

Southern Strategies
Summary Report for Gatherings
August 31, 2007 and July 7-9, 2008
Highlander Center

Background and Context:

On Labor Day weekend 2007, the Highlander Center celebrated its 75th anniversary and used the occasion to convene, in collaboration with partner groups, a day long Southern Strategy Think Tank. The facilitation team of staff from Project South, Stone Circles and Highlander was joined by other planning committee members from Appalshop, Colectivo Flatlander, Kentuckians for the Commonwealth, Southeast Regional Economic Justice Network, Tennessee Immigrant and Refugee Rights Coalition, and UNITE HERE Local 2262.

Goals of the gathering included:

- Lift up the needs, issues and cutting edge work of the region;
- Provide opportunity for organizations in the region to convene following the US Social Forum and build on the gains and momentum of the Forum;
- Build new and strengthen existing relationships between organizations in the South;
- Explore creating an ongoing effort that develops strategies for attention to the issues, work and key role of the region.

Over 70 people from 60 organizations, networks and coalitions attended the day long session. People shared individual organizational strengths, identified resources and support needed for regional collaboration, and offered invitations to collaborate. Small group work focused on the following core questions, with brief summation of key points of discussion:

- **Core Values/Unifying Vision –**
 - What do we really want?
 - Need for pro-active values;
 - Develop and communicate our vision;
 - Build a movement around human rights;
 - Build a movement for economic democracy.
- **Funding, Infrastructure and Turf –**
 - Funder education;
 - Creating Structures outside the 501(c)3 model;
 - Collaboration vs. competition; overcoming turf issues;
 - How to share power.
- **Messaging –**
 - How the voices of experts (we the people) get heard, how our historical experience informs this, and how we do it collectively;
 - Use the elections to build new leadership;
 - Take Social Forum process to the southern states;
 - Being clear about makes the South unique and how we use that to create change?
 - Honoring the ancestors and full heritage of the South, including whose land we are on and on whose shoulders we stand.

- **Youth –**
 - Youth friendly language and structures;
 - Involvement of youth in all issues and campaigns, not just youth issues;
 - Preparing youth for leadership roles;
 - Sharing intergenerational models;
 - Movement vs. career.

 - **New Communities/Globalization of the South/Unfinished Business –**
 - Building understanding and new relationships in the context of global capitalism;
 - Need for education on legacy of region, Civil Rights Movement, unfinished business around race, globalization and the experiences of immigrants.
 - Need popular education for African Americans, immigrants, and other southern folk.
 - Create learning opportunities through exchanges and tours – for instance, Civil Rights History and the border.

 - **Collective Strategy –**
 - The importance of the South to the rest of the country;
 - The '08 election and USSF process as movement building opportunities;
 - Working with themes and issues that affect us throughout the region – displacement; human rights;
 - How we overcome the digital divide;
 - Building a movement that brings our full selves to the work and doesn't ignore wedge issues.
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Southern Strategies II

On July 7th, 2008, the Southern Strategies discussion continued with the second of three sessions. The facilitation team of staff from People's Institute for Survival and Beyond/Atlanta, People in Defense of Earth and Her Resources (PODER) and Highlander was joined by other planning committee members from Appalshop, Colectivo Flatlander, and Southern Energy Network.

Basic Shared Assumptions which framed our continued work together:

- What happens in the South profoundly affects the rest of the country, good and bad.
- We are stronger when our work is connected.
- Great organizing work is going on throughout the region. People often don't know about this work, and it often isn't connected.
- The US Social Forum, the presidential election and ongoing cutting edge organizing on Katrina, mountaintop removal, immigration, and the cradle to prison pipeline, among others, provide opportunities for education and engaging new people in social justice organizing.
- With rapid changes in the South, everyone is in a new place and people need new and different skills regarding leadership.
- We benefit from intentional, collaborative strategy to build across the country a better understanding of the critical role of the South and our particular needs in the region.

Goals –

- Develop a working understanding of what each other does and contributes.
- Identify core priorities/common ground.
- Strengthen relationships.
- Develop strategies to maximize the organizing opportunities in the South.
- Assess infrastructure needs of the region and begin developing plans to meet those needs.

Key questions framed for the gathering included:

- How do we build on the current momentum in the South?
- How do we shift the excitement and momentum around the elections into social justice organizing?
- How can we structurally link our work in ways that collectivize our capacity and build needed infrastructure for the region?
- How do we develop skills so activists and leaders of diverse communities can work together and build authentic relationships and enduring alliances?

Values

The group recognized there is no short cut to relationships and that collaborations often unravel because people don't take the time to consolidate around shared values and principles. Common shared values from small group work included (but were not limited to):

- Integrity
- Inclusivity
- Non-violence
- Accountability
- Common Good
- Anti-racist at core
- Interconnectedness
- Collective leadership
- Equity in Communication
- Bring full selves to the work
- Cooperation for mutual benefit
- Sustainable models of organization and leadership
- Lift up/understand our differences and the power in those differences
- Democratic, and see the work to make democracy real as a value not as a burden

What Stops Us from Coming Together:

The group explored what stops us from coming together and named barriers including:

- race, racism, internalized racial superiority and internalized inferiority;
- funding issues
 - theirs - issues are interconnected and funders often fund in issue silos;
 - ours – turf, we aren't good at collaborating and we have lived within their system;
- don't invest in shared principles and values;
- don't know enough about each other;
- effectiveness of divide and conquer tactics.

Opportunities and Challenges

We recognized great opportunity to engage others by being in such an unusual election cycle with so many people thinking the country is going in wrong direction (illegal war, soaring gas and food prices, and economic uncertainty). There is massive voter registration, youth engagement; and exciting uses of technology. NAFTA became a house hold name, there is growing awareness of the environmental crisis, and the whole country is being pushed forward about race.

The theme of displacement, which came up in the first session, came up strongly in the second session and was a powerful connector among people. Those displaced by immigration, Katrina, mountaintop removal, and gentrification shared commonality across race, region and issue. A Katrina survivor acknowledged that before hearing about mountaintop removal he hadn't thought about white people being displaced. And some white people moved in understanding that racism is all our problem and fighting it key to liberation for all of us, not just people of color.

Actions

Common interests in continued activities based on small group report backs included focus on education, action and communications

EDUCATION and COLLECTIVE ACTION:

1. Developing a four point "People's Dialogue on Race, Immigration, Displacement and Incarceration."
2. Shared interest in political education for our communities and organizations by developing/identifying and disseminating educational materials for study circles. The study circles would help build toward the people's dialogue but not be limited to those.
3. Our movement is in need of understanding the history of the struggle for justice, including successes in the struggle, people's heroes and international models.
4. Interest in looking toward collaborative action, including a possible 2009 SE Social Forum, 2010 US Social Forum, and 150th anniversary of the Emancipation Proclamation in 2013.

COMMUNICATIONS:

- Create a web based directory.
- Create a web based calendar and communication tools between groups.

Note on Recent History: From 1999 – 2001, Highlander and Project South entered a collaboration called Southern Strategy that among other activities, convened two Southern Strategy meetings bringing together key organizations to explore ways to support a civil and economic rights movement. In addition to the convenings, they published a collaborative report and conducted mapping of over 257 organizations in the South.
