

# Southern Movement Assembly

Dothan AL, August 2013

40 organizations met in Dothan, Alabama on August 30-31, 2013 in the third Southern Movement Assembly since September 2012. The Assembly was held in the Baptist Bottom community, hosted by The Ordinary Peoples Society (TOPS). The Assembly followed a dynamic four months of Freedom Summer that included base-building, liberated educational spaces, and an organizing drive to hold simultaneous actions on Southern State Capitols on August 28<sup>th</sup> - the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the historic March on Washington. The summer also included a rapid response organizing campaign to show a strong movement force in the fallout of George Zimmerman's acquittal for murdering Trayvon Martin, an unarmed Black youth. The Walk for Dignity was a coordinated response that was organized within days of the verdict to march from Jacksonville to Sanford FL. The third Southern Movement Assembly converged organizations and movement forces that have participated in advancing the Southern Freedom Movement in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.

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*"We are at a crossroads in history. This is a time of great, massive change in the world. The status quo of white supremacist, capitalist, gender oppression and supremacy is under attack. We have suffered from colonialism over the last 500 years, but we are intervening on this 500-year march of death. The only thing we have to contribute to this change, I believe, is Movement. It's all we have. Other forces have the military, governments, banks, lots of money. We don't have that, but I don't want those things. I want a Movement and the power of each other. That's what we have here today."*

- Emery Wright in the opening statement of the Assembly

The Assembly recognized the recent history of Southern movement organizing that has emerged since the Gulf Coast Crisis in 2005. The participants collectively engaged a timeline of movement benchmarks that included the Southeast Social Forum, the US Social Forum, and coordinated organizing drives that led to the first Southern Movement Assembly held in Lowndes County, AL in September 2012.

The Assembly engaged and affirmed a set of Principles of Unity developed by the anchor organizations over the last year. The Principles were adjusted to reflect feedback and ideas and will continue to evolve as a working document for the Southern Movement Assembly process.

The Assembly engaged and discussed a Governance Process for the Southern Movement Assembly that reflects accountability to the Southern Freedom Movement frontline communities and the Movement Council that meets at the Assemblies. The process recognizes the leadership and work of the anchor organizations to facilitate the overall process and creates entry points for all groups and organizations to participate. Work Teams were discussed as being necessary to organize shared actions, develop shared communications infrastructure, and advance tactical decisions.

The Movement Council (representatives from sites, organizations, and assemblies) worked to synthesize the general political directions and practices of the Southern Movement Assembly. The agreements stemmed from group conversations on political fronts of struggle and organizing practices to confront, shift, and grow power in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

*This Synthesis reflects a process that strives to express a three-dimensional analysis of the spirit of the assembly, the political content we developed, the analysis of conditions we face, and the direction we are*

*moving in collectively. The full notes are also available upon request.*

**NAMING OUR POLITICAL DIRECTIONS:**

**We agree to build grassroots Southern movements on multiple fronts of struggle including:**

- **Capitalism**
  - Connections between generational poverty, economic exploitation, new era of work, capitalism, and modern-day slavery of migrant workers and all workers
  - Threats: criminalization of workers and non-workers; myths around poverty & economy
  - Opportunities: corporate campaigns; poverty 101, leadership development
- **The Body**
  - Connections between gender, sexuality, race, and disability as it relates to the body
  - Threats: Criminalization of sex workers, birth workers, queers; health care legislation
  - Opportunities: Collective Accessibility; visible on multiple fronts, more than female
- **Education Justice**
  - Addressing privatization and re-segregation of education, education as a public good
  - Threats: School to prison pipeline; defunding, high stakes testing, etc.
  - Opportunities: youth organizing, exposing the forces privatizing education, making our own liberated spaces
- **Youth movements**
  - Youth need space and opportunities to engage in their own education and organizing
  - Threats: Criminalization and drug war, corporate media
  - Opportunities: Creating media, retreats to organize across the region
- **Environmental Justice & Land**
  - Discussed in connection with other fronts but not by a specific group
- **Criminalization & Violence**
  - Discussed in connection with other fronts but not by a specific group

**We are committed to dismantling oppressive systems while also building movement infrastructure:**

- We will build and sustain long-term movement infrastructure as well as striving to meet basic needs in the immediate short-term.
- We will build our own media, online platforms, and communications systems.
- We will create and practice liberatory education systems and spaces.
- We will create our own mechanisms of enforcing justice & regaining that which has been taken from us.
- We will take on the root causes of poverty by going up against targeted corporate institutions and building self-determination and decolonization.

**We commit to come together and prepare to make collective strikes:**

- By deepening our collective analysis
- By expanding our community bases
- By expanding movement representation
- By connecting to each other through cultural means, communication mechanisms, & diverse entry points
- By identifying critical opportunities and key threats

**NAMING OUR ORGANIZING STRATEGIES & IMPACT:**

**Our strategies reflect experimentation with developing shared best practices in this new era:**

- Based in shared principles and shared visions (that include goals and demands)
- Authentic intergenerational work
- Using the existing infrastructure we have access to including allied churches, community centers, and neighborhoods; creating our own media; and utilizing our skills and resources.
- We provide actual resources to people as we build.
- We look global for examples, perspectives, and alignment; We study history.
- We learn from each site and bring active solidarity (we are never “visitors”).

**We recognize our own power as movement forces:**

- We dismantle the divide and conquer tactics by converging our forces (EX: rural and urban connections).
- We build resource strategies that generate income, that innovate distribution strategies, that consider capacity sharing, movement banks, and exchanges.
- We build relationships through practice.
- We protect against local attacks, as well as federal and state attacks.
- We develop imagination for the creation of new systems.

**We are committed to self-determination of local strategies, and we support organizing short-term local power through:**

- Voting rights & voter education campaigns; Base-building in affected communities; Local elections and preparing community people to run for key offices or hold decision-making positions

**We agree to long-term goals to build decolonization and self-determination:**

- By building tools and maximizing existing skills
- By defining the silos and fronts with more explicit articulation
- By building culture and communications that connect us to our legacies

**Our impact as a collective movement process can be measured by:**

- Emerging social movements converging across differences, geographies, and issues
  - Intersectional politics carried through and by each other
- Leadership in deeper relationship with each other
  - Developing responses to trigger events/crises
  - Learning from each other and sharing resources, knowledge, experiences
- Organizations in relationship to each other
  - We celebrate our victories together and hold each other accountable
- People relating to social movements beyond organizational relationships
  - Decentralized coordination across sites
- Recognizing threats to the whole of our social movement work
  - Diluted, manipulated media; Reagan-era/Confederate Southern Strategy; opportunists that corrupt and co-opt; the police & surveillance state