for their lives against Coca Cola in this human rights violation. So, this is also an indigenous issue.

So with that said, I'd like to introduce one of our mothers, our aunties, and our sister who is indigenous from these territories. Who comes from the Eastern band of Cherokee. She's here to bring a message as she talks and shares with you their historical trauma of genocide colonization, pluralism, and their culture. She comes from the Quala Boundary of the Southeast region of the United States called the Cherokee Territories.

Historical Trauma experienced by Eastern Cherokee of the Qualla Boundary of the Southeast Region of the US

Patty Grant, MSW, CSAC, Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians

My name is Patty Grant and I am an enrolled member of the Eastern Band of the Cherokee Indians. I am half Cherokee and half Lakota and I come from the Deer Clan. Historical grief and trauma is an issue and a concern for many cultures and for the indigenous peoples of this continent, known to many as Native Americans or the American Indians. Before the onset of the European in the 1500's, all of this continent belonged to the indigenous peoples. Over 80 million native peoples occupied this land we call today the United States of America. The goal of the Europeans was to exterminate us, to kill us. That did not happen. So they passed a law to relocate us. All of the native people, indigenous people were to be moved, to be relocated. All the ones east of the Mississippi were relocated West of the Mississippi to a place called the Oklahoma Territory. Then came acculturation. They were to force their culture on us so that we could become

white. Historical grief and trauma is defined as "accumulative and physic wounding across generations related to massive root trauma". Maria Yellow Horse Brave Heart coined this definition. Originally the Cherokee's occupied land that extended over eight states, this includes the state of Georgia. We are a matriarchal clan system, we have seven clans. Our clans determine who we are, who our family is. Each clan played a specific roll within the culture. We had our own political system [and] governmental system in place.

on taking of land

Tonya Gonnella-Frischner, United Nations North American Representative to the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues & Native American Law Alliance

I guess I'll kind of go down in the history of how the United States has treated us.

There was the 1848 Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, then in 1862 there was the Homestead Act. This is the first attempt that was made to break up the collective system of the indigenous peoples.

Then, in 1924, they had what they called the Citizenship Act and in this act, Indians are supposed to become citizens of the United States. You know what? I thought about this a lot as well. If we are citizens of the United States of America, why does the Department of the Interior act as a trustee? It's a question I've always wondered about.

Then in 1934, the Indian Reorganization Act was passed whereby our people now have to have a government based and put out by United States of America. It is not their own, it is not our own type of government. It's a government based on United States' principles; controlled by United States.

In 1946, they enacted the Indian Claims Commission Act under this Act Indian people were paid for the lands. It is not supposed to extinguish any title if there is a title that still exists. We talk in the words of "title" and all of these strange words and so that other people can understand what we are talking about. Under this Indian Claims Commission, somehow very mysteriously in the Western Shoshone case, they found that the land was taken by gradual encroachment in 1872. Now they want to pay us money for this taking of our lands. How do Americans take lands? I understand by reading some of the things in the so-called US Constitution, only government can take lands.

Okay, in 1974, United States brought a lawsuit against Mary and myself, my sister and me. We had cattle on other land and we still believe it is Western Shoshone land. America has not produced a document how the land was transferred to the United States. That is one of the things that Mary and I was said, you know, give us the documentation how the land was taken. They haven't done so yet. Each

one of you that claim to have property, you know you have documentation of what you have, all except for Indigenous peoples. They have no documentation of how their land was taken or how it was transferred to the United States of America. I call that very much so racism. Racism!

In 1979, the Indian Claims Commission awarded Western Shoshone people 26 million dollars, give or take either way a little bit, for over 24 million acres of land. America may sell land. Western Shoshone people and indigenous people can't sell land, because that land is the Earth and it is our Mother. We cannot sell that breasts that feed us not today, not tomorrow or forever. United States brought this lawsuit against me and Mary in 1974, and we went all the way to the Supreme Court of the United States of America.

Somehow, very mysteriously the Indian Land Commission found that our land was taken by gradual encroachment. Is gradual encroachment a law? Is it the law of the United States of America? I don't think so. At least if it is I would like to know where I can find it and read it with my own eyes to see if it is a law. But anyway, that's what they found. The Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals said there's never been a title argument in any courts of United States and the Senate. When we arrived at the Supreme Court of the United States, they've ruled on the ruling of the Indian Claims Commissions findings that our land was taken by gradual encroachment by white settlers and others. You must remember US Constitution says the Federal government not by individuals, or states or anybody else can only take lands. But because we are Indian people, they allowed themselves to take our lands by gradual encroachment, which isn't even the law; at least I don't think it is. But anyway, as we walked through these court systems when the Supreme Court ruled against us, I guess it was a time that I was most devastated in all the court proceeds before us. I mean, it was shocking; it was shocking to me that the highest court in the United States of America based their ruling on a commission's findings. Not a court finding, but on a commissions finding and I think that's wrong ladies and gentlemen. I think the United States Supreme Court was such a racist court that they didn't even realize that we were right. In the House of Representatives Barbara Vucanovich introduced a distribution bill for how these 26 million dollars should be divvied up among the Shoshones. After she retired; James Arthur "Jim' Gibbons, who is now the Governor of the state of Nevada, along with Senator Harry Reid, who is the Senate Majority Leader, started introducing Bills.

The money has never been claimed, yet the United States continues to claim the land.

When I see how people act toward the Indigenous people here in the United States, especially some in the House and the Senate, it is very discouraging as far as I can see. For me it's very discouraging and yet, we have to. I feel like there's times we have to practice our ways and look at it, you know you're suppose to

treat the person next to you as you would treat yourself. Our duty is to look out for the next seven generations to come. Seven generations, that's approximately 140 some odd years. As a representative, we work with our people; that is our duty is to look out for the seven generations to come.

Treaty Rights and Sovereignty of Indigenous Peoples

Julie Fishel, Western Shoshone Defense Project (Nevada)

My name is Julie Fishel; I work at the Western Shoshone Defense Project. My family, my mother's family came here from Ireland during the potato famine. My father's family came here from Germany during the inquisitions in the 1600's, so I am a settler here in this country and I'm very honored to be doing the work that I am doing.

I guess, what I want to say in this overall USSF is that the Indigenous rights issues are the foundation of the human rights struggle in this country. This is Turtle Island. This is Indian country and we have to come to recognition with that and what we've been doing in our organization and the other organizations that are up here and the amazing struggle of the indigenous peoples of Turtle Island of whom only two percent survived the genocide. They are survivors and they are fighting and they're winning. Recently we won a decision of the United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, last year, the first full decision against the United States of America. We won before the Inter-American Commissioner on Human Rights, 10 years of hearings and legal briefings, the United States had attempted every argument, they lost on every argument, they are wrong. So, I think my 60 seconds is up, but please support the original peoples of this land. They were the first homeless, they were the first poor, they were the first terrorized populations of this country and we have to come to terms with it and clean this up!

Self-Determination and Struggles of Hawaiian Natives

Ikaika Hussey, Aloha Aina

To me, it's an amazing testament to the spirit of resilience and resistance that the indigenous peoples of North America and of South America are still here. After 500 years of brutal colonization, oppression, occupation—you name it—it's happened here in North America and South America. I think that, it says a lot about what strength really means. It's not about the ability to inflict violence, which is what Europe and what the United States have tried to do. They have tried to

inflict tremendous amounts of violence, but it's the ability to withstand that violence, the ability to survive in the face of all of those obstacles.

So I want to appreciate that, the strength of these peoples. I want to try to contextualize Hawaii's history, to talk about it just a bit, juxtapose it against Cuba. I'm going to get into a lot of trouble because I'm not an expert on Cuba, but those two places have a lot in common in terms of history. Obviously, Cuba has a much longer colonial history than Hawaii, but they were both sugar plantation colonies of the mainland of North America. They were both places, which the middle class and the wealthier classes of the United States would go on vacation. They were both fantasy playgrounds for, you know, capitalist ideas of what a good time is. They both share a, really an interesting year, the year 1959 was a critical year in Hawaii and also in Cuba. In Cuba it was the year of the Revolution, in Hawaii it was the year of a vote on forced statehood. The question that my immediate ancestors had to answer in the statehood vote was, shall Hawaii be immediately admitted into Union as a State? Yes or no? For those of you who are experts on international law, you know that every people that's colonized, every people that's occupied should have the option, at least of choosing independence, should have the option of choosing free association or integration into the colonizer.

Those choices were not offered to my grandparents and I think that there was a lot of people in Hawaii, first of all, who opposed state-hood, because they remembered, just when they were little children or their grand, or their parents they remembered it being an independent country up until 1893. Secondly, there were also a lot of people, who I think supported state-hood because it was better than being a territory. It meant, being able to vote for the President who sends you off to war.

For a lot of our people in the Pacific, a lot of peoples of color, we have been subject to higher levels of militarization, of forced military service through economic situations than other peoples. That's sort of our history that year in 1959, that year is very important. I'm going to have to guess, but I think that for the United States, seeing what happened in Cuba made them press that button in Hawaii, made them say okay, we've got to have that vote now. We were going to do that in a couple years, but let's do it now because we want to force Hawaii into a position where it has to be at least by force a part of the United States of America. Of course, we've always resisted that. We've had a vibrant independence movement since the beginning of US occupation of Hawaii of 1893. I should mention that Hawaii is a little bit different than other occupied peoples of North America, the indigenous peoples of North America because Hawaii was also recognized as being sort of a Westernized modern nation states similar to the countries of Britain, and France and Germany and so forth. All of those countries

including the United States recognized Hawaii as an independent country. We had full treaties and so forth. On the other hand, it is very similar to the other peoples of North America because the US broke their treaties with Hawaii just as they've done with all of the people here.

So, one of the demands we should expect, or that we should make as progresses as we talk about a new America is that the United States has to live up to its basic obligations, its treaties that are signed with all indigenous peoples. The other connection that Hawaii has with Cuba is that between Guantanamo and Pearl Harbor, which in our language is, [Hawaiian translation] which in the old days was a series of beautiful fishponds, 36 fishponds, with which we could feed ourselves, all of our people. The other connection that we have is that those two bases were the first and second foreign oversees military basis of the United States. They represented the time in which the United States went from being a colonizer on the continents of North America to being an imperial power oversees.

So we enter US history fully in 1898, with the Spanish American War, with the decision to establish a poling station at Pearl Harbor, and the growth of the US as an imperial power. To this day, this has been a burden that we carry and not everyone in Hawaii, or not everyone period is completely aware of this burden, but the fact is that Hawaii is a major launching point for US military imperialism all throughout the world. Here is some basic statistics: 25 percent of the island of Oahu, which is the metropolitan island, is controlled by the military. Throughout the Archipelago, one-sixth of all of the land is controlled by military, and that's just the land. If you go into a movie theatre, you have discounts for military service persons and their dependents, but not a discount for someone who's lived there for two thousand years. Hawaii is militarized to the point where people don't even recognize that it's militarism. It's faded into the background; it's become the paint on the wall. When you drive down the road, the off ramps and the on ramps on the freeway are all military bases.

So there's a degree to which the militarism in Hawaii has become such a pressing problem and, at the same time, it's something that is completely invisible. Tourists come to Hawaii, as some of you may have, and not even recognize it as a problem. It is just Pearl Harbor, "Oh it's the Arizona Memorial! Let's go see the Arizona Memorial!" That's a great common conversation with tourist in Hawaii. What I want to say tonight is to ask for your solidarity in supporting our Independence Movement and our moving for de-militarization. The reason why I'm asking you to do this, obviously it helps the people of Hawaii for you to support our independence movement.

But I would like for you, as US progressives, to support independence for Hawaii because that's part of taking apart the US Empire. Hawaii is one of the first incidents of US imperialism, that's pretty clear historically. It's also one of the

critical bases, the launching points that allow United States to continue to grow as a military power. The planes that flew to the Persian Gulf in the first Persian Gulf War flew from a place about five minutes from my house. Hawaii is bubbling as a military center and the United States depends on that. The US Pacific command, which governs military operations on half the planet, is located in the Halava Valley; it's in a middle of a residential neighborhood. People drive by and they don't even think about it. I'm sure that it doesn't show up on a lot of our radars when you think about militarism. But the fact is it has become very innocuous looking and it's right there and it's inflicting tremendous violence all throughout the world in Iraq, in Afghanistan and other places as well.

The second thing, in my last thirty seconds, is I want to let everyone know that the independence movement like many of the people in Hawaii opposes the Accaca Bill. The Accaca Bill is the bill that would extend federal recognition to the peoples of Hawaii. We've never said that we are Americans. We've never acquiesced to that. The bill also creates specific exemptions for the US military, in Hawaii. To us it's a threat to our independence and to a right to self-determination. It also has erosions of Federal Indian law for all Native peoples.

Self Determination

Pitt River, Resisting Environmental Destruction on Indigenous Lands (REDOIL) Network

My name's Pitt River in Winnpoo. I was raised in Bushright Oil, Arctic Village, Alaska. It's an honor for me to be here today to present on behalf of REDOIL, Resisting Environmental Destruction on Indigenous Lands. I work with indigenous nations throughout Alaska; the Inupiat, Yupik, Aleut, Tlingit, Gwich'in, Eyak and Denaiana Athabascan tribes are part of the REDOIL Network. REDOIL is a movement of the Alaskan natives who are challenging the oil industry and demanding our rights to a safe and healthy environment conducive to subsistence.

We aim to address the human and ecological health impacts brought on by unsustainable fossil fuel development practices and the ensuing effect of catastrophic climate change. We strongly support the self-determination rights of tribes in Alaska, as well as a just transition from fossil fuel development to sustainable economies and sustainable development. I would like to speak to the history of Alaskan natives and why we are in the situation of today, and give a little context to the destruction and legacy of the fossil fuel regime and other forms of exploitation and development in Alaska. Since time immemorial, the land in Alaska belonged to the indigenous peoples of Alaska. Various acts and laws have put into effect a chain of pilferage of native lands in Alaska. For the past couple hundred years, the sovereign authority of Alaskan native peoples has been undermined by both Russia and the United States. Though the question of land title was not settled,

our lands and resources were illegitimately claimed by Russia, and later illegitimately sold to the United States.

On June 20, 1867, the Treaty of Cession proclaimed Alaska as part of the US, after the US bought it for the sum of 2 cents an acre from Russia. The discovery of oil at Prudhoe Bay in 1968, established an alliance of the Federal government and multi-national oil companies to promote their combined interests. This alliance provoked an urgency to further settle the land claims in Alaska, to provide for a right-of-way for the Trans-Alaska Pipeline to access the resources on the North Slope and bring it to market. The US Congress unilaterally passed the Alaskan Native Claims Settlement Act, known as ANCSA, in 1971, to legitimatize US ownership and governs over indigenous peoples, our lands and access to our resources. ANCSA created "for profit" native regional and village corporations and also conveyed our ancestral lands to the newly created corporations instead of existing tribal governments.

Because the US government considered our tribal governments an impediment to assimilation and a threat to a US control in Alaska, the lands which were taken from us through this Act became corporate assets of the newly created state-chartered limited liability for profit native regional and village corporations. The sole purpose of a corporation is profit at all costs. A corporation does not look out for the health and wellbeing of the people. ANCSA changed the dynamics of how Alaskan natives relate to the land, but also how we relate to one another. State and federal promoted economic development interests are aligned with these native corporations that pursue lands and marine ecosystems for economic gain, despite adamant opposition by Alaska's tribes, whose way of life is endangered by such proposals. We are affected by the mining industry, the oil industry, the timber industry and the military. Now the legacy of ANCSA is our ancestral homelands are compromised by exploitation and polluted beyond recreation. Most Alaskan natives believe ANCSA was an illegitimate infringement upon our inherent right to self-determination and subsistence.

Many refuse to acknowledge the validity of the government-created ANCSA native corporations and the act itself. ANCSA was put forth to eliminate average full title to our ancestral territories, to access and exploit our resources, to assimilate Alaskan natives and incorporate us into a Western society and value system, but also to divide and conquer Alaskan natives, the same tactic that the US implements when dealing with indigenous peoples throughout the world. As I speak today, there's also a political movement within Alaska to deliver the final nail in the coffin of ANCSA. The state legislature is actually trying to terminate the tribes of Alaska. This is beng promoted under the guise of regionalization and consolidation of our tribes. We will be put under these native corporations and we will become from 227 tribes in Alaska we will become 13 tribes in Alaska.

If the United States and the state of Alaska can terminate 227 tribes in Alaska they will come south and terminate the tribes of the US in the same way next, and therefore for our people we are standing up, we're strongly upholding our ownership, our authority over our ancestral territories and we're strongly objecting and condemning the theft and its appropriation of our lands, as well as our sovereign rights. It is my hope, in my lifetime; I will see our homelands returned to us, the rightful owners. That is the burden and the responsibility of my generation to correct this passed act and undo these laws for the survival of our peoples. We're defending our lands now, our sovereignty. This elder told me sovereignty is inherent it cannot be granted, nor can it be taken away.

In Alaska, we live a subsistence lifestyle based on the land, the land provides everything we need still to this day our food, our survival, our life, our culture, our spirituality, and our identity. When we talk about subsistence, we're talking about our connection to our lands. What's happening now, is through ANCSA we, our homelands are put forth as national sacrifice areas through attempts to access the remaining lands that native Alaskan natives rely on for subsistence needs for mining, for oil and gas, and other unsustainable fossil fuel development. We have coal power plants coming in now to in new areas, we also have toxic pollution left from military activities.

Alaska is a strategic military site and we are affected by the military. Genocide and ecocide are perpetuated in Alaska and are part of unjust US energy and economic development policy under the guise of Homeland Security to further fuel the war in Iraq and vice versa as the war in Iraq further perpetuates assault on our lands. The same rape of our ancestral lands that has been the consistent policy of the United States for the past 500 years continues today. At this time, there are many areas in Alaska that are under threat and our Alaska native people are in distress due to the sad legacy of ANCSA and the system of forced incorporation. The outer continental shelf almost in its entirety, including 83 million acres of the Cook Inlet, Bristol Bay, Chukchi and Beaufort Sea are now being debated in Congress, now to open to offshore oil and gas development. Shell Oil and Conoco Phillips are waiting to do seismic activity this summer starting in July and we are calling for an emergency stay on that and we're involved in litigation. Other areas such as the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge are at threat.

This is the last 5 percent of America's Arctic coast that's still protected. 95 percent of Alaska is open to oil and gas development. All of you have a say what happens to that area, we need your help, it's still being debated in Congress and there are other areas where industry is looking at; these are the last areas. Teshekpuk Lake of the National Petroleum Reserve of Alaska, this area that brings life to the Inupiat people, their subsistence way of life is dependent upon it. That's also on the chopping block. Lastly, in the Yukon Flats, the US Fish and

Wildlife Service, they're supposed to protect wildlife in this area, but they are negotiating a land exchange with Doyon Native appropriation to facilitate oil and gas development in this national wildlife refuge and facilitate more taking of our lands.

We're standing up to these proposals and this energy policy of the United States; they violate the integrity of our lands and are now felt globally through catastrophic effects of climate imbalance and the warming of the North. We're literally burning in Alaska: We have massive forest fires due to the warming of our lands. We are literally melting. The ice is melting. There are literally towns that are caving off into the ocean from storms that are eroding the coastline and the state refuses to pay one dollar—not even one dollar—to move these communities. So this is what's happening to us up in Alaska.

We're affected by climate change and yet we contribute to it by more fossil fuel development. My people, we have a prophecy, it's called 'The Voice of the North' and it said there's going to come a time in humanity when we are on the brink of destroying ourselves. When that time comes a voice of the north is going to rise and give a warning to all people to change how we live; to change what we're doing. That time is now. All of our survival is at stake. We are calling upon the US to move towards sustainable and renewal energy development. It's time now that 'drill it all' mentality must end now. We must give Mother Earth the time to heal and replenish herself. So I give you part of our burden, part of our responsibility [to] stand up now and speak up against the Bush administration and their energy policy and that regime. Thank you.

on current struggle

Enei Begaye, co-director of the Black Mesa Water Coalition

My name is Enei Begaye and I am of the Diné and Tohono O'odham nations. I am director of the Black Mesa Water Collation, which started out as young Navajo and Hopi people defending our homeland from energy and water mining. Across the ocean, there is a shameful war for oil and energy resources being waged by the United States government and by multi-national corporations. This is a war we should all stand against. At the same time, here in the United States, the so-called United States, there is a war for these same resources being waged by the same government and the same corporations. The Indian wars are not a remnant of history. The Indian wars are not a story of 500 years past.

The battles continue today as you have heard here. I grew up between one of the largest coal mining operations in the US and a whole slue of abandoned uranium mines. As a young woman, and as young as I am, I have seen the casualties of this war for energy. It is not a war of so many guns and bloodshed, but it a war that is killing our lands, our waters, our culture and our future generations. Where

I grew up on the Navajo and Hopi reservation, Peabody Western Coal has been strip-mining Black Mesa for our coal and our water resources for decades. Our people have been forcefully relocated, our families have been divided. Peabody is taking our only source of drinking water and polluting our lands. They are taking the liver and the lifeblood of Mother Earth.

What is happening to my people is happening to many tribes throughout this country. Indigenous people's lands hold most of the last remaining resources here. When Bush said we need to get off foreign dependence of oil he pushed for the US Energy Act, which targeted tribal lands for energy development, giving corporations even more incentives and freedoms to continue the raping of our people, our lands and our waters. Our waters, these industries use huge amounts of water; coal fired power plants sucking up our soul sources of drinking water. Our waters are being privatized and comodified.

Water is a sacred element to our people. Water is life. This war for energy and water cannot be a battle indigenous people's face alone. In my community where coal and water are mined 24 hours a day, most households do not even have running water or electricity. Huge power lines run right over our homes, supplying electricity to Los Angeles, Las Vegas and Phoenix. It is because of this insensible, over consuming appetite of this country that as, that we as indigenous peoples find ourselves continuing to defend our homelands. Our people have prophecies tied to these fossil fuels. We were told to leave them in the ground. For if we don't, we'll cause, they will cause us great harm. We are seeing that now. Climate change is affecting us all. The continued dependence upon fossil fuel energy is threatening to take the, what remains of our people.

This process of global warming threatens us all. In the battle against climate change, we must stand in solidarity with one another, and with those frontline communities, those communities whose resources are being extracted. By standing together, we are also battling climate change. Together we must find ways to conserve and curb our energy consumption. From 1970, to 19 to 2006, it was true that, when you turned on a light in Los Angeles, you were contributing to the destruction of Navajo and Hopi lands, water and culture.

But when enough people of California learn this, they stood up in solidarity, and said: "We don't want our energy to come at this cost". Our Navajo and Hopi communities are now working with Californians in a new innovative plan to that we're calling the Black Mesa Just Transition Campaign. This plan is an effort to build wind and solar plants that are owned by Navajo and Hopi people that will provide electricity to our communities, as well as jobs. That will also be a partnership with California so that the excess of electricity can be sold to Californians. As indigenous peoples, we are still in the battles of the energy and water wars, throughout this continent. There are proposals being pushed, left and right, desert rock,

the uranium mines are pushing to be reopened. Our sacred sites are being threatened.

But there is a path towards peace. The Just Transition Campaign is one example of a single step on this path. It will take all of us to think outside our category, whether it's environmental justice, climate justice, social justice, and economic justice education. We must think outside of these categories. We must think critically and holistically about the solutions to the battles that we face. The continued battle over indigenous people's lands' is directly tied to the action or inaction of everyone here. We must stand together. We must demand that our land and our water are not for sale. Our Mother Earth is not for sale! Thank you.

on breaking cycles

Shash Yazhi, co-moderator, Spirit in Motion

My name is Shash Yazhi. I come from the Bear Clan, born by the Folded Arm people, and both of my grandmas and grandfathers are from Mexico. So, I own that Mexican blood that runs through me. I want to just give one more round of applause and many round of applause for my sisters, brothers, aunties, grandmas, grandfathers stand, give honor to the spirits for continuing to hold this space, of indigenous peoples. It's really important that we continue to hear these stories, these struggles that continue every day. As many of the panelists have said tonight about historical trauma, those traumas that continue to be in our blood, those traumas that continue to hold us back in many forms to healing.

It's time for us to break those cycles. Break these cycles of all these -isms; all these hurts that hold us back, all the sexual abuse, domestic violence, verbal, emotional violence that we continue to do, not only to ourselves, but our partners, our loved ones and our families and our communities. It's about healing. We know where those histories come from, we heard them tonight–extermination, relocation, being taken away. I hear the stories on the land of the Diné country my grandmothers, grandfathers, all these stories are connected. So we hold that into our blood, we hold that in our body. It is our responsibility to break that cycle and as many of the panelists said tonight, because we're here for the next seven generations. We carry these burdens. You know, I wish I could be on the reservation, waking up at four o'clock in the morning, but I've been told to be here.

Because we are messengers, that's a big burden, being on the road, messengers, carrying this message. Now we've delivered this message, now it's your responsibility to deliver the message to your people. When I talk about your people, look at yourself, who are you? Where you come from? Where your roots come from? This is a challenge for you to hold that space. As we have taken on the challenge for ourselves to hold that space. We've talked about the sacred things, about the land, the water, the air, the sun, all these things that bring life and that

connect us to life. Whew. We've forgotten to live sometimes because we've been in survival mode. What I've realized I have a survival tool kit, about five years ago; I replaced that with a life tool kit, life, feeling all the senses.

What are the senses? Feeling, scent, taste, sight and touch. These are the senses that were given to us as gifts. Now I'm going to ask you to go run off and try to find somebody. You know the feeling! But I'm asking you to find yourself because that's where it begins. That's where that rippleness begins. We talk about the water here, the sacredness, when you touch it that ripple opens up. In organizing in this community that we've created here in the social justice world let's stop being afraid of each other. Bring these connections together. Remember the connection between the North, the South and Central Americas, that big Turtle Island that connects us. When I was down with the Kuna women, and with the Kuna people, the Kuna women that came together, one of the elders stood up and said, "I traded with your grandmas, we bartered together, there was no borders there."

What has happened is we've seen those borders and they became in our hearts. So, let's take those borders out of our hearts and open our hearts to one another. We've heard tonight about many struggles from mining, oiling, the oil, the timbering, and the military–all these different things that have affected us and mostly have affected the climate. It's so, so painful to my heart. I saw a documentary about the polar bears drowning, because they're so used to traveling [a certain] distance and now they have to swim and they're dying. [They are all dying] all these relations that are connected to us-the two legged people which are you, the four-legged ones, the winged ones, and the creepy crawly ones. You know my sister; you had an ant walking across on your ear. We took it off, and in Africa those ants means a way of organizing. You know? If you see an ant colony, they have a rhythm they work together.

This is how we have to be. How to get here to this point, just sitting here in front of y'all, out as in (Indian translation), owning that which translates to be too spirited. Being here with my elders, thank you for allowing me to be here and hold this space. Being a Nautli has a lot of responsibilities of holding that male and female in balance, as is the water. Twa, our grandma, and if we could imagine a flame here, we couldn't burn the fire in here, but you know what, I don't think we need to because all of you have fire in your bellies. That is Quant, which is grandfather, so we have grandma and grandpa always walking with us all the time.

What I would like to say is the importance of us all coming together, as many ways that we can. I see all these divisions of this movement, women, youth, environmental, economic, and justice all these movements need to come together and be tied because when you tie it together you become one strength. One of the things I see and I give thanks for the USSF for allowing us as indigenous people to be able to have a space here especially also the march to be in the front. It's

important for you visitors of this Turtle Island, that you walk on to remember to honor and to not take for granted when you get off that plane in Chicago, when you get off that plane in New York, when you get off that plane in Florida, it's your responsibility to honor the nations that caretake for those lands there. Even if you don't know what nation of what tribe they've come from, even the simple honor of touching that earth is saying "

Thank you for allowing me to walk on you." I honor the people who care take for this, to pass that on to others. It is your responsibility to know that, a responsibility to support the original peoples of this land. It is time for us to build partnership, as what was said here, and come from that holistic way of being together. Coming back to harmony, you know in our language, we say [Indian translation] always walking in beauty and harmony. You know my grandmother would always tell me [Indian translation] only you can make your heart feel good. Only you, so stop blaming others and take responsibility. So, I hope I did a good job summarizing. Please, don't leave because we have more to come. And if you continue to stand, ask of you to wave your hands up in the air, all of you are warriors and continue to stand your ground and hold that space. Take everything that was here and everything that has been said and fly!

An Offering

Sharon Lugo

My name is Sharon Lugo and I come from the land of Beautiful Things, which is called El Salvador. I want to offer a song from our Chichi Mecca relatives in the North. It's a song of encouragement. It says, "We are rising, rising. We are coming back to our old ways. We see our reflection in the water and we ask the creator to ignite the fire inside of us."

So, I make this offering to each of you, as a way to encourage and support each and everyone.

Chapter 26

Proposed Resolution to Protect the Human Rights of People Struggling to Return to and Rebuild the Gulf Coast Region in the Aftermath of Hurricanes Katrina & Rita

A PEOPLE'S MOVEMENT ASSEMBLY RESOLUTION

Kimberley Richards,
People's Institute for Survival and Beyond, New Orleans, LA

Monique Harden,
Advocates for Environmental Human Rights, New Orleans, LA

July 1, 2007
Whereas, if another world is possible, another United States is necessary and another South is critical;

Whereas, people around the world witnessed the U.S. government's racist treatment of African Americans in the Gulf Region of the southern United States during Hurricane Katrina;

Whereas, this racist treatment included the federal government's approval of a hurricane evacuation plan designed for people who have access to vehicles and resources for lodging away from the Gulf Coast region, which discriminated against African Americans who do not have access to vehicles and resources for lodging;

Whereas, this racist treatment included the federal government placing the lives of African Americans in jeopardy by failing to immediately transport African Americans to safe haven;

Whereas, this racist treatment included the federal government constructing substandard and ineptly designed levees that were breached by a storm surge that flooded 80% of the city of New Orleans;

Whereas, this racist treatment included the federal government ignoring the eyewitness accounts of African American hurricane survivors living in the Ninth Ward of New Orleans, who heard an explosion at their levee before their homes and neighborhood were inundated with floodwater;

Whereas, this racist treatment included giving law enforcement officers a shoot to kill order that allowed the brutalization, incarceration, and merciless killing of African American hurricane survivors;

Whereas, this racist treatment included law enforcement officers blocking access of mostly African American hurricane survivors to bridges that led to higher and safer ground near the city of New Orleans;

Whereas, this racist treatment included a search and rescue operation that separated African Americans hurricane survivors from family members and brought them far distances without their knowledge or consent;

Whereas, this racist treatment included denying food, water, and shelter to African Americans who were evacuated from the Gulf region;

Whereas, the government continues the injustice to this present day–twenty-two months after Hurricane Katrina–with a privatization scheme that is hostile to the needs and human rights of African American, Vietnamese American, Latino, and poor white people who live in the Gulf Coast region;

Whereas, the post-hurricane governmental programs began with providing lucrative contracts to companies that overstated their expenses while perpetrating wage theft and other abuses on mostly Latino migrant and immigrant workers;

Whereas, a governmental priority of recovery expenditures has not been the rebuilding of homes and communities, but the expansion of the prison industrial complex and the deployment of the national guard to residential neighborhoods in New Orleans;

Whereas, the post-hurricane governmental programs include repairing and upgrading levees and floodwalls in a way that–as of June 2007 and at least through

the end of 2011–will protect predominantly white neighborhoods in New Orleans from flooding, but will not protect any African American neighborhood in New Orleans from flooding;

Whereas, the post-hurricane governmental programs include providing huge tax breaks for private companies seeking to demolish public housing units in New Orleans that were not damaged by the hurricanes and take over other Gulf Coast neighborhoods for the purpose of building golf courses, condominiums and other housing that Gulf Coast residents cannot afford;

Whereas, the post-hurricane governmental programs include replacing public schools and public healthcare facilities with privately owned companies;

Whereas, nearly two years ago, more than 750,000 people from the Gulf Coast were displaced from their homes as a result of Hurricanes Katrina and Rita as well as substandard levees constructed by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers;

Whereas, to this present day, approximately 300,000 people suffer the injustice of prolonged displacement and remain separated from their homes, families, friends, and communities as a result of hostile governmental programs that deny their right to return home, which constitute an ethnic cleansing of New Orleans and the Gulf region;

Whereas, the Robert T. Stafford Act, the federal law establishing governmental responses to national disasters, mandates that the President has complete discretion in responding or not responding to a disaster and its after effects; and establishes that people affected by a disaster have no legal right to any assistance, including emergency medical care and shelter;

Whereas, the United Nations has established the *Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement*, which recognizes that people who are forced to flee their homes as a result of a natural or man-made disaster are internally displaced people, and provides protections for internally displaced people who would otherwise have neither a right to restorative justice nor protection from unfair and abusive treatment by governmental and private entities that unjustly prolong their displacement and deny their right to return;

Whereas, the United Nations' *Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement* prohibits displacement that is aimed at or results in ethnic cleansing or altering the racial, ethnic or religious composition of the affected population;

Whereas, the United Nations' *Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement* establishes the right of displaced persons to request and receive humanitarian assistance and protection, as well as the right to voluntarily to return to their communities or resettle;

Whereas, the United Nations' *Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement* establishes the right of displaced persons to housing that requires governments to provide temporary housing for the duration of the displacement and support the rebuilding of permanent homes;

Whereas, the United Nations' *Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement* establishes the right of displaced persons to education that requires governments to provide education and training facilities as soon as conditions permit;

Whereas, the United Nations' *Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement* establishes the right of displaced persons to healthcare that includes mental health and social services;

Whereas, in international settings, the U.S. government has endorsed the United Nations' *Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement*, encouraged other nations to adopt the *Guiding Principles* as binding national law, and established a foreign policy, *USAID Assistance to Internally Displaced Persons Policy*, which applies the *Guiding Principles* to the assistance that is provided by the U.S. government to displaced people in other countries;

Whereas, social justice and human rights organizations led by African Americans and other people of color in the Gulf Coast region are in the struggle to bring people back home, which involves advocating that the government comply with the United Nations' *Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement*, and seek to build a united front that dismantles the racist and regressive politics and governance controlling our communities in the South;

Therefore, be it resolved that the United States Social Forum ("USSF") People's Assembly stands in solidarity with the people of the Gulf Coast region who are struggling to rebuild their lives and communities and those who remain displaced;

Therefore, be it resolved that the USSF People's Assembly calls for a just, anti-racist, and sustainable rebuilding of the Gulf Coast that ends the U.S. government's human rights violations which have denied mostly African American residents of the Gulf Coast their right to return and rebuild; and have created a new slavery of

mostly Latino migrant and immigrant people whose labor has been brutally exploited in the reconstruction of Gulf Coast communities;

Therefore, be it further resolved that the USSF People's Assembly advocates for federal laws that:

- adopt the rights and duties established by the United Nations' *Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement* in order to protect the human rights of people from the Gulf Coast who are struggling to return to and rebuild their communities, as well as the human rights of all other people who become displaced as a result of a natural or man-made disaster;

- prohibit the exploitation and abuse of people, regardless of status, who work in the reconstruction of communities damaged by a disaster; and

- establish and fund the Gulf Coast Civic Works Project, a civic works program in the Gulf Coast that would create 100,000 rebuilding jobs for the region's residents.

Chapter 27

A PEOPLE'S MOVEMENT ASSEMBLY RESOLUTION

Resolution to Support Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions

Call Against Israel

Free Palestine Alliance

Forty years after Israel's occupation of Gaza and the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, and almost sixty years after the ethnic cleansing of Palestine in the Nakba (catastrophe) of 1948, Palestinians still live under occupation and apartheid. The state of Israel undemocratically controls the lives of the indigenous people of Palestine—as second-class citizens in a Jewish state, as occupied subjects, as resident "aliens" in Jerusalem, and as refugees exiled from their homes since 1948.

The Palestinian struggle for self-determination and freedom reflects the continuing struggles of indigenous peoples, immigrants, and prisoners, poor communities, communities of color and dislocated people in the United States. Moreover, these struggles share the devastation created by the historic and current imperialist agenda of the United States and its Western allies.

The US government and its allies have escalated the implementation of a long-term agenda of securing control of the Middle East/West Asia for its economic, military and political interests. At the center of this agenda is the US and its Western allies' unwavering support for Israel and the leveraging of Israel's confiscation of Palestinian land and its broader designs for the region. Western governments imposed sanctions on the democratically elected Palestinian government led by Hamas, unconscionably compounding the suffering, poverty, and malnutrition caused by the Israeli occupation. The US and the E.U., in collusion with Israel and neighboring states, worked underhandedly to sabotage the Palestinian unity government and to exacerbate factional tensions. The US encouraged the war on and destabilization of Lebanon last summer, and is supporting the current shelling of defenseless Palestinian refugees living in the Nahr-El-Bared refugee camp, with the silent approval of governments around the world.

To date, official diplomacy has failed in enforcing countless UN resolutions and relevant principles of international law aimed at ending Israel's occupation, colonization, displacement and dispossession of the Palestinian people. While Israel is allowed to act with impunity, Palestinian rights and concerns have been erased from the international agenda. As governments continually fail to hold a belligerent state up to the standards of international law, peoples' movements must intervene to ensure respect for human rights and self-determination.

American military investment that is required to maintain the US occupation of Iraq and the Israeli occupation of Palestinian correspond with a divestment from education and health care, and a decrease in employment options. This leaves youth from poor communities and communities of color with few options for their futures other than prison or the military.

The key to our struggle against US imperialism abroad and at home is the building of solidarity between Palestine activists in the US and domestic struggles that oppose war, dispossession, and attacks on marginalized and oppressed communities at home and abroad. We condemn the walls, barriers and prisons built to divide and destroy communities in the US as well as in Palestine. We affirm that the call to Boycott, Divestments, and Sanctions (BDS) is part of a larger struggle against militarization, colonialism, and global systems of apartheid.

Echoing the demands included in the Palestinian Civil Society call for BDS in July 2005 and reaffirmed in the joint statement of Palestinian civil society to the World Social Forum in January 2007, and inspired by the struggle against apartheid in South Africa, we resolve to support a comprehensive BDS campaign against Israel until it complies with its obligations under international law by:

1. Ending its occupation and colonization of all Arab lands and dismantling the wall,

2. Ending its system of racial discrimination and recognizing the fundamental rights of the Arab-Palestinian citizens of Israel, including their right to full equality,

3. Recognizing the right of Palestinian refugees, including Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs), to return to their homes and properties, as stipulated in UN General Assembly resolution 194.

We bring our solidarity to domestic and other global struggles for liberation and request your participation in the following Call to Action.

We call on our friends and allies to endorse the call for BDS issued by Palestinian civil society.

We call on our friends and allies to support the Global Day of Action against the Apartheid Wall in November 2008.

We call on our friends and allies to support and participate in the Fourth International Israeli Apartheid Week in February 2008.

We call on our friends and allies to prepare for mass commemoration of the 60th anniversary of the Palestinian Nakba (Catastrophe) in May 2008 and throughout that year.

We call on our friends and allies to support the first grassroots Popular Palestinian National Conference "Claiming our Voice, Asserting our Narrative" organized for and by Palestinians in North America to be held in Chicago, Illinois, on August 8, 2008.

Chapter 28

Liberating Gender and Sexuality

Andrea Smith
Incite! Women of Color Against Violence

In forums such as the USSF or WSF, discussions on gender and sexuality are often reduced to discussions on the status of women or LGBT communities. What we pay less attention to is how the logic of heteropatriarchy fundamentally structures colonialism, white supremacy and capitalism. To look at how heteropatriarchy is the building block of US empire, we can turn to the writings of the Christian Right. For example, Christian Right activist and founder of Prison Fellowship, Charles Colson makes the connection between homosexuality and the nation-state in his analysis of the war on terror, explaining that one of the causes of terrorism is same-sex marriage:

> Marriage is the traditional building block of human society, intended both to unite couples and bring children into the world. . .There is a natural moral order for the family. . .The family, led by a married mother and father, is the best available structure for both child-rearing and cultural health. Marriage is not a private institution designed solely for the individual gratification of its participants. If we fail to enact a Federal Marriage Amendment, we can expect, not just more family breakdown, but also more criminals behind bars and more chaos in our streets. It's like handing moral weapons of mass destruction to those who would use America's depravity to recruit more snipers, more hijackers, and more suicide bombers.
>
> When radical Islamists see American women abusing Muslim men, as they did in the Abu Ghraib prison, and when they see news coverage of same-sex couples being "married" in US towns, we make our kind of freedom abhorrent–the kind they see as a blot on Allah's creation. [We must preserve traditional marriage in order to] protect the United States from those who would use our depravity to destroy us.

The implicit assumption in this analysis is that heteropatriachy is the building block of empire. Colson is linking the well-being of US empire to the well-being of the heteropatriarchal family. Heteropatriarchy is the logic that makes social hierarchy seem natural. Just as the patriarchs rule the family, the elites of the nation-

state rule their citizens. Consequently, when colonists first came to this land they saw the necessity of instilling patriarchy in Native communities because they realized that indigenous peoples would not accept colonial domination if their own indigenous societies were not structured on the basis of social hierarchy. Patriarchy in turns rests on a gender-binary system; hence it is not a coincidence that colonizers also targeted indigenous peoples who did not fit within this binary model. In addition, gender violence is a primary tool of colonialism and white supremacy. Colonizers did not just kill off indigenous peoples in this land, but Native massacres were always accompanied by sexual mutilation and rape. The goal of colonialism is not just to kill colonized peoples, but to destroy their sense of being people. It is through sexual violence that a colonizing group attempts to render a colonized peoples as inherently rapable, their lands inherently invadable, and their resources inherently extractable.

Unfortunately, it is not only the Christian Right, but our own progressive movements which often fail to critique heteropatriarchy. The issue is not simply how women are treated in the movement; rather heteropatriarchy fundamentally shapes how we think to resist and organize in countless ways.

First, because we have not challenged heteropatriarchy, we have deeply internalized the notion that social hierarchy is natural and inevitable, thus undermining our ability to create movements for social change that do not replicate the structures of domination that we seek to eradicate. Whether it is the neo-colonial middle managers of the non-profit industrial complex or the revolutionary vanguard elite, the assumption is that patriarchs of any gender are required to manage and police the revolutionary family. Any liberation struggle that does not challenge heteronormativity cannot substantially challenge colonialism or white supremacy. Rather, as Cathy Cohen contends, such struggles will maintain colonialism based on a politics of secondary marginalization where the most elite class of these groups will further their aspiration on the backs of those most marginalized within the community.

Second, our sense of social hierarchy as natural then limits our revolutionary imagination. For instance, the theme of the USSF is "Another World is Possible: Another US is Necessary." But the critical question we must ask ourselves is, if another world is possible, then is the US itself necessary? If we put all our revolutionary imaginations together, is the best thing we can come up with a kinder, gentler settler colonial nation-state based on slavery and genocide? This is where we should be informed by indigenous peoples' (particularly indigenous women's) struggles to re-imagine nationhood without nation-states. The indigenous models of nationhood are based on nations as inclusive rather than exclusive, based on respect and responsibility for land rather than control over territory, and are governed on principles of mutual respect, interrelatedness and responsibility for a

larger world, rather than governed through violence, domination, and social hierarchy.

Third, our organizing often follows a gendered model that is based on a split between private and public spheres. That is, in the public sphere of social protest, we are supposed to be completely together people who have no problems. However, when it turns out we do have a problem, we are supposed to address those problems in the private sphere–at home, or through social services. Because we cannot bring our whole selves to the movement, we then end up undermining our work through personal dysfunctionality that cannot be publicly addressed. In addition, when we think to work collectively, our collective action is confined to the public spheres of protests and other actions. But our movements do not think to collectivize the work that is seen as part of the private sphere, such as daycare, cooking and tending to our basic needs. Consequently, we build movements that are accessible to very few people and which are particularly burdensome for women who often are responsible for caretaking in the private sphere.

Finally, because we lack an intersectional analysis of how heteropatriarchy structures white supremacy and colonialism, we end up developing organizing strategies that are problematic to say the least. To name but a few examples: We have anti-violence groups supporting the bombing of Afghanistan in order to save women from the Taliban, and we have these same groups supporting the build-up of the prison industrial complex by relying on criminalization as the primary strategy for ending domestic and sexual violence. These groups fail to see how the state itself is the primary perpetrator of violence against women, particularly women of color, and that state violence in the form of either the military or prison industrial complex is not going to liberate anyone. We have racial and anti-war groups meanwhile organizing against state violence in Iraq and elsewhere, but cannot seem to do anything about ending violence against women in their own organizations. These groups fail to see that it is primarily through sexual violence that colonialism and white supremacy work. And then we have mainstream reproductive rights and environmental groups supporting population control policies in order to save the world from poverty and environmental destruction, thus blaming women of color for the policies wrought by corporate and government elites, thus letting these elites off the hook. In all these cases and many more, activists fail to recognize that if we do not address heteropatriarchy, we do not just undermine the status of women, but we fundamentally undermine our struggles for social justice for everyone.

Thus, if we are not serious about dismantling heteropatriarchy, then we are not serious about ending colonialism or white supremacy. We might as well go home and tell all the Christian Right activists to retire because we will be doing their job for them.

Chapter 29

FEMINISM

Gender, Race & Class

Lessons Learned & Today's Moment

Rose M. Brewer

and

Walda Katz-Fishman

We want to share lessons learned from our histories of struggle and what this moment teaches us–as feminists, as movement builders, as revolutionaries. Historically and today the "movement of women"–that is women who are in motion and struggle–is often not the same thing as the "women's movement" and is, in fact, broader and more diverse. Our movement needs to be grounded and inclusive of the "movement of women"–girls and women who are poor, working class and from communities of color, from queer communities and in struggle.

The feminist movement has long been internally divided along lines of race and class. And race and class, as well as gender/sexuality have divided the larger movement for liberation and transformation. In the early 21st century, we face a profound choice about the future of humanity and the planet and how we build today's movement. After centuries of struggle and some twentieth century reforms and gains in the political and economic wellbeing of women, workers, communities of color, and queer communities, this moment is one of attack and rollback of these reforms. The reality is growing poverty and all its ills, and growing state violence and war in our communities and in communities around the world–the Middle East, Africa, Asia, and the Americas. At the same time the technological revolution means we have an abundance of all the things we need, and only the system of private property and maximum profits blocks us from accessing the basic necessities of life.

The question and the challenge is:

> Are we going to move from a defensive posture to pursue a vision of a truly just, egalitarian and cooperative world? Will we allow our diversity to be used against us, to divide us or will we use the wholeness, the richness and the diversity of our feminism and our humanity to broaden and deepen our struggles and our movement?

Grounding Our Struggles Theoretically: Intersectionalities, Relationalities and Simultaneities

We understand that practice is always deeply informed by theory and the world is remade in the context of the dynamic interplay of theory and practice–praxis. One of the most significant insights from women in motion on the ground and in the way we theorize our world is the articulation of how deeply race, class, and gender operate in deep interplay and simultaneously in the world. The Third World Women's Alliance of SNCC, The Combahee River Collective, Latina/Chicana, Indigenous/Native and Asian feminist activists, and transnational feminists have all articulated and struggled with this fundamental insight. Racism and white supremacy involves simultaneity, interaction and relationality with sexism and classism, hetereonormativity and ableism. The deep relationality of these social forces is expressed explicitly in the histories. Racism, colonialism and imperialism and this recent period of neoliberalism deeply and profoundly are intertwined with women of all groups being inferiorized; and black, brown and yellow men were "feminized". Black women were "masculinized" and sexualized; and Asian women were sexualized and exploited. Latinas were sexualized as well as exploited as workhorses. Native women were sexualized and killed. Race is called into being simultaneously around the making of whiteness and the othering of "nonwhites." Whiteness is made as are these other identities. Race is called into being in deep relationality to the expropriation of labor, enslavement, land theft, and the making of empire. Hetereonomativity is encoded in the very acts of colonialism, imperialism, transnational capitalism.

Unity of Theory and Practice

If our theory and understanding of gender/sexuality exploitation and oppression is not within a structural, holistic and historical framework, then our political practice of transformation and liberatory gender/sexuality work will not take us to where we need to go. At same time, we know the systemic and structural roots–today's global neoliberal capitalism and imperialism are thoroughly white supremacist, patriarchal and homophobic to the core. The analysis and vision within our theory also has to reflect the transformative, revolutionary process that is an objective process in society situated in material, technological and economic forces. We cannot resolve and end the oppressions that come with patriarchy and homophobia within the structures and systems of today's global capitalism and its increasingly fascist state.

Whenever our struggles converged into a powerful movement, it was because people united theory and practice–they acted, reflected, and were intentional about the intellectual and subjective side of the movement as well as the

action side. We have to organize study circles and popular education to insure the broadest and deepest popular participation in the movement and to develop collective leadership from all sectors of society. We have to connect university-based intellectuals and movement-based intellectuals in a meaningful way within the movement building process so theorizing is rooted in political practice, practice is grounded in living theory, and both sections of society are part of the emerging social movement.

Historical Context & Lessons Learned

History is a powerful teacher and we want to share some historical moments and lessons that situate us within the broader feminist and liberation struggles. We speak to those movement moments that inform our feminist and revolutionary consciousness and practice, and lessons learned from these historical processes. We each focus on four brief movement moments in our lives and struggles.

ROSE

1) Growing up in a city that was bombed and burned in early period of US terrorism and racial apartheid. North Tulsa, Black Tulsa's business district was burned to the ground in 1921. At least 300 people were killed, countless homes were destroyed and the Black population removed from the city.

Lessons

- The Black community must and did fight back even in the midst of ethnic cleansing and murder.

- This resistive spirit was passed on to the following generations. I learned that the spirit must be planted, reaffirmed through our history, our commitment to freedom, and our communal obligations.

- I was nurtured in this spirit–expected to resist, challenge and fight back against those forces that were bent on destroying my people and me, if not physically, psychically and I was expected to pass it on.

2) Coming of age during the late 1960s and getting involved in political activism and the Black Student Movement powerfully shaped me. We made demands. We created Black cultural centers and student unions. We began to fight for Black women's voices and political agency. We tried to challenge higher education to its very foundation, fueled by the courage and commitment of everyday people who were putting their lives on the line and often dying for the Black liberation.

Lessons

- Righteous Civil Rights movement, revolutionary decolonization movements—from the streets into the academy and back out again are important. Ideas matter, but youth in the academy need to work in deep relation with struggles on the ground.

- It was largely the insights and struggles of the Black Women's Liberation Committee of SNCC (later becoming the Black Women's Liberation Committee) that was key to the emergence of Black feminist thinking today as Linda Burnham righteously points out. I later came to know women like Frances M. Beal through the work in the formation of the Black Radical Congress. Organic intellectuals are central to our struggle.

3) Black Radical Feminism and the struggle for Black Studies and developing a critical Black women's studies routed in the theory and practice of intersectionality.

Lessons

- Capitalist racialized hetereonormative patriarchy is the core systemic dynamic confronting women in the US and globally.

- This dynamic is relational and takes an especially insidious form in the context of working class and poor women.

- Revolutionary practice must be connected to revolutionary theory. This means locating a critical Black Women's Studies not only in theory but global transnational feminist struggles.

- Those of us who spend time in the academy must reclaim a tradition of study and struggle, creating the critical classroom with education for liberation and movement building.

4) The struggle for a Black radical feminist space within the Black Radical Congress and the formation of the Black Radical Feminist Caucus was highly shaping of my current political vision.

Lessons

These lessons are taken directly from the Principles of Unity of the Black Radical Congress http://www.blackradicalcongress.org, struggled for by LGBTQ and Black radical feminists within the Black Radical Congress, articles IX and X:

- IX. We will fight for gender equality, for women's liberation, and for women's rights to be recognized as human rights in all areas of personal, social, economic and political life. We will work to create a society and world in which women of African descent, along with their sisters of other colors, nationalities and backgrounds, shall enjoy non-discriminatory access to the education, training and occupations of their choice. We will struggle to ensure that all women enjoy equal access to quality health care and full reproductive rights, including the right to determine when or whether they will bear children and the right to a safe, legal abortion. We will fight to end domestic abuse and sexual harassment in the workplace.

- X. We recognize lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people as full and equal members of society, and of our communities. We affirm the right of all people to love whom they choose, to openly express their sexuality, and to live in the family units that meet their needs. We will fight against homophobia, and we support anti-homophobic instruction in public schools. We will fight for effective legal protections for the civil rights and civil liberties of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people, and we demand that violence and murder committed against such people be prosecuted as hate crimes. We will also fight to end discrimination against this sector in employment, health care, social welfare and other areas.

WALDA

1) Growing up during Jim Crow–fascism, racial and class apartheid, and sexism–southern style in New Orleans and accompanying my family in the 1950s and 60s in the Black freedom struggles of the Civil Rights Movement; and being part of much smaller efforts as a teenager and young woman to end sexism in the spaces I was in, especially in sports and school.

Lessons

- Working class Black women were central to the Black freedom struggles and the Civil Rights Movement. Women across race, religion, class were powerful, strong and part of the leadership that held things together on the ground, though we were not often acknowledged publicly–despite and/or because of state and social patriarchy and paternalism around gender as well as race.

- The movement struggles and reforms of this era changed laws and policies of white supremacy and sexism–but left intact the underlying structures of capitalism and imperialism, and left sexism, white supremacy, poverty and economic inequality as entrenched realities of daily life.

- Realities that the destruction of hurricanes Katrina & Rita in New Orleans and the Gulf Coast unmasked in 2005 and that our movement must address and is struggling to address.

2) In Detroit in the late 1960s, participating in the anti-war/anti-imperialist movement; becoming a Marxist feminist in the city where the League of Revolutionary Black Workers in the auto plants was forging a revolutionary analysis of race and class, capitalism and imperialism, and gender.

Lessons

- Despite a powerful and profound anti-imperialist analysis on campuses involved in the anti-war movement, it lacked a race and gender/sexuality analysis and an inclusive practice; and was more open to white women than to women and men of color.

- The transformative power of theory to shape our lives and our practice–if we understand theory as a living theory to be applied to historical processes and political struggles as they unfold and develop, rather than as dogma and doctrine that is rigid and disconnected from reality and new objective conditions emerging in society and the economy.

3) Participating in the Marxist feminist movement among "left/Marxist" intellectuals/academics; and working in various tendencies of the women's movement–working class and revolutionary trends and bourgeois/petty bourgeois trends in 1970s, and '80s. Analysis of anti-ERA among working class women linked to labor struggles–"right-to-work" and Taft-Hartley 14B pervasive in the South. Mainstream women's movement–too often about pay equity and affirmative action for existing jobs, but not really about jobs for all; about getting rid of the "glass ceiling" for largely white middle class women.

Lessons

- Disconnect between theory and practice among left/Marxist intellectu als/academics as legacy of McCarthyism,

COINTELPRO and the ebb in the popular movement in 1970s, ’80s, and ’90s. A white Marxist mostly male “left” emerged that was disconnected from gender/sexuality and race as core oppressions in society and fundamental realities of daily life in the U.S. Marxist feminism spoke to the interrelationship of patriarchy and capitalism; but remained outside a deep race analysis–which in the US context is key to any living Marxist and liberatory analysis and practice.

- The more working class, closer to the ground, closer to struggle, the more inclusive of an intersectional and holistic analysis that looks at poverty and class in the context of gender/sexuality and race/nationality, vision and strategic practice.

4) Participating in revolutionary Marxist feminist movement trends and building today’s popular movement for justice and equality across gender/sexuality, race/nationality, class, age, ability.

Lessons

- Work in the revolutionary movement and grassroots sector is more grounded in working class realities, historic and contemporary analysis of patriarchy/sexuality, white supremacy, capitalism and imperialism.

- Our movement building practice still needs work to move beyond divisions and errors of the past.

- We need to go from describing the many problems we face to visioning the transformed and fundamentally new society and world we are fighting for, and developing a practice and a long-term revolutionary strategy and tactics (day to day).

We need to build and see ourselves as part of a broad, deep and converged movement that is multi-issue, multi-sector and puts the program and leadership of those most adversely affected–poor and working class women of color and others–at the center.

Going forward we have to deeply revisit our analysis, our vision, our strategy and tactics for building an inclusive movement of women and girls in all our diversity that is an essential aspect of our larger movement for liberation and transformation.

Chapter 30

Rising from the Grassroots

Leonora Tisdale, Kiyoko McCrae and Jordan Flaherty,
Left Turn Magazine

A breathtaking and unprecedented array of leaders and activists from grassroots movements across the US spent months building for the US Social Forum. Activists and organizers strategized and planned—not just how to get there, but more importantly how best to use the USSF as a tool to support their organizing, and to connect their work with broader movements. Formerly incarcerated and their family and friends from across the US organized a "family reunion." High school and college students organized in their schools. Bus caravans traveled from points across the US. Snapshots from the preparations for the USSF follow.

Rev. Kenneth Glasgow, Founder of The Ordinary People Society (T.O.P.S.), Dothan, Alabama, www.wearetops.org

T.O.P.S. is a nonprofit, faith-based organization that offers hope, without regard to race sex, creed, color or social status, to individuals and their families who suffer the effects of drug addiction, incarceration, homelessness, unemployment, hunger and illness, through comprehensive faith-based programs that provide a continuum of unconditional acceptance and care.

What is the work you're involved in?

All of our work is based on Matthew verses 25-36. We feed the hungry, clothe the naked, we have a feeding ministry, we do gang prevention and intervention for at risk youth, we also do an elderly project, we get the ex-felons to be the ones who do this, to bring food and assistance, including meals on wheels.

How do you see the work you're doing intersecting with a larger movement or movements?

The Prison Industrial Complex is a vast growing and money making complex. If you look at the issues we face, if you look at the money that's spent to lock people up, it all fits into a larger movement. There are people who don't have voting rights because they were in prison, or because they are immigrants. You have people oppressed because they can't get housing. It's not how our work fits into the movement, it's how the movement fits into all these issues.

How do you see the USSF relating with your work?

I was on crack, and in prison, for twelve years. For people who have been to prison, there are different rules. There is a hierarchy in society. That hierarchy not only makes the laws, but classifies the people. The USSF is about addressing that inequality, addressing the other inequalities that exist, and facing that oppression so people feel the space to express that.

All of us are suffering separately. When we come together, we see the power of all of us. In coming together, we can see the connection between us.

We're putting together a family reunion at the USSF. It's for the formerly incarcerated, their family and friends, to get together. It is a reunion of all of us affected by these issues. We want to come together, in this space, across different backgrounds, across regions; it's an open space to meet each other, to see how we can be stronger together.

At least 100 people from our organization will be at the USSF. We're working towards bringing at least 400-500 people from Alabama.

Aubry Jeanjacques, Youth Organizer, People's Institute for Survival and Beyond, New Orleans, Louisiana, www.pisab.org

The People's Institute for Survival and Beyond is a national and international collective of anti-racist, multicultural community organizers and educators dedicated to building an effective movement for social transformation. The People's Institute considers racism the primary barrier preventing communities from building effective coalitions and overcoming institutionalized oppression and inequities.

What is the work you're involved in?

I'm a trainer in training for the People's Institute. The People's Institute was founded in 1980 by the late Dr. Jim Dunn, and Ron Chisolm, who met up at a training around organizing, liked each other's perspectives and analyses and started it.

They recognized that the work couldn't be done without youth presence in the work they were doing. You gotta have someone to pass the torch to. The Freedom School in New Orleans was organized by Kool Black (Robert Horton) to teach kids about racism, community organizing, and leadership development. In 1999, I attended Kool Black's summer camp—it was run in the St. Thomas housing development. Kool knew that young folks should be having conversations about racism. We only knew racism as lynchings, dogs attacking, and stuff, and we weren't seeing that anymore. Where does racism stand now if that's not happening? So we started understanding racism as a mental state of mind.

My eleven-year-old sister kept bugging me about going to this camp. I kept hearing it as "school" and I don't want to go voluntarily to school in the summer.

But Kool is the MAN to a lot of young males, and he called and asked me to come. How could I say no to a guy who's played such an amazing role in my life, who I look at like a father, you know?

I got there and saw lots of other young Black males there who were interested in the work. That kept me there. They weren't too cool to be doing what they were doing. I grew up in St. Thomas, spent my whole life in projects. Only thing I had seen was dealing drugs and damn near in jail. All the Black males was in all that kind of hype like that. So I see other kids who looked like me, walked like me, talked like me, and I thought, "Well damn! Here's other young black males really involved, really concerned with others' well being, not just themselves."

How do you see the work you're doing intersecting with a larger movement or movements?

A lot of times I don't see the work we're doing here connecting until I travel and tell other folks about what I'm doing. I really don't see a lot of times my work as tied to anywhere but New Orleans. You can't go into other folks' back yards and fix that unless your's is straight. I want to make sure New Orleans is straight, my hometown is straight. Other folks in other places say you're pretty much doing the same work we're doing. I would say that as long as I'm doing the work that I am here in New Orleans, I see it contributing.

How do you see the USSF relating with your work?

The Freedom School national trip this year is to the USSF. To have thousands of young folks, people doing work around social change and racism—it'd be a blast to have people together.

It's important to have a full session around Hurricane Katrina. A lot of folks are confused, like, damn, why did that happen? You want to know what racism is? Hurricane Katrina is it. A lot of folks not from New Orleans are confused about what happened. Folks from around the country want to have that conversation.

Carlos Jimenez
Student Labor Action Project (SLAP)
National Coordinator, Washington, DC, www.studentlabor.org

SLAP supports, advises, and solidifies the student-labor work that is energizing campuses and communities across the country. SLAP has maximized the depth and breadth of this new student movement by facilitating networking, training, material development, and technical assistance for student activists. SLAP is a network of students from a wide array of student organizations that cut across a diverse grouping of students.

What is the work you're involved in?

We work to engage students around issues of economic justice, such as worker's rights on and off campus, living wages, immigrant worker rights, access to education…and ensure that those issues are also being brought out to the broader local community, integrating and forming cohesive relationships in communities.

We work with lots of different groups—student-labor groups, student of color organizations, student governments, faith based organizations...We are a resource and want to be useful to students.

Right now, we just wrapped up helping coordinate the National Student Labor Week of Action that saw around 200 actions from March 31-April 4. We're working to sustain the same work of campus-community link, and in the coming year we're looking to kick up the level and intensity on living wage campaigns cross the country after the merging in of the Living Wage Action Coalition. Local campaigns driven by local needs, issues of economic rights, training, strategy, fluidity and continuation—that's what we're working on.

How do you see the work you're doing intersecting with a larger movement or movements?

We're set up from the get-go to make sure students are connecting to others organizing in the local community. And not only the usual suspects, but making sure students of color, women, LGBTQ folks specifically are involved and taking on issues affecting our communities.

We're all the time working on issues that effect the larger community, that just one campus, one town. Our work links the work on one campus to similar work going on in other places. The USSF is bringing together all these folks to do something like that—to create a bigger network. It's so important, collaborating with one another to launch cohesive campaigns.

How do you see the USSF relating with your work?

It's an opportunity to have strategic access to a lot of folks. The USSF is a way to connect people working on issues in different parts of the country, as a time for trainings and teaching for students, and as a way to get people really excited to continue doing the work they're doing.

We're trying to get a coalition of students from key cities together. We've developed scholarships for folks from Miami, Philly, Chicago, California, Boston, Wisconsin, Oregon—folks who will be working intensively on campaigns in the next year to all be there to get trained, get ideas to bring back home, meet one another and connect.

We're organizing broad delegations from campuses to get folks trained, connected to each other and excited. We've been asking ourselves how to support a

lot of this work, and how to be a real resource and of assistance to students. Hopefully we'll help about 50-60 students in coming.

One of the main things we want to get out of the conference is a bigger plenary, or broader discussion, on local and national levels of the college organizing scope. We want to unite activism in college campuses around lots of issues—antiwar, reproductive rights, access to education, environmental and economic justice. To use the USSF as means for coming together.

Genaro Rendon, Director of the Southwest Workers Union
San Antonio, Texas, www.swunion.org

SWU is a grassroots, multi-issue membership based organization representing over 2700 school workers, youth and community members.

What is the work you're involved in?

Our focus is on environmental justice, labor justice, youth empowerment and youth organizing, and border justice. Cutting across all of those areas, we do leadership and membership development trainings. We want all of our members to be up to speed and savvy about what's going on, to have a political education. Membership building is the other piece that cuts across it all—to have the power to converge people.

How do you see the work you're doing intersecting with a larger movement or movements?

Internationally we're building relations with international allies. The vision is global. How does our work contribute to the larger struggle? We're continually asking ourselves that.

How do you see the USSF relating with your work?

We're part of the People's Freedom Caravan that's leaving from Albuquerque, New Mexico on June 22. Two buses of about 100 people will drive to San Antonio. In San Antonio we'll be joined by another 50 people—we'll have a daylong program, a march, barbeque, and cultural night. The next day we drive to Houston for a local event there. Then an action in Lake Charles, Louisiana at the Southwest Louisiana Chamber of Commerce, then on to New Orleans.

New Orleans is working on four buses—one to go North with the rest of the Caravan and other ones to move East along the Gulf Coast, along I-10 through Mobile, then North and all the buses will converge in Selma/Montgomery. Wednesday morning, June 27, we'll be rolling into Atlanta with at least 500-700 people.

It's creating a space to not just show up individually. To bring the USSF to each city, so people will know some of the voices and stories of folks who can't

participate. In every town we're gonna have a culture share, folks can come out and be part of the USSF even if they can't go themselves. We'll have banners with messages from each city—folks in towns the buses pass through can write messages, stories, whatever on banners that will be hung in tents and other spaces at the USSF. The Freedom Caravan is based on the summer Freedom Rides through the South in 1961.

The USSF is an open space that gives credibility to every movement. Everybody coming together is a sign of power, sign of convergence. We have to galvanize force and come out with some concrete measures for change.

We're looking specifically at the South and Southwest—the historical nature of colonialism and slavery. Currently Blacks and Latinos are wedged against each other by the mainstream media. But the similarities are more prevalent than differences—our working class background, our histories of struggle, food, culture. We need to be uniting as organizations and regions. The South by Southwest tent at the USSF will be space to come together, work to create some power in these two areas.

Teresa Almaguer, Youth Program Coordinator of PODER
(People Organizing to Demand Environmental and Economic Rights)
San Francisco, CA, www.podersf.org

PODER is a grassroots environmental justice organization based in San Francisco's Mission District. PODER's mission is to organize with Mission residents to work on local solutions to issues facing low-income communities and communities of color. PODER believes that the solutions to community problems depend on the active participation of all people in decision-making processes.

What is the work you're involved in?

We're 16-years-old, founded in the Mission district in San Francisco. We work on environmental justice issues, primarily in the Latino community to improve the quality of life.

Gentrification has led us to do popular education on developers. The community has a voice and leadership development is a way to channel that voice. We are always trying to get more community participation. We ask ourselves, how do we build assets? How do we increase the number of homeowners? Our neighborhood is disappearing. Our communities are being dispersed.

We develop youth leadership. The youth work on a hands-on campaign, under the principle that we are the experts in the neighborhood and are therefore best suited to address the problems in our communities. The youth do research, surveys, organize community meetings and trainings, and advocate on behalf of their community.

We use all kinds of avenues for social change. In the past, youth have also worked on city planning. If there is a space available in the community, who is going to have access to it? What will be built on it? What opportunities will be available for youth?

We have an Environmental Justice program that combines these issues with housing issues. We work with cross-cultural leadership—Chinese and Latinos—through the Chinese Progressive Association. Both communities live in the same neighborhoods and face a lot of the same problems, like lack of resources and access to resources.

How do you see the work you're doing intersecting with a larger movement or movements?

We are part of an international community because we work with immigrants. Latin America is always in our hearts. We are constantly faced with the question of why people are unable to stay in their homes in Latin America and have to move here. Good jobs, union jobs are leaving and causing unemployment in the United States. It is important to make those connections. Environmental justice is not just for us, locally. It's an issue that affects many communities. How do we all work together to achieve environmental justice? We contribute to the larger movement by building leadership in our own communities.

How do you see the USSF relating with your work?

The USSF is an opportunity to build and expand on ideas and energy and support one another. As of now 25 members are going, 18 of which are under 18.

Through their participation in the Youth Organizing Training Institute with the Southwest Network for Environmental and Economic Justice, a network of 60 affiliate organization, our youth members will be linking with other youth groups and learn from one another.

We will be driving there. Many of our members are families. Youth in the program go through training and often their parents are training them. They are given a lot of support and encouragement. We try to be as intergenerational as possible. I grew out of the youth movement, which can be isolating. I like to think of social change as being most effective when the work is intergenerational.

We will organize a training day before and throughout the USSF to educate youth about global justice issues and the civil rights movement. Project South is organizing a civil rights tour for our youth. I feel that this is very important that our members, especially our youth, so they don't feel lost throughout the USSF. We would like our members to take part in meaningful exchanges and be really trying to have a voice in the process. It's important to try to make the movement exciting and not get bored by intellectuals. We are thinking about how to meaningfully

participate, and to carry the work forward and plan actions locally. We want to be able to contribute what we have learned to others.

In the Bay area, planning for the USSF has brought many organizations together. We have been focusing on fundraising and political education workshops to talk about the different issues that will be raised at the USSF. We would like to collaborate with other organizations to work together after the USSF. We have already started networking with other organizations and look forward to networking more at the USSF. Also, our members will be joining the Gulf Coast People's Caravan in New Orleans.

Casandra Stewart, Youth Intern with the Southwest Organizing Project, Albuquerque, New Mexico, www.swop.net

SWOP is a statewide multi-racial, multi-issue, community based membership organization. Since 1980, SWOP has worked to make it possible for thousands of New Mexicans to begin to have a place and voice in social, economic and environmental decisions that affect their lives. Their mission is "working to empower our communities to realize racial and gender equality and social and economic justice."

What is the work you're involved in?

It's a grassroots, community based organization. We work to empower the disenfranchised. We work with poor communities of color to make gender and racial equality a reality and to create social and economic justice.

We do door knocking. We talk about issues in the community. We get people involved in issues they see as pressing. We do a lot of empowerment work. We don't speak for people, we go and find out what people care and are concerned about and work with them.

We have a youth rights campaign—we want to give young people better options, better choices than war or prison. We've been working on getting into schools. The administrations are so afraid to let people hear the other side. We're working with the school board too—to exercise our right to present alternatives to students. But it's hard to get access. In lower-income schools, administrations don't want federal funding revoked. So they're fearful of any type of criticism. But if you can't get in through the administration, you get in through the students.

How do you see the work you're doing intersecting with a larger movement or movements?

In New Mexico we're good at empowering and strengthening local communities. We want to work on collaborating with national struggles and building strength, especially in the South. All the work we do here in New Mexico around water

issues, racism and environmental racism, is all directly related to things going on in the South, New Orleans specifically. Our struggles are very similar.

The Freedom Caravan, which we are co-organizing, is a place to build strong, solid relationships—relationships that demonstrate a willingness to struggle and work together.

How do you see the USSF relating with your work?

The Freedom Caravan started out as an idea of ours to get to the USSF. We want to caravan for the media attention but also for economic reasons—it's cheaper than flying 100 people out. We're raising money to make it happen. We made 500 enchiladas for Cinco de Mayo and sold 'em for $10 a plate. People are committed to raising money for the delegation. Ally organizations and our membership are committed to sending people to Atlanta. All of our members' costs are subsidized.

When we first pitched the idea of caravanning to other organizations, people were skeptical. How to get people to take 2 weeks off of work? But people totally committed. Here we are a month and a half before and two buses are completely booked by people who are gonna take two weeks to go across the country and to the USSF.

In each place the caravan goes we want to learn about local struggle, learn about how local struggles are similar, how to work together to create change.

Part IV

Chapter 31

Moving Forward!

SAVE THE DATE!!

A Call to Participate in Building the Road to Detroit

http://tinyurl.com/email-this-flyer-to-friends

US SOCIAL FORUM II • JUNE 22-26, 2010

DETROIT, MICHIGAN

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WHAT IS THE US SOCIAL FORUM?

The US Social Forum (USSF) is a movement building process. It is not a conference but it is a space to come up with the peoples' solutions to the economic and ecological crisis. The USSF is the next most important step in our struggle to build a powerful multi-racial, multi-sectoral, inter-generational, diverse, inclusive, internationalist movement that transforms this country, and changes history. We must declare what we want our world to look like and we must start planning the path to get there. The USSF provides spaces to learn from each other's experiences and struggles, share our analysis of the problems our communities face, build relationships, and align with our international brothers and sisters to strategize how to reclaim our world.

WHY A SECOND US SOCIAL FORUM?

The gathering in Atlanta in June 2007 had 12,000 people come together in the belief that "Another World Was Possible!" Movement forces from all over the country took advantage of the opportunity to celebrate, organize, teach, debate and otherwise contribute to a growing sense that "Another US Was Necessary!" The USSF made it clear our need for greater convergence among progressives and the Left in this country and to begin to articulate our vision for "Another World." The purpose of the USSF is to effectively and affirmatively articulate the values and strategies of a growing and vibrant movement for justice in the United States. Those who build towards and participate in the USSF are no longer interested in simply stating what social justice movements "stand-against," rather we see ourselves as part of new movements that reach beyond national borders, that practice democracy at all levels, and understand that neo-liberalism abroad and here in the US is not the solution. The USSF provides a first major step towards such articulation of what we stand for.

WHY DETROIT?

To win nationally, we must win in places like Detroit. The Midwest site of the USSF marks a fierce resistance movement for social, racial, gender, and economic justice. Detroit has the highest unemployment of any major city in the country—23.2% (March 2009)—with nearly one in four Detroiters unable to find work. Michigan has had the highest number of unemployed people in all 50 states for nearly four years. Thousands of living wage jobs have been permanently lost in the automotive industry and related sectors. Some think that it will take at least until 2025 for Michigan to recover from the economic collapse and social dislocation. What is happening in Detroit and in Michigan is happening all across the US Detroit is a harbinger for what we must do in our communities! As grassroots activists and organizers, we work to address the indignities against working fami-

lies and low-income people, and protect our human right to the basic necessities of life. In Detroit, we can make change happen!

The US Social Forum provides this space—drawing participants from different regions, ethnicities, sectors and ages across the US and its colonies. Community-based organizations, Indigenous nations, immigrants, independent workers organizations, unions, unemployed, youth, children, elders, queers, differently-abled, international allies, academics, and advocacy organizations will be able to come together in Detroit for dialogues, reflection and to define future strategies.

WSF TO USSF–GLOBALIZING THE RESISTANCE

A global movement is rising. The USSF is our opportunity to prepare and meet it! The World Social Forum (WSF) has become an important symbol of global movement convergence and the development of alternatives to the dominant paradigm. Over the past nine years, the WSF has gathered the world's workers, peasants, youth, women, and oppressed peoples to construct a counter-vision to the economic and political elites of the World Economic Forum held annually in Davos, Switzerland. After gathering 100,000 people in Porto Alegre, Brazil in 2005, the International Council (IC) decided that in 2006 there would be regional social forums to culminate in a WSF in 2007. The IC delegated Grassroots Global Justice Alliance (GGJ) to help shepherd the US Social Forum process, stating that it was strategic to hold a gathering of peoples and movements within the "belly of the beast" that were against the ravages of globalization and neoliberal policies in the US and world wide. GGJ is an alliance that grew out of people-of-color-led grassroots groups who participated in the first WSF. These grassroots leaders initiated a process to create the first USSF National Planning Committee (NPC), and Atlanta was selected as the USSF host city. In early 2009, the NPC selected Detroit as the second host city for 2010. Learn more on WSF: www.forumsocialmundial.org.br

CALL TO PARTICIPATE IN THE BUILDING THE ROAD TO DETROIT

We call those who fight for justice to converge and act, and to reflect on the potential of our position and the power of our connections. Although we have built organizations that push forward an integrated, multi-issue, multiracial strategy, we have yet to build our movement on a scale relative to our sisters and brothers in the Global South. The USSF II offers the opportunity to continue to gather and unify these growing forces. We must seize this moment and advance our collective work to build grassroots leadership, develop collective vision, and formulate strategies that keep a strong movement growing. There are many ways to get involved. Your organization can join the NPC, you can join the working groups or

start building regional and local committees to ensure a massive and diverse participation in Detroit, June 22-26, 2010. Get more info at www.ussf2010.org

TELL US YOUR STORIES &
SOCIAL FORUM EXPERIENCES ON OUR WIKI

We invite you to tell us why the USSF matters to you, what your experience was like at USSF 2007, and more! Help us show others what the Social Forum is about as we kick-off 2010! Go to wiki.ussf2010.org/wiki/Press_and_People's_Stories

ANOTE LA FECHA!

Un llamado a participar en la construcción del camino a Detroit

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22-26 DE JUNIO, 2010
DETROIT, MICHIGAN

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¿QUÉ ES EL FORO SOCIAL EE.UU.?

Foro Social de los EE.UU. (FS-EE.UU) es un proceso de construcción de movimiento. No es una conferencia, pero es un espacio para llegar a soluciones a la crisis económica y ecológica. El Foro Social es el siguiente paso más importante en nuestra lucha por construir un poderoso movimiento diverso que es multi-racial, multi-sectoriales, inter-generacional, inclusivo, internacionalista. Tenemos que declarar lo que queremos para nuestro mundo y tenemos que empezar a planificar la ruta para llegar allí. El Foro Social proporciona espacios para aprender de las experiencias y luchas de los demás, compartir nuestro análisis de los problemas enfrentados por nuestras comunidades, construir relaciones nuevas, y también alinearnos con nuestras hermanas y hermanos del resto del mundo para formular estrategias en común.

¿POR QUÉ UN SEGUNDO FORO SOCIAL EE.UU.?

El Foro en Atlanta en junio de 2007 había más de 12.000 personas que se unieron en la creencia de que "Otro mundo es posible!" Movimiento sociales de todo el país aprovecharon la oportunidad para celebrar, organizar, enseñar, debatir y contribuir a un sentimiento creciente que "Otro EE.UU. es necesario!" El Foro Social ha dejado claro la necesidad de una mayor convergencia entre los progresistas y la izquierda en este país para comenzar a articular nuestra visión de "otro mundo".

El objetivo del Foro Social es de articular de manera efectiva y positiva los valores y las estrategias de un creciente movimiento por la justicia en los Estados Unidos. Los que construyen y participan en el Foro Social ya no están simplemente interesados en lo que los movimientos de justicia social "en contra," y nos vemos como parte de nuevos movimientos que van más allá de las fronteras nacionales, que práctican la democracia en todos los niveles, y comprenden que el neoliberalismo en el extranjero y aquí en los EE.UU. no es la solución. El Foro Social constituye un primer paso importante hacia este tipo de articulación.

¿PORQUE DETROIT?

Para ganar al nivel nacional, tenemos que ganar en lugares como Detroit. El Centro-Oeste del país marca un fuerte movimiento de resistencia social, racial, de género y la justicia económica. Detroit tiene el desempleo más alto de cualquier ciudad en el país-el 23,2% (marzo 2009)-con casi uno de cada cuatro Detroiters no pueden encontrar trabajo. Michigan ha tenido el mayor número de desempleados en los 50 estados durante casi cuatro años. Miles de puestos de trabajo se han perdido definitivamente en la industria de automobiles y sectores afines. Algunos piensan que se tardará al menos hasta 2025 para recuperación económica y social en Michigan. Lo que está sucediendo en Detroit y en Michigan está ocurriendo en

todo los EE.UU. Detroit es un símbolo de lo que debemos hacer en nuestras comunidades! Como activistas y organizadores de base, que trabajamos para hacer frente a las humillaciones en contra de las familias que trabajan y las personas de bajos ingresos, y proteger nuestro derecho humano a las necesidades básicas de la vida. En Detroit, podemos hacer el cambio!

El Foro Social EE.UU. ofrece este espacio- participantes de diferentes regiones, etnias, edades y sectores a través de los EE.UU. y sus colonias. Las organizaciones de base comunitaria, las naciones indígenas, inmigrantes, organizaciones de trabajadores independientes, los sindicatos, los desempleados, los jóvenes, los niños, los ancianos, la comunidad LGBTQ, personas de diferente capacidades, aliados internacionales, académicos y organizaciones de defensa serán convocados a reunirse en Detroit para el diálogo, la reflexión y definir estrategias futuras.

DE FORO SOCIAL MUNDIAL AL FORO SOCIAL EE.UU. – GLOBALIZANDO LA RESISTENCIA

Un movimiento mundial sigue creciendo. El Foro Social es nuestra oportunidad de preparanos y responder a ella! El Foro Social Mundial (FSM) se ha convertido en un símbolo importante del movimiento mundial en la convergencia y el desarrollo de alternativas al paradigma dominante. Durante los últimos nueve años, el FSM ha reunido a los trabajadores del mundo, los campesinos, los jóvenes, las mujeres y los pueblos oprimidos a construir una ofensiva a la visión de los élites económicos y políticos del Foro Económico Mundial que se celebra anualmente en Davos, Suiza. Después de reunir 100.000 personas en Porto Alegre, Brasil en 2005, el Consejo Internacional (CI) decidió que en 2006 habrá foros sociales regionales para culminar en un FSM en 2007. La delegación de CI le pidio a Grassroots Global Justice Alliance (GGJ) para ayudar a los EE.UU. pastorar un proceso del Foro Social, afirmando que era estratégico para organizar una reunión de los pueblos y los movimientos dentro de la "barriga de la bestia" que estaban en contra de los estragos de la globalización y las políticas neoliberales en los EE.UU. y en todo el mundo. GGJ es una alianza que surgió de la gente de color-que condujo los grupos de base que participaron en el primer FSM. Estos líderes de base iniciaron un proceso para crear la primer Comité Nacional de Planificación (NPC), y Atlanta fue seleccionada como la ciudad anfitriona para el primer Foro Social EE.UU. A principios de 2009, el NPC seleccione Detroit como la segunda ciudad anfitriona para el año 2010. Más información sobre el FSM: www.ForumSocialMundial.org.br

CONVOCATORIA PARA PARTICIPAR EN LA CREACIÓN DEL CAMINO A DETROIT

Hacemos un llamamiento a los que luchan por la justicia a converger, actuar, y reflexionar sobre el potencial de nuestra posición y el poder de nuestras

conexiones. Aunque hemos construido organizaciones que impulsan un enfoque integrado, multi-sectoral, multirracial, todavía tenemos que construir nuestro movimiento en una escala relativa a nuestras hermanas y hermanos en el Sur Global. El Foro Social II ofrece la oportunidad de continuar reuniendo y unificando estas fuerzas cada vez más. Debemos aprovechar este momento y avanzar en nuestro trabajo colectivo para construir la base de liderazgo, desarrollo de visión colectiva, y formular estrategias que mantienen un fuerte movimiento creciente. Hay muchas maneras de involucrarse. Su organización puede unirse al NPC, puedes unirte a los grupos de trabajo o empezar a crear comités regionales y locales para garantizar una participación masiva y diversa en Detroit, junio 22-26, 2010. Obtenga más información en www.USSF2010.org

COMPARTA SUS HISTORIAS
DEL FORO SOCIAL EN NUESTRO WIKI

Le invitamos a que nos diga su experiencia y historia con el FS-EE.UU 2007! Vaya a la pagina web: http://wiki.ussf2010.org/wiki/Press_and_People_Stories

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