

THE SOUTHERN FREEDOM MOVEMENT ASSEMBLY: REFLECTIONS ON THE
PEOPLES MOVEMENT ASSEMBLY PROCESS AS A CONVIVIAL TOOL

By

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ABSTRACT

THE SOUTHERN FREEDOM MOVEMENT ASSEMBLY: REFLECTIONS ON THE PEOPLES MOVEMENT ASSEMBLY PROCESS AS A CONVIVIAL TOOL

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This study takes a focused look at the methodology of the Peoples Movement Assembly (PMA) and its specific use through the Southern Freedom Movement Assembly (SFMA). In particular, I examine the history, politics, process, and practice of the PMA as a grassroots social justice movement building strategy used by working poor communities of color across the US South. I argue that the PMA is an important political process for confronting neoliberalism because it provides a way for communities in struggle to democratically facilitate the formation of multi-front initiatives. Moreover, the use of PMAs, and popular assemblies more broadly, represents a shift in the way people are collectively exercising power for positive social change. Because of this, the PMA is a convivial tool, a social device that cultivates practices of self-determination through the development of shared struggles across communities, issues, and identities. Because I participated in the organizing and coordination of the 2012 SFMA and 2010 National PMA, this study will rely heavily on my personal experience, observations, and reflections as one of many grassroots organizers involved throughout the Southern Freedom Movement Assembly from 2010 through 2013. I also draw from convivial research approaches as guides to make transparent the co-production of specific knowledges in and through this process.

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PREFACE

“it’s no good talking about who started or initiated something, Tent Cities were happening everywhere, what’s important is the fact that they occurred, the context they occurred within and what they represented.”

Dr. Gwen Patton, History Telling, Southern Freedom Movement Assembly, September 21, 2012.

In a lot of ways this study is about Project South: The Institute for the Elimination of Poverty and Genocide and their commitment to building grassroots movements for social justice in the South. Their role in the Southern Freedom Movement Assembly (SFMA) is clear even at a glance. That is because the 2012 Southern Freedom Movement Assembly, the 2010 National Peoples Movement Assembly, 2007 United States Social Forum, and 2006 Southeast Social Forum were all anchored by Project South. Project South has been a consistent facilitative force in each process from inception. Because of this, this study is partly a reflection and partly a celebration of Project South’s use of the PMA process as a movement building tool.

It is also important to note Project South because they were my entry into PMA organizing. Emery Wright and Stephanie Guilloud, the co-directors at Project South, invited me to support the coordination of the 2010 National PMA process, beginning in April 2009. During my time working with Project South, I came to realize that my invitation into the process was an intentional practice not specific to me (i.e. I wasn’t invited because I was a cool guy), but an institutional commitment anchored by a set of

political principles. As Ruben Solis notes when describing the assembly process, I was “sucked” into the process, as many were, much like a jet engine sucks in air. Once part of it, my rapid inclusion and integration of experiences, ideas, and commitments into shared visions, analysis, and plans of action helped propel the process forward.

It is in this context of invitation that I choose to use Manuel Callahan’s theorization of conviviality to discuss the political significance of the PMA process through the advances of the Southern Freedom Movement Assembly. Conviviality can mean many things, but in this instance it represents a practice of hosting a political space that continuously invites people, their communities, and struggles to join, build, and share in its leadership and movement forward. It is important to highlight my invitation and the work done to support me to contribute to the organizing because both testify to an intentional process and rigorously stewarded systems that all required massive amounts of work, time, patience, resources, and commitment to maintain. I stayed because people were committed to my presence, and the PMA in a larger sense represents a way to invite and host the active presence of a broad range of communities in struggle in the direct work of movement building.

Yet, a deep weakness in this study is the lack of specificity to which Project South is directly engaged as such. A more thorough examination of the SFMA would need to begin with Project South’s mission, political philosophy, and deep historical roots within the traditions of Black freedom struggles. Additionally, a more complete study of the SFMA would also look at the grassroots organizing and extended facilitation strategies involved in cultivating the PMA process as a collective leadership development

methodology. Portions of this thesis engage these areas lightly. For example, the introduction includes a section that briefly engages the politics, process, and practice of the PMA and in some respects this section implicitly touches on aspects of the leadership development methodology. Chapter two engages limited aspects of the organizing that preceded the SFMA, while chapter three goes into some detail on the facilitation associated with the Lowndes Assembly. But these instances are lacking in specificity and do not speak to the facilitative leadership of Project South in this process, a role that was fundamental to the vision and success of the SFMA at every stage. Nor does this study engage the role of the PMA as a collective leadership development process, one of the core motivations behind Project South's use of the PMA.

Instead I chose to focus on what using Peoples Movement Assemblies represents in this current moment. For me, a central interest is why we should pay attention to PMAs and popular assemblies like them: what can and do they reveal about social movements today and how can this information help build stronger grassroots movements for social justice. I choose this direction ironically because it felt more like a *Project South* way to go about the study.

While this study proceeded with the blessing and encouragement of Project South, because of personal constraints I was only able to engage a limited selection of materials. For example, this study relies primarily on my personal reflections and experiences alongside a small collection of primary sources. While my insights as an organizer in the process are the direct result of a collective process, they only represent one perspective within a process that engaged thousands, was attended by hundreds, was lead by dozens,

and anchored by a tight knit cohort of veteran southern grassroots organizers. Not to mention that a vast archive of materials exists containing thousands of documents, photos, video footage, and ephemera. In short, there is a long list of voices whose insight and reflections are missing that would profoundly enliven and transform this study into a sharper, more relevant political tool. Moreover, their presence in this study would undoubtedly fill those gaps noted above.

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

This study is about understanding the strategic value of the Peoples Movement Assembly (PMA) process as a grassroots movement building strategy. In broad strokes, I explore the relationships between strategic convergences, popular assemblies, and new social movement formations through the lens of class compositional analysis in order to highlight the most compelling elements of the PMA. Furthermore, I examine how PMAs are used by US based, grassroots-led, social justice initiatives to confront neoliberalism across intersecting fronts of struggle. I look at how local struggles use the PMA methodology to build commitments, systems of communication, shared analysis, collective visions, collaborative plans of action, and strategies for sharing resources. More specifically, I focus on the Southern Freedom Movement Assembly as an active example of the PMA facilitated on a regional scale.

The Southern Freedom Movement Assembly

I woke up at 6am. The sun beaming through my tent was cause enough and plus we all had a full day ahead us. I rolled out of my lodgings, put on my boots, grabbed some toiletries, and began to head over to the Historical Interpretation Center, a large new looking brick building housing an elaborate federally funded indoor museum of Alabama's civil rights history. It had been generously left open, over night, by the center's staff to provide bathroom accommodations to the campers. Walking away from my tent, I remember looking back and seeing a field full of brightly colored tents dotting

a grassy area roughly the size of two football fields. Small posters staked into the grass designated “neighborhoods” throughout our tent city. In the James Baldwin Gayborhood a cluster of a dozen plus tents were organized into a village with two large eight-person tents flying a bright rainbow colored banner between them. Southerners On New Ground, aka SONG, the regional queer liberation movement building organization, was present in full force.¹ Adjacent to their left were a smaller cluster of tents in the “Black Belt Farmers” neighborhood, full with families and children.² Their location was seen as ideal because of its proximity to a large covered pavilion, the site where an all day children’s assembly was scheduled to be held. Across the field on the opposite side was my neighborhood, the “Original Black Panthers,” homage to the history of the site we occupied.³ Our makeshift community was composed of small clusters of tents hosting a range of people representing communities in struggle from across the Southeast. We were

¹Southerners On New Ground: Building A Political Home Across Race, Class, Culture, Gender and Sexuality, “Vision, Mission, History,” (Atlanta: SONG, n.d.) <http://southernersonnewground.org/about/vision-mission-history/> (accessed Dec.5, 2013).

² For historical timeline highlighting select moments of political, cultural and economic significance in Lowndes county, as it related to Black farmers see Appendix A; For a historical analysis of cross cultural radical labor movements in Alabama, among black and white sharecroppers and tenant farmers during the period of the Great Depression see Kelly, Robin D.G., *Hammer and the Hoe: Alabama Communists during the Great Depression*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1990); For a further elaboration on the topic extended into a discussion about the study’s relevance to US social movements in the current moment see Camp, Jordan, “Black Radicalism, Marxism, and Collective Memory: An Interview with Robin D. G. Kelley,” *American Quarterly* 65, no. 1(March 2013): 215-230, http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/american_quarterly/summary/v065/65.1.camp.html (accessed Dec 5, 2013).

³Patton, Gwen, “Framing the Moment: Tent City, LCFO and Southern Freedom Struggles,” History Telling Session: Southern Movement Assembly, video recording [September 21, 2012]. Project South: Institute for the Elimination, SMA video footage e-folder, Atlanta, Georgia. During a “history telling” session at the Southern Movement Assembly, Patton recollected how the Lowndes County Freedom Organization(LCFO) chose the symbol of the black panther as the official symbol of their party to distinguish their candidates from the white roosters used to symbolize the local white run democratic party. The combination of the black panther used as a symbol, an expression of a local cultural practice of black families using black panthers carved onto wooden plaques placed over doorways and fireplaces, their formation of an independent political party and the cultural norm of firearm use and ownership by local black sharecroppers as a means of subsistence and self-defense was used to highlight the pervasive southern roots of the Oakland based Black Panther Party for Self- Defense.

surrounded, and almost eclipsed, by the energy of the “Sammy Young Youth Space,” a neighborhood housing a large contingent of youth organizers representing an effort called the National Student Bill of Rights movement.⁴ In all, over a hundred and fifty people camped out in the Tent City that night, with another hundred driving in that morning to participate in a process called the Southern Freedom Movement Assembly (SFMA).

Strategy

The focus of the SFMA was to create a space of connection between grassroots Southern struggles organizing against attacks and working to build stronger communities. The idea was to create a democratic convergence space of decision making for Southern grassroots social justice initiatives. Using an overnight tent city to bring together communities, the goal was to build shared analyses of common conditions and cultivate robust visions for a 21st century networked social justice movement. The point was to decide on plans of action that could be coordinated across the South towards those visions and in direct response to specific attacks waged by Right wing forces within their communities.⁵

Political Energy

Stretching across eleven states within the southeast region of the US, the South is the most active region to date where PMA processes are underway. The SFMA in

⁴ Sammy L. Younge Jr, according to the Encyclopedia of Alabama, was a member of the Tuskegee Institute Advancement League and young civil rights activist murdered in Alabama while attempting to use a whites only bathroom. For a brief biography and description of the political significance of Younge’s murder see Summerlin, Donnie, “Sammy Young Jr,” *Encyclopedia of Alabama* (Alabama Humanities Foundation, Auburn Univ., Univ. of Alabama and Alabama State Dept. of Education, last updated Sept. 23, 2011), <http://www.encyclopediaofalabama.org/face/Article.jsp?id=h-1669> (accessed Dec.1,2013).

⁵ Appendix C, for an in depth description of the strategy; and Appendix E, for an historical analysis and detailed representation of attacks on voter rights from Project South’s perspective.

Lowndes County has been followed by two additional Southern regional assemblies, one in Jacksonville, Florida convened April 26th thru the 28th in 2013, followed three months later by the second in Dothan, Alabama, August 30th and 31.st All three of the regional PMAs (referred to collectively as the SFMA, unless the city is noted) have been driven by regionally coordinated organizing projects such as the *2011 Summer Organizing Drive*; the *2012 We All Count: We Will Not Be Erased* campaign; the *Peoples' 1st 100 Days* direct action campaign; and the *2013 Freedom Summer* campaign.⁶ Each of these projects either represented organizing that lead to assemblies or immediately followed assemblies representing action plans developed during the assembly process. In all cases, these projects involved regionally coordinated direct actions, community education forums, skill shares, and the convening of smaller community assemblies, ballooning the total number of assemblies associated with the process to well over 60. Because of its ongoing energy, the SFMA process represents a rich and deeply situated opportunity for an in-depth look at the political significance of the PMA, and assembly processes more generally, as a movement building strategy used in the United States.

The Alliance

The Southern Movement Alliance, a group of eight southern-based grassroots social justice organizations, was the official organizing body behind the Southern Freedom Movement Assembly. The assembly was held on September 21st and 22nd 2012 and convened on the same site a previous tent city was organized over 40 years ago by

⁶ See Appendix M, for a visual description and a timeline of the Southern Freedom Movement Assembly process. .

the Lowndes County Freedom Organization.⁷ Lowndes County, Alabama, once known as “Bloody Lowndes” and considered by SNCC organizers during the height of the Civil Rights Movement as the most politically repressive county in the South, was chosen as the site for the assembly and as a tent city. Its historical significance was seen as relevant to the current moment given the resurgence of intensifying Right wing attacks on voter rights.⁸ Reading the attacks as symbolic of a larger crisis unfolding across the country, the alliance convened the assembly as part of a larger strategy to build deeply rooted independent Southern movement forces.⁹

The SFMA convened in Lowndes, was a regional PMA process. Since Fall 2006, over 200 People’s Movement Assemblies (PMA) had been organized across the country to date.¹⁰ Ranging in size, shape, theme, format, location, composition of organizers, and

⁷ Project South: Institute for the Elimination of Poverty and Genocide, “Southern Movement Assembly” *As The South Goes*, Peoples First 100 Days Edition, (Fall 2012), 7, <http://www.projectsouth.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/12/AsTheSouthGoesFall2012web.pdf> (accessed Dec. 1, 2013) For a thorough explanation of the purpose and reasons regarding the selection of Lowndes county as the site for the first Southern Movement Assembly.

⁸ Patton, “Framing the Moment: Tent City, LCFO and Black Freedom Struggles,” video recording, for a firsthand account of Lowndes county’s political climate.; for specific examples of political repression in Lowndes see Appendix A; for an in depth analysis see Jefferies, Hasan Kwame, *Bloody Lowndes: Civil Rights and Black Power in Alabama’s Black Belt*, (New York: New York Univ. Press, 2009).

⁹ See Appendix B for an analysis, articulated in the form of a popular education infographic, of the unfolding crises read in the form of attacks; by “independent southern movement forces,” I am referring to the proliferation and shared coordination of political projects, un-beholden to grant funding, political parties, election campaigns or parachute organizing projects but lead by grassroots organizing efforts primarily informed and directed by the political will of local communities in struggle. This does not mean that grant funding, electoral politics or “outside” organizing projects are absent from these projects and involved in the coordination of those efforts towards specific ends, instead my emphasis is on the authority and centrality of grassroots efforts in the self-determination of the political directions they take, the strategies they use and the visions they cultivate. As long as funders, electoral campaigns or “parachute” projects are politically subordinate to the authority of grassroots projects then the effort can be considered “independent.”

¹⁰ *Peoples Movement Assembly Organizing Toolkit* (2011), <http://peoplesmovementassembly.org/> (accessed Dec. 2, 2013) for a list of the 100 assemblies organized during the Detroit USSF process; see Southern Movement Alliance, *Peoples First 100 Days: Summary Report from the Southern Regional Campaign* (2013)1, <http://southtosouth.org/> (accessed Dec. 2, 2013) for reference to the assemblies and other

participants, the PMA process had been organized within every major social justice movement sector in the United States since its introduction in 2006 during the Border Social Forum held in Ciudad Juarez.¹¹

Questions

This study is informed by the following questions. First, what is the strategic value of PMAs to grassroots organizing efforts and how can that value be best understood? Second, is it useful to describe PMAs as convivial tools, if so why and how is that relevant to grassroots social justice organizing in the current moment? Lastly, what does it mean conjuncturally that popular assembly processes are being used by newest social movement formations, and in particular the alter-globalization movement?

Chapter Outline

This study examines the Southern Freedom Movement Assembly (SFMA) held in Lowndes County, Alabama, September 2012 and the larger process it embodies. Studying

gatherings organized throughout Peoples First 100 Days campaign. The number 200 is drawn from the approximate 100 PMAs that were organized before and during the 2010 Detroit United States Social Forum. The Southern Freedom Movement Assembly process itself has accounted for approximately 30-40 assembly processes, with the remainder of approximately 40-60 assemblies occurring across the country in varying forms.

¹¹ See Appendix D, for a visual of the PMAs organized before and during 2010 United States Social Forum in Detroit; also see PMA Working Group, *National Social Movement Agenda: U.S. Social Forum 2010, Detroit*, www.peoplesmovementassembly.org (accessed Dec 2, 2013) for a list of assemblies organized throughout the NPMA process, as well as summaries of synthesized declarations generated during the Synthesis Assembly. A close look at the themes of assemblies and who lead the organizing, available online at www.peoplesmovementassembly.org, would reveal an extensive list of social, environmental, racial, economic and gender justice projects from across the United States such as the Tar Sands battle led by indigenous communities from Canada, to gulf coast environmental justice struggles responding to the BP oil spill; domestic workers organizing in New York and across the northeast for a bill of rights; undocumented communities representing a range of fronts against intensified anti-immigrant attacks; Healthcare organizers working to push for single payer healthcare; youth organizers converging to build a youth led national education justice movement to combat privatization and mass school closure projects across urban cities; queer and gender justice assemblies representing a range of intersections and prison abolitionist projects pushing to end the war on drugs.

the SFMA allows for a deeper appreciation of the PMA and its impact on movement building in the South because of its scope. By taking up the SFMA as part of a larger “circulation of struggle,” the theoretical basis for both defining and describing processes of social movement development, this study engages how the PMA succeeds as a strategic convergence space designed, as a convivial tool, to advance movement building processes. In particular, this framework makes observable the PMA as a site where specific dynamics of the circulation of struggle can be mapped, and then read to reveal the forms of political recomposition taking place within larger fronts of struggle. In other words, my intent is to show how connections and interlinkages are occurring across/between/within struggles through the PMA broadly and the SFMA specifically. In turn this should also reveal the form, productive capacities, and potentialities of emergent oppositional forces. In the case of the PMA, this work of connection was facilitated through an ongoing process of synthesis facilitated throughout the organizing of the SFMA.

My use of conviviality as an analytical framework in this thesis is largely informed by Manuel Callahan’s theorization of the concept in a recent published article titled, “In Defense Of Conviviality And The Collective Subject.” In particular, by convivial tools I refer to collective processes of “social renewal” that, through their use, cultivates democratic capacities of communities in struggle.¹² Additionally, here conviviality will refer to intentional processes that tightens social bonds across different

¹² Callahan, Manuel, “In defense of conviviality and the collective subject,” *Polis: Revista Latinoamericana* 33(2012):1-22.

communities helping to anchor healthy forms of cultural, social, economic, and political interdependence.¹³ In short, a convivial tool can help facilitate the networking of communities in struggle into collective political forces. As this thesis will demonstrate, the PMA is a convivial tool because it is a decision making process that works to produce forms of synthesis in an effort to form politicized collective subjects capable of mobilizing across a wide range of fronts. The following section on the politics, process, and practice the PMA will touch on this further as well as in my conclusion.

Throughout this study I discuss the SFMA in two main forms: the first view discusses the SFMA as a specific political event organized through a continuum of activities; where the second discussion focuses on the strategy and process of the Southern Freedom Movement Assembly as a convivial tool operating within a social justice movement building context.

In instances or sections where my focus is on the event of the assembly itself, I will simply refer to the *Southern Freedom Movement Assembly (SFMA)* as a general catch all reference. This is because the SFMA as a whole is composed of over forty assemblies with three large regional assemblies animated and punctuated by four regional direct action campaigns organized over a period of two years. In the case of particular assemblies, I will refer to them by location such as the “Lowndes assembly”, the “Jacksonville assembly,” and the “Dothan assembly.” Because of the focus and limits of this study, we spend the majority, if not all, of our time on the Lowndes Assembly. This

¹³ Illich, Ivan. “Convivial Reconstruction,” *Tools of Conviviality* (New York, Marion Boyars, 1990):11

is because the Lowndes assembly represented the official inauguration of the SFMA as a collectively claimed political identity.

The SFMA as a whole presents a distinct process where particular politics and practices are generated to advance long term organizing in southern Black, Latino, queer, rural, and working poor communities. When referring to this distinct process, I will reference the “SFMA process” to distinguish between the assembly as a continuum of specific activities and the politics of the assembly. This same rationale of referencing also applies to discussions on the PMA.

This study is broken into three parts. Chapter two provides a historical analysis of the PMA method in order to situate the political development of the SFMA. Chapter three provides a detailed account of the SFMA in Lowndes, Alabama with focused descriptions of the organizing, facilitation and coordination of the SFMA. Lastly, my conclusion situates the PMA process within the larger context of popular assemblies used by the alter-globalization movement. I approach this section by highlighting the analytical utility of class compositional analysis as a way to make explicit how we observe the circulation of struggle as a method for reading assemblies politically. Here the purpose is to support the continued refinement of the organizing, convening, facilitation, and coordination of PMA processes specifically and the assembly process more broadly.¹⁴

¹⁴ By “reading politically” I am referring to Harry Cleaver’s use of the term to note the strategic quality of a theory, concept or framework for advancing working class struggles. In this sense I am proposing that the SFMA specifically and the PMA more broadly can be engaged as sites of knowledge production, generated within and by working class struggles, that can be read and analyzed collectively to advance their political work. Thus “reading politically” can be used as a method for supporting a focused, intentional and

Chapter two situates the SFMA in two historical threads. The first historical thread makes available the history of the PMA process in relationship to the World Social Forum and the second thread outlines the political context informing the Southern Freedom Movement Assembly process situating it within two overlapping contexts: 1) the history of Katrina and 2) the political moment surrounding the 2012 Presidential Elections.

In chapter three I describe the organizing that lead to the Southern Freedom Movement Assembly in Lowndes, Alabama in three phases: 1) the organizing before, 2) the facilitation strategy during, and 3) the shared coordination after. In the “before” section of the chapter, I focus on the formation of the Southern Movement Alliance, the official organizing body behind the SFMA process and its work together through two shared organizing projects: 1) the 2011 Summer Organizing Drive and 2) the 2012 We All Count Campaign. Next, focusing on what took place during the Southern Freedom Movement Assembly, I outline the actual assembly paying close attention to the flow, activities, and facilitation strategies used during the second day of the gathering. I emphasize moments of sharing throughout the assembly that advanced processes of synthesis among the multiple struggles present. Lastly, in the after section of the chapter, I provide a brief overview of the Peoples First One Hundred Days campaign that followed the Lowndes assembly. In this section I note some of the accomplishments of

collective reflection process after (or even during) assemblies. For a review of Cleaver’s analysis of reading politically see “Introduction” *Reading Capital Politically*. San Francisco: AK Press, 2000: 30&58.

the campaign in order to illustrate the role the Lowndes assembly played in advancing southern movement building work.

In my conclusion, I briefly discuss other assemblies underway to emphasize the emergent use of popular assembly processes as political tools mobilized to confront neoliberalism and its strategies of differential abandonment.¹⁵ To do this I provide a summary of the circulation of struggle as an analytical framework emphasizing the relationships between convergences, popular assemblies and strategies of connection pursued by working class struggles. I emphasize how assembly processes convened by various political formations, a part of the Alter-globalization movement, embody the circulation of struggle revealing specific moments where processes of political recomposition are experimented with and in some cases achieved. The point is to show that communities in struggle are creating and reclaiming convivial tools that they have

¹⁵ Differential abandonment, and inclusion, is a category of analysis used to describe a strategy of governance, informed by, what Wendy Brown calls a "neoliberal-neoconservative political rationality," both produces and manages disposable populations. The intensity and breadth of abandonment/inclusion a person or community experiences is determined by their social value and visibility which is differentiated, and determined, by the confluence of raced, classed and gendered technologies of power inscribed on those social bodies. Put plainly the more invisible the population the deeper and more profound the abandonment and to a larger extent the closer their proximity to varying degrees and states of death (social-cultural-political-material). Thus differential abandonment is what takes place when community infrastructure has been dismantled, individuated and privatized. In this context what's left are abandonments, sites of institutionalized neglect. In these sites the state is almost completely absent as a productive social force and instead it's presence as a repressive and coercive force policing the borders of the abandonment perpetuates the reproduction of what Achille Mbembe calls "necropolitics" and its "death worlds." For an analysis of neoliberal-neoconservative political rationalities see Brown, Wendy, "American Nightmare: Neoliberalism, Neoconservatism, and De-Democratization," *Political Theory* 34, (2006):690-714; For an analysis of the politics of disposability see Giroux, Henry, "Reading Hurricane Katrina: Race, Class, and the Biopolitics of Disposability," *College Literature* 33, no. 3 (2006)171-196; for an analysis of race as a political process that produces "premature death" among racialized populations see Gilmore, Ruth Wilson. "Globalization and US Prison Growth: From Military Keynesianism to Post-Keynesian Militarism." *Race Class*, 40 (1999)171-188; For an analysis of processes of social valuation see Cleaver, Harry, "The Commodity-Form," *Reading Capital Politically*, (San Francisco: AK Press, 2000);and Mbembe, Achille, "Necropolitics." trans. Libby Mientjes, *Public Culture*. 15:1(2003):11-14.

developed strategies for sharing across communities. It is this process of production, reclamation, and sharing, from what SONG organizers call a place of “desire and longing” where forms of struggle can be observed circulating and assembling throughout the circuits of capital. Furthermore, this place of “desire and longing” should also be read as an oppositional force(s) carving out spaces of social renewal within those sites abandoned by neoliberal-neoconservative austerity measures.¹⁶ Lastly, I use class compositional analysis to illustrate how the PMA process can be read strategically to inform movement building strategies.

As we shift back to the remainder of the introduction, the following sections will provide a working definition of the Peoples Movement Assembly, brief descriptions of the process, politics, and practice of the PMA as a convivial tool, concluded with a summary of this study’s research methodology.

The Peoples Movement Assembly as a Convivial Tool

A Peoples Movement Assembly (PMA) is defined as “community gatherings designed for groups to develop collective political agreements and positions” where “people make action plans in order to work together across issues on local, regional, and

¹⁶ Southern Movement Allaince, “Love In The Streets - Freedom of Movement,” *Peoples First 100 Days: Summary Report from the Southern Regional Campaign (2013)*, <http://southtosouth.org/>, (accessed Dec 5, 2013): no pagination, this day of action was the most explicit expression of a politics of desire and longing. This is in large part because SONG played a lead organizational role in the framing and political imagination of this day of action. For SONG’s analysis of the politics of desire and longing see Southerners’ On New Ground, “Vision, Mission and History,” (Atlanta: SONG, n.d.), <http://southernersonnewground.org/about/vision-mission-history/>, (accessed Dec.5, 2013).

national fronts.”¹⁷ As such, a PMA is a strategic convergence of communities in struggle into a singular place for the purpose of developing a collective analysis of a shared condition of struggle, a collective vision for the “world” they want to create together, and the plans of action to advance that work collectively.¹⁸ Lastly, PMAs are generally concluded with public commitments to plans of action captured in documents called “resolutions for action” and, in the case of the SFMA, “synthesis statements.”¹⁹

A PMA is called a strategic convergence because of its focus on the development of collectively coordinated direct action strategies or campaigns through collective decision making processes. The emphasis on a democratic and collective process of decision making is what makes the PMA a convivial tool. Ivan Illich defined tools more broadly to include “productive systems of intangible commodities such as those that produce ‘education,’ ‘health,’ ‘knowledge,’” and “‘decisions’.” With this expanded definition, Illich defined “convivial tools” as “those which give each person who uses them the greatest opportunity to enrich the environment with the fruits of his or her vision.” This is critical to highlight precisely because the PMA process relies heavily, as the following discussion will show, on a process of collective visioning to inform democratic decision making on plans of action. Furthermore, Callahan’s expanded theorization of “conviviality as fundamental to humankind and present as part of a sacred process of social renewal” and as an “effort to reclaim those social processes in specific

¹⁷ PMA Working Group, *Peoples Movement Assembly Organizing Kit*, (2011):4, www.peoplesmovementassembly.org (accessed Dec. 2, 2013).

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 3. Another World is Possible is the official banner of the World Social Forums, and by extension the US Social Forum. In this context, the PMA is seen as a strategy for realizing the “other world possible” through collective actions developed through movement assembly processes.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 8.

political contexts” where “the struggles to engage conviviality can be observed in oppositional spaces over time and in specific instances” theoretically situates the PMA process as a convivial tool that also results in the production of other tools used to advance the collectively determined interests of those gathered during assemblies.²⁰ Here the term, “community in struggle,” refers to social formations organized around the reclamation of conviviality through various oppositional political projects such as: a local community’s fight to stop the development of a Wal-Mart in their community; efforts to end the mass deportation of undocumented persons; mobilizations to stop the privatization of local water systems via damming projects; or a campaign to stop the shackling of incarcerated mothers during delivery. Thus, in a literal sense the work of “movement building” can refer to the way a community in struggle organizes itself to create, reclaim, and use convivial tools as a process of democratic renewal. In this context, the work of building movement infrastructure represents the institutionalization of practices and commitments that allow for greater degrees of sharing and collaboration across communities in struggle.²¹ The PMA’s conviviality is clearest when one takes a look at the process, politics, and practice of the Peoples Movement Assembly.

Process

The Peoples Movement Assembly is called an “assembly” because it is a decision making process where the people attending name and describe a shared condition of struggle (a common form of oppression they are fighting against), a shared

²⁰ Callahan, Manuel, “In Defense of Conviviality and the Collective Subject,” *Polis: Revista Latinoamericana* 33(2012):1-22. <http://polis.revues.org/8432> (accessed Dec. 5, 2013)

²¹ Universidad de la Tierra, “UTC Summary of Democracy Ateneo 11-16-13, 2-5 p.m.,” unitierracalifas@lists.resist.ca, November, 13, 2013.

vision (a collective imagination of the better world their struggle is producing), a coordinated plan of action (what they will do together to advance their struggle and make the vision a reality), and a resolution of action (a statement articulating the above mentioned items into a declaration of commitment).²² Each one of these areas is viewed as a process of decision making because the group as a whole charges itself with determining its self-representation.

Yet that decision making is not facilitated in a classic parliamentary or structured form, where phrases or terminology is “word smithed” through a tedious process. The decision making, as this study will highlight, is facilitated throughout the PMA process, such that engagement within the actual assembly itself is captured in forms of dialogue throughout each section of the assembly, that when documented and synthesized, represent “bodies of work” that speak and articulate political positions.²³ These bodies of work show up in several forms: as the facilitation strategy and schematic proposal of action developed during the organizing phase before the assembly; the resolution for action generated during the action planning stage of the assembly; and the synthesis statement drafted and disseminated at the close of the assembly. In each phase the assembly affirms, clarifies, alters, or expands on the collective articulation shared.²⁴

²²PMA Working Group, *Peoples Movement Assembly Organizing Kit* (2011):4, <http://peoplesmovementassembly.org/>, (accessed Dec. 5, 2013), for a breakdown of the PMA method.

²³ By “bodies of work” I am referring to actual work done by intentionally organized groups of people within assemblies that represent a documented engagement with a set of questions or themes. However bodies of work also represent the collection of content generated throughout the organizing process of the assembly. For example, numerous meetings are generally required to organize an assembly, and if notes were taken throughout the organizing process those notes would represent a portion of a PMA’s body of work.

²⁴ PMA Working Group, *Facilitator Guide for USSF II(June 2010)*, <http://peoplesmovementassembly.org/resources> (accessed on Dec.2, 2013)

For example, one form of synthesis generated during the Lowndes assembly was developed by an artist who graphically depicted the core themes raised during a critical part of the process called the synthesis roundtable. His depictions created in front of the entire assembly resembled small picture boards composing larger collages on panels that remained present throughout the duration of the assembly. In another example, in a more “traditional” format, lead facilitators recapped to the entire assembly the dominant themes and agreements discussed during the assembly asking the assembly, which was standing in a large circle, for affirmation and clarification on the proposals presented.²⁵

In general, the synthesis of statements occurs throughout the actual assembly. For example, the larger group is routinely broken into small “break out group” sessions where everyone is charged with engaging specific questions or themes and prompted to return prepared to present the core content of their discussion back to larger group. While this may seem banal, the way the larger group is supported to engage in focused discussions within it determines the quality of the content. Thus, the process is a highly public and participatory one. If effective, everyone present who participated in the PMA should be able to identify the tone of their voice within the resolutions produced, a direct indication they influenced the content produced by the assembly. If so, that person or community

²⁵ I say traditional in the context of a generally accepted facilitation practice used by organizers, usually with popular education training, in which the facilitator constantly “reflects back” the content of discussions to the group as a way to highlight themes resonant with the direction or goals identified by the group. Both the Facilitators’ Guide and PMA Organizing Kit imply this practice. For an example of a facilitator practicing this method see PMA Facilitation Training video at <http://peoplesmovementassembly.org/videos> (accessed on Dec. 2, 2013) - pay special attention to how the Facilitator emphasizes key themes raised during the discussion, routinely “reflecting back” the content shared by participants, either by writing it on the dry erase board or by reiterating a point made by participants.

has a concrete marker for observing the role their shared “leadership” in the process, as well as seeing elements of their struggle intertwined with the struggles of others.

Politics

Lastly, it is called a “movement” assembly because the emphasis of the decision making, regardless of scale, is on the work of changing social conditions. Here, the point is about the degrees of collectivity fostered. Illich argues that the time and speed at which things move determines its conviviality as well as its anti-thesis. The “velocity” represents a site where capitalist social relations find entry into convivial processes.²⁶ Things are organized hierarchically for efficiency in order to speed up the process of production and through the process of speeding up outcomes a world of violent exclusions are introduced and institutionalized into place.²⁷ This is why Jorge Gonzalez argued that the way we organize ourselves to produce knowledge determines the knowledge we produce, reiterating Audre Lorde’s often quoted assertion that one cannot

²⁶ Illich, Ivan, “Convivial Reconstruction,” *Tools of Conviviality* (New York, Marion Boyars, 1990):19-22; also see Illich, “Speed Stunned Imagination,” *Energy and Equity*(Patheon press, 1978) no pagination, <http://www.ecotopia.com/webpress/energyEquity/node3.html>, (accessed Dec. 6, 2013). While in *Equity and Energy* the focus is on the relationship between energy production, consumption and their corresponding relation to structural increases in social inequities, Illich’s analysis can be extended into a framework for understanding how organizing processes compressed by time pressures imposed above from funding cycles or campaign organizing cycles along side the push to scale up an organizing effort can transform a convivial movement building process into a neoliberal colonializing project. The speed at which we move can impact who, how and when others are included and supported to stay within an organizing process, the faster that process moves the more differentiated the inclusion becomes.

²⁷ De Sousa Santos, Boaventura “World Social Forum as Epistemology of the South,” *The Rise of the Global Left: The World Social Forum and Beyond*, (New York: Zed Books, 2006):13-34. De Sousa’s proposed methodology for “sociology of absences,” intersects with Illich’s analysis of “industrial tools” because it also identifies efficiency, as a rationality determined by the “monoculture criteria of capitalist productivity”, as a form of knowledge production that produces “non-existence” as an effect of its productive process. Sousa’s analysis of the logic of efficiencies provides a critical reflection on how hierarchical hegemonic power relations can be seeded within oppositional movement building processes through systems of scale as the logic for efficiency supplants itself in the way a group works.

dismantle the master's house with the same tools used to build it.²⁸ Thus the process of developing action plans is as important as the plan itself, if not more so. The process is strategic and the action effective if the process results in the cultivation and reinforcement of a collective subject. In a convivial context, this process can only occur over time and through the heat and pressures of shared struggle.²⁹

If people emerge from the PMA claiming the process as their own and engage in an action that binds them closer together as a community, then the process has fulfilled an important objective because the collectivity of the group constitutes the depth and capacity of its political force. The depths of the ties that bind a community together define its capacity to act, learn, and grow as well its resiliency in the face of hardship. In this context, the strategic quality of the process is dependent on the depth of shared commitments cultivated. Commitments move and the assembly cultivates "movement" by inviting people to craft shared visions worth fighting for as a community, and it's the work of struggling together, over time, that forges the bonds that make up the cultural elements of a deeply rooted movement infrastructure.

However, as the SFMA will show, decision making becomes a living process because the real work of a decision is expressed after the assembly when communities mobilize to follow-thru on their commitments. The resolutions are not binding contracts; the collective articulations are produced through an open yet focused process. It is not

²⁸ Gonzalez, Jorge, "Willingness to Weave: Cultural Analysis, Cultural Fronts and the Networks of the Future." *Media Development* 1, (1997). Lorde, Audre. "The Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master's House," 1984 speech, *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches*. Ed. (Berkeley: Crossing Press, 2007): 110-114.

²⁹ Zibechi, Raul. *Dispersing Power: Social Movement Forces as Anti-state Forces* (Oakland: AK Press, 2010)4.

uncommon for a slightly different configuration of communities to advance the actions than those who originally developed the resolution. In part because, hopefully, the social formation advancing the action has grown since the assembly, but this change in the configuration could also be due to any number of factors. The point is that things change. Desire and commitment may, in one moment, only produce a statement of solidarity, while in another moment it may compel a prolonged occupation. This is especially the case in contexts where struggles are advanced by grassroots efforts lead by communities in struggle, emergent from those sites hardest hit by the structural violence of neoliberalism. Folks initially “down” to act may not be able to follow-thru because personal circumstances prevent them in that specific moment. This is why an open process facilitated over time and anchored by ongoing processes of encounter, dialogue, and connection are critical. Here the Zapatista’s insistence on a liberatory politics that moves at the pace of the slowest is instructive.³⁰

At the same time, decision making occurs in degrees with most of its force occurring during the follow-thru after the assembly. As is generally the case with grassroots organizing projects, the follow-thru is what determines the vitality and longevity of a process as a whole. If relevant, resonant, and reflective of the aspirations, struggles, and commitments of the group present, then people will further decide on the content of the process through their commitments to act. This is where we can map and read the circulations of struggle occurring through the process.

³⁰ Callahan, Manual, “Why Not Share a Dream? Zapatismo as Political and Cultural Practice,” *Humboldt Journal of Social Relations* 29, 1(2005):6-38; Esteva, Gustavo, “Celebration of Zapatismo,” *Humboldt Journal of Social Relations* 29, 1(2005):127-167.

Practice

In practice PMAs, when concluded, represent bodies of work produced throughout the planning, organizing, convening, and facilitation of the assembly. In addition to these phases, what took place after the PMA also represents a body of work as well. Each of these phases represents sites of knowledge production that can be critically engaged.³¹ A PMA is a facilitated process because everything hinges on the quality of the encounter (the process of introduction) and the intercultural-intergenerational dialogues established between those communities present. This is why the organizing strategy is tightly tied to facilitation and also why organizers of the SFMA, and PMA process more broadly, refer to the process as “intentional.”

Intentionality refers to the role facilitation plays in the organizing, convening, and follow-thru of the process, but in particular it pays special attention to the way particular power dynamics are negotiated. Every PMA is managed by an organizing body of some sort and their shared clarity of purpose, principles, and politics determines the quality of the PMA, or even if it is actually a PMA. The practice of facilitating is also where an intersectional ethical-political commitment is most apparent.³² This is because the way a community facilitates itself to organize a PMA determines the quality of what they are able to organize.

³¹ For analysis of social movements as producers of knowledge see Ron Eyerman and Andrew Jamison *Social Movements: A Cognitive Approach*, (University Park: Pennsylvania State Univ. Press, 1991).

³² For an analysis of the role of “ethnic political commitments” within newest social movement formations see Day, Richard, “Ethic, Affinity and the Coming Community” *Gramsci is Dead: Anarchist Currents in the Newest Social Movements*, (Toronto: Between The Lines Press, 2005):178-201.

The PMA is used to facilitate processes of “political recomposition” or what Ruben Solis calls “political integration.”³³ Its sole function is to convene a space of convergence between struggles towards the launching of collective actions. Thus, the assembly brings together an array of struggles, and through a process of encounter (introduction) and critical engagement, creates conditions of sharing that lead to an erosion of political divisions. Not an elimination of differences, but a defiance of borders. This process can only occur in a context where whole communities, and people as whole selves, are invited to attend and engage each other as an ongoing exercise. The extent to which whole selves can attend and participate is a function of the invitation and of facilitation. Once again, intentionality refers to a group’s attention to how various “technologies of power” such as a race, class, and gender etc. produce, reinforce, and

³³ Political recomposition is used to describe historical processes of connection that occur across working class struggles such that those connections result in the development of working class power and the subsequent weakening of the capitalist class. Here political recomposition is situated within a three part “cycle of struggle.” The first process within this cycle (these elements are not linearly linked) is called class composition. Here a class composition represents the current organization of the working class in its divided state. A particular class composition is required for capital to maintain hegemony. The second phase is political recomposition this phase represents a historical moment where preexisting divisions used to maintain a particular class composition is weakened through processes of connection facilitated by working class initiatives. As these connections grow, the current class composition dissolves throwing capital into a state of crisis. The last phase, or process, is called decomposition. This phase represents strategies used by state-capital to weaken and break a part those connections facilitated by and through working class initiatives. Thus the assembly is a tool for facilitating processes of political recomposition because its stated purpose is to bring struggles together for the purpose of collective action. For a detailed analysis of class composition theory see Harry Cleaver “Inversion of Class Perspective in Marxian Theory: From Valorisation to Self-Valorisation,” *Open Marxism: Theory and Practice, Volume 2.*, Werner Bonefeld, Richard Gun, and Kosmas Psychopedis, eds. (London: Pluto Press) 105-144. :Ruben Solis, co-chair of the PMA Work Group, uses the term political integration to refer to a process of synthesis where a convergence of different struggles articulate shared visions, analysis and plans of action that mobilize shared action on a cross section of fronts of struggle. In other words political integration is a process whereby local struggles incorporate the elements of other struggles into their own resulting in the production of new political paradigms, formations and strategic directions. Here political integration refers to the process and depth of connections facilitated through assemblies where political composition refers to the larger historical process it embodies. For Solis’ historical analysis of the function of the PMA as a movement building tool towards processes of political integration see “History,” Peoples Movement Assemblies, <http://peoplesmovementassembly.org/history> (accessed March 28, 2014).

inscribe political divisions on bodies (both individual and social) and desires as a larger strategy of social control, and how those divisions are animated into politically corrosive devices, or what Illich calls “industrial tools,” when people come together.³⁴ Later on in this study I return to the role facilitation plays in the assembly processes as a core practice.

Method: Towards a convivial research approach

Convivial Research

I was directly involved in PMA organizing through my work with Project South from spring 2009 through spring 2013. It is important to note that I did not begin organizing with Project South for the purpose of studying the PMA process. I initially connected with Project South in an effort to build with a racial justice movement building organization based in Atlanta (my parents’ new home town). My original intent was to connect with a social justice organization that could help me advance my research into the incarceration of developmentally disabled persons in Georgia State prisons. However, as we became acquainted, Project South’s work in the area of assemblies became

³⁴ Ann Stoler provides an in depth analysis of race, as an epistemology and technology of power, designed by and through processes of imperial colonialization to produce racialized social bodies, as a strategy of social control within colonial sites, which in turn allows for the refinement of tools of governance exported to and used within western imperial metropolises. See Stoler, Ann Laura. “Cultivating Bourgeois and Racial Selves,” *Race and the Education of Desire: Foucault’s History of Sexuality and the Colonial Order of Things*. (Durham: Duke Univ.Press, 1995):95-136.: For a definition and description of industrial tools see Illich, Ivan, “Convivial Reconstruction,” *Tools of Conviviality*, (New York: Marion Boyars, 1990):10-45; For an analysis of the use of the state, as an industrial tool, by revolutionary movements see Zibechi *Dispersing Power: Social Movements As Anti-State Forces (2010)* and John Holloway. “Beyond the State” and “Beyond Power” chapters in *Change The World Without Taking Power: The Meaning of Revolution Today*, (Ann Arbor: Pluto Press, 2005):11-42.

compelling. After about three months, Project South asked me to support them in their efforts to organize an assembly. Over the four years that I worked with Project South, my role in PMA organizing was usually split in four forms. I either 1) helped design facilitation strategies for assemblies, 2) helped track and document the content generated during assemblies, 3) developed and co-lead trainings/skillshares on how to organize and facilitate assemblies, or 4) directly supported the organizing efforts towards specific assemblies. In the case of the 2012 SFMA, I played all four roles throughout the entire process in varying degrees.

Prior to the SFMA I was tasked with writing a synthesis report outlining best practices of PMAs. This report represented a synthesis of reflection interviews gathered from approximately thirty lead PMA organizers from across the country who had been heavily involved in PMA organizing before and during 2010 Detroit USSF. This report helped support the revision of the new PMA Organizing Kit, but also provided organizers with a more in depth look at some of the dominant practices used across assemblies. This is important to note because when I asked if it would be appropriate to write this thesis (approximately two weeks prior to the first SFMA), the Project South staff collective not only agreed, they thought the project was commonsensical given the role I had played in the process.

In this study I rely heavily on my “observant participation” and critical reflections as one of many grassroots organizers involved throughout both regional and national Peoples Movement Assembly processes.³⁵ In addition, I draw from a grassroots archive of materials generated throughout the organizing of the SFMA process, from organizational reports and summaries to facilitation strategies and agendas (some of which are included in the appendix), among a variety of other texts produced and disseminated for public engagement. Also, because of my direct involvement within the process, I take advantage of a convivial research approach, developed by the Convivial Research and Insurgent Learning Taller (workshop), to make transparent the co-production of specific knowledge in and through this process.³⁶

Convivial research is rooted within the “tradition of participatory...collective, community-based” practices of “knowledge production.” Thus the emphasis is on the work of intentional, collectively produced knowledge. In this context, convivial research’s primary focus is on supporting the advancement of grassroots social justice efforts by making “observable” epistemic systems generated through local struggles. Convivial research engages this knowledge through the use of “transdisciplinary, reflexive investigative approaches that prioritize local, situated, and poetic knowledges.”

³⁵ Costa Vargas, Joao H., “Activist Scholarship: Limits and Possibilities in Times of Black Genocide,” ed. by Charles R. Hale, *Engaging Contradictions: Theory, Politics, and Methods of Activist Scholarship*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008): 164-182.; As a program coordinator with Project South, the anchor organization behind the 2007 USSF, the 2010 National PMA process and SFMA I was tasked with drafting a report summarizing best practices of the PMA during the 2010 National process using a reflection interviews and discussions. The drafting of this unpublished internal report, which involved over 30 discussions with lead grassroots organizers, helped orient my process of reflection shared in this study.

³⁶ Juris, Jeffrey, S., “Practicing with the Movement for Global Resistance in Barcelona.” *Constituent Imagination: Militant Investigations Collective Theorization*, ed. Stevphen Shukaitis, David Graeber and Erika Biddle, (Oakland: AK Press, 2007): 164-176.

The point is to make transparent, as a humble offering, the various ways communities in struggle exercise forms of power capable of renewing and emancipating their communities.³⁷ Thus the emphasis is on “amplifying” those strategies and providing an array of tools that help to make the process publicly transparent to the community.³⁸ In essence, convivial research begins from the standpoint of processes collectively forged through struggle, especially within those sectors of society historically subjected to violent processes of erasure and subjugation, and represents sites of social brilliance and collective wisdom.³⁹ The challenge is making transparent where those forms of knowledge are produced and under what conditions. Most importantly, this method seeks to share and gather tools that support communities in struggle seeing their own brilliance. Emphasizing “strategic, collectively determined research projects” that “address community struggles, reclaim commons, regenerate culture, facilitate intra/inter-cultural encounters, and promote direct democracy,” convivial research is uniquely designed to engage the complex, translocal multi-sector convergence spaces of PMAs.⁴⁰

Ultimately this project aspires to be a convivial research project. In that sense it operates more as a beginning and incomplete reflection offered up to a deep community

³⁷, “Convivial Research,” *Convivial Research and Insurgent Learning Taller* (Universidad de la Tierra's Center for Appropriated Technologies and the Center for Community Research and Autonomy, n.d.) <http://cril.mitotedigital.org/convivialres> (accessed Dec. 5, 2013)

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ The concept of social brilliance and collective wisdom was introduced to me by Manuel Callahan, and has remained a consistent underlying theme of our ongoing discussions. Representing more of a political principle to guide grassroots organizing strategies and community based research approaches the notion of social brilliance and collective wisdom takes seriously the situated knowledges communities in struggle produce precisely because of their conditions of struggle.

⁴⁰ “Convivial Research,” *Convivial Research and Insurgent Learning Taller*, (Universidad de la Tierra's Center for Appropriated Technologies and the Center for Community Research and Autonomy, n.d.) <http://cril.mitotedigital.org/convivialres>(accessed Dec. 2, 2013)

of folks working hard to build independent social movement forces across the south from the grassroots. As a convivial research project, this study makes transparent a practice for reading assemblies politically. In a somewhat circular fashion, I hope to reveal the role PMAs can play as a convivial research strategy for communities in struggle. That is to say, the work of organizing a PMA represents a rich process of knowledge production where valuable information can be collectively gathered at critical points throughout the process, archived, and later analyzed to reveal a range of dynamics necessary to understand in order to plan, map, and advance locally situated movement building work. Thus the convivial orientation of my methodology is to make this process transparent and its applications accessible. Lastly, its strategic quality or ability to be read politically is rooted in its potential to be a convivial tool. That is to say, by insisting that the PMA process is a convivial tool I hope to open up a larger dialogue about the regenerative capacities of popular assembly processes within communities of struggle.

CHAPTER TWO: SITUATING THE SOUTHERN FREEDOM MOVEMENT ASSEMBLY

The roll call exploded in energy as the Southern National Student Bill of Rights youth contingent, a group of over forty teens, stood up and in a large roar announced their presence at the assembly. Many were literally wearing dozens of different colored bandanas as they stood up and waved them around like flags while chanting slogans in a melodic bombast.⁴¹ Their flamboyance and playful audacity elevated the energy of the assembly as the roll call instigated thunderous, rowdy announcements from the remaining groups present at the Southern Freedom Movement Assembly.

Over 250 people were present, representing a full spectrum of generations. From toddlers to elders, many noted the assembly felt like a family reunion. Instead of families connected by extended bloodlines, communities of struggle gathered representing a range of issues from across the south such as:

- Environmental justice organizers from the Appalachian mountains;
- Prison abolitionists fighting corruption within Florida's criminal justice system;
- Education justice organizers from central Georgia;
- Anti-poverty community workers from Atlanta;
- Queer liberationists organizing across five southern states;
- Formerly incarcerated human rights organizers from Dothan, Alabama;
- Immigrant rights struggles based across Georgia and Alabama;
- Social justice organizers working around voting rights and redistricting issues in New Orleans;
- Southern technologists committed to building free, secure communications infrastructure for southern grassroots movements;

⁴¹ Colored bandanas were made available by the organizing team to participants during registration process as a strategy to playfully help groups distinguish themselves as groups.

- Southern cultural workers committed to sharing practices of cultural renewal as a part of community and movement building work.

The focus was not to speak on behalf of the entire region but to learn how to speak as an assemblage of communities in struggle, to craft a compelling vision that communities present could be inspired by, to articulate an analysis of the current moment that resonates with the realities people face, and to develop a plan of action everyone could mobilize behind.

This chapter establishes the political significance of the PMA process as grassroots organizing process by outlining its historical development through two historical threads. The first thread will trace the development of the PMA out of the World Social Forum process broken into three shifts and the second thread will situate the SFMA within the context of two overlapping conjunctures: Hurricane Katrina and the 2012 Presidential Elections.

The People's Movement Assembly: Atlanta 2007, Detroit 2010 and Lowndes 2012.

First Shift

In order to understand the history and development of the PMA and the nature of the first shift within the PMA process, it is important to briefly discuss the World Social Forum (WSF) and its relationship to the Global Network of Social Movements Assembly (aka the Social Movement Assembly).

The Social Movement Assembly (SMA) was created to provide a space for movement actors present at the World Social Forums (WSF) to develop declarations representing what Boaventura De Sousa Santos argued was a process of “articulation,

reflection and combined planning of collective actions carried out by organizations and movements integrated in the WSF.”⁴² Created as a related but separate and distinct space from the WSF, the Social Movement Assembly allowed movement actors to take collective positions on issues advanced by larger calls of action.⁴³ This process occurred through the Social Movement Assembly because the World Social Forum’s “Charter of Principles,” the governing document defining the political character of the WSF, prohibited the WSF from deliberating, speaking, and taking positions on its behalf as a body.⁴⁴ However, while the WSF explicitly prohibited itself from such actions in charters 5 and 6, in 7 it encouraged communities, organizations, and social movement formations to connect and deliberate on declarations and calls to action, which the WSF would “undertake to circulate” through its networks.⁴⁵

Thus the Global Network of Social Movement Assemblies would be a space of deliberation. In effect, the Social Movement Assembly spoke, through collective declarations issued, on global scales through calls to action. One of the most prominent examples of a Social Movement Assembly declaration and call to action is the 2003 global day of action against the war in Iraq that was initiated by the SMA declaration during the 2003 World Social Forum. At the time, the global day of action represented one of the largest mass global protests in recorded history.⁴⁶

⁴² De Sousa Santos, Boaventura, *Rise of the Global Left: The World Social Forum and Beyond* (New York: Zed Books, 2006) 36.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ International Committee, World Social Forum Charter of Principles, (World Social Forum, 2001) http://www.choike.org/documentos/wsf_s111_wsfcharter.pdf (accessed on October 24, 2013)

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ De Sousa Santos. *Rise of the Global Left: World Social Forums and Beyond*, 36.

While the global day of action in protest to the war in Iraq failed to prevent the war from occurring, the SMA's ability to mobilize millions across the globe bolstered its utility as a strategic convergence space during Social Forums. Thus, the purpose of the Social Movement Assembly centered around bringing social movement formations, many of which were fully formed into significant political forces within their respective regions or nations, together in order to hash out political positions and coordinated actions on international scales.

The PMA was directly inspired by the model of the Social Movement Assembly.⁴⁷ However, the first shift centers on the change in name, from a "Social" to a "Peoples" movement assembly, and what that change represented for its organizers. This difference is directly related to the overall orientation of the USSF and is best observed within the context of the 2007 United States Social Forum convened in Atlanta, Georgia.

The National Planning Committee (NPC), the United States Social Forum's official organizing body, saw the Social Forum as an opportunity to advance social movement development across the country and proceeded to organize the USSF to facilitate heightened degrees of connection and exchange between grassroots people of color led social justice formations organized at all scales.⁴⁸ Because of this, the NPC employed an "intentional" organizing strategy to insure that the USSF was attended by

⁴⁷"History"[subpage], Peoples Movement Assembly <http://peoplesmovementassembly.org/history>, (accessed on October 24, 2013)

⁴⁸ Guilloud, Stephanie and Project South Executive Team, *The First US Social Forum: Report from the Anchor Organization*. (2008): 1-3.

grassroots social justice organizing formations led and composed of people of color.⁴⁹ The hope was to create a convergence radically different from conferences and “networking bonanzas” by organizing a gathering of “forces in motion” within those sites viewed as most affected by the violence of neoliberalization.⁵⁰ The goal was to lay the foundation for the development of social movement forces through the process of connection and exchange facilitated through Social Forums. Many viewed the political landscape in the U.S. as one where social movement forces and their development had been halted, countered, and decimated by the new and refurbished tools of repression introduced by the War on Terror.⁵¹

In this context, the “movement assembly” process that developed in the U.S. was focused around engaging grassroots struggles on smaller scales. The “Peoples” movement assembly would be slightly different from the “Social” movement assembly in that it would operate as a movement building vehicle among smaller grassroots initiatives within the U.S., focusing on creating conditions through a process of deliberation for the development of stronger locally rooted social movement formations. Whereas the Social Movement Assembly brought together large global, national, and regional movement actors for a process of deliberation, the PMA would have to focus on bringing together

⁴⁹ Jackie Smith, Jeffery Juris and Social Forum Research Collective, “‘We Are The Ones We Have Been Waiting For’ ”: The U.S. Social Spaces of Intentionality: Race, Class, and Horizontality at the United States Social Forum.” *Mobilization* 13, no. 4(2008): 374.

⁵⁰ United States Social Forum website, <http://www.ussocialforum.net/about> (accessed Dec 3, 2013)

⁵¹ See Appendix B.

smaller grassroots initiatives, many of whom were unfamiliar with the World Social Forums and by extension movement assembly processes.⁵²

For example, the first PMA to be organized in the United States was convened in 2006 during the first ever Border Social Forum held in Ciudad Juarez, led by Ruben Solis of the Southwest Workers Union to mobilize Black and Brown communities across the intersection of border militarization.⁵³ Close to a thousand people attended the social forum, with hundreds participating in the PMA, one of two regional social forums; the second held in the Durham, North Carolina two months earlier, led by Project South and representing over 600 participants from black and brown communities from across the south. Both of these social forums were considered fundamental to the organizing of the 2007 USSF.

The 2007 USSF was considered a huge success. Partly because it happened, partly because over fifteen thousand people attended, but mostly because the majority of the fifteen thousand participants present were black, brown, indigenous, and working poor communities of color from across the US, with significant representation from the deep South and Southwest; an unprecedented movement convergence in any US context.⁵⁴ Activist scholars like Robin D. G. Kelley described the USSF process as the most important movement convergence to occur in the US in over a decade.⁵⁵

⁵² Project South, *The First US Social Forum: Report From the Anchor Organization*, 1-4. <http://www.projectsouth.org/movement-building-projects/us-social-forum/> (accessed Dec. 5, 2013)

⁵³ Ibid. 4

⁵⁴ Ibid. 1-3; also see Jackie Smith et al, "We Are The Ones We Are Waiting For: The United Social Forum Context," 373-377.

⁵⁵ See Robin D. G. Kelley, "The Future in the Present" Lecture given at US Berkeley's Center for Race and Gender Studies, <http://www.ustream.tv/recorded/18527337> (accessed Oct. 24, 2013)

The 2007 USSF is important to draw attention to because the PMA was introduced as a focused space of deliberation within the social forum.⁵⁶ For example, the PMA process convened during the 2007 USSF was organized in two parts falling on two days. The first day was organized around caucuses representing larger regional convergences, where initiatives and communities within specific regions could connect and develop resolutions for action specific to the region. The second day, the PMA invited groups throughout the USSF “from workshops, strategy sessions, tents and other spaces” representing over a thousand spaces, to develop and announce their resolutions of action to the larger assembly.⁵⁷ This invite provided an opportunity for any group organizing a space within the Atlanta USSF process to participate in the movement assembly process. Because spaces were self-organized and in theory representing expressions of a constellation of struggles, or “forces in motion,” the invite to those spaces functioned to further orient the “workshop” into a movement building space versus an educational space. In effect, the invite to organizers of workshops to develop resolutions of action with their participants encouraged organizers to situate the organizing efforts their workshop represented in relationship to others – a position that would be subject to a public forum.

On the last day, over fifty groups signed up to read their resolutions of action to the larger assembly. In the end, the PMA had a declaration which included a long list of

⁵⁶ See Project South. *The First US Social Forum: Report from the Anchor Organization*. 11-12.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

actions and declarations.⁵⁸ Although textured by significant challenges, the overwhelming response to the PMA process highlighted its political usefulness as a strategy for supporting larger scale processes of collaboration and coordination across movements.⁵⁹ Here the first shift within the first National PMA process centered around providing a focused space of deliberation and connection across small grassroots initiatives as a movement building strategy. According to organizers of the 2007 USSF PMA process, a reflection process after the USSF led to the formation of a PMA Working Group in 2008 to coordinate the PMA process in a more focused and supported fashion in the build up towards and through the second USSF to be held in Detroit summer 2010.⁶⁰ Co-chaired by Stephanie Guilloud, co-director of Project South, and Ruben Solis of the Southwest Workers Union, the working group would be led by the two organizations that had anchored the Southeast Social Forum and the Border Social Forum in 2006. Representing the most experience organizing, anchoring, and facilitating large scale convergences, Guilloud notes that both organizations were able to contribute significant insight, infrastructure, and continuity to the development of the PMA. The PMA Working Group would be the official and primary organizing body behind the PMA process from then on.⁶¹

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ The PMA working group would be co-chaired by Stephanie Guilloud, Project South Co-Director based in Atlanta, Georgia, and Ruben Solis, co-founder of the Southwest Workers Union, based in San Antonio, Texas.

Second Shift

The second shift took place within the context of the 2010 Detroit USSF. Stephanie Guilloud, co-chair of the PMA, points out that the PMA during this shift became a national “organizing process” to draw in “authentic representation from grassroots struggles.” For example, whereas in 2006 during the Border Social Forum and in 2007 during the United States Social Forum, the PMA was introduced during those forums as a decision making process to experiment with, test, and facilitate forms of cross movement collaboration, the PMA process after 2007 would be developed into a primary organizing vehicle in the build-up before, during, and after the 2010 US Social Forum. The idea was to extend the energy of the USSF into a continuum of political activity beyond the event of the Social Forum itself using the PMA to “spark action” through cross movement collaborations.

Thus the working group crafted the methodology of the PMA into a simple before, during, and after frame in order to highlight the function of the social forum as a convergence of community struggles and movements AND insist on an intentional process of connection and decision making. To facilitate this, the working group would launch a yearlong organizing drive beginning with an announcement circulated broadly inviting people, communities, and organizations across the country to self-organize their own PMAs in preparation for the 2010 USSF. The broad circulation of an invitation to organize PMAs introduced the method of the PMA as a democratic grassroots movement

building process, but also expanded the PMA into a national project through the invite.⁶² Through the invite, people were asked to organize PMAs in order to prepare to connect through a larger national process of strengthening movement forces. Moreover, the PMA invite also encouraged individuals to locate themselves within a community of struggle. Organizers of the NPMA process wanted active collective struggles, not just activists. Where the Social Movement Assembly convened a process in which large international movement actors would converge, the National PMA process convened during the 2010 USSF would emphasize the self-organization of local projects, regardless of size, scale or focus through a PMA method that prepared communities to attend and participate in the USSF as “forces in motion.”⁶³

Third Shift

A common thread through movement assembly processes noted above has been the gravitational pull of the social forum. The movement assemblies noted thus far were developed within the context of, during, and in relationship to social forums. The SFMA represents an interesting shift because of the absence of the social forum as a center of gravity within the process. In other words, the SFMA convened and gained momentum without any clear sense of when the next social forum would be held. This is largely because the primary focus of the SFMA has been on the specific issue of “regenerating the southern freedom movement.” This represents a significant shift in the PMA process because the SFMA, alongside other assembly processes that have occurred since 2010,

⁶² See Appendix D for a map of PMAs.

⁶³ “Forces in Motion” means a group of people actively working to change social conditions. The group is the force and the “in motion” represents the work they are actively doing together. See *Facilitator Guide for USSF II (June 2010)* online at <http://peoplesmovementassembly.org/resources> (accessed Dec. 4, 2013)

are engaged within a political trajectory determined by the energy of their constituent struggles, and not primarily by the convergence of the USSF.

We've discussed the history of the PMA process in three shifts over a period of ten years. Beginning with the World Social Forum and the Global Network of Social Movements Assembly into its current form articulated through the SFMA process, the PMA has focused on providing small grassroots initiatives with a method for reclaiming democratic practice as a strategy for regenerating community and building movement. The following section will further situate the SFMA by highlighting two overlapping moments critical in the historical development of the SFMA as a grassroots movement building strategy.

The Southern Freedom Movement Assembly: Hurricane Katrina, 2010 NATIONAL
PMA process and 2012 presidential elections

The “Great Shellacking” of the 2010 primaries was a clear sign of a fast approaching storm. Unseating incumbent Republican and Democratic elected officials across the country, Tea Party candidates, backed by a small but deep pocketed cohort of the country's wealthiest corporations and individuals, created Republican super majority state governments across the South. Championing severe austerity measures, like those that inflamed Hurricane Katrina into a social catastrophe, the Tea Party represented a historic convergence of politically potent socially constructed fears. From the political shock of a black president to fears over the insecurity of the US Mexico Border, a confluence of anxieties were stoked to mobilize collective subjects in defense of

American society. In this context, the alleged clandestine development of radical Islamic cells within universities and mosques, frustrations over the institutional legitimization of gay rights in marriage and the military, and alarm bells sounded over narratives of wide spread voter fraud perpetrated by “get out the vote” organizations mobilized in poor communities of color, together symbolized instances where sacred American institutions were strategically represented as under attack from internal enemies. This context set the backdrop for the SFMA.

The history of Katrina and the political moment surrounding the 2012 Presidential Elections were two overlapping events that framed the political context described above. These conjunctures represented two moments informing how the SFMA would develop longer term movement building strategies. Where Katrina played a role in the organizing that directly informed the 2007 USSF, the 2012 Presidential Elections would play a central role in informing the SFMA. This section will briefly highlight how each moment informed the vision and strategy behind the SFMA in Lowndes, Alabama because they were both read as crises that required strategic convergences to heighten levels of coordination and collaboration across southern communities in struggle.

Hurricane Katrina

The social catastrophe of Hurricane Katrina represented the erasure of entire communities through strategies of differential abandonment.⁶⁴ Hurricane Katrina is

⁶⁴ See Camp, Jordan, “‘We Know this Place,’ Neoliberal Racial Regimes and the Katrina Circumstance,” *American Quarterly* 61, no. 3 (September 2009): 693-717; Giroux, Henry A., “Reading Hurricane Katrina: Race, Class, and the Biopolitics of Disposability,” *College Literature* 33, no. 3 (2006):172-196. ; Guilloud, Stephanie, “Another World is Necessary...: How a Hurricane Taught US How to Organize for the US

directly related to the development of the PMA process and the visioning for the SFMA because it had a huge impact on a community of younger, southern-based, grassroots organizers who were also involved at the time in organizing the first United States Social Forum – a national, historically unprecedented, movement convergence scheduled to be held in the south.

In reflections shared within an article published in “As the South Goes...,” a biannual periodical produced by Project South, organizers noted how the USSF was originally scheduled to take place during the summer of 2006.⁶⁵ However, the magnitude of Katrina’s displacement along the gulf coast forced the National Planning Committee, at the insistence of these organizers, to postpone the social forum for a year. Guilloud notes that, “in order to ensure a representative set of organizations working in the South authentically connected to the social forum process and in anticipation of the US Social Forum, now planned for summer 2007, a series of regional convergences were organized in the summer of 2006.”⁶⁶ The Southeast Social Forum was organized in Durham, North Carolina, proceeded a few months later by the Border Social Forum held in Ciudad Juarez, where the first PMA was organized. Both these convergences represented important departure points in the history of the SFMA. The Border Social Forum literally introduced the method of the assembly process for the first time to social justice organizing in the US, while the Southeast Social Forum demonstrated the political possibility and strategic necessity of a regional convergence process bringing southern

Social Forum,” *As The South Goes: A Project South Periodical* 13, no. 2(Fall 2005):3, 6; See footnote 15, for a definition of differential abandonment.

⁶⁵ See Guilloud, et. al, *The First US Social Forum: Report from the Anchor Organization* (2008).

⁶⁶ Guilloud, email communication 2/28/2014.

movements together. Held in conjuncture to each other, the Border and Southeast Social Forums were credited with the success of the first United States Social Forum convened a year later, which also hosted the first National PMA process.

Furthermore, Katrina is important to highlight in the history of the Southern Freedom Movement Assembly and in the historical development of the Peoples Movement Assembly process because it introduced the urgent need for new movement building strategies capable of effectively confronting neoliberalism.⁶⁷ In particular, Katrina underscored the need for a “politics of intentionality” to inform the way convergence spaces were convened. Both the first USSF and the PMA process immediately following were examples that such a strategy was necessary and effective at creating strategic convergence spaces for grassroots struggles lead by historically marginalized communities.⁶⁸

However, while the Southeast and Border Social Forum were credited with the success of the first United States Social Forum, a feat this cohort of southern organizers could claim a lion’s share as its own, the challenges experienced when attempting to convene and facilitate deliberative processes among southern movement actors in the immediate aftermath of Katrina forced this generation of southern organizers to focus on the process, politics, and practices of convening strategic convergences. One example of

⁶⁷ Guilloud, “Another World is Necessary...: How a Hurricane Taught US How to Organize for the US Social Forum,” *As The South Goes: A Project South Periodical* 13, no. 2(Fall 2005):3, 6.

⁶⁸ See Appendix B, for a visual representation of the political significance of USSF and PMA process. Also, see note 75 for a link to Robin D.G. Kelley’s lecture given at UC Berkeley, where he situates the Occupy Wall Street Movement in relationship to the historical significance of the first USSF in Atlanta and Hurricane Katrina in New Orleans. Kelley’s analysis further underscores the significance of what organizers did during this period and the political innovations that emerged from this context, such as the PMA process, and its refinement into the Southern Freedom Movement Assembly.

this would be the interventions developed by a “Healing Justice” formation that emerged during this period that focused directly on responding to the role “generational trauma” played in undermining movement building processes.⁶⁹

Organizers within this formation argued that activists had to take serious the way collective trauma presented itself within intergenerational and intercultural movement organizing spaces by integrating a politics of healing into liberation strategies. This intervention, in part, was a response to challenges organizers encountered while attempting to convene intergenerational organizing spaces where either old wounds between organizations were still inflamed and/or fresh wounds from the structural violence of Hurricane Katrina present.⁷⁰

In this context, organizers would have to take seriously the way hegemonic power relations presented themselves through peoples’ responses to trauma within organizing

⁶⁹ See Kindred Southern Healing Justice Collective. <http://kindredhealingjustice.org/index.html> (accessed Dec. 4, 2013)

⁷⁰ This point was made throughout a variety of organizing spaces and conversations throughout my four years organizing with Project South. While it would be inappropriate and out of place for me to go in depth on specifics (a reflection, if ever published, that should be part of a broader collective process lead by members from the cohort noted above), the emergence of the Kindred Southern Healing Justice Collective in 2007 and their political philosophy and aspirations provides a window through which to view the presence of this dynamic. In particular the Kindred Collective embodied an important process of conviviality, largely informed by the desires and tradition of radical black feminist to create radically different kinds of libratory movement building strategies and practices through the reconstitution of cultural, social, political and personal worlds divided by the violence of interlocking systems of oppression. Asserting the need for movements to take seriously the psychic injuries organizers battling on frontline struggles accumulate throughout their lives, the Kindred Collective set out to gather convivial tools and organize a process for the crafting of new tools in order to integrate situated practices of healing and wellness into movement building work. A close look at their political philosophy and strategies coupled with the fact they were an active member of the Southern Movement Alliance from its inception, highlights the presence of this awareness among the community of organizers in leadership behind the both United States Social Forums, and the Peoples Movement Assembly process. See “Health, Healing, & Environmental Justice Working Group: Practicing new models of collaboration,” *First US Social Forum: Report from the Anchor Organization*. (Feb.15, 2009): 10, 11; See Page, Cara. “Transforming Wellness: Reflections from the Healing Justice Practice Space: Detroit 2010.” *As the South Goes: A Project South Periodical* 18, no. 2(Fall 2010): 5, 14.; See Appendix I, for a profile of the Healing Justice PMA held in Detroit.

spaces, because if unaddressed and accounted for, the process could be subjected to crippling antagonisms that could undermine the group's ability to form into an active collective subject. This would in turn further hinder the group's ability to deliberate on the kinds of actions and processes it could engage together. Thus a central question Katrina introduced was how communities in struggle find each other, come together, and form sustained shared struggles in and beyond moments of crisis.⁷¹ For organizations like the Kindred Collective, one member of Southern Movement Alliance, the assembly process was one tool that could be used to collectively engage those questions.⁷² For example, the Kindred Collective organized a Healing Justice PMA during the 2010 USSF

⁷¹ Katrina also amplified the political significance of processes of community regeneration through convergences and gatherings. In a context where thousands of families were displaced and dispersed throughout the country the act of coming together to reconstitute families and communities divided by Katrina further underscored the political necessity of a strategy that brought people together amidst other forms of displacement like incarceration. For example a space called the "Peoples Family Reunion" was organized during the 2007 USSF and was organized to create a space of gathering "for formerly incarcerated people," their "friends and loved ones... to be inspired by... unity" in order to build a network of organizations and communities of struggle to "forge a platform for collective action" to address the way in which "the criminal justice system attacks and destroys our communities." Thus the Peoples Family Reunion would be another example of an effort to regenerate community through community organizing using the convergence processes as a movement vehicle. See Wright, Emery, "The Peoples Family Reunion: Beyond Resistance, Towards Liberation," *The First US Social Forum: Report from the Anchor Organization*. (February, 15, 2009): 9, 10.

⁷² One of the factors that distinguished the Southern Movement Alliance was that it agreed to organize itself around the organizing of assemblies as a shared organizing vehicle vs. identifying a specific issue to organize around. See Middleton, Tamika. "Raising the Ground: The Southern Legacy, the Historical Moment, & the Regional Plan," *As the South Goes: A Project South Periodical* 19, no. 1(Spring 2011) 3.: also one of the central questions that informed the alliance from the onset, centered around a question posed during the BAM Institute which I discuss in the next chapter, revolved around what would have needed to be in place for southern movements to respond to Katrina. At the same time, organizers were also actively working to develop strategies that did not simply respond to crisis but were focused around building the kinds communities they desired and dreamed of. Once again this political impulse, informed from a variety of traditions, was a driving force behind the first USSF that continued into the alliance. See footnote 85, Guilloud reference. Plus the insistence on processes of social, political and cultural renewal can be observed in a number of sites from the political intervention of Alternate Roots and its explicit insistence on processes of cultural reclaiming and celebration through the arts, through SONG and their insistence on "desire and longing" as sources compelling their political work (see Appendix F) to the Kindred Collective and their focus on the reclaiming and regenerating cultural practices of healing(See Appendix I).

where the primary focus was the collective development of a Healing Justice analytical framework among a group of over 150 people representing a cross section of healers, healthcare workers, social justice organizers, and community members, outlining a politics of healing justice and a regional research strategy to map the presence of “healers” throughout the south.⁷³ This group, one among many, is important to highlight because their work illustrates the attention paid to engaging processes of social renewal and regeneration as a movement building process. While significant in many ways, the Kindred Collective represented one strategy of using the PMA among a deep repertoire of approaches engaged by wide range of struggles. The formation of the Southern Movement Alliance represented a political process where creative projects like Kindred’s could further integrate and fuse with those of other communities.

2010 National PMA Process

While the Tea Party was gaining political momentum, the second United States Social Forum, the largest convergence of social justice activists in the country, was scheduled to take place in summer 2010 in Detroit. The USSF had been a huge success in Atlanta two years prior, pulling off what some considered being the largest, most diverse social movement gathering in US history. Not only was it a diverse hosting of over a thousand workshops representing every major social justice struggle in US, the social forum had been organized by grassroots social justice organizations lead by people

⁷³ For reference to the use of the PMA as a collective research strategy to initiate the development of a healing justice framework see Appendix I.

of color and this leadership was reflected in the fact that 2007 USSF was highly attended by working poor communities of color from across the South and Southwest.

Looking to build off the success of the first USSF, the National Planning Committee, via the PMA Working Group, would use the Peoples Movement Assembly process as a prominent grassroots organizing strategy to build social momentum into the Detroit USSF. A focused look at the PMA process that took place during the USSF is important for three reasons. First, the same organizers responsible for the SFMA were also the lead organizers behind the NPMA process, establishing a direct line of connection from Ciudad Juarez to Detroit. Second, this connection meant that the NPMA represented a critical exercise where the method and practice of the PMA was further developed through a high intensity process. In this sense the direct act of organizing assemblies not only elevated their capacity, but the fact that over twelve thousand people directly participated in the assembly process represented the dispersion of the tool across the country and a multitude of social movement sectors. Third, the experience of facilitating a synthesis process on a national scale produced a number of lessons. One of those lessons sharpened their clarity about the political possibilities of an assembly process organized on a regional scale. For the lead organizers, the challenges and political opportunities associated with the NPMA process forced folks to refocus their efforts to organize nationally by organizing assemblies throughout the south.

The 2010 National People's Movement Assembly (NPMA) process represented a moment where the PMA strategy was further refined through the heat and pressure of mass use. During the NPMA, over 100 assemblies, involving over twelve thousand

people, were organized throughout its entire process creating a laboratory for movements to experiment with and learn from assembly processes.⁷⁴ Plus the NPMA provided an opportunity for organizers to learn from the experiences of hundreds of organizers and communities using the process, within a shared methodology, in the same space towards the shared goal of building a national social movement agenda. While the NPMA was effective at facilitating the actual creation of a political document articulating a movement agenda, the process of synthesis was not as successful at translating the document into a sustained active political project. Not for lack of effort. The lead organizers behind the NPMA process, for over a year and a half, worked hard to reanimate the NPMA through an ambitious fund raising strategy, an extended reflection process that involved over 30 assemblies, a revised and polished organizing kit, revamped web infrastructure, and a strategy to reconvene lead national movement actors in an “assembly of assemblies.”

Delving deep into the specific reasons why the NPMA stalled after the Detroit USSF extends beyond the scope of this thesis.⁷⁵ However, the SFMA, through its own

⁷⁴ For a listing of PMAs organized see *Peoples Movement Assembly Organizing Kit* (2011) <http://peoplesmovementassembly.org/> (accessed Dec. 5, 2013) 6. For a visual representation, see Appendix D.

⁷⁵ The National PMA process deserves a focused study to engage the question around why the process has “stalled” or slowed since the 2010 National PMA process. However, that question may be premature given that a 3rd USSF is in the works and a new National Planning Committee, still forming, has asserted that the 3rd USSF should be the result of a protracted PMA process moving from local, to regional to national where the USSF would essentially represent a convergence of assemblies. If effective the 3rd USSF may produce yet another proliferation of assemblies in the organizing towards, during and even after the 3rd USSF. In any event, the NPMA did “stall” in critical ways immediately after the Detroit USSF over a period of two years and an in depth reflection from organizers part of of the process would be critical in engaging this question. For references to the NPC’s commitment to use the PMA process as a central method for organizing the 3rd USSF, see National Planning Committee, “The US Social Forum 3 Strategy

organizing, provides insight into what a future national process could look like. This is in large part because the volume of PMAs associated with the NPMA helped clarify and further sharpen the practice of organizing assemblies. A number of lessons were learned, but one in particular revolved around the work of facilitating synthesis across and between dozens of converging struggles. One expression of this lesson, embodied in the SFMA process, centered on the work of streaming processes of synthesis throughout the grassroots organizing before, during, and after assemblies. As I show in the following section on the “BAM” institute, organizing drives and direct action campaigns that followed the Lowndes assembly all employed processes of synthesis within them. Whereas the NPMA attempted to work through a synthesis process on the eve of the National assembly, cramming at least a week’s worth of work between dozens of organizations and communities into three hours, the Southern Movement Alliance facilitated a process of synthesis that ran through a period of two years. In essence, the synthesis process for the SFMA was ongoing because of its active and cyclical nature.

As I noted earlier in the study, a PMA should be read in relation to its before, during, and after phases. Plus, if a PMA is able to “spark action” and animate a regenerative organizing process, then the “after” comes to represent the new “before.” This may have surfaced as a relation within the NPMA process if the NPMA was able to solidify itself into a working network, but the challenges of coordinating a loose formation of locally organized convergences, as Guilloud notes, with “no form of

centralized resource, dedicated staff time except those provided by a few organizations significantly limited the potential” of the national process, stalling its ability to root into an active network.⁷⁶ And with the 2012 Presidential elections on the horizon, large sectors of social justice organizations funded by civic engagement non-profit funds would focus their efforts on “GOTV” projects to counter and push back the advances of ultra-conservative political blocks dominating state and local politics across the union.⁷⁷

2012 Presidential Elections

If Hurricane Katrina taught a lesson, the NPMA was an exercise and the SFMA the lesson learned. In this context, the 2012 Presidential Elections were read as an approaching storm that would have far reaching devastating effects on the South, setting the context for waves of displacements in the form of expanded political disenfranchisement and institutionalized abandonments through privatization projects and austerity measures. In preparation for the elections, and in order to mobilize beyond them, the Southern Movement Alliance organized four grassroots campaigns and three regional assembly processes within a two-year span from spring 2011 through summer 2013.⁷⁸ On a practical level, the SFMA demonstrated the capacity to mobilize southern forces to particular fronts of struggle using assembly processes to converge communities. Moreover, the Peoples First One Hundred Days campaign, the regionally coordinated campaign following the Lowndes assembly, demonstrated not only the collective

⁷⁶ Guilloud, email communication, 02/28/2014.

⁷⁷ GOTV stands for “get out the vote” campaign work.

⁷⁸ For a visual representation of SFMA strategy including the campaigns and assemblies see Appendix M.

capacities of the alliance to engage in coordinated direct actions across the south, but the presence of a developing movement infrastructure.⁷⁹

As I noted in the section outlining the PMA history, the SFMA process represented a significant shift in the PMA because of its independence from the USSF. However, although pursuing its own political trajectory, the SFMA is still a PMA process representing a comprehensive expression of the method. That is to say, the SFMA should be read as a committed application of the PMA methodology as a movement building tool. In part this is due to the fact that the lead organizers of the process were also the lead organizers of the NPMA process in Detroit in 2010, in Atlanta in 2007, and in Ciudad Juarez in 2006 not to mention directly involved in the organizing of dozens of PMAs over a seven-year period.⁸⁰

While each of the above mentioned examples embodied grassroots movement building efforts, the SFMA process represents the first time this method was applied separate from the USSF on a regional scale, as well as engaged by a body of organizations adept at using the movement assembly process. Moreover, the PMAs that

⁷⁹ For a review of social justice organizing infrastructure in the South see *Social Justice Organizing In the U.S. South: The Southern Scan Research Project*. March 2009 by the Institute for Southern Studies, Hill-Snowdon Foundation and New World Foundation,

⁸⁰ The NPMA process in Detroit was co-chaired by Project South and the Southwest Workers Union, but a number of other lead organizers part of of the alliance were also involved in Detroit, either a part of the PMA Working Group- like the Kindred Healing Collective, members of the USSF National Planning Committee- like SONG and or were directly involved in organizing PMAs before and during Detroit USSF which included all four of the above mentioned organizations. See www.southtosouth.org for a comprehensive list of alliance members; Project South and the Southwest Workers were lead organizations involved in the organizing of 2007 USSF PMA process; The Southwest Workers Union was the one of the lead organizations involved in organizing the Border Militarization PMA, but the co-founder of SWU, Ruben Solis is also attributed with naming and introducing the Peoples Movement Assembly process in the US see Project South, "Border Social Forum," *As the South Goes: A Project South Periodical* 14, no. 2(Fall 2006), for a brief organizing summary of the Border Social Forum and the PMA held during it.

preceded the SFMA could be viewed as a strategic experimentation with a new process, a sort of research strategy and grassroots organizing exercise engaged over a period of years. In this context, the magnitude of the NPMA process, especially through the “before and during” phases, proved the efficacy of the PMA method as a tool for facilitating heightened levels of coordination and collaboration between movement sectors, communities, and organizations. Because of their experience developing and using the process on multiple scales, the SFMA represents the implementation of best practices of the PMA process learned thus far.⁸¹

This long term engagement with the PMA process also represented a deeper commitment to a democratic and democratizing politic. Moreover, the politics of the PMA process was fashioned in part by their experiences during Katrina where they struggled to convene strategic convergence spaces among southern movement actors to develop shared analysis, political direction, and coordinated actions in response to the violence of Katrina. The challenges of convening such spaces revealed a world of lessons, many of which are laced throughout the history, politics, process, and practices

⁸¹ Organizers part of of the alliance have organized two national assembly processes (i.e. Detroit 2010 and Atlanta 2007 NPMA processes), two regional processes (i.e. Southeast Social Forum and Border Social Forum represented movement assembly processes used to mobilize grassroots support for the first USSF), multiple thematic assemblies (i.e. Preemptive Prosecution PMA- an assembly organized around the intersection of the war on terror, war on drugs and war on immigration), city-wide assemblies (lead organizers supported a Detroit PMA process that included at least three assemblies) and local assemblies(a series of youth lead assemblies organized around the intersection of criminalization, privatization of public schools and youth autonomy to self-determine the content of their education within the South Atlanta community) not to mention all done while playing key leadership roles during the organizing of both United States Social Forums. This is important to highlight and celebrate because this innovation emerged from black, brown and queer southern struggles from regions where very little social justice funding is funneled.

of the SFMA.⁸² The larger PMA process and the specific focus of the SFMA revealed the need for the (re)development of southern based movement infrastructure capable of supporting grassroots organizing throughout the South and, when necessary, a shared formation of networked political forces that could deliver “strategic hits” against right wing attacks.⁸³

⁸² Guilloud, Stephanie, “Another World is Necessary...How a Hurricane Taught US How to Organize for the US Social Forum,” *As the South Goes: A Project South Periodical* 13, no. 2 (Fall 2005).

⁸³ “Strategic hit” a term commonly used by Emery Wright, co-director of Project South to describe the ability of a movement formation to mobilize and through coordinated action push-back against neoliberal-neoconservative attacks on community infrastructure. The push-back or “hit” halts the attack providing those under assault limited time and space to reorganize and reposition themselves.

CHAPTER THREE: THE SOUTHERN FREEDOM MOVEMENT ASSEMBLY:
BEFORE, DURING AND AFTER LOWNDES

This chapter provides an overview of the SFMA process broken into three phases: the before, during, and after. Once again, these three phases represent the explicitly claimed methodology of the PMA, which highlights elements of its democratic, grassroots movement building function. Ultimately, the point is to build a process that authentically represents grassroots struggles and their leadership from the start. In the before phase, I outline the organizing that led to the Lowndes assembly. This section illustrates how the PMA methodology was engaged to build a network of southern, grassroots organizing social justice organizations. The next section details the Lowndes assembly itself, focusing on the design and facilitation of the assembly. Lastly, the after phase briefly describes the accomplishments of the Peoples First One Hundred Days (P100D) campaign, the collaborative plan of action developed out of the Lowndes assembly.

Before Lowndes: BAMs, Alliances, Organizing Drives and Campaigns

Seated in an eclectic array of office chairs and cushioned seats, a group of thirty organizers from across the southeast quietly scribbled comments on pieces of paper. It was the close of the first day of the *Summer Organizing Intensive*. Organizers were asked to draft agreements they personally could commit to that they would also want to ask the larger group to honor during the *2011 Summer Organizing Drive* over the next ten weeks.

The statements were gathered and then synthesized overnight into a declaration statement that everyone reviewed the following day before signing. This document became known as the “Plan For the South.” It was a simple document articulating a range of statements like “provide political climate updates from the south,” and “share research strategies, writing skills, political education and historical analysis.” This document was also one example of an ongoing process of synthesis, in this case around shared values that the Southern Movement Alliance would rely on to advance the organizing of the Southern Freedom Movement Assembly.

Formation of the Southern Movement Alliance

The Southern Movement Alliance (the Alliance) was the official organizing body behind the Southern Freedom Movement Assembly. The Alliance consisted of eight grassroots Black- and Brown-led social justice organizations based in the South organizing around four primary fronts: racial justice, economic justice, environmental justice, and queer liberation.⁸⁴

The alliance was formed out of a 2010 “Building A Movement Institute” (BAM) series, anchored by Project South and organized as a collective peer leadership development process for organizers, all under the age of forty, recently “transitioned into advanced or executive level positions” within southern based social justice organizations, and who also had a history of organizing together over the past 6 years.⁸⁵ The purpose of

⁸⁴ See www.southtosouth.org for a comprehensive list of organizations part of of the alliance.

⁸⁵ See www.projectsouth.org for a description of the “Building A Movement Institute” aka BAM!. BAM! (s) are leadership development spaces that rely heavily on popular political education methods to facilitate critical dialogue, collective analysis and skill building. In the case of the “next generation” BAM Institute, the BAM was used to facilitate shared reflections leading to collective analysis, visioning and strategizing

the BAM Institute was to support the cohort to “map the current political landscape” and develop “innovative, shared, regional action plans for Southern movement building.”⁸⁶ Upon its conclusion, the cohort agreed to form the Alliance in order to “develop common political, economic and social analysis to implement strategic and collective actions plans.” The 2011 Summer Organizing Drive would be the first project the alliance would coordinate together.

2011 Summer Organizing Drive

The Alliance launched the Summer Organizing Drive as a strategy to build deep relationships across organizations in order to develop the capacity of the alliance as a collective force. However, the Alliance asserted from the start that it did not intend to be a classic alliance focused around a single issue or campaign. Describing the purpose of the *Summer Organizing Drive*, Paulina Hernandez, co-director of SONG, notes that “in 2011, we organized more intentional concentrated work through the Summer Drive” in order to “have our staff and organizers go through joint trainings and leadership development to build stronger leadership in a shared way.” The Summer Organizing Drive would be convened three times throughout the summer in what it called “organizing intensives,” using a southern popular education strategy that would combine skill building, collective analysis, visioning, and strategizing into multi-day sessions.⁸⁷

across a network of primarily southern based social justice organizations lead by a new generation of organizational leadership recently transitioned into advanced and executive level positions with their organizations.

⁸⁶ Project South. “Project South & Partners in Action” *As The South Goes: A Project South Periodical* 19, no. 1 (Spring 2011): 4-5.

⁸⁷ See Project South, “Southern Movement Alliance: Building People Power- Summer Drive 2011,” *As the South Goes: A Project South Periodical*, 25th Anniversary Special Edition (Fall 2011) 8. Each of the

The Summer Organizing Drive focused on three goals with an emphasis on collectively supporting organizers part of each organization to “build their organization’s bases... organize within their communities...and research and map local community assets.”⁸⁸ This process would result in the sharing of analysis, strategies, visions, relationships, and personal experiences that would result in a robust collective analysis of the current moment, with a particular emphasis on the impact of right wing attacks experienced by the communities organizers were a part of. In addition, participants during the “organizing intensives” would develop a set of shared principles and values for how the group would work together and relate each other. Lastly, the Organizing Drives as a whole would allow the Alliance to map its resources and strengths in order to envision a shared regional organizing plan attuned to the context of the upcoming 2012 Presidential Elections.

What is important to note about the Summer Organizing Drive and the BAM Institute is that they both embodied the PMA processes themselves in method. At smaller more focused scales, the BAM Institute allowed the organizational leadership to engage in a focused process of reflection, collective analysis, visioning, and strategizing immediately directed into action plans that organizers worked on to implement within their specific local contexts. This process started with the BAM Institute in a small

gatherings played a specific purpose. The first convening was called the “Summer Organizing Intensive” and was focused around introducing the alliance to itself, the idea and purpose of the Summer organizing drive and landing the main goals of the drive. The second convening was called the Halftime Huddle, and was held six weeks into the drive to bring folks back together, evaluate the work done thus far and the Southern Movement Organizing Institute concluded the Summer Organizing Drive reflecting on the accomplishments and challenges as well as devising next steps.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

focused fashion and was expanded out into their organizations and bases through the Organizing Drives. However, while the organizational leadership developed shared proposal throughout the BAM Institute, each organizational leader took their proposals back to their organizations and shared those proposals with their staff and bases. Moreover, each organizing intensive represented a collaborative process where the idea of the alliance was directly engaged by those present and expanded upon. For example, while the alliance was proposed by the directors of these organizations, the collective analysis and actions plans were collectively developed within the organizing intensives. Here the organizing intensives provided a public forum and deliberative process for the organizing communities of each organization to come together and define, clarify, and further anchor the shared political direction set by the Alliance. From the onset, the idea was to refine a practice of sharing towards the development of shared analysis, visions, strategies, and plans of action.

An explicit emphasis was on developing shared systems of leadership, values, and principles that the organizers and organizational membership could rely on to govern the way the Alliance would work together. One of the best examples of this process was the development of a document called “A Plan For The South,” which included a list of 23 statements, representing commitments the group was willing to make to itself in its efforts to movement build a “new south” into existence. Collectively drafted by the entire group during the first organizing intensive, the document represented a shared statement of values that each participant made a public commitment to honor. For example, this document included statements such as, “know everyone, listen to each

other's stories and learn from everyone” and another asked participants to “give the best ideas away freely and gladly.⁸⁹”

The Summer Organizing Drives explicitly functioned as a space to establish shared systems of information, communication, and knowledge production between the communities. For example, one simple yet practical communications strategy was to insure that everyone part of the Organizing Drive had an extensive contact list of everyone present. To buttress the system of communication, the group agreed that anyone called by anyone within the alliance was obligated to return the call within a 24-hour period. This was another commitment included in the document noted above. Now this may seem like an obvious point, but the emphasis here is on the establishment of a robust system of communication, anchored by a shared commitment.

What made the Summer Organizing Drive a critical process was that it facilitated an intentional process, using direct face to face encounters, the sharing of analysis, visions, and plans of action, establishing direct engagement across communities as an ongoing occurrence and expectation. For example, constituents of the SFMA later on would come together because they expected to see each other, and because the gathering was an expression of one's commitment to the process. During the Summer Organizing Drive, local grassroots initiatives engaged with a constellation of projects that represented a range of differences. This allowed for translocal connections to form; from youth led efforts to democratize and self-determine their local education, to the struggles of queer

⁸⁹ Southern Movement Alliance, “A Plan For The South,” Summer Organizing Drive, Project South, Atlanta, Georgia (Summer 2011).

communities organizing around racial and economic justice issues within their communities. The Summer Organizing Drive operated to create intersectional relationships, analysis, visions, strategies, and skills across a network of communities in struggle.

Another critical development coming out of both the BAM Institute and Summer Organizing Drive was a collective analysis of the current moment. It was clear to everyone that the current moment represented deep historical changes and that there was an urgent need to understand those changes in order to be clear about what needed to be done to insure the development of strong movements through the crises and beyond.⁹⁰ An important quality of the BAM Institute and Summer Organizing Drives had to do with the fact that organizations and their bases were involved in heated battles throughout the south in some of the most contested political terrains. From mountain-top removal projects displacing entire communities in the Appalachians to the environmental racism of crude oil clean-up disposal strategies of BP along the Gulf Coast, from the privatization of public schools across Metro Atlanta to targeted legislative attacks on women's rights in Arkansas and the neo-apartheid attacks on undocumented communities through deportations, these gatherings represented a rich convergence of frontline struggles. Dedicated time was given to the sharing of stories and concerns, allowing the group throughout the process to hear what struggles and attacks people were up against, as well as the strategies being developed or deployed to counter those attacks. This helped the group paint a vivid picture of a southern political context and the

overlapping fronts of struggle their coming together represented. Most importantly, this process helped the Alliance build its organizing capacity in preparation for 2012.

The 2012 We All Count Campaign

The *We All Count: We Will Not Be Erased Campaign* was launched in spring 2012 by the Alliance to coordinate a regional organizing drive around voter education, registration, and community organizing focused on and around those communities targeted for disenfranchisement and already excluded from the electoral process. Noting the fact that 2012 Presidential elections would result in the largest number of disenfranchised voters prior to 1965 Voting Rights Act, organizations part of the Alliance engaged in a regional campaign to develop actions held community education forums on local voter issues related to the larger southern political context, hosted voter registration drives, convened community assemblies, and organized delegations to attend the Southern Freedom Movement Assembly in late September. The banner “We All Count We Will Not Be Erased” was a collective assertion that all people mattered, regardless of citizenship, criminal record, sexual orientation, and age, and that voting, while important, was only one form of meaningful civic engagement. This assertion was also a collective statement reflecting the shared position cultivated during the Summer Organizing Drive, in which those communities part of the process came to a shared understanding that current attacks on their communities represented a process of erasure through processes of political disenfranchisement that was destroying their communities.

Emphasizing the importance of the expansion of the right to vote as a strategic target of the civil rights movements that represented the defeat of Jim Crow, the Alliance

emphasized that the vote was only one way to participate in a democracy, and that communities could vote with their actions, visions, and commitments to build socially just and inclusive communities. This was an important emphasis because the Alliance, keenly aware of those structurally excluded from officially participating in electoral process (ex-felons, undocumented, the homeless, youth, elderly), wanted to expose another plane for civic engagement through the assembly process by inviting communities to form and attend movement assemblies for the purpose of connecting local struggles and engaging in processes self of determination. Thus, the Southern Freedom Movement Assembly was convened in Lowndes, Alabama, the very same site a historic battle for democracy was waged by working poor Blacks. This assembly would serve as the culmination of the 2012 We All Count Campaign.⁹¹

During Lowndes: Roll Calls, Fishbowls, Freedom Songs and Freestyles

The Lowndes assembly was an intensively facilitated process from start to finish. Organizers chose to use a popular education strategy to design the assembly. This meant that a collection of interactive, dialogue-centered activities would be used throughout the assembly to generate collective analysis, shared visions, and proposals for action that the larger assembly would articulate into a synthesis statement and resolution for action. Thus, “roll calls” would be used as a high energy activity to introduce the assembly to itself; the “synthesis fishbowl” would be used to facilitate dialogue across communities in order to produce collective analysis; freedom songs would be song by cultural workers as

⁹¹ See Appendix C.

a strategy to (re)convene the assembly; and a spoken word freestyle, always impromptu, would be used to bless, affirm, and close the assembly. These activities are just a few examples of the kinds of “convivial tools” used to facilitate introduction, critical engagement, collective dreaming, and decision making during the Lowndes assembly. What follows is a description of the Lowndes assembly.

Synthesis Fishbowl

The circle was barely distinguishable; partly because it hardly looked like a circle, but mostly because over two hundred people were tightly packed around a group of approximately 20 people. Those seated in the circle were tasked by the small groups they came from with sharing a two-minute summary of the major themes and ideas raised during the conversations they just had between each other. The entire assembly had just returned to the larger tent from their small groups after having an hour to engage in discussions around two sets of questions posed to them by Emery Wright and Stephanie Guilloud, the lead facilitators. This was the first breakout group during the assembly. The questions, part of a larger facilitation strategy, had been developed collectively by the Southern Movement Assembly organizing team and were a part of an activity called the “Synthesis Fishbowl.” This activity was called a “fishbowl” because the small group in the center of the assembly was facilitated in a discussion observed by the larger assembly. This section of the assembly was used to collectively map, name, and describe the role of the Southern Freedom Movement in the 21st century. At the end of the activity, major themes shared were reflected back to the larger assembly and the assembly was asked for affirmation on the themes teased out. This process came to represent a

collective analysis of the current moment and a beginning sketch of a collective vision for a “new south” defined by grassroots social justice struggles.

Overview

The assembly was convened over a period of two days. The first day was broken into the following sections: tent distribution and general set-up, dinner, an official welcome, a history telling section followed by a blues concert, and late night campfire socializing. The second day held the deliberative section of the assembly and was organized in six parts. In the first part, the assembly was called to order and opened with an introduction of the assembly that included statements on community guidelines; the arrangement of the assembly; goals for the day; a brief statement highlighting the political context and purpose of the assembly; ending with a roll call to publicly acknowledge and celebrate the various communities in attendance. The second section of the assembly was facilitated in five parts: 1) small group delegation discussions based on a set of questions provided by the facilitation team; 2) an assembly wide activity called the *Synthesis Fishbowl* used to facilitate a larger discussion among the assembly on the political context and role of a southern freedom movement in the current moment; 3) an action planning session to deliberate on the strategy of the direct action campaign; and 4) the close of the assembly, which included a process of affirmation used to engage the

action proposals and publicize the commitments of communities present to the plans of action developed during the assembly.⁹²

The emphasis of the first day was on cultural renewal through the sharing of food, the recuperation of silenced histories of struggle, and celebration through black southern cultural practices of poetry, music, and comedy (the blues artists were also brilliant comedians). The history telling section deepened the urgency of the moment, while spoken word and the blues concert provided by regionally renowned blues artists reiterated a black working class southern positionality.

Purpose and Goals

The alliance identified two sets of goals for the assembly. The first set of goals was called the “external” goals because they represented the clear objectives of the assembly based on the strategy of the PMA process. The "External Goals" were outlined as the following:

- 1) Develop clear strategic actions for after the [presidential] election [through the] People's First 100 Days that show movement force, lift up clear vision, confront power, have clear and decentralized entry points for involvement;
- 2) Strengthen our local efforts with broader, regional& global analysis of the current moment;
- 3) Tell and lift up our story of Southern resistance and movement in the “red states.”⁹³

Thus the external goals clarified the kinds of actions, analysis, and shared narratives the assembly would develop. The second set of goals was called the “internal goals” because they represented the focus of the facilitation strategy itself. The facilitation team

⁹² Southern Movement Alliance, “Facilitation Strategy: Southern Movement Assembly, Lowndes County, September 21-20.”

⁹³ Ibid.

developed six internal goals. They were the following (represented as seen in the document with minor additions for greater clarity):

- 1) Recognize historical reality, connections, relevance, lessons and pain [in particular] lift up the hidden histories of people's place and experience,
- 2) Create a cultural experience that fuels us moving forward,
- 3) Shift the dynamic of separate issues/identities to fronts and combined force,
- 4) Establish a relationship to community governance,
- 5) Practice collective decision-making and representation [which in this context will specifically relate to] broader processes of accountability to politics and community,
- 6) Build a sense of shared identity and connection as Southern movement forces.⁹⁴

The internal goals helped guide the design of the facilitation strategy and larger organization of the assembly itself. More importantly, these goals reflected the shared desire of the organizing body and the kind of political space it was working to create.

The facilitation strategy is important to highlight because its design was a product of an ongoing collective process that itself represented an internal process of deliberation and synthesis. For example, the goals were identified through a brainstorming process between and among organizational leaders from the alliance who met on weekly calls where the main themes were teased out and synthesized. Next, a smaller team took the content identified, distilled them into themes that represented the current goals, and designed an agenda based on the themes outlined. Once a draft of the facilitation strategy was developed, it was circulated among the team for feedback and revisions.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

The drafting of the facilitation strategy represented an important moment within the SFMA where agreement on the assembly was further anchored and collectively decided on. For example, the facilitation strategy represented a micro assembly process where the internal goals represented a collective vision of the assembly that also included an embedded analysis of various dynamics the alliance anticipated. Moreover, the external goals represented the larger plan of action, and actual activities and organization of the assembly represented a detailed strategy for advancing that vision.

Main Elements of the Assembly

The following section provides a brief profile of the assembly focusing on who attended, brief descriptions of key elements within the assembly, followed by an overview of action proposals developed towards the end.

Choosing Lowndes.

The Assembly was held on the grounds of the newly opened Lowndes Interpretative Center, by the National Park Service.⁹⁵ Recently opened only two years earlier, the site sat on several acres of lush grassland cupped by what appeared to be old farms on its adjacent sides, with highway I-80 (the highway that hosted the famed 1965 Selma to Montgomery Civil Rights March) defining the front border of the interpretative center's land.⁹⁶ Located literally half way between Selma and Montgomery, the site was chosen because Gwenn Patton, Project South co-founder and lead Alabama SNCC

⁹⁵See United States National Park Service <http://www.nps.gov/semo/planyourvisit/directions.htm>, (accessed on November 30, 2013, and last updated November 16, 2013)

organizer, recommended the site. Upon her recommendation it was immediately clear that its history, location, and arrangement were the right fit.

The site represented a flash point in southern black freedom struggles, a historic moment of intensifying battles that occurred after significant civil rights gains were obtained; in this instance the VRA of 1965. Seeing parallels, with the election of the first Black President and his bid for reelection fueling right wing backlashes and intensified attacks on the voter rights, organizers and community members gathered in Lowndes to remember and celebrate black southern histories of struggle and fashion deep bonds for future organizing and southern movement building. The site and decision to hold the assembly as a tent city was intended to recuperate the history of the Lowndes County Freedom Organization and the tent city it occupied for over two years.⁹⁷

Four additional projects were developed to celebrate the history of Lowndes County. The first project was centered on the development of a historical timeline situating the local history of Lowndes County. This project was developed by Cita Cook, a retired southern historian, scholar activist, and long-term member of Project South, who developed an extensive timeline chronicling the history of Lowndes dating back to the colonial era. The timeline was developed in two forms: 1) a short two-page synopsis and 2) an extended detailed version. The two-page timeline was disseminated as part of the

⁹⁷ Not only was the site the half way point between Selma and Montgomery on Highway I-80, it was the site of a two year tent city encampment occupied by black families evicted from their homes and terminated from their jobs because of their attempts to register to vote. During the encampment the Lowndes County Freedom Organization was formed as an independent political party that would intensify local voter registration efforts and run black candidates for local offices such as sheriff, tax collector, board of education seats and coroner. The LFCO embodied a distinct political assertion that insisted on democratization to advance local self-determination and defense towards community regeneration. See Appendix A.

assembly materials passed out during the registration process, while the extended version was made available upon request. Plus, the content gathered was also integrated into a media and various outreach materials.

The second project was called a “history walk” and was developed by Taliba Obuya, a regional organizer with Project South. This project consisted of several dozen enlarged, laminated, black and white photos of significant moments within southern histories of struggle and indigenous struggles for autonomy. On site along one of the main high traffic walkways bisecting the park into north (open green field where the tents were housed) and south sections (where the pavilions and large event tent, and parking lot were located), a series of posters were attached to clothes lines strung along both sides of the path way, stretching approximately 20 yards depicting historical images along with short summaries of southern movements and global southern liberation struggles.

The third project or historical element was provided by the history telling section of the assembly on the first day. Dr. Gwen Patton, a respected civil rights organizer in Alabama, the first female president of the Tuskegee University student body, and a lead organizer within SNCC, opened the history telling session. Dr. Patton emphasized political principles, closely associated with SNCC, such as the importance of self-determination, local leadership, collectivity, rigorous economic and political analysis, and unabashed militancy. Dr. Patton reiterated the urgency of the moment and necessity for the generalization of assembly processes like SFMA as a strategy to encourage everyday

people to “organize where they live.”⁹⁸ Her talk was followed by another veteran SNCC organizer named “Scotty B,” who was also directly involved in the tent city from its inception.⁹⁹

Scotty B noted how the Tent City was the site of an ongoing war, emphasizing how local whites in passing cars shot into the tents late at night from the highway, a road we could see in plain sight from the assembly tent. At various moments throughout his talk it was clear he was re-living the moment as tears welled in his eyes, his voice changed and rage burst through his tone as he declared war on “those crackers” for the pain and suffering they caused. Painfully clear his talk was taking an emotional toll on her comrade, Dr. Patton touched his hand and discretely whispered in his ear and his demeanor immediately changed as he closed his talk by saying that he loved us all and challenged us to remain committed to each other and to be courageous and fearless. The importance of their talk could not be over emphasized. A clear example of its importance and gravity was apparent in the fact that throughout the talk, a section that exceeded the allotted time by over an hour, no one left the assembly tent.¹⁰⁰

Lastly, the historical interpretation center provided a museum of civil rights history specific to the Selma to Montgomery march, with a focused exhibit on the history of the Lowndes County Freedom Organization and tent city. The museum was opened

⁹⁸ For a short biography of Dr. Gwen Patton see Illenberger, Abbie. “A Tribute to Our Beacon in the South,” *As the South Goes: A Project South Periodical* 13, no. 2(Fall2005)8-9.

⁹⁹ Patton, Gwen, see footnote 2, pg 13.

¹⁰⁰ In an assembly organizing context participants leaving a space in a constant flow is a clear sign that the energy of the space is dispersing either because of lack of relevance, discomfort with the energy of the assembly or because of boredom to name a few reasons. People remained out of respect and because the stories shared were viewed as sacred.

extended hours to accommodate the assembly and the building kept open overnight in order to provide overnight access to restrooms and seating areas.¹⁰¹

Roles

Six teams were created to support the assembly: 1) program and facilitation, 2) synthesis and note taking, 3) logistics and registration, 4) communications, 5) tents and campsite, and 6) the Peoples First 100 Days tactical team. In addition to teams, an interpretation and translation cadre, focused around Spanish and sign language translation, was organized to provide continuous translation support throughout the assembly.

“Community journalists” were recruited among participants at the assembly to gather interviews, photos, and video footage from other participants throughout the PMA. The idea of the community journalists was to insure that the representation of the assembly was undertaken by those who participated in the assembly. Plus, the idea was to create a critical mass of journalists, from within the assembly, in an effort to insure everyone present had an opportunity to share their stories, reflections, ideas, and feelings about the process. Most importantly, this insured that the assembly would have a reserve of internally produced narratives lead by participants themselves that organizers could rely on for future reflections and analysis.

¹⁰¹ It is important to note that the existence of the historical interpretation center was the result of organizing lead by Dr. Patton. Thus their hospitality was also a statement of respect and honor shown by the museum staff.

Children's Pavilion

Asserting the need for there to be critical and intentional space for children to engage and participate in the process, a Children's Assembly was organized. The Children's assembly, lead by Tamika Middleton, included a Southern Freedom Movement coloring book, an activity centered around creating a freedom song, and an arts activity to create a collage depicting images of the kinds of communities the children wanted to live in. The song and collage were also presented to the larger assembly during the close of the assembly.

Who Showed Up

Over 25 Southern delegations and at least 250 people representing youth, elders, black, Latino and LGBTQ communities attended the assembly. The delegations were developed during the We All Count Summer campaign, as organizers part of the alliance lead voter registration and education drives, community education forums and organizing workshops, and community assemblies in preparation for the SFMA. Other delegations attended because the work they were already doing directly intersected with the We All Count Campaign and thus their aspiration was to connect their existing work with other communities and a larger movement.

The three largest delegations present at the assembly were Southern LGBTQ communities coming in from 5 southern states, anchored by the southern regional queer liberation organization known as Southerners On New Ground aka SONG. The next largest delegation was southern youth organizers part of a growing formation known as the National Student Bill of Rights. Youth part of local education justice community

organizing projects across the south saw the SMA as an opportunity to develop a southern NSBR organizing committee to advance the larger national effort to build a youth led education justice movement. The third largest delegation was undocumented immigrant communities organizing against anti-immigrant legislative attacks. The largest delegation within this group was the *Just Immigration Coalition* based in Alabama. However, SONG was also deeply involved with immigrant rights struggles organizing in Alabama, Georgia, and North Carolina, making the immigrant rights presence the largest formation present. Other prominent formations were a small group from Florida called the *New Jim Crow Movement*, who was organizing against corruption within Florida's criminal justice system. Another group called The Ordinary Peoples Society, also based in Alabama, but engaged in regional organizing to advance human rights recognition for formerly incarcerated communities were also present; women's rights and reproductive justice formations from Little Rock, Arkansas and Atlanta, Georgia; healthcare justice organizers; and anti-poverty workers from Atlanta were all present.

Day Two

Over 150 people awoke to a crisp Saturday morning. By 8am, a group of women from a local church were on site preparing breakfast. From 7am to 9:30, the facilitation team gathered and discussed the night before, the morning, and possible changes to the facilitation strategy that may be needed. Others awoke, dressed, ate breakfast, and gathered in clusters around the field and various spaces. At 10am, the Assembly was opened in a freedom song by a minister from North Carolina and SONG member. They invited everyone to the large 300-person tent. As folks gathered, the minister invited

folks to sing along and the assembly was officially opened with over 200 people packed in the Tent and dozens more gathered in clusters along the outskirts of the tent.

The Assembly was opened with 6 speakers who gave short one to three minute pieces to set the tone, reiterate the goals, explain the flow, lay out the community agreements, set the political context, and prepare folks to engage in the upcoming activities. Each speaker highlighted the political significance of the gathering as a space of deep resistance, celebration, convergence, and connection.

From language justice and the practical process of facilitating a multilingual space to the politics of disagreement and critical engagement with each other to mutual exchanges of respect between youth and elders speakers provided frames for political conduct during the assembly process. “If you become upset by anything that is said here, step out if you need to, but come back ready to work together,” Paulina Helm-Hernandez, Co-Director of SONG, would state as she set the guidelines for the place. More importantly, Helm-Hernandez would begin by noting the fundamental need for the group, given the current political context, to “struggle and build together” in order to develop “shared accountability and community collaborations across the whole South” in order to effectively combat and push back against attacks, like the “North Carolina amendment banning same sex families, and marriage, the anti-immigrant laws in Georgia and Alabama, and voter suppression” present everywhere in the south.¹⁰²

¹⁰² Cita Cook, “Key Points from the Southern Movement Assembly, September 21-22, 2012,” digital copy of document filed at Project South. This document contains detailed notes of the Lowndes assembly.

Roll Call

Lead by Reverend Kenneth Glasgow the delegations were prompted to stand and “represent” as states, cities, struggles and organizations. Loud clapping, cheers and shouts were followed as Rev. Glasgow called out groups to represent themselves. This activity allowed the larger group to see “who was in the room.” The roll call was a simple activity that allowed the group to collectively take stock of itself and see the depth and diversity of the convergence. Moreover, this activity helps the assembly facilitate connections across communities.

Delegations

After the opening and larger framing for the day, Emery Wright and Stephanie Guilloud, co-directors from Project South, prepared the assembly to gather into their delegations by providing an overview of the activity and emphasizing the questions each delegation needed to engage. They noted that the purpose for the delegations to gather was to “establish political clarity about their relationship to the larger, collective frame of the Southern Freedom Movement.”¹⁰³ The space was designed to provide local initiatives with an opportunity to deliberate within their specific communities in order to further clarify the purpose and relationship of their delegations to the assembly. The assembly was prompted to discuss two separate sets of questions. First they were asked to discuss why they were present at the assembly and in particular, “what struggle/frontline they represented,” what they felt was “at stake” within their communities, and what they hoped to “bring back” to the people within their communities. After discussing these

¹⁰³ Southern Movement Alliance, Facilitation Strategy.

questions, delegations were then asked to reflect on how their particular struggles “mattered to the freedom of all people,” emphasizing why their front of struggle “was important to ... the Southern Freedom Movement.”¹⁰⁴ The facilitators concluded their instructions by instructing each group to choose and prepare one representative to report back the content of their discussion to the larger assembly.

Small groups facilitators had already been chosen and oriented on how to support delegations who may need support engaging the questions and coming up with a strategy for reporting back to the larger group. Most of the small group facilitators came from and were already part of the delegations, so the majority of small groups had facilitators within their groups already. The assembly was dispersed into approximately 2 dozen small groups. This activity lasted approximately an hour.

Synthesis Fishbowl

The synthesis fish bowl was the next activity. The larger assembly was reconvened in song by a long-time cultural worker and grassroots organizer from Arkansas. The synthesis fish bowl was based on a relatively simple format. In the center of the tent was a circle with one chair for each delegation. The representatives from each small group were invited to take a seat within the circle while the larger assembly surrounded them. One by one each representative was passed the microphone and asked to report back to the larger assembly. This is what gave it a “fishbowl” feeling because the facilitator, after the report backs, then engaged the small group within the circle in a discussion as the larger assembly observed. Emery Wright lead the activity by framing

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

the purpose of the activity and noted that the process, the presentations, and discussions expressed would be used to inform a synthesis statement reflecting the shared analysis of the group.

The NSBR delegation was invited to speak first. Challenging the guideline that only one person could represent the group, the delegation chooses three youth representatives to present their position. In addition they also challenged the time limit as well. However the larger assembly and facilitator celebrated the diversion and allowed space for the youth delegation to speak. Their assertion set the tone as each delegate, while stating in succinct and focused positions, routinely went over time. After the youth spoke, the following delegations spoke: Health Care Now; Just Immigration Alabama; Language Justice Warriors; Vital Arts Collective; Youth in Appalachia; Reproductive Justice in the South; Alternate Roots – representing southern artists for movements; Radical Technologists – representing a formation of techies committed to developing liberated communications infrastructure for liberation movements; Southern Anti-Racist Network; Southerners On New Ground; New Jim Crow Movement – a representing the fight against the criminalization of black and brown youth within the criminal justice system in Jacksonville; Moving Forward Gulf Coast – representing media and racial justice organizing taking place in New Orleans; Atlanta Coalition of movement organizations – representing a range of projects; and Georgia Citizens Coalition on Hunger – representing human rights struggles for the poor and houseless.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰⁵ Some larger groups represented multiple delegations. For example the SONG delegation represented at least five or more delegations from Alabama, the Carolina's, Virginia and Georgia.

To aid the synthesis, a cultural worker and visual artist was on stage behind the fishbowl circle with four large dry erase boards. While the discussion took place the artist graphically tracked the content and translated it into imagery on the large dry erase boards using a storyboard format. In addition, there were three note takers each tracking different elements of the conversation. One tracked the direct content, another tracked the process, and the other tracked the tone and social energy of the group.

After each delegate spoke, Wright reiterated that the purpose of the assembly was to figure out how we can act together as a unified force in the south. With questions like “Given what everyone shared, what are the commonalities between the reports from the different groups?” Five themes were immediately shared by delegates in the circle.

- Each struggle represented an effort to address the unequal balance of power,
- Each struggle represented a fundamental opposition to systems of oppression,
- The centrality of incarceration as a front of struggle and the “new criminalization of a variety of behaviors targeting youth, undocumented and LGBTQ” communities creating “school to prison pipelines” blocking “access to the vote, education and healthcare” for those with records.
- Education was also lifted up as a central front of struggle highlighting the necessity for the national student bill of rights as a counter strategy to the corporatization of public school education.
- Self-determination, dignity, and safety for all people were at stake because increasing systems of control were being put in place to determine how people identify themselves and where people could go.

Next it was asked how the assembly could act together and what needed to be expressed from this assembly to the larger public. Here the discussion was opened up to the larger assembly. Three main themes surfaced from the assembly. First, people emphasized the importance of learning about each other’s struggles. Second, participants

asserted the importance of being proud of the gathering itself and the fact that people came together further emphasizing the necessity for everyone to share the significance of the assembly, within their communities back home. Lastly, it was noted that the assembly needed to be strategic about the actions advanced, focusing more on small steps the assembly could take together in order to build deeply towards larger actions. To wrap up and close the discussion, Guilloud stepped in and began to reflect back the dominant themes expressed.

“The pressure is coming from neoliberalism, colonialism, imperialism and capitalism. Our resonances are and we have identified people in the south. Women, young people, queer, trans, poor, low income and rural folks as our communities.....Our visions are towards autonomy, self-determination, desire, a rightful place, a south where we can be who we are, stay in our communities –in the cities and rural places we are from. Knowing each other, each others struggles, visions and hopes, being present, acknowledged and claiming space. Building with our communities and building communities not just bases. And We should close the hundred days with simultaneous actions to honor our dreams and desires and to declare our love for our communities. The South is alive. We are many. We want to liberate our bodies, resources, our knowledge, our languages and communities. We will communicate, accelerate, and coordinate specific actions across the south within our communities. Does that sound right?!”¹⁰⁶

The assembly affirmed the reflection with applause and was closed for lunch.

After lunch the assembly was to return and engage in a “SNCC style” debate session. The goal for this activity was “to build shared analysis of the conditions, threats, and resistance in motion now in the South ...and to land a shared understanding of our combined force” as well as identify the “potential strategic attacks we are positioned to take on” in order to understand what the group could do together and identify what

¹⁰⁶ Cita Cook, “Key Points from the Southern Movement Assembly, September 21-22, 2012.”

attacks the assembly was strong enough to confront with critical force. To draw out the ideas and thinking from the group, facilitators had three questions they planned to pose:

1. What was different today than 40 years ago?
2. What is our forecast of the South?
3. What/who is the Southern Freedom Movement?

While the group was dispersed for lunch, due to a series of technical difficulties with the food, the local pastor who provided lunch miscalculated the amount of time it would take to smoke, grill, and fully cook fifty pounds of chicken and hamburgers on his grill. As a result lunch was served over 2 hours late. Despite this challenge, the assembly was called back at 2pm.¹⁰⁷

The facilitation team had planned on facilitating a 30 minute debate session “SNCC-style” where the assembly would be posed a question and encouraged to share their ideas and thoughts critically, not for the purpose of winning, but debate towards agreement. The team thought a warm-up activity after lunch would help energize discussion as well as tease out some more specific themes to fill out the visioning and analysis, further preparing the larger group for the action planning session of the assembly. Given that lunch went over by an hour and most of the group had not eaten yet, the team decided to cut that section and jump straight into the action planning section.

Action Planning

The goal for this section was to facilitate collaboration across communities, organizations, and struggles by creating clear action proposals that could “be

¹⁰⁷ Southern Movement Alliance, “Facilitation Strategy: Southern Movement Assembly, Lowndes County, September 21-20.”

decentralized, coordinated and ... show presence” during the People’s First 100 Days. To frame the discussion and action planning work, a community organizer and civil rights lawyer from New Orleans reopened the space by asserting, “It’s time we do something. We each need to commit to taking action. We need to seek simple solutions without multiple definitions and fight back against oppressive power with courage, faith, and strategic actions.” Furthermore, the organizer added that the group needed to think about those things “we can do to build up each other’s courage” in order to act together as a collective force. The organizer reminded the group that love was hard work, which was fundamentally about commitment, the content of which was determined by what one does when things get difficult. Thus, they noted, it was important to think about those things we can do to strengthen our commitments to each other so that we can stand together through hardships and attacks. Their statement would frame and guide the direction of the group. The assembly was broken up again into five groups: 1) November 7th, the day after the elections and the official start of the *People’s First 100 Days*; 2) Community Assemblies; 3) NSBR actions in the South; 4) MLK Day 2013; and 5) February 14th, the last day of the *People’s First 100 Days* campaign.

The groups worked for an hour to develop proposals. Because of the size of the groups, the Alabama heat, fatigue, hunger, and time pressure to create proposals, the work groups struggled through the process. This was the most challenging section of the assembly as facilitators worked hard to keep their groups focused and together despite a number of antagonisms. After an hour, the assembly was reconvened and each action group was invited to share their proposals. Using flip charts and hand drawn visuals, each

group shared the specific elements of their proposals. Three days of joint direct actions were teased out: N7- the day after the elections and the first day of the Peoples First 100 Days campaign, 2) MLK Day as the mid-point of the campaign, and 3) Valentine's day, the last day of the campaign. In addition to these dates the National Student Bill of Rights group launched an initiative to gather "ballots" on a bill of rights they had collectively developed.¹⁰⁸ Lastly, the assembly indicated a desire to continue organizing assemblies as key part of the direct action campaign, and as a strategy to share what took place in Lowndes, as well as continue building a southern vision based around the incorporation of new voices.

Decision Making Process- Circle

Once the report-backs were completed, the whole assembly was invited to stand and gather into a large circle. Lifting up the proposals, one of the lead facilitators began to call out each delegation present. Noting that we were going to, as an assembly, decide on proposals the facilitator asked each delegation to state their commitment to the action proposals presented. One by one each delegation stated their commitment to the proposals. Some committed to them all, others to some elements, and some to only distinct portions, but all committed to support the People's First 100 Days as the plan of action developed by the Southern Freedom Movement Assembly.

¹⁰⁸ The National Student Bill of Rights had developed a mock ballot part of of a larger strategy to gather over 100,000 votes on the items within the bill from youth across the country. One interesting aspect about this process is the fact that the ballot itself was the result of a 6 year youth led collaborative process that stretched across the US. In a lot of ways their process for developing the ballot resembled a PMA methodology, and in fact involved one PMA back in 2010 during the National PMA held in Detroit. Once the NSBR connected up with Project South through their youth leadership program, youth organizers under Emery Wright's leadership would fuse the PMA methodology into the national organizing strategy as the southern arm of the NSBR began to organize across the south.

After all the affirmations, the circle was closed in song as Pat Hussain, co-founder of SONG and Project South member, lead the assembly in a freestyle spoken word using We All Count.... We Will Not Be Erased as the hook, naming and incorporating every delegation present at the assembly into the rhyme.¹⁰⁹ Exhausted, hot, and sweaty yet electrified, the group dispersed and began to work quickly to pack up the temporary tent city.

After Lowndes: Coordinated Actions and More assemblies

After Lowndes, the alliance worked to launch the Peoples First 100 Days (P-100D) campaign beginning November 7th, the day after the presidential elections. The point for beginning on N7 was to assert that the real work of social change occurred through the collective grassroots action of everyday people. Stretching from N7 to Valentine's day, the P-100D would be a joint regional campaign anchored by ten organizations, and supported by a larger network of forty, across the south. At the end of the campaign, the alliance would celebrate an effort lead by over 50 community organizers across ten states based in over twenty cities and small towns that hosted over 30 actions and over three dozen assemblies. Each action represented a collaborative effort where systems of communication, information sharing, and knowledge production tied the network together through weekly conference calls and social media tools. In addition, a tech team developed a system for "lives streaming" actions, using videos and photos captured from smart phones uploaded online to the shared website. This helped

¹⁰⁹Pat Hussein was a co-founder of SONG as well as a respected long-time southern movement builder and queer liberation organizer.

turn the SouthtoSouth.org website into an information sharing hub during days when joint actions were being coordinated.¹¹⁰

The P-100D demonstrated the capacity of the alliance to launch a grassroots movement research project leading to the collection of hundreds of interviews across a dozen locales across the south. In this context, the alliance had the ability to gather, interpret, and analyze its own information gathered by grassroots sources.

The P-100D campaign represented the “after” phase of the SFMA, but also a new “before,” in which a second SFMA would be scheduled to convene as a follow-up to the P-100D. The Second SFMA was convened in Jacksonville, Florida and resulted, once again, in the launching of another series of actions during 2013 Freedom Summer campaign, which included a 100 mile Walk for Dignity to raise awareness and build political momentum behind a series of abuses within the Florida Criminal Justice System, a focal point of injustice the alliance focused its efforts around. This phase concluded in the convening of a third SFMA in the historic “Baptist Bottoms” of Dothan, Alabama anchored by The Ordinary Peoples Society. To date, the SFMA represents a movement building process where its constituents have successfully convened three regional assembly processes, within a one-year period punctuated by regionally coordinated direct action grassroots organizing campaigns involving communities across the Southeast and into portions of the Appalachia Mountains.¹¹¹

¹¹⁰ Southern Movement Alliance, *Peoples First 100 Days: Summary Report from the Southern Regional Campaign*, www.southtosouth.org (access Dec. 4, 2013).

¹¹¹ Ibid.

CONCLUSION: (RE)ASSEMBLYING DEMOCRACY: CONVERGENCES,
ASSEMBLIES AND THE OVERTHROW OF DIVISIONS

The “circulation of struggles” is a concept within autonomist Marxist theory for understanding how working class struggles connect across differences (i.e. race, class, gender, sector, geography etc.) and form into revolutionary political forces. Circulation of struggle draws our attention to how disparate struggles, within the circuits of capital, form into shared and networked oppositional forces through processes of connection, either facilitated by circumstances created by capital or articulated through working class self activity.¹¹² What distinguishes autonomist theory is its emphasis on the agency of the self-active working class against its position within capital, and the working class’ capacity to force capital into states of crisis which, if deep enough, can “carve out” social space for the cultivation of new social relations.¹¹³ In fact, Bell and Cleaver argue that “revolution be understood as a ‘working class produced’ crisis to which capital is unable to find an adequate response.”¹¹⁴ It is the efforts of capital to divert, prevent, and “find adequate responses” to crises generated by the “dynamics of working class struggles” that also reveal networked circuits of struggle, within capital, continuously inflamed by a

¹¹²See Kolinko. “Class Composition.” http://www.nadir.org/nadir/initiativ/kolinko/engl/e_klazu.htm (accessed Oct. 17, 2013); and Dyer-Witthford, Nick. “Circulation of the Commons,” paper presented at King’s College, University of Cambridge, and April 29-30, 2006. <http://www.fims.uwo.ca/people/faculty/dyerwitthford/Commons2006.pdf> (October 17, 2013)2.

¹¹³ Ibid. 3-7.

¹¹⁴ Peter Bell and Harry Cleaver. “Marx’s Theory of Crisis as a Theory of Class Struggle,” 1.

constellation of working class self-activity.¹¹⁵ The PMA is a convivial tool because it has the potential to facilitate connections across communities in struggle.

Close to a dozen regional convergences have been convened to strengthen southern grassroots movement forces since Hurricane Katrina. However, other critical assembly processes have emerged as well, like the Detroit PMA process, effectively countering the mayor's and now governor's austerity measures to "right size the city."¹¹⁶ In New Orleans, grassroots organizers are using assembly processes to democratically determine the governing district lines of the city council according to the parameters defined by local communities (in effect shrinking the district lines so that local representation and governance more accurately reflects local realities).¹¹⁷ In Jackson, Mississippi, the mayoral race was recently won by a candidate who had a respected history of using a "people's assembly" process as a primary source for the development of political platforms and determination of positions taken during city council meetings.¹¹⁸ These instances, alongside the upsurge in assembly processes instigated by

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

¹¹⁶ Patrick Geans, "The Peoples Movement: A Community Response to the Detroit Works Project," *Michigan Citizen*, April 17, 2011, Sunday. <http://www.emeac.org/2011/04/peoples-movement-assembly-coming-up.html>, (accessed Dec. 5, 2013).

¹¹⁷ The effort is lead by the New Orleans Organizers Roundtable. I became aware of the effort during a conversation with a longtime local grassroots racial justice organizer and scholar activist based in New Orleans who shared the effort with me and partner organizer during a Peoples First 100 Day campaign push in which we toured through four states to connect with partner organizations throughout the region. NOOR had advanced a very interesting and sophisticated process using GIS and electoral district mapping software to create new district maps, and coupled with popular education activities, organized community assemblies so that participants could cluster into groups according to their specific neighborhoods and through a process of critical discussions about the intersections of race, class and democracy, redraw the lines of maps in a participatory remapping process according to grassroots realities of their community and what they felt was a appropriate district size.

¹¹⁸ Mayor elect Atty. Chokwe Lumumba, a long time human rights activists, civil rights lawyer and co-founder of the national organization Malcolm X Grassroots Movement recently won the Jackson, Mississippi mayoral race in a landslide victory by 85 percent. Unfortunately his recent untimely death has

the Occupy Wall Street movement, highlight a broader circulation of struggle in the US where communities are actively creating new practices of democratic renewal across a spectrum of strategies and struggles.

This conclusion is organized in two sections. The first section provides a summary of the circulation of struggle as an analytical framework within class composition theory, emphasizing the relationships between convergences, popular assemblies, and networks (strategies of connection) between working class struggles. The point will be to emphasize how convergence and assembly processes, as essential political formations of the alter-globalization movement, embody the circulation of struggle and reveal moments of political recomposition. The second section uses the Zerowork Collective's framework for class compositional analysis to illustrate how the PMA process can be read strategically to inform movement building strategies.¹¹⁹

Connections by Circumstance

According to Dyer-Witthford, the circulation of struggle essentially refers to two types of circulation. The first moment looks at how the circulation of capital, through its own process of making a profit, causes antagonisms, compelling people to oppose in varying degrees the particular attempts of capital, to extract value from their labor at specific points in the production process. The critical aggregation of oppositions within a

had a deep impact on Jackson communities. See the official campaign website highlighting the "People's Platform," <http://www.electlumbamayor.com/peoplesplatform.html>, (accessed Dec. 5, 2013)

¹¹⁹ The Zerowork Collective was a formation of prominent autonomist Marxist scholar activist that collaboratively wrote and published analysis on worker struggles using class compositional analysis during the 70's and 80's.

specific point can cause interruptions in the flow of capital, affecting, in a sort of ripple effect, other points of production. Because capital has to flow in a particular direction, along a particular sequence, through points of production in order for it to realize profits, the flow is called a circulation because the realization of profits represents an expanding loop.¹²⁰ This is also why a disruption in the flow of capital can result in a flow of disruptions because nodes are connected.

More centrally, this analysis locates labor-power as a producer of capital because labor is a fundamental element in the circulation of capital. In other words, nothing exists outside the creative activity and energy of what people do as living labor. As capital attempts to extract increasing amounts of value from the labor of people, whether it be within the direct processes of production or from a wholesale theft of social wealth through the privatization of public services like public education (representing another form of enclosure), the circulation of capital also represents a circulation of oppositions to that process. In this context, one line of inquiry looking at the circulation of struggle would investigate how capital, through its own processes of accumulation, creates a context for the development of oppositional forces.¹²¹

The recent intensification of austerity measures across the globe revealed the presence of deep erosions in democratic institutions, a point the alter-globalization movement, and especially the Zapatistas, in some of the most analytically creative and

¹²⁰Dyer-Witherford, "Circulation of the Commons," 2.

¹²¹ Zerowork Collective, "Introduction to Zerowork I," *Midnight Oil: Work, Energy, War, 1973-1992*. (Brooklyn: Autonomedia, 1992): 109-114.

politically potent ways, have made over the past two decades.¹²² The SFMA, while active within its own distinct cultural and political context, is preceded by a long list of convergence and assembly processes combating local neoliberal de-democratizing forces:

- The Zapatista encuetros beginning in 1994 inviting civil society to Chiapas to discuss and share stories of rebellion against neoliberalism to the democratic strategies used to collectively govern their autonomous communities;
- Indigenous assembly processes across Oaxaca from the mid 90's that later erupted into the 2006 "Oaxaca commune" coordinated by APPO (the Popular Peoples Assembly of Oaxaca) that lead to a six month occupation of Oaxaca city;
- Urban assemblies in places like Bolivia's El Alto;
- Neighborhood assemblies that immediately emerged in the wake of Argentina's economic collapse of 2001;
- 2011 "15 May" assemblies and occupation actions by the "indignados" throughout Spain;
- General assembly process by Occupy Wall Street.¹²³

This rise in activity represents a larger circulation of struggle animated by the crisis of neoliberalism as state governments reorganize themselves to ensure capital's survival and temporary expansion through the wholesale theft of public wealth and the leveling of liberal democratic institutions.

¹²² De Marcellus, Olivier, "Peoples Global Action: Dreaming Up an Old Ghost,,"; See Subcomandante Marcos. *Conversations with Durito: Stories of the Zapatista and Neoliberalism*. ed. Accion Zapatista Editorial Collective (Brooklyn: Autonomedia, 2005): For academic analysis of this phenomenon see Aiyer, Ananthakrishnan, "Hemispheric Solutions?: Neoliberal Crisis, Criminality And "Democracy" In The Americas." *Urban Anthropology* 30, 2-3 (2001): 239-268; Du Bios, W.E.B., "African Roots of War" *Atlantic Monthly* 115, no. 5 (May 1915): 707-714; Brown, Wendy, "American Nightmare: Neoliberalism, Neoconservatism, and De-Democratization" *Political Theory* 34 (2006): 690-714.

¹²³ See Callahan, Manuel. "Why Not Share a Dream? Zapatismo as Political and Cultural Practice," *Humboldt Journal of Social Relations* 29, no. 1 (2005): 6-38; For an overview of Oaxaca's assembly process and its impact on Oaxaca's political landscape see Esteva, Gustavo, "The Oaxaca Commune and Mexico's Coming Insurrection," *Antipode* 42, no. 4(2010):978-993; For analysis of Bolivia's El Alto community assembly process see Zibechi, Raul, *Dispersing Power: Social Movements As Anti-State Forces*, translated Ramor Ryan (Oakland: AK Press, 2010); For a review of Argentina's neighborhood assembly process see Sitrin, Marina, *Horizontalidad*, (Buenos Aires: Chilavert, 2005); For descriptions of Spain's assembly process see Maeckelbergh, Marianne, "Horizontal Democracy Now: From Alterglobalization to Occupation," *Interface: a journal for and about social movements*, 4, no 1(May 2012): 207-234; for reflections on Occupy Wall Street's use of the general assembly see Maeckelbergh. "Occupy the US: Musings on Horizontal Decision Making and Bureaucracy," <http://stirtoaction.com/occupy-the-us-musings-on-horizontal-decision-making-and-bureaucracy/> - (accessed on November 20, 2013).

If capitalism “governs by division” and neoliberalization represents an effort to “free” capital from social “constraints” loosely imposed on it by liberal democracies, then a resultant effect would be the proliferation of social divisions between, within, and among people.¹²⁴ Thus a counter response, or convivial impulse, would be the queering of borders, the bridging of gaps, and the convergence of singular forces into shared spaces (be it physical, cultural, social, or digital). This is why convergence processes and assemblies are important objects of study for advancing deep movement building processes in the current moment. Convergences reveal the formation and movement of oppositional networks and the coalescing of singular forces into collectively constructed spaces, while assemblies represent insurgent laboratories where converged forces experiment with democratic, deliberative, oppositional processes. The PMA process is a politically significant process in large part because neoliberalism has created compelling conditions and the technical infrastructure (the web and mass production of smart phone technologies and communication platforms) for the cultivation and convergence of democratizing processes.

Intentional Connections

Circulation of struggle as a framework identifies intentional strategies of connection between oppositional forces. In other words, locating how communities in

¹²⁴For brief analysis of how capital governs by division see Kolinko. “Compositional Analysis” http://www.nadir.org/nadir/initiativ/kolinko/engl/e_klazu.htm .(accessed on October 17, 2013): For an in-depth analysis see Holloway, John. *Change the World Without Taking Power*. (Ann Arbor: Pluto Press, 2005) : For references to, and analysis of, neoliberalism as an effort to free capital from social and political constraints see Harvey, David, “Freedom’s Just Another Word...,” *Brief History of Neoliberalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005): 5-38.

struggle facilitate connections across communities in order to form stronger oppositional forces. For the purpose of this study, I focus on how communities in struggle seek out connections across sectors, geographies, identities, and issues to network struggles across differences towards the development of deliberate political formations. This is critical because the circulation of struggle represents the formation and exercise of political power at varying degrees as connections form and strengthen. Thus, those processes that accelerate the circulation of struggle at higher degrees represent emergent political recompositions through the “overthrow” of social divisions, a primary source of power anchoring the hegemony of capital.¹²⁵ This process of intentional connection helps to describe an important distinction about the politics and practices of “newest social movement formations” operating in the current moment.¹²⁶

The Peoples Movement Assembly is a movement building method developed by the Global Justice Movement in an effort to provide a pathway of connection between local struggles and larger movement processes.¹²⁷ In particular, the assembly was viewed as a strategy to politically anchor convergence processes, “anti-corporate globalization” direct actions, and mass protests occurring within the US into a collectively sustained movement building process rooted in local grassroots organizing.¹²⁸ In other words, the

¹²⁵ Kolinko. “Compositional Analysis,” 1-2.

¹²⁶ See Day, Richard, “Introduction,” *Gramsci is Dead: Anarchist Currents in the Newest Social Movements* (Ann Arbor: Pluto Press, 2005): 4-9.

¹²⁷ Jermone Scott and Walda Katz Fishman, co-founders of Project South, and active organizers part of the USSF Planning Committee, have always insisted on this point. That is the PMA was always conceived of as a strategy for connecting local struggles to larger movements at different scales.

¹²⁸ See “History,” Peoples Movement Assembly, www.peoplesmovementassembly.org (accessed Dec. 3, 2013) for a historical overview of the PMA, from the perspective of community organizers, through a social movement lens.

hope was to address the strategic shortfall of short-lived summit protests and mass marches by trying to create a process that incorporated locally organized and lead assemblies to “spark actions” that advanced the development of local projects.¹²⁹ Informed by the “diversity” and “horizontalism” politics of summit protests and social forums, the PMA process de-centered the notion of political “unification” commonly used to describe revolutionary processes, and instead focused on strengthening strategies of coordination and cross movement collaborations across movement networks using popular education facilitation strategies to cultivate the development of collective analysis, shared visioning, and collaborative direct action plans.¹³⁰ These popular education facilitation strategies used across movement spaces in the US over the past two decades would rely on dialogical formats, centering the sharing of personal experiences, through creative interactive activities, as the building blocks to constructing shared analysis, visions, and plans of action. The use of popular education strategies across grassroots movement building organizations is one site where convivial processes can be located.¹³¹ From sharing food, money, living space to visions, strategies, and decision

¹²⁹ Ibid.

¹³⁰ For explicit references to the PMA process as a movement building tool for 1) “convergence”, 2) “cross movement collaboration” and coordination, and 3) “collective articulation” see the Peoples Movement Assembly Organizing Kit (2011)14: For a discussion on “horizontal decision making” and “diversity politics” as an inclusive democratic process compared to processes of unification see Marianne Maeckelbergh’s “Occupy the US; Musings on Horizontal Decision Making and Bureaucracy” <http://stirtoaction.com/occupy-the-us-musings-on-horizontal-decision-making-and-bureaucracy/> - (accessed on November 20, 2013). ; For an autonomist Marxist perspective on the notion of unification also see Kolinko’s “Compositional Analysis” http://www.nadir.org/nadir/initiativ/kolinko/engl/e_klazu.htm . (accessed on October 17, 2013)

¹³¹ For example, Project South has been using popular education methods as a central strategy for facilitating collective processes of learning and leadership development for over twenty years. More importantly, Project South’s leadership role as an anchor organization within the PMA process has meant that the use of popular education methods have been a dominant strategy for formatting assemblies. The

making the practices of sharing represent a larger politics where movement formations in the current moment are attempting to create the world(s) they desire now as a core expression of opposition.¹³² In this context, the Zapatistas and diversity politics characterized by the alter-globalization movement inform my de-emphasis on the subordination of differences into singular political platforms (a process of unification considered the opposite of diversity) and highlight the development of strategies, practices, politics, and processes of sharing through collaborations.¹³³ From experiences, communications, information, and analysis to resources, from direct financial support to time, energy and commitments, the ability of communities in struggle to share within it and across sectors is one way to identify and map the circulation of struggle.¹³⁴ This strategy of sharing represents a one form of movement infrastructure solidified through ongoing processes of encounter facilitated through assembly processes.

synthesis fishbowl, action planning sessions, history telling and history walk were all activities based in a popular education methodology centered around using peoples lived experiences as the departure point for generating collective understanding through dialogue. Plus a review of the 100 PMAs organized during Detroit, would reveal the dominance of popular education activities throughout assemblies, furthering underscoring a broader diffusion of popular education methods across movements (more an indication of a broader historical process), but also their potentiality as sites for observing processes of conviviality.

¹³² See Appendix F and I.

¹³³ Peoples' Global Action (PGA) is a good example of this because, as De Marcellus narrates, the PGA took shape during the 2nd Intercontinental Encuentro for Humanity and against Neoliberalism, a Zapatista convening in south Spain against the commemoration of GATT and the WTO in 1997. An international network of "people's organizations" representing "mass based farmers' movements from India, Philippines, Indonesia, Brazil, Peru, Bolivia... Nigeria and Mexico" as well as a variety of organizations from western European states, the PGA would coordinate and launch hundreds of anti-WTO actions across the globe engaged by tens if not hundreds of thousands of people. Its most infamous anti-summit protest, at least in a US context, was the shutdown of the 3rd WTO Summit in Seattle. De Marcellus. "Peoples Global Action: Dreaming Up an Old Ghost," *Auroras of the Zapatistas: Local and Global Struggles of the Fourth World War*, ed. Midnight Notes Collective. (Brooklyn: Autonomedia, 2001)105-118. For an account of the 2nd Intercontinental Encuentro for Humanity and against Neoliberalism see Esteva, Gustavo. "The Traditions of People of Reason and the Reasons of Peoples of Tradition: A Report on the Second Intercontinental Encuentro," *Auroras of the Zapatistas*. (2005)55-64.

¹³⁴ Dyer-Witheford, Nick. "For a Compositional Analysis of the Multitude," *Subverting the Present, Imagining the Future: Insurrection, Movement, Commons* (Brooklyn: Autonomedia, 2008): 261.

Beyond being a methodology for organizing a PMA, trisecting PMAs also makes observable important dynamics within the assembly. By “reading politically” these phases, we can engage assemblies as sites of knowledge production convened by communities in struggle. Additionally, doing so can allow one to analyze both the process of convening the actual event itself and what takes place before and afterwards as snapshots of grassroots movement activity where strategic knowledge is generated. In this context, the ultimate goal is to glean knowledge that can be put into the service of increasing the capacities of movement formations. Class compositional analysis is useful to introduce here because it further illustrates the potentiality of assembly processes as a convivial tool. More specifically, PMAs can help create political spaces that foster connections across struggles.

Compositional Analysis and the Southern Freedom Movement Assembly

The Zerowork Collective provided an important framework for understanding the “dynamics and cycles of struggle” at “four interconnected and necessary levels.”¹³⁵ Zerowork argued that the analysis of the circulation of struggle must account for the following four areas: 1) an analysis of the struggles themselves, 2) an analysis of the relationships between different working class sectors to each other, 3) an examination of the role and relationship of official organizations to those struggles, and lastly, 4) the

¹³⁵ Zerowork Collective. “Introduction to Zerowork I,” 111-112.

initiatives of capital itself.¹³⁶ A class compositional analysis of the PMA process, using Zerowork's framework, can reveal how the PMA embodies a circulation of struggle. It also provides a comprehensive framework for mapping the fronts of struggle an assembly engages. Thus, a simple before, during, and after continuum would be rendered more complex by the following four interconnected levels of analysis.

The first level of analysis calls for an examination of the "specific struggles themselves....their content, direction, how they develop and how they circulate," emphasizing the way workers "bypass technical restrictions of production and affirm themselves as a class with political power."¹³⁷ At this level of analysis, there are several areas to observe. First, we can look at how the PMA process itself represents a co-production of analysis, visions, and plans of action, that together provide insight into content and direction of how struggles converged. More importantly, an analysis of how the PMA organizing body formed, facilitated itself, developed the facilitation strategy for the assembly, and organized itself to organize the assembly in the before phase of the assembly, all provide critical insight into the content and direction of those struggles that converged into assembly processes. In the before phase, a great deal is said and circulated in order to convene an assembly, from the use of social media to email blasts, conference calls, flyers, videos etc. Thus, what is said as well as not said can also reveal important characteristics of the assembly and the political intentions behind the process. This is why the strategy of the PMA process, emphasizing strategies of self-documentation and

¹³⁶ Ibid. By official organizations Zerowork is referring to trade and labor unions, political parties and other legally recognized non-governmental organizations.

¹³⁷ Ibid.

self-representation, results in PMAs developing living archives of their work that, if read politically, provide direct insight into their content, direction, development, and circulation, but also reflects a democratizing politic and democratic set of principles oriented to encourage collective reflection beyond the event itself. In the case of the Southern Freedom Movement Assembly, its content is revealed through the synthesis statements generated throughout the process, the direction of the SFMA revealed through the expanding “cycles” of organizing propelling the process, its development made observable in its history, and its circulation highlighted through a mapping of the assembly sites and actions launched afterwards. More importantly, the convening of assemblies and the resolutions they produce represent exercises in the political affirmations of an emergent collective subject whose capacities can be mapped throughout its process during the before, during, and after phases of the PMA.¹³⁸

The second area of analysis calls for an examination of the “dynamics of different sectors of the working class,” studying how “these sectors affect each other and thus the relation of the working class to capital.¹³⁹” Noting that these differences are a function of sectors “power to struggle and organize,” which in turn is related to a “hierarchy of wages,” Zerowork cautions that capital’s primary strategy of control is through the creation, imposition, and management of divisions historically. Thus, the working class should not be simply viewed as only including waged labor.¹⁴⁰ Moreover, Zerowork argues that an analysis of class composition “defines the working class as a struggle

¹³⁸ For a detailed step by step breakdown of the PMA process in three stages; a before, during and after see People Movement Assembly Organizing Kit (2011) <http://peoplesmovementassembly.org/node/371> 7-9.

¹³⁹ Zerowork Collective. “Introduction to Zerowork I,” 111.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid.

against capital and not by its productive functions” and thus, the working class consists of both waged and unwaged labor whereby capital survives as a hegemonic relation through the continual reproduction of those divisions.¹⁴¹ The PMA process represents a strategic convergence of movement sectors under an expectation of political connection. Moreover, the organizing and facilitation strategy used to convene and facilitate assembly processes provides a backdrop for observing dynamics between these sectors. The before phase of a PMA is probably the most critical site to observe and examine some of these dynamics because they determine how the assembly will “hold” challenges, tensions, and political antagonisms common to deliberative processes among a diversity of actors. However, the depth of connection can be assessed during moments of significant conflict at the assembly itself. Lastly, what takes place after a PMA represents the clearest site to map the depth of the relationships formed between the different sectors converged during the PMA, because shared action is an expression of an emergent or fully formed collective subject. In this context, the SFMA and the organizing that emerged from the assembly provides the most current and active example, in the context of the PMA, of this dynamic.

The third level of analysis examines the “relation between the working class and its official organizations.” Here the emphasis is on the role these organizations play in

¹⁴¹ For specific reference to capital’s management of society through the imposition of division see Zerowork. “Introduction to Zerowork I,” 111-112; For an autonomist feminist analysis of capital’s imposition of division through the family and patriarchal construction of the “women’s role” in society see Mariarosa Dalla Costa and Selma James. *Power of Women and Subversion of Community*. 21-23; For a comprehensive explication of compositional analysis see Harry Cleaver, “Inversion of Class Perspective in Marxian Theory: From Valorisation to Self-Valorisation.” *Open Marxism: Theory and Practice*, v. 2 (London: Pluto Press) 106-144.

either advancing or undermining the efforts of working class struggles. For the Zerowork Collective, they note organizations such as “trade unions, worker parties, and welfare organizations.”¹⁴² Notably these organizations do show up throughout the PMA process, especially in Detroit during the National PMA process to varying degrees, and in a limited capacity during the SFMA in Lowndes.¹⁴³ A focused study on the history, politics, and practices of Project South as an anchor organization would significantly advance our thinking in this area because of their success building a strong network across both official and unofficial organizations based throughout the South.

Lastly, the fourth area of analysis relates the three areas outlined above to the “capitalist initiative in terms of general social planning, investment, technological innovations, employment, and to the institutional settings of capitalist society.”¹⁴⁴ Zerowork argues that the “relationship between the dynamic of the working class struggle and institutional change” represents the “most significant” aspect of “the analysis of the class recomposition” because it’s where we can see the capacities of “the power of the working class to transform capitalism.” As I briefly noted earlier in this section,

¹⁴² Zerowork. “Introduction to Zerowork I,” 112.

¹⁴³ During the National Peoples Movement Assembly process over 200 organizations participated in the process with approximately fifty playing lead anchor roles in those assemblies. An unpublished document, drafted by myself titled “Synthesis Report,” during my tenure with Project South, details some of the dynamics and trends that occurred in Detroit during this process, based on the reflections gathered from over 30 lead organizers involved in assembly processes. Because most assemblies were collectively organized and facilitated by small organizing bodies composed of organizations, their reflections shared on the organizing process behind their respective PMAs speaks specifically to a number of inter-intra organizational dynamics. However, this report, while speaking to some specific dynamics like collaborations and processes of shared facilitation, only touches on a narrow scope of a much broader front of dynamics. As I have noted earlier, the NPMA process as a whole, especially with the possibility of a 3rd USSF process building energy, deserves a more thorough study of the Detroit National PMA process, of which the role NGO’s played in this process is critical to study.

¹⁴⁴ See Zerowork Collective, “Introduction to Zerowork I,” 112.

neoliberalization is an effort to liberate capital from social restraints loosely imposed on it by liberal democratic institutions. Coupled with neoconservatism in what Wendy Brown calls a “neoliberal neoconservative political rationality,” the current “capitalist initiative” reveals “social planning” that results in the differential abandonment of working poor communities of color exposing a necro-political relation of disposal.¹⁴⁵ For the organizers of the SFMA, this realization was revealed by Katrina. As I noted, a core political intention behind the PMA process was a direct response to both the memory of Katrina and its future occurrence. This shows how the PMA process, through the SFMA, represented a strategy to counter another wave of displacements and political erasure occurring through conservative attacks on voting rights within marginalized communities of color. Thus, the SFMA was a focused strategy to seed practices of “community governance” in an effort to develop an alternative convivial movement infrastructure capable of responding to state facilitated crises that also functioned to resource the cultivation of southern freedom movement forces orientated towards the creation of a “New South.” In this context, if the state is organized to abandon and disenfranchise, as a strategy to facilitate another degree of accumulation, then the response of the SFMA is a counter strategy to enfranchise the excluded by creating an alternative process of civic decision making, rooted in the collective work of grassroots organizing and direct action.

¹⁴⁵For a definition of differential abandonment see footnote 15.: Wendy Brown argues that neoconservatism and neoliberalism are “two distinct political rationalities” that have “converged” not only under the Bush Administration but in their “de-democratizing effects” working “symbiotically” together in their “devaluation of political liberty, equality, substantive citizenship, and the rule of law in favor of governance according to market criteria on one side and valorization of state power for putatively moral ends on the other.,” see Brown. “American Nightmare: Neoliberalism, Neoconservatism, and De-Democratization” in *Political Theory* 2006; 34; 690-714; Mbembe, Achille. “Necropolitics” *Public Culture*. 15, no. 1 (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003) 11-40.

Thus the PMA process embodies moments of the circulation of struggle because of its potential for creating contexts where abandonments, as re-articulations of social division, facilitate heightened degrees of displacement and political erasures through disenfranchisement and are “overthrown” by an open and cyclical process of collectively crafted analyses, visions and plans of action.

The Southern Freedom Movement Assembly process represents an interesting process to examine because of the energy it has been able to mobilize thus far. When one situates the SFMA in relationship to the history of Hurricane Katrina, the accomplishments of the SFMA are compelling. Whether or not the SFMA will be able to strategically respond to Katrina-like disasters is still to be determined. However, their collective read of the presidential elections as a political storm and their collective response through the SFMA before, during, and after the Lowndes assembly expressed a compelling case such a capacity now existed. What is clear is that a new crop of organizers have emerged, many gaining valuable experiences, relationships, and entry, through practice, into movement building work through the assembly process. Plus, the P-100D campaign demonstrated the lessons learned from Katrina. The alliance, representing an expanded network of organizations across the south, was able to convene convergences, facilitate a process leading to a shared vision, analysis, and plan of action, follow through and launch several direct action campaigns, and develop a grassroots communication and media strategy, allowing the network to share information and represent itself to itself using readily available resources and technologies held by most people. All of this represents a profound process of, what Callahan calls, “insurgent

learning,” where democratic renewal as a collective learning process is used to shape deeply rooted, active, collective subjects mobilized to regenerate communities and intervene against neoliberal attacks. In this instance, the use of the PMA as a convivial tool has played a key role in facilitating a (re)introduction to democratic practice as an ongoing learning process.

Paralleling the SFMA, an exciting Southern Worker’s Assembly process, anchored by the North Carolina based Black Workers for Justice organization, is building alliances across southern based worker centers, autoworker unions, university based student unions, and immigrant worker rights groups across the Southeast. Working to develop a shared fundraising, political education, and mobilization strategy to target the service and domestic worker sector dominating the largest sector of working poor communities of color in the south, the Southern Worker’s Assembly and its potential convergence with the SFMA represent a compelling, potentially historic confluence of forces. The fact that the Southern Worker Assembly has been explicit about their use of the PMA methodology and the presence of lead organizers from the SWA at the Jacksonville Assembly alongside a large contingent of Florida based union and worker rights organizations, represented a potential expansion of the SFMA process. As was the case for the SFMA, I suspect an intentional, focused, and time tested process of encounter and synthesis will determine the depth, longevity, and functionality of their connection to each other.

In this study I have introduced a theoretical basis for situating the assembly processes convened through convergences as convivial tools crafted within the context of

the global justice movement, or “newest social movement formations,” in efforts to counter locally articulated de-democratizing forces of neoliberal globalization. The point is to simply highlight the fact that if capital in the current moment governs and survives on social division, then oppositional movements in the current moment are devising strategies to build deep connections across those divisions. One of those strategies centers on processes of sharing and collaboration across communities in struggle. The PMA process is one strategy and the SFMA one example where one can observe how communities are attempting to craft convivial movement building tools.

APPENDIX

Appendix A: Concise Chronology of the History of Lowndes County, Alabama, developed by Cita Cook for Project South, September 2012.

Appendix B: Project South “Roots of this Moment” pullout poster in *As the South Goes: Periodical from Project South: Institute for Elimination of Poverty and Genocide* 2011 Fall 2011, Volume 19, Issue 2.

Appendix C: Project South “We All Count” pullout poster in *As the South Goes: Periodical from Project South: Institute for Elimination of Poverty and Genocide*, Peoples First 100 Days Edition, Fall 2012.

Appendix D: Project South “Peoples Movement Assemblies: 2006-2011” pullout poster in *As the South Goes: Periodical from Project South: Institute for Elimination of Poverty and Genocide*, Fall 2010, Volume 18, Issue 2.

Appendix E: Project South “We Will Not Be Erased” pullout poster in *As the South Goes: Periodical from Project South: Institute for Elimination of Poverty and Genocide*, Spring 2012, Volume 20, Issue 1.

Appendix F: First Queer Movement Assembly at Creating Change Calls for Shift in Direction.

Appendix G: Education Transformation Peoples Movement Assembly profile, prepared by Project South.

Appendix H: Food Sovereignty Peoples Movement Assembly profile, prepared by Project South.

Appendix I: Healing Justice Peoples Movement Assembly profile, prepared by Project South.

Appendix J: Echo Justice Peoples Movement Assembly profile, prepared by Project South.

Appendix K: Fronts of Struggle Infographic prepared by Project South

Appendix L: Southern Workers Assembly Flyer

Appendix M: SMA Timeline, prepared by Project South

CONCISE CHRONOLOGY OF THE HISTORY OF LOWNDES COUNTY, ALABAMA

1796 – The invention of the cotton gin made it possible for people to become wealthy by exploiting enslaved workers wherever cotton could easily be grown, including in parts of Alabama.

August 1814 – The treaty ending the war between the Red Stick Creeks and the United States gave the United States sovereignty over the area that became Lowndes County in 1830.

January 1, 1863 – President Lincoln’s Emancipation Proclamation made the freeing of the slaves a goal of the Civil War. Most enslaved people liberated themselves once Union troops were relatively close.

1865-1872 – The 15th Amendment made it unconstitutional to restrict (male) citizens’ right to vote because of race. About 4,000 African Americans in the county elected an ex-slave to the state legislature.

1872 – James T. Rapier became the first Lowndes County African American in the U.S. Congress.

1875 – White Democrats regained control of the Alabama state government and expelled any remaining black legislators, including Hugh Carson and William Gaskin from Lowndes County.

1882 – After a number of years using voter fraud and terrorism to oppose black citizens gaining political power, white Democrats took over all of the offices in Lowndes County.

1892 – The Calhoun School, founded by two New England women with the help of Booker T. Washington, offered the best local education for black students and helped sharecroppers buy land.

1901 – Over 5,000 black men had registered to vote in the county, but whites changed the state constitution to make it so hard for them to register that by 1906, there were only 57.

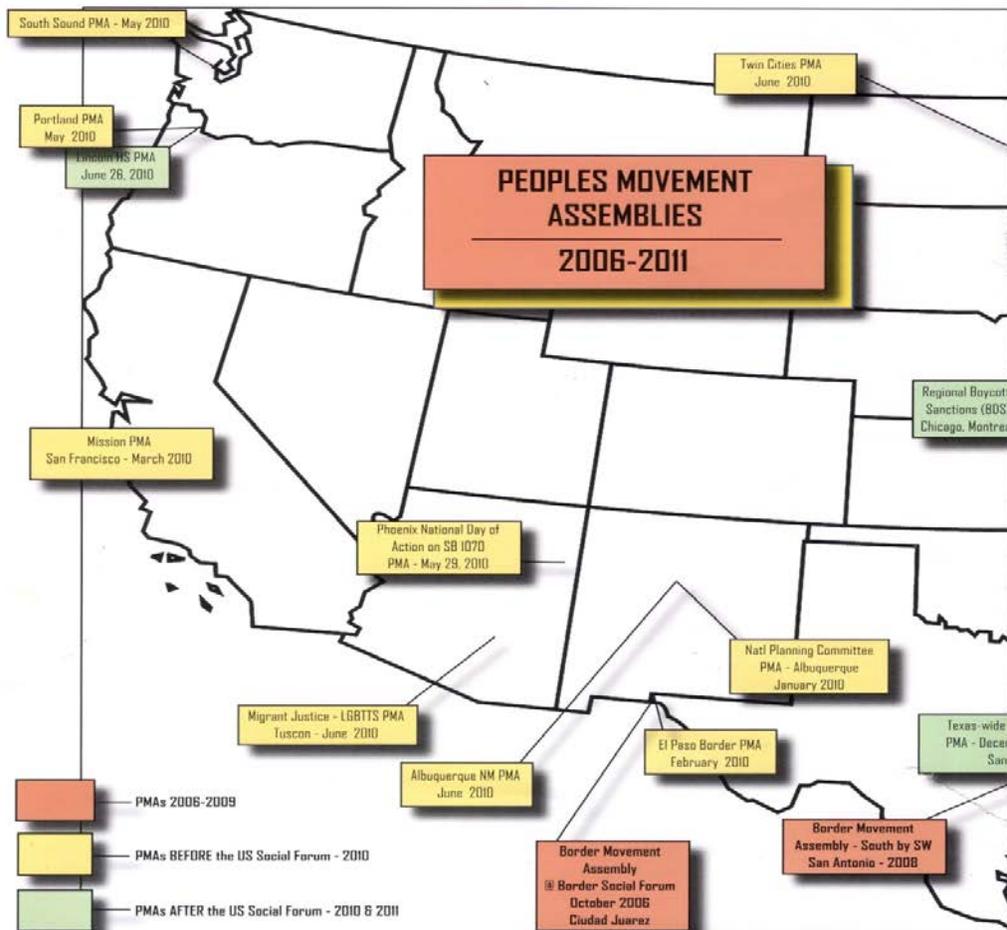
1906 – W.E.B. DuBois used Labor Department money to oversee a study of Lowndes County, including interviews with over 21,000 black sharecroppers. When officials saw the results, they destroyed all of it.

1917 to early 1920s – The new jobs World War I opened up led to about ten thousand Lowndes County African Americans moving north, especially to work in Detroit’s growing automobile industry.

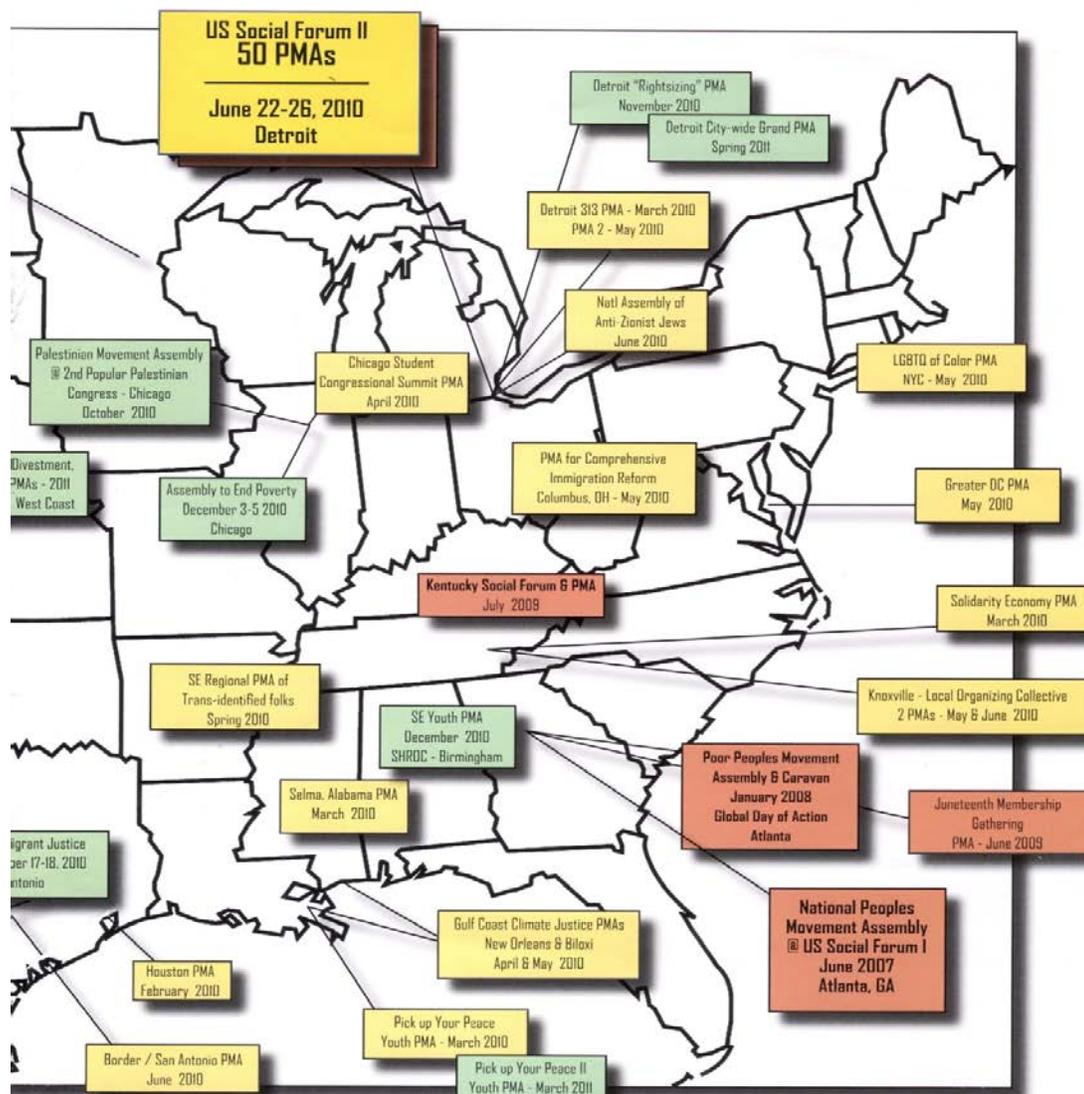
1931-1936 – The Alabama Sharecroppers Union became active with the help of the Communist Party. The primary local leader of the successful Lowndes County chapter was young Eula Gray.

September 1935 – Members of the Alabama Sharecroppers Union in the county struck for higher wages. They lost the strike; six activists were killed; many were beaten; and twenty-five leaders had to leave.

1941 to 1946 – During World War II about seven thousand African Americans sought job out of the South; in Detroit, they formed Lowndes County Clubs.



The Peoples Movement Assembly represents an unprecedented collaborative
 Over 12,000 people have gathered in groups of thirty to three hundred to d
 Check out the Resolutions and find out mo



... and consolidation amongst movement organizations and forces in the U.S. develop clear visions, common analysis, and shared commitments to action. ... more about the process at www.pma2010.org

If voting is a symbol of democracy, access, & political strength, why are voting rights under attack?

Millions of people are excluded from voting in 2012

Millions more are prevented from voting by new restrictions

Tens of millions who can vote don't believe their vote counts

We will not be erased
 VOTING IS A FUNDAMENTAL RIGHT AND COMMUNITIES MAKE DECISIONS AND EXERCISE POWER IN MANY WAYS

HOW PEOPLE ARE BEING EXCLUDED:

- VOTER ID LAWS** exclude elders, youth, people of color, and people living in poverty
- REDUPLICATING** steers numbers and consolidates power
- LIMITED EARLY VOTING** punishes people who work, folks without transportation
- REGISTRATION RESTRICTIONS** limit when and how we can register, and who is allowed to help us register
- RESIDENCY REQUIREMENTS** erase students, renters, and short-term residents
- ELECTORAL COLLEGE LAWS** negate the popular vote

- Voter ID laws on the books in 30 states.**
- Early voting periods reduced in 6 states.
- Electron Day Registration only available in 7 states and being repealed in several.

One in 10 voters lack photo ID - that's 21 million voters. 18% of elders, 25% of Black folks, 19% of Latinos, 20% of Asian-Americans, and 19% youth between ages 18-24. Student IDs & accepted in Texas and Virginia. - Voting Rights Institute Report

Almost 60% of eligible voters did not vote in 2010. - US Elections Project
 Super PACs are a tool used by wealthy individuals and institutions to dominate the political process. - Demos "Municipal Democracy"

WHO IS BEING EXCLUDED:
 Many elders, young people, people with felony records, people living in poverty, gender non-conforming people, immigrants, and people displaced from their homes by foreclosure or disaster

- Over 3 million people cannot vote because of laws restricting people in prison, on probation, and on parole. Registering the right differs in every state and is often confusing. - US Elections Project & Institute for People & Democracy
- Over 25,000 transgender folks face barriers to vote. (Compounded by over 45% of Native American transgender people and 37% of African American transgender people lack identification with accurate gender) - Williams Institute, UCLA Law School
- Efforts in several states have begun to challenge voters registered at the address of homes in foreclosure. 3.8 million foreclosures were filed in 2010.
- 12.6 million legal permanent residents are not allowed to vote in national elections.

A little history . . . The US South is contested ground for national voting rights.

1776	White men with property can vote. All Black people, Catholics, Jews, Quakers, women, poor folks, and youth are denied the right.								
1787	Constitutional Convention in a victory for Southern slave-owning states. Black people are recognized at only 3/5 of a person.								
1865-1877	Reconstruction acts Over 1500 Black men are elected. Homestead of railroad are built, and transportation system improved. In Mississippi, 493,000 African-American were registered in 1870. By 1890, fewer than 9,000.								
1920	19th Amendment ratified During the battle for women's right to vote, Black suffragists and abolitionists like Ida B. Wells-Barnett are rejected from the major national women's groups because the leaders are concerned about offending Southern white women.								
1964-1965	Civil Rights Act passes Voting Rights Act passes To break Jim Crow, civil rights organizations require thousands of Black voters and build power that pressures LBJ to sign the Voting Rights & Civil Rights Act.								
1971	War on Drugs War on Drugs initiated by Nixon								
2008	Following unprecedented voter turnout in 2008 by young people and people of color, 164 LAWS limiting voting rights now face ten to erase and disenfranchise tens of millions of people.								
2012	What is the role of movements today?								

John Adams, signer of the Declaration of Independence and later president, wrote in 1776 that no good could come from enfranchising white Americans:
 "It is dangerous to open so fruitful a source of controversy and altercation as would be opened by attempting to alter the qualifications of voters; there will be no end to it. Not to do so is to leave the door open to every man who has his face a fashion will demand an equal voice with any other, in all acts of state."

Jim Crow laws, based on Black codes, in direct response to the increased political power of freed Black people. Legal discrimination, poll taxes, white-only primaries, and literacy tests prevent Black people from voting. Mass violence enforced racial segregation.

After signing the Civil Rights Act in 1964, President Lyndon Johnson anticipated the backlash and said:
 "We have lost the South for a generation."



First Queer Movement Assembly at Creating Change Calls for Shift in Direction

On Saturday, January 28th SONG and Project South facilitated a Queer Peoples Movement Assembly at the Creating Change annual conference held this year in Baltimore, Maryland. Over 125 people participated in a 3-hour assembly that affirmed paths to queer liberation through fronts of struggle for the self-determination of all people.

WHY have a Queer Peoples Movement Assembly:

The anchor organizations and Facilitation Team (11 organizers) offered a Queer Liberation frame, as a way to build from our legacy while looking at how we align our work with others to increase our collective impact. We asserted that the times call for an assembly process because we need spaces to re-imagine our work together and a structure that is democratic and participatory, not ideological or partisan. We affirmed that winning single issues is not enough. We affirmed that bringing queer liberation perspectives, strategies, leadership, & analysis to all fronts of struggle advances our collective efforts. We acknowledged that we need multiple strategies to move us toward clear and comprehensive visions.

Working definition of Queer Liberation: (presented at opening) Queer liberation seeks liberation for all peoples through working for the recognition of our whole selves; the integrity of the relationships and families we embrace; self determination in choices for our bodies in sexuality, gender, eroticism, disability, safety, and privacy; the dignity of our spiritual practices; fairness in our economic systems, our work and its compensation; full access to participating in and benefiting from society's institutions; human rights for all; and justice as a birthright for all.

WHO participated: Over 125 people

43% live in the Northeast / 20% live in the Southeast / 17% live in the Midwest

with representation from the Plains, the West Coast, and the Northwest

13 participants were born outside the United States, including Zimbabwe, Brazil, South Korea, Portugal, Cyprus, Puerto Rico, and Japan. The space was intergenerational and represented over 50% people of color.

WHERE do we work:

Participants shared resources and organizations in every region including, social justice organizations, youth organizations, trans-health centers, university LGBTQ centers, and people of color-led queer groups.

WHAT did we do:

We shared our many paths to queer liberation through political context, generational realities, and personal experience. We split up into facilitated small groups along the fronts of struggle to discuss how queer people are affected, what opportunities exist, and what actions we can take together over the next year. [FRONTS of STRUGGLE: Economy, Work, & Poverty / Land & Environment / Body / Displacement & Migration / Permanent war & Militarization / Indigenous sovereignty / Social forces & Culture / Democracy & Governance – MAPPING TOOL ATTACHED]

WHAT happens next:

A Synthesis Commission (15 folks) volunteered to gather the notes from the rich discussions and develop a Synthesis Statement that can serve as a resource and reference to continued work in our many communities, organizations, and spaces.

ORGANIZING TOOLS:

Go to www.peoplesmovementassembly.org for more about the process & history of the Peoples Movement Assembly process. Hundreds of assemblies have engaged 1000s of people over the last five years. The PMA Organizing Kit is available for downloading.

Go to www.southernersonnewground.org to learn more about SONG's work to organize queer and LGBTQI folks in the South, in rural spaces, and on frontlines of economic and racial justice.

Go to www.projectsouth.org to learn more about Project South: Institute for the Elimination of Poverty & Genocide, an organization based in Atlanta working with young people, Black communities, and Southern organizers on all fronts.

Peoples Movement Assembly Profiles



EDUCATION TRANSFORMATION

THURSDAY JUNE 24, 2010 @ DETROIT

350-400 PARTICIPANTS

PURPOSE / GOALS:

We sought to take full opportunity of this strategic moment to: **(1)** Identify where our educational practices need to head to create the world we envision. **(2)** Build a national movement for visionary transformation of education so that teaching and learning embody and cultivate democratic, resilient communities within thriving ecosystems. **(3)** Create a framework and powerful alternative agenda that we can take on the road to our local cities. **(4)** Ensure youth have the tools they need to create a more just, democratic, and sustainable world

SPONSORING ORGS:

Institutue for Democratic Education in America (IDEA)
Boggs Educational Center
Teachers for Social Justice
Education for Liberation Network
Education Circle of Change

QUOTES ABOUT THE EXPERIENCE:

"I was surprised by the quality of what came out of the process in terms of identifying the gaps. We share a lot of values - yet some people think we should get rid of all private schools and charter schools, and focus on the public system. And other folks see the public system as broken and we need to stay outside. Some people see a middle ground. Some people are fierce advocates for teachers unions, other folks are critical of teachers unions. The level of collaboration and comfort with naming what I think is really hard territory was impressive. What came out of it was a really pretty crystal clear sense of those gaps - which surprised me, that that could come forth out of that four hours in such a clear way without trying to solve it. I mean there were some beautiful heated moments but everyone stayed in a really generous space. So I think the framing really helped because for the hard conversations people were able to have, hard critical conversations, but we all knew we were on the same team."

"I think that the there's lots of relationships that have been built out of it that I know of, and I'm sure more that I don't know of, the Boggs folks, and education liberation, and other folks who are more involved we are all collaborating more. I don't know if we are doing that in any formal name or alliance but we are definitely communicating much more often. We have held a couple of calls post PMA to talk about how we hold on to what we learned."

QUOTES FROM THE RESOLUTION:

"We acknowledge that we face a crisis that is both deeply challenging and full of possibility. We can move beyond a dying system to transform our educational practices to create the conditions where youth are prepared to participate in a democratic, multiracial, and sustainable society.

We seek to reform the property tax system and other formulas that create inequitable funding for schools.

We seek to replace zero tolerance polices in schools with restorative justice practices.

We affirm October 7th as a National Day of Action for youth, parents, educators, and all allies who want educational justice and transformation.

We support the creation of a National Student Bill of Rights and effort to ensure Quality Education as a Constitutional Right."

AGENDA:

1. Open (Bill Ayers)
2. Introductions - Shout-out for descriptors of who is in the room (Shea, Scott)
3. Frame political landscape & strategic moment, examples of impact of national agenda: (Grace Lee Boggs, Vincent Harding, Mia Henry, and Julia Putnam)
4. Explain the PMA Process (Nate Walker)
5. Small working group discussion (individual facilitators): From personal to vision and strategy
7. Small group resolution, drafting and revising: What actions or statements do we want the national assembly to endorse or mobilize towards? What are the first steps/big steps?
8. Large group fishbowl: Goal is to raise up next steps for everyone to consider.
9. Seek affirmations of fishbowl groups work back in original small groups.
10. Back to fishbowl to make adjustments/have further conversation based on feedback
11. Affirm resolutions as a large group. We will aim to capture the sense of the room.
12. Quick round of feedback, shout outs, thanks, and ashe's
13. Closure

ACTIONS / NEXT STEPS:

>> October 7th as a National Day of Action for youth, parents, educators, and all allies who want educational justice and transformation.

Peoples Movement Assembly Profiles



FOOD SOVEREIGNTY

WEDNESDAY JUNE 23, 2010 @ DETROIT

PURPOSE / GOALS:

Raise and prioritize the problem; Envision together the future we want; Propose strategies and steps for solutions which we can act upon together...

150 PARTICIPANTS

SPONSORING ORGS:

US Food Crisis Working Group
National Family Farm

QUOTES ABOUT THE EXPERIENCE:

"I think the spirit of the event was such that we felt it was more than we could have anticipated, the hunger of many local groups and many grassroots groups that have been working in relative isolation finding themselves together with other like minded people, beginning to working together to create a plan was energizing for a lot of folks"

"access to urban land and land issues in general is a strong direction we are moving in, another one is linking farm workers with workers in the struggle, like restaurant workers with farm workers, bringing them into the movement was and is an important part of the process.....creating community across race and class lines. A proposal that came out the small groups was for local communities to have meals together.....doing community meals together as one way to break down barriers between race and class....this a project that we are doing here "

"a lot of new stuff emerged..... there was a lot of resonance among folks around land, generally the question of land is taken up by rural communities and in this space land issues really resonated with everyone, especially urban communities"

QUOTES FROM THE RESOLUTION:

"We endorse actions that include: the liberation of land and water resources for the production of food and sustainable livelihoods; the creation of new structures for cooperative ownership of land and food production, processing and distribution; the integration of labor rights, immigrant's rights and food justice; the valuing of women as primary food providers, and the denouncement of false solutions and false partnerships addressing climate change, hunger and economic development.

We demand a world in which everyone has control over their food and no one has to put food in their mouth that hurts people or the environment."

AGENDA:

1. Introductions with music, drumming, ritual cornucopia
2. Clarifying the political landscape and the problem, highlighting possible focal points of struggle
3. Explanation of PMA process and goals, brief history of Social Movement Assemblies.
4. Break out groups: (Each group matched with facilitator. Each group chooses note takers and reporters.)
Part I: Problems and alliances;
Part II: Solutions and Shared Proposals.
Themes: National Campaigns, Food industry worker struggles, Urban Agriculture, Anti-Trust process and Corporate Control, Control of Means of Production, Blending of Food Justice Movement and Struggle for Ecological/ Environmental/ Climate Justice, So-called "free trade" versus Solidarity Economy models, Spiritual and cultural orientation of peasant, or family farm resistance, Youth in Ag caucus
5. Break and Music and socio drama elements
6. Guided Plenary for Reporting, Proposals and Dialog
7. Break for organizational consultations
- 8.. Regroup Plenary to choose reps to national PMA, and to Prioritize and seek Consensus on Proposals.
- 9: Adjourn: Drumming and dancing circle

ACTIONS / NEXT STEPS:

>> The Food Sovereignty PMA consolidated a loose working group into the US Food Sovereignty Alliance

Peoples Movement Assembly Profiles



HEALING JUSTICE

FRIDAY JUNE 25, 2010 @ DETROIT

100-150 PARTICIPANTS

PURPOSE / GOALS:

We came to the PMA as a mechanism for creating a social and political convergence to allow us to have the opportunity to imagine what it would look like if we had a room full of social justice-minded healers. Can we come into the room and ask how can we look at health care? How can we look at healing? How can we look at these things inside of social justice organizing?

SPONSORING ORGS:

Kindred Southern Healing Justice Collective
Detroit HHEJ
Generation Five
Cure This

QUOTES ABOUT THE EXPERIENCE:

"The PMA as a tool for building convergences and beginning to build a joint strategy yes absolutely, but the PMA as a tool for building solutions - not yet. Because we were at the end of the forum some of us as organizers had been able to attend other PMAs and began to adjust our expectations slightly of what was possible and realize that not everyone was going to get to the end plan of having an action day. Now that's not to say that it wasn't hard because people wanted to see solutions people wanted to see where we are going. So let's set ourselves up for building strategy beyond this talk, about setting ourselves up for the website where we can share work and potentially setting up a regional PMA and national PMA meetings on healing justice where we can communicate by phone."

"And the opportunity to cross fertilize with many movements in terms of healing around liberation is very exciting, the momentum is begun and we are just trying to keep up with it. The visibility now of 100+ folks across the country starting to look at trauma, look at memory and to look at where healing fits inside of social transformation. That's undoable, that's an amazing thing and now we are being contacted by 100 more people who heard about the PMA and wanted to be there. These people are doctors, social workers, midwives and now we see these other ripple effects."

QUOTES FROM THE RESOLUTION:

Although the Healing Justice PMA did not produce a formal resolution they did commit to a series of next steps which are summarized in this quote by one of the main facilitators:

"Even in our actual solutions and strategies we said we will work together regionally and nationally to use alternative economies provide access to healing services that will create safe spaces for wellness in our personal community and organizational spheres. We will build a national healing Justice network that will develop multi-media approaches to documenting and raising awareness on the impact of healing strategies in our communities and movements. We also talked about the need to build healing movements that cross-pollinate with resources for safety and wellness nationally. Finally we also talked about the importance of transferring information and knowledge about our traditions of resiliency practices between generations so that they are not lost."

AGENDA:

1. Intro, agreements
2. Mapping conditions inside spheres as a large group
4. Energizing activity
5. Timeline of health justice- document ways that people have been resilient to end health injustice. Shareback and round of applause for our own resistance and resilience
6. Values-to guide our discussion and process handed out, read and discussed Underlying Value-organizing practice is healing practice is a road to liberatory thinking
7. Vision exercise-what would wellness and safety look like free of generational trauma and violence
8. To strategy: Small group activities
9. Individual expressions of commitment to one concept to bring from this pma into our work

ACTIONS / NEXT STEPS:

>> The Healing Justice PMA launched two new collectives in New Mexico & the Midwest

Peoples Movement Assembly Profiles



ECHO / MEDIA JUSTICE

FRIDAY JUNE 25, 2010 @ DETROIT

PURPOSE / GOALS:

Main Questions: How can we transform the current political and cultural terrain through cross-sector framing, coordinated storytelling, new forms of journalism, and collaborative media policy campaigns that create the conditions for systemic and narrative changes that increase racial justice, economic equity, and human rights and dignity for all communities? What media policies are the most important to ending structural oppression/racism and eliminating wealth/economic gaps caused by Capitalism

QUOTES ABOUT THE EXPERIENCE:

"through the process we sharpened what we were really talking about... it went from being solely being focused about communication and narrative strategies to also being much more about a bigger analysis of media justice that includes not only the media justice part but the policy change that supports the narrative change we want to see..... It cemented this idea that strategic story telling is a core movement building strategy for political, social and cultural change and it also solidified this idea that we have to have a media policy platform that is also fighting structurally racist media system."

"The process affirmed a commitment to create a "Justice Communications Working Group" of movement communicators to convene and reframe core movement goals and advance a collaborative strategy to win key framing fights around structural racism, the economy, corporate control of government, immigration, ecological justice and more."

"The process also affirmed the need for a movement building media policy platform anchored in Article 19 of the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights that defines a media policy agenda for our movements, anchors this agenda in participatory models, advances a 21st Century demand for rights, access, and power in an information age, and expands the concepts of free speech and public press to include a broader concept of Communication and Cultural Rights for all."

QUOTES FROM THE RESOLUTION:

"As organizers, communicators, cultural workers, artists, media makers, and technologists we believe the right to communicate, and therefore the power to transform society, must belong to everyone.

We call for full and equal access, rights, and power to create and use all forms of media, communications, and technology to democratize the production and distribution of information, culture, and knowledge- and to use these as tools in the furtherance of our own collectively determined liberation.

With an emphasis on advancing movement goals and confronting identified framing threats, we commit to deeply integrating communications strategies into our organizing fights. We will work together to develop and deploy meaningful, powerful, shared stories through coordinated communications strategies that connect issues and communities, and advance a compelling shared vision for democratic social change, racial and economic justice, and human rights."

~150 PARTICIPANTS

SPONSORING ORGS:

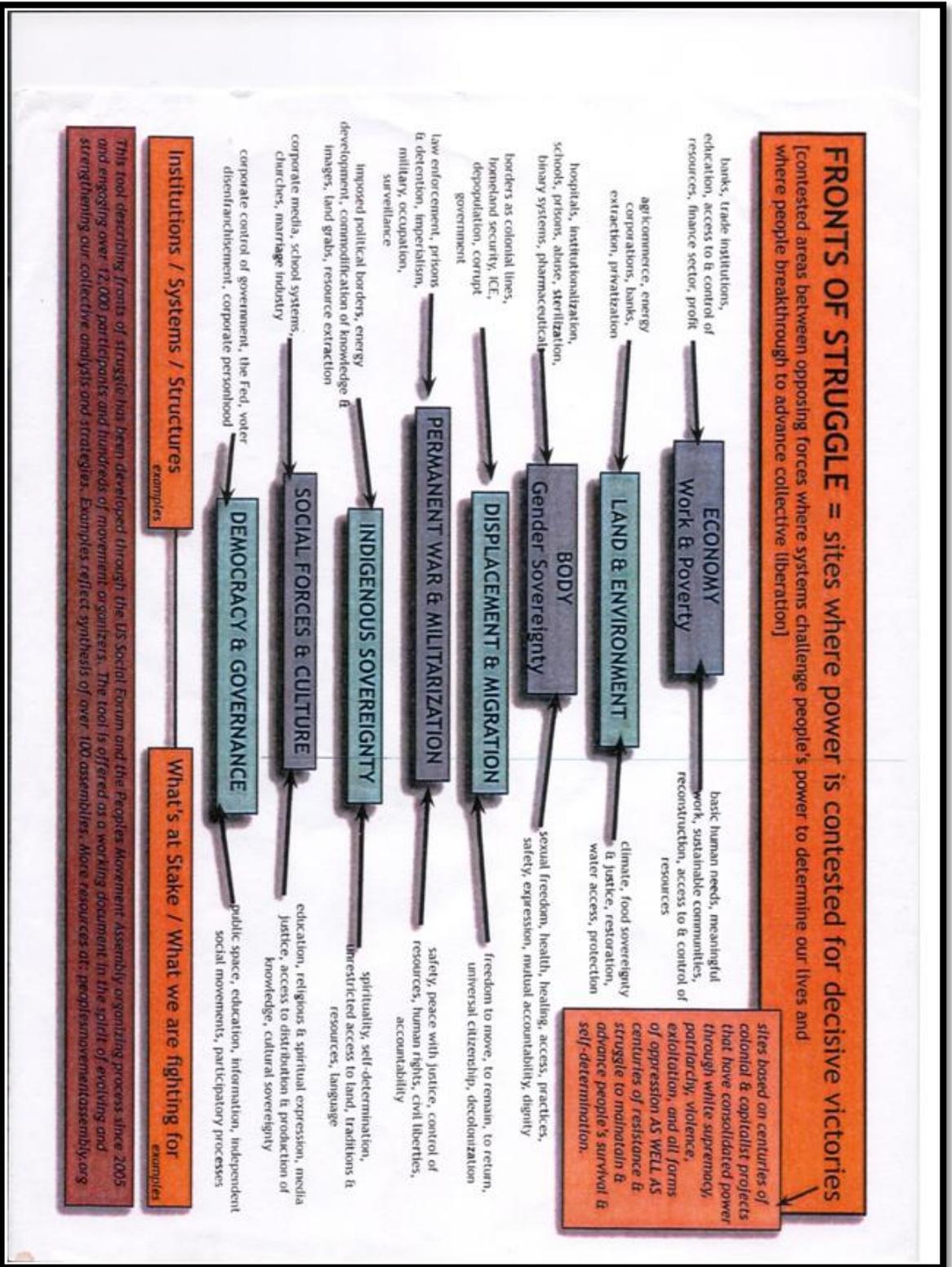
Center for Media Justice
Smart Meme
The Praxis Project
Progressive Communicators

AGENDA:

1. Pair and Share #1: What media policy/conditions most threaten liberation struggles for people living in continental US?
2. Pair and share #2: Based on what you just talked about, create two headlines A: most dangerous frame and B: least effective movement frame
3. Visioning/Building a Common Story: (What's the umbrella story that connects us all?, What are the frames that can move forward our issues?, Which ones do not put any other struggle back?)
4. Simple Report Back: Frames to take action on
5. Framing Values/Principles surfaced
6. Quick Reflections from Policy Discussion (Rights, Access, Distribution)
7. What media policies are the most important to ending structural oppression/racism and eliminating wealth/economic gaps caused by Capitalism

ACTIONS / NEXT STEPS:

- >> Creating a justice communications working group of folks involved in the PMA process (soft launch in early November and fully launch in January 2011)
- >> Alliance between The Center for Media Justice and Praxis Project - co-held Communication Racial Justice Learning Circle.



SOUTHERN WORKERS ASSEMBLY

September 3, 2012 (Labor Day) at 1 PM

First day of Democratic National Convention, Charlotte, NC

Southern Workers Speak Out

NORTH CAROLINA



- ▶ Union density : 2%
- ▶ Main issues : Denial of collective bargaining rights, low wages, unjust disciplines, long work hours, dangerous work, no representation rights or payroll deduction.

"We are overworked and underpaid. We just wanna be treated fair across the board. On Monday August the 6th we are gonna take signs down town to Government Center, City Hall about our working conditions and unfair treatment. We will repeat this every Monday until we get justice and make sure our voice is heard at the Southern Workers Assembly."

—Barbara Edgecomb, Sanitation Worker
City of Charlotte
UE local 150, NC Public Service Workers Union

VIRGINIA



- ▶ Union density : About 6%
- ▶ Main issues : Denial of collective bargaining rights, privatization, understaffing, downsizing, low wages.

"State mental health workers responded to closures of 4-5 Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Services centers and attempts to privatize in central, Tidewater and Northern Virginia. People are pushing back against the state's attempt to increase tolls on state highways. At the Southern Workers Assembly we want to talk about our campaign for a Mental Health Workers Bill of Rights and our fight for public sector collective bargaining rights. One big issue for state workers is our retirement plan and not having wage increase in last 6 years."

—Patrick Brown & Wilma Nedrick, Mental Health Workers
Petersburg, Virginia
UE local 160, VA Public Service Workers Union

Join Southern unions, workers organizations, civil rights, human rights groups, immigrant rights groups, unemployed, young workers, faith and community for a workers speak-out that uplifts our on-the-ground actual workers' rights struggles in the US South.

The Southern working class must encourage our workers and organizations to have an independent presence at the Democratic National Convention as an opportunity to discuss, plan and organize around our own working class needs and struggles for independent political action as we continue to challenge Right-To-Work (for less) & Taft-Hartley laws, low wages, denial of collective bargaining, and workers' human rights connected with the historical demands against the South's legacy of Jim Crow laws, anti-immigrant scapegoating and racism.

The Southern region is the least unionized region in the country. NC is the single least unionized state and is home of Wall Street South as headquarters of Bank of America, Wells Fargo Bank East with the largest concentration of finance capital outside NYC. Workers must let the big banks, corporations and both parties know that we as workers will continue building our powerful Southern movement that addresses our needs as workers and not corporate greed! Enough is enough! We will Organize, Unionize and fightback!

To take place at

1:00 - 5:00 PM

at

Wedgewood Baptist Church

4800 Wedgewood Drive
Charlotte, NC 28210

For more information contact:
Saladin Muhammad of the

Southern International Worker Justice Campaign at
saladin62@aol.com and 252-314-2363

Southern Workers Speak Out to build a Southern Workers Assembly

MISSISSIPPI



► Union density: 5%

“The Southern Workers’ Assembly is long overdue!!! It is absolutely the most important gathering of workers rights organizers, workers, activists and human rights

defenders. As we watch the political footballs being passed from one side of the aisle to the other, we know that working people must take power. We cannot rely upon any part of the decaying machine that rolls over the hopes and aspirations of millions of workers and their families, while greasing the cogs of profit and exploitation. We must stand together, assemble, plan, organize and win!!!!

—Jaribu Hill Greenville, MS

Mississippi Workers Center for Human Rights

TENNESSEE, MISSISSIPPI AND ARKANSAS

► Union density: Arkansas is 4.2%, Tennessee is 4.6%



“Within the last year or so we have had elections at poultry plants. In August 2011 we won an election in Water Valley, MS, with 236 poultry workers overwhelmingly. The states we work in are right-to-work and that makes it harder to orga-

nize because they play games with us. You can get the same that the members get that are not organized, but if we work together and everybody plays a part it would make it better. The “Right To Work” has the wrong name. It is the right to be a slave! There is nothing about right to work.”

—Rose Turner

Organizing Director

United Food and Commercial Workers Union, local 1529

See videos, call to action and more at:
<http://southernworker.org>

SOUTH CAROLINA



► Union density: 3.4%

“This year, the state was trying to strengthen the Right-to-work laws. Everything that was originally in there that was very harmful got stripped from the bill. It first passed the House, but when it got back

to the Senate, we were there to express our concerns and raises issues of legality and constitutionality. For instance, they tried to strip and nullify Project Labor Agreements in S.C. but we showed this will be big problem with Federal government. We got them to make motion to strike that from the bill. Another part of the bill was on reporting on retirements. We showed that there is already requirements and the states cannot require more reporting than this. Everything in there that would cripple us was stricken down. They want us to report our membership list and now forget about it, that is not going to happen. We counted it as a great success.”

—Ken Riley, President of South Carolina AFL-CIO, President of ILA local 1422, Vice-President of ILA international, dockworker, Charleston, SC

NORTH CAROLINA



“Over the last few years we built the H.K.O.J. Coalition (lead by the NAACP) and Together NC, coalitions of groups that are organizing about the budget crisis and how it adversely impacts low income people,

teachers, medical care and people of color. We talk about how legislature is being more punitive to the working poor. Yet, there are divisions there mainly due to ignorance of middle class white people. The main issues for us to talk about at the Southern Workers Assembly is raising minimum wage so that we can get a living wage, probably over \$10 an hour. That should be a unifying agenda because even poor whites will see how they are in common with poor Blacks and poor immigrants.”

—Billy Green, office worker, Spring Hope, NC
 Public employee with State Department of Commerce
 UE150, NC Public Service Workers Union

We All Count Campaign 2012

25 ORGANIZATIONS REGISTER, EDUCATE, ACTIVATE COMMUNITIES



Action Site Voter Registration Drives:

We All Count Community Event with Alpha Sigma Omega in Montgomery AL, registered 50 young people

3 drivers registered formerly incarcerated people in Alabama with TOPS

145 people registered with the East End Neighbors in Decatur GA

Women's Project in Arkansas registered over 100 people in collaboration with churches and community groups

12 drivers in Atlanta led by disability link registered over 200 people

Women Watch Africa tabled at citizenship hearings to ensure new citizens had access to registration forms

4 Hoops for Peace events led by youth organizers of Project South's Spina Clark for the National Student Bill of Rights

Delegations to the Southern Movement Assembly

22 Action Sites represented their work and communities:

- San Antonio TX
- Little Rock AR
- Whitesburg KY
- Knoxville TN
- Durham NC
- Charleston SC
- Atlanta GA
- Augusta & Columbus GA
- Jacksonville FL
- Dothan AL
- Montgomery & Selma AL
- Sidalil LA
- Richmond VA
- Harrisonburg VA

40 organizations participated, volunteered, and represented frontlines

Children's Assembly created liberated space for young people under age 12 (see article on page 17)

Community Education for voters and organizers

Moving Forward Gulf Coast developed toolkits, videos, and webinars for Louisiana voters

Project South facilitated 7 Monthly BAFs in Atlanta for over 125 community members and an Organizing Intensive in June for 54 community members

Dozens of NSRR presentations and workshops in West Virginia, Mississippi, Alabama, Louisiana, and Georgia

South & Community BAF in Nixon GA was held in July with Centenary Methodist Church and the GA Council on Developmental Disabilities

Weekly Community Meetings in Dothan AL with TOPS to organize after a member was shot by police in August

Women Watch Africa held a Movement Assembly with immigrants and refugees in Clarkston GA in August

Southern Anti-Racism Network fought against misinformation around registering voters and facilitated a Columbus GA Community Forum in September

Georgia Citizens' Coalition on Hunger and the Georgia Human Right Union led We All Count meeting in October

Round table discussion Intellectual Intercourse African American, Voting Rights, and the Women's Project

New Jim Crow Movement in Jacksonville FL teamed up with the Ordinary Peoples Society in Dothan AL to explore police militarization and community mass incarceration and police misconduct

N7 AFTER the election

106 people gathered in Sidalil LA for a Voter Party with Moving Forward Gulf Coast

Georgia Citizens' Coalition on Hunger caked over 250 people on November 8 & coordinated transport, meals, and community support

Project South Red Carpet Actions in Atlanta collected 100 interviews and engaged over 250 students and community folks

Southwest Workers Union in San Antonio held a Red Carpet youth action

Over 130 people gathered over the weekend in Harrisonburg VA for the ONC in

Little Rock Muslim women with Women's Project facilitated an intergenerational discussion about Islamophobia and their recommendations to the President

SONG North Carolina released a vision of queer liberation

Alternare ROOTS hosted strategy session & house party in Charleston, SC

Community Assemblies determine what's next

National Student Bill of Rights Assembly with Women's Project & Philander Smith College on Nov 14

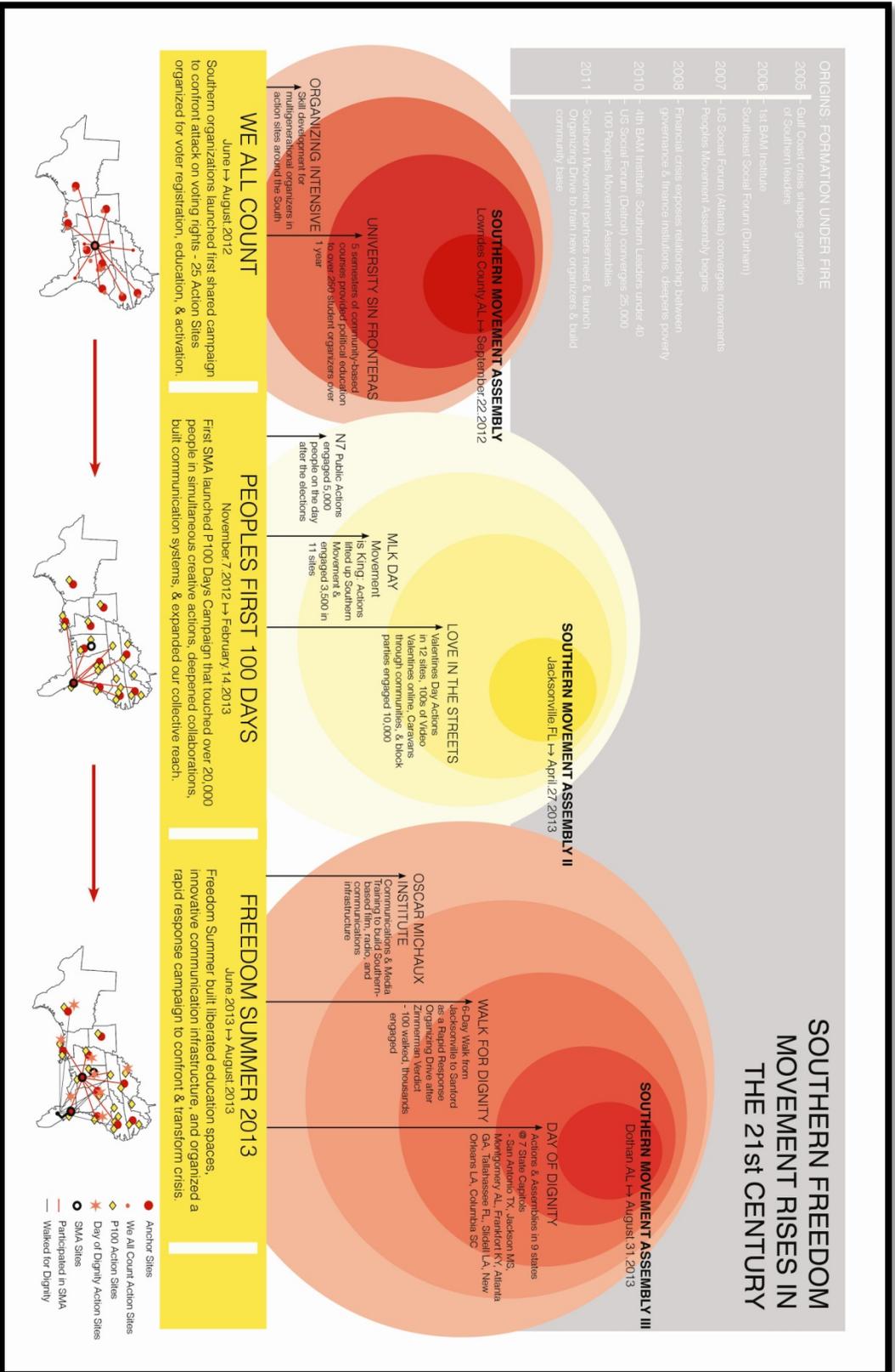
Northshore Peoples Movement Assembly in Sidalil LA with Moving Forward Gulf Coast created action plans on Nov 17

New Orleans Organizers Roundtable Forum on November 14

Election analysis in West Virginia with STR organizers on December 4

Southern Human Rights Organizing Conference in Charleston SC, December 7-9





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