Peoples Movement ASSEMBLY

ORGANIZING HANDBOOK

This Organizing Handbook is designed for organizers, educators, activists, and community members who want to use the Peoples Movement Assembly methodology to build power in their community, on their frontline struggle, and in our social movements.

This updated Handbook reflects the learnings of hundreds of organizers practicing the Peoples Movement Assembly from 2006-2016.

Handbook produced by Project South

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www.peoplesmovementassembly.org

Table of Contents

How to Use this Handbook 5

Peoples Movement Assembly Overview 6

- History & Timeline of the PMA
- Why is the PMA important?
- What is the PMA?
- Political and Practical Principles

Global Snapshots: Liberation Movements use Assemblies 14

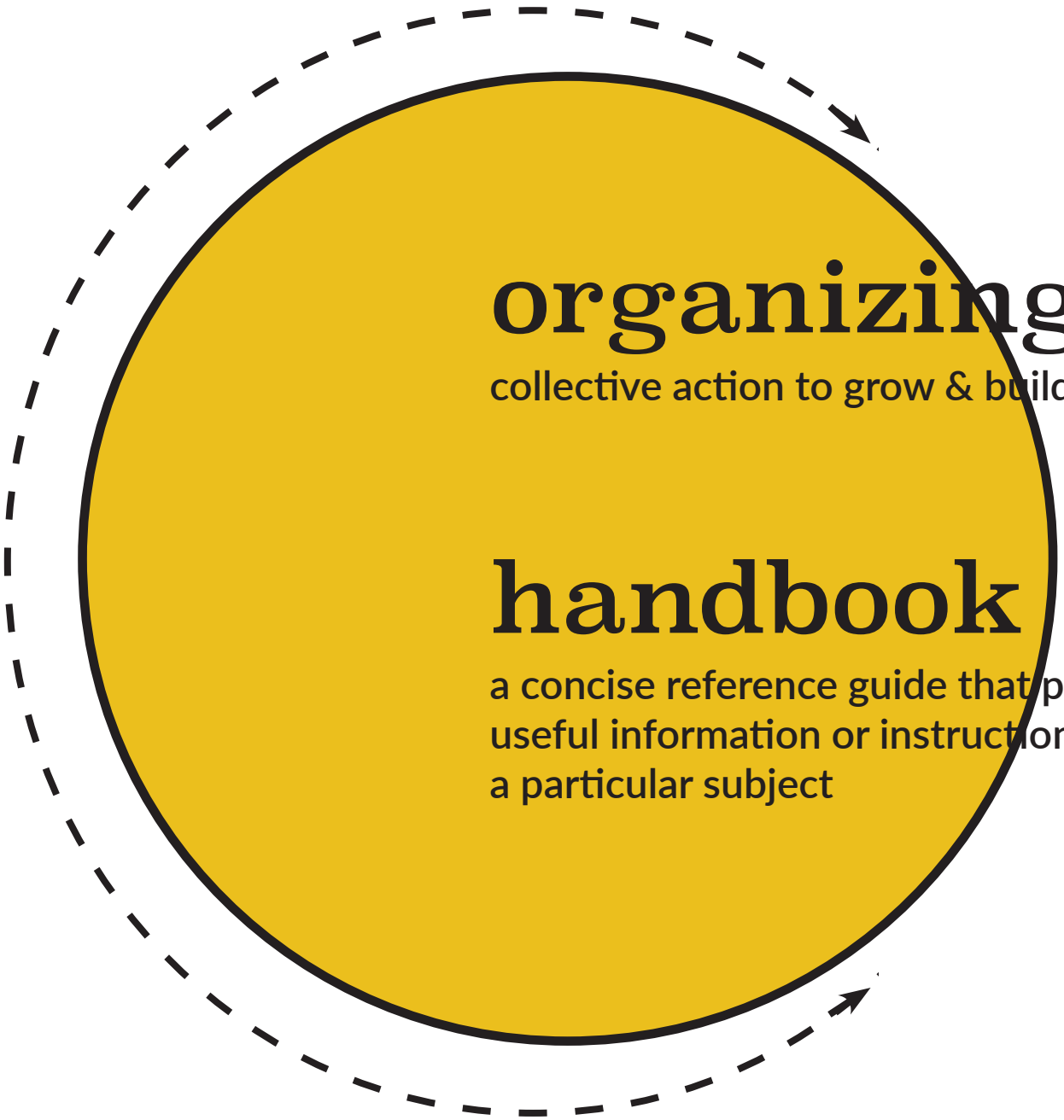
- Lowndes County Freedom Organization (1960)
- Pan-African Congress VI (1974)
- Zapatista Mexico (1994-present)
- Tahrir Square - Egypt (2011)
- Kurdistan Peoples Movement (2001-present)
- Southern Movement Assembly (2012-present)

Organizing a Peoples Movement Assembly 27

- How Does it Work?
- Organizing a PMA : Before / During / After
- Facilitating a PMA : Sample Agendas & Worksheets

Tips & Tools for a Successful PMA 30

- Documentation & Notetaking
- Small Group Facilitation Tips
- Synthesis Guide : How to facilitate synthesis process
- From Commitments to Action
- References



organizing :

collective action to grow & build power

handbook :

a concise reference guide that provides useful information or instructions about a particular subject

HOW TO USE this handbook

The PMA methodology is not the property of any single organization, person, or group.

Social Movements throughout history and around the world have used assemblies to make decisions. Movements, particularly in the Global South - Africa, Asia, and Latin America - have used assemblies to advance the practice of people power, self-determination, and governance.

In the 21st century, social movements are building power through radical democratic, participatory spaces that respect and trust the collective voice of people in struggle.

World Social Forums are semi-annual convergences that create open space for movements to share, connect, and strengthen beyond the boundaries of political parties, initiated in resistance to the World Economic Forum. The Social Movement Assembly was created to make and implement movement decisions within the World Social Forum. The Peoples Movement Assembly is a political methodology born out of the Social Movement Assembly process and the United States Social Forum *(more history on pages 6-7).*

Over the last decade, countless organizations and struggles have contributed to the collective efforts to build movements that liberate all people using the Peoples Movement Assemblies. The PMA Handbook is a fusion of that thinking, experience, and work.

Section 1: OVERVIEW The Handbook includes a historical timeline and overview of the PMA process in the U.S. in order to locate the assembly within a movement continuum and connect to current examples.

Section 2: GLOBAL CASE STUDIES The PMA Handbook includes snapshots of historical and current liberation movements using assemblies and assembly practices to grow power.

Section 3: HOW IT WORKS Assemblies are different depending on the group, the purpose, and the function. The PMA Handbook offers insight into the fundamental characteristics of assemblies that are useful for the organizing process Before, During, and After the Assembly.

Section 4: TOOLS & TIPS The PMA Handbook offers resources including planning tools, sample agendas, methodology descriptions, notetaking tips, and guidelines for synthesis development.

ASSEMBLIES
& Movement Convergences

Black Womens PMA following release of Marissa Alexander, Jacksonville FL

SMA V
Aug 2015
New Orleans LA

SMA IV
Aug 2014
Atlanta GA

SMA III
Aug 2013
Dothan AL

SMA II
April 2013
Jacksonville FL

SMA I
Sept 2012
Lowndes Cty AL

The Southern Movement Assembly (SMA) initiated in 2012, converges over 250 grassroots community members affected by poverty, migration, racism, violence, and climate disaster. Five regional assemblies develop joint campaigns & action plans to build movement power. The SMA organizes rapid response to crisis & opportunity, deepens political education, and flanks local leadership to take action.

Gulf Coast Climate Justice PMAs begin. Over 5 years, multiple assemblies converge communities of color, develop experiential analysis on ecological justice, gather visions for community response & prevention, and launch the **Gulf South Rising initiative** in 2015.

100 Community PMAs are organized in Detroit, the Pacific Northwest, San Antonio, and many other sites inspired by the assembly organizing around the second USSF.

US Social Forum II
June 2010 - Detroit
2nd National PMA

Kentucky Social Forum
July 2009 - Berea
PMA organized to close Forum

National Student Bill of Rights is launched at a Youth Assembly during USSF I
15-20 youth-led assemblies in Boston, Philadelphia, Jackson, Atlanta, New Orleans, and Chicago create list of rights, a ballot process, & organizing campaigns.

US Social Forum I
June 2007 - Atlanta
1st National PMA

Border Social Forum
October 2006 - El Paso

Southeast Social Forum
June 2006 - Durham NC

Immigrant Megamarches
Mayday 2006
Millions of Latino immigrants & migrants demonstrate popular show of force across the U.S.

Root Cause March
Oct 2003 - Miami FL

Global Day of Action
February 2003
decision made at Social Movement Assembly at WSF

Seattle Shutdown
November 1999
World Trade Organization
Ministerial disrupted & defeated

World Social Forums

Tunis
Tunisia 2015

Tunis
Tunisia 2013

Porto Alegre
Brasil 2012

Dakar
Senegal 2011

Mumbai
India 2009

Nairobi
Kenya 2007

Caracas
Venezuela 2006

Mumbai
India 2004

Porto Alegre
Brazil 2003

Porto Alegre
Brazil 2002

Porto Alegre
Brazil 2001

CRISES
& Movement Moments

Mike Brown killed
Ferguson uprising
August 2014

Zimmerman acquitted
July 2013

Trayvon Martin killed
February 2012

Idle No More 2012
Indigenous movement erupts

Occupy Wall Street
September 2011

Wisconsin Structural Adjustment & Popular Uprising
February- 2011

BP Oil Spill in Gulf
April 2010

Obama elected
November 2008

Global finance crisis exposed
September 2008

Hurricane Katrina & Gulf Coast Crisis
August 2005

FTAA meeting
Oct 2003 - Miami FL

9/11/2001
War on Terror begins

Supreme Court grants Bush presidency
November 2000

HISTORY of the PMA in the U.S.

Since 2006, thousands of people have participated in over 400 Peoples Movement Assemblies (PMAs).

Community organizers across the United States have used the PMA to gather people affected by injustice, analyze what is happening in communities, and create collective plans of actions to address those conditions.

PMAs are inspired by global social movements that use large-scale governance practices to establish collective action plans across issues, cultures, and geographies. The Social Movement Assembly was developed as a decision-making space of the World Social Forum (WSF) initiated in 2001 in Porto Alegre Brazil. At each WSF, an Assembly gathers thousands of community members from hundreds of countries to make movement decisions. A historic decision to implement the Global Day of Action against War in February 2003 converged millions of people to take to the streets in sites across the world in a united political action to prevent the U.S. war in Iraq.

Since 2006, the organizing process of the Peoples Movement Assemblies has grown and evolved in the U.S. One of the first movement assemblies in the U.S. was held in 2006 at the Border Social Forum in El Paso, Texas/Ciudad Juarez. That regional social forum along with the Southeast Social Forum held in Durham, North Carolina, built momentum to converge the first United States Social Forum in Atlanta, Georgia in 2007 with 20,000 people participating. The first national PMA was facilitated with thousands in attendance and resolutions read by over 60 groups.

At the 2nd U.S. Social Forum in Detroit in June 2010, 100 Peoples Movement Assemblies convened over 10,000 people, and the National PMA produced a Social Movement Agenda for Action based on a Synthesis Assembly of representatives and a Commission of movement elders. Communities took the PMA organizing process back home and facilitated city-wide assemblies, frontline assemblies on environmental racism, youth power, immigrant justice, healthcare, economic alternatives, international solidarity, and other issues, as well as regional assemblies for movement governance.

"We can build a better world. We must move aside old systems that have failed and create new ones that serve and are accountable to all peoples and all living beings."

From the statement produced by the Synthesis Commission in 2010.

Photo from the National PMA in Detroit, 2010

WHY is the PMA important?

Our movements need collective action plans, governance, and infrastructure.

Social movements are rising. Social movements exist in the U.S., yet are often disjointed and working separately. We need to build stronger collaborative social movements by deepening our understandings of our common goals and seeking to intersect across issues, frontlines, and regions.

We need autonomous, independent social movements with their own social and economic agendas. Current social, economic, and political systems are designed to fail our communities. Assemblies build parallel democratic infrastructure to determine community action plans.

Multiple strategies and a diversity of tactics are more effective. Attacks on our communities are part of reactionary strategies to dismantle public infrastructure. Multiple strategies engage more people and increase our collective potential to respond, fight back, and win.

Reforms are not enough. We need long-term vision and strategies for liberation. We need to envision alternatives and create new structures to initiate the world that we want and deserve. We need to move from single issues to convergence across frontlines. We need to develop collective strategic plans that create immediate results and also lead to long-term systemic social justice.

Leadership and power must be held by people who live and experience injustice. Our movements are led by people who are affected by social control, oppression, racism, and economic displacement. This guiding principle and practice strengthens the effectiveness of our movements and reduces cooptation and exploitation.

"Our community should be the source of our power."
Rubén Solís, University Sin Fronteras

WHAT is the PMA?

The Peoples Movement Assembly is a gathering of people to make decisions for collective action & power.

The assembly collectively answers:

1. **What are the problems we face?**
2. **What are the solutions?**
3. **What are we going to do about it?**

The assembly is a constellation of social movement organizations and people that seek to govern themselves.

It is not a network, not a coalition, not an alliance, and not a political party. It is inclusive and not exclusive to one political line or ideology. It is a convergence of social forces.

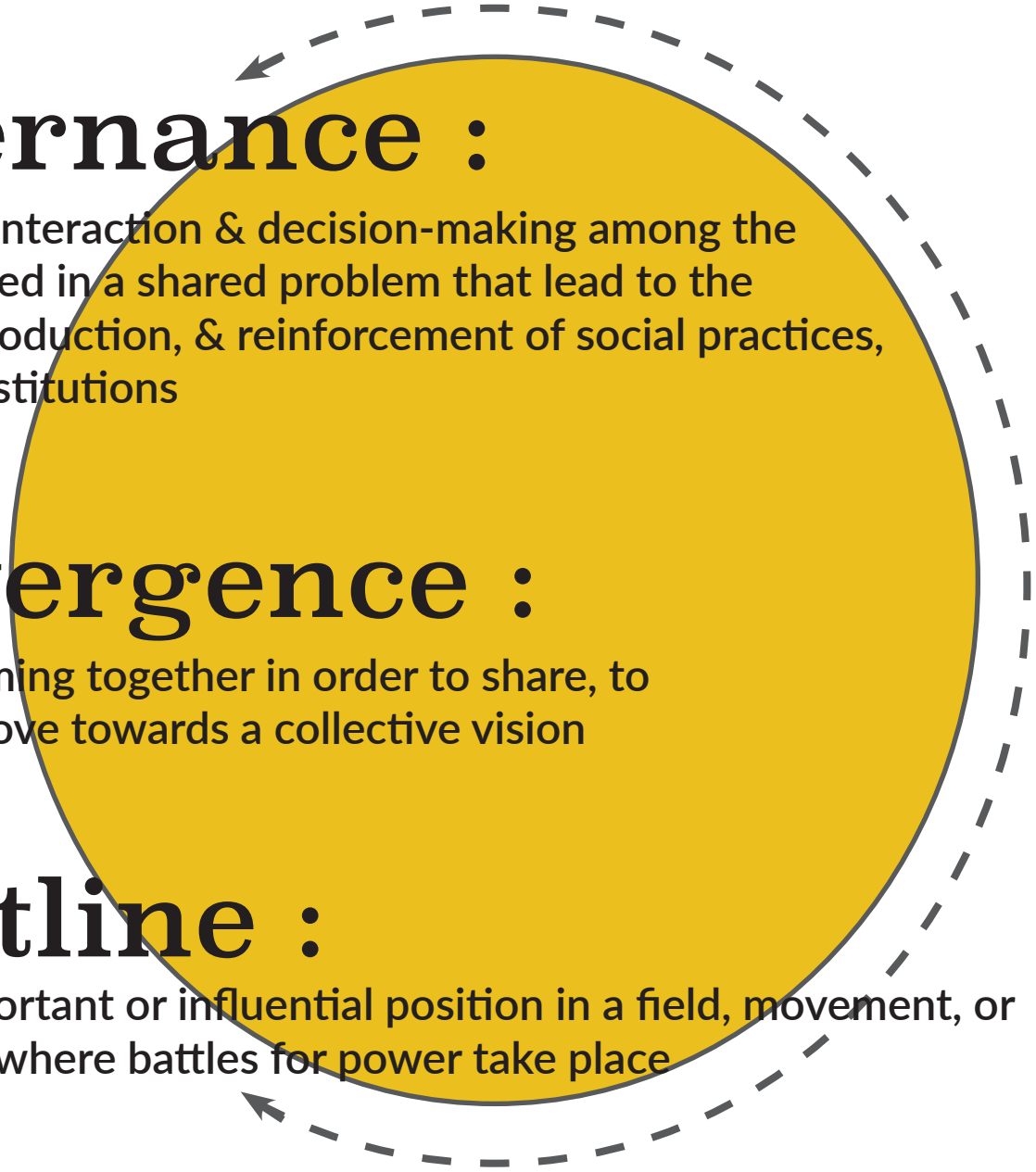
The assembly process is based on the facilitation methodology of collective critical thinking and analysis, resulting in a synthesis that represents the sum organic total of all of the ideas and commitments. The social movement assembly results in action based on that synthesis.

The assembly is a decolonizing process. The assembly process is based on a theory of change that people can create processes that dismantle colonial, neocolonial, and neoliberal systems while at the same time creating a new society.

At the heart of the assembly process is a project to dismantle patriarchy, racism, poverty, capitalism, oppression, exploitation, and violence while replacing those systems with movement governance and liberated institutions.

The assembly creates an open space for people to enter social movements and become active participants and leaders. The assembly is facilitated to encourage maximum participation in order to practice direct participatory democracy at the community level, within particular frontlines, and across social movements.

The assembly is multiracial, multigenerational, multi-ideological, and multi-gendered. The assembly brings all the voices together in a circular fashion and engages the thinking, experiences, and visions of all the participants in order to synthesize and collectively agree on action steps.



governance :

processes of interaction & decision-making among the people involved in a shared problem that lead to the creation, reproduction, & reinforcement of social practices, cultures, & institutions

convergence :

the act of coming together in order to share, to work, & to move towards a collective vision

frontline :

the most important or influential position in a field, movement, or undertaking; where battles for power take place

social movement :

a coordinated, sustained, & collective force of people most affected by historical & current injustices that has the capacity to demand justice & exercise power

Assemblies create community governance, frontline convergence, and movement governance.

Assemblies for Community Governance

are organized to bring together people in a particular neighborhood, city, town, constituency, or population in order to share analysis, collaborate, develop and implement action plans that grow community power.

Examples: Detroit City-wide Assemblies (2011); Clarkston GA Youth Assembly (2014); Chattanooga TN Peoples Assembly (2016); South Atlanta Assemblies (2009, 2014, 2016)

Assemblies for Frontline Convergence

are organized to bring together people who work on a similar frontline of struggle in order to share analysis, collaborate, develop and implement action plans that grow cohesion and unity for frontline power.

Examples: Border Wall Assemblies (2006) Gulf Coast Climate Justice Assemblies (2010-16); Formerly Incarcerated Peoples Movement Assembly (2011).

Assemblies for Movement Governance

are organized to represent communities, frontline struggles, and organizations in order to share analysis, collaborate, and develop and implement action plans to convene and grow movement power.

Example: Southern Movement Assembly convenes communities and frontlines from 13 states & Up South sites to represent and plan shared work= (2012-2016)

Southern Movement Assembly II in Jacksonville FL opens with dialogue from community elders (April 2013)

Formerly Incarcerated Peoples Movement Assembly, 2011

Held in Montgomery Alabama, The Ordinary Peoples Society (TOPS) anchored a national assembly of people affected by mass incarceration.

Healing Justice Peoples Movement Assembly, 2010

Held at the second U.S. Social Forum and anchored by Kindred Collective, the HJ PMA developed a historical timeline & launched regional healing justice efforts.

Poor Peoples Caravan & Movement Assembly, 2008

As part of the Global Day of Action, Georgia organizations convened over 600 people to caravan through Atlanta, rally at the capitol, and assemble to develop plans of action.

REMEMBER

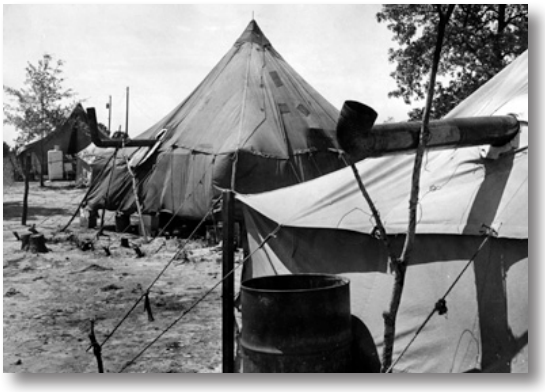
the PMA is not neutral

- The PMA is based in a **clear, political analysis** that considers the history of place and people, the current conditions, the lived experience of the participants, and relationships of power.
- **Place and space matters.** The PMA reflects the local leadership, culture, and practices of the participants and organizers.
- The PMA includes attention to **food, culture, music, physical set-up**, opportunities to interact, how children are engaged, how bodies move through the space, and ceremony.
- The PMA is **multi-ideological** and creates space for a plurality of understandings and worldviews.
- The PMA is based in the **capacity and political will** of the anchors that organize and create the space. Anchors, as groups or organizations, accept the responsibility of coordinating or moving the collective agreements forward into action.

GLOBAL snapshots

These snapshots demonstrate examples of historic and current people's movements that use assemblies and popular gatherings to make action plans, decisions, and political commitments.

The following descriptions represent case studies, not complete histories. These snapshots are designed to inspire and encourage further investigation. *All references and citations are on page 36.*



"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."

Gwen Patton, SNCC veteran

Spoken at the opening of Southern Movement Assembly I when 150 people camped in a re-enactment on the grounds of the 1965 Lowndes County Tent City, September 2012

Lowndes County, Alabama sits in an area of the South known as the Black Belt.

Jim Crow Apartheid in the Deep South ensured that in counties like Lowndes the political power structure and economic ownership of industry was held solely in the hands of the white minority. A history of terroristic violence and murder strengthened the social control of Jim Crow Apartheid and white supremacy through a combination of law enforcers, politicians, and business leaders.

The Lowndes County Freedom Organization represented the strength and tenacity of thousands of Black residents, and the Black Panther symbol captured the imagination of community organizers around the country.

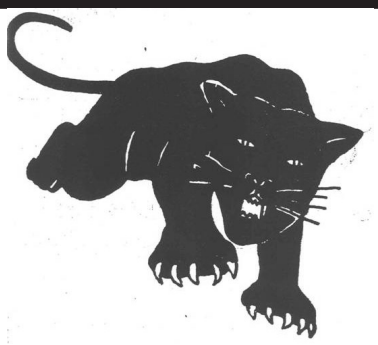
SNCC organizers, including Stokely Carmichael, Gloria House, and Jack Minnis among many others, worked in Lowndes and initated the formation of an independent political party in 1965 based on lessons learned during the 1964 Democratic National Convention and the Mississipppi Freedom Democratic Party. Their assessment of the MFDP and the opportunities of the 1965 Voting Rights Act spoke to the need for an independent political power base to control their own communities with grassroots independent parties being a first step. *"So the people decided to form their own political organization. They would elect their own public officials. If they could take over the County government, they'd no longer have to ask for what they needed. They could then take it."* Jack Minnis declared in notes from the time. *"Until county courthouses can be taken over, bit by bit there is no point focusing faraway on glamorous offices which leave the local situation unchanged*," he described.

Lowndes residents faced tremendous retaliation for organizing and registering to vote. Sharecroppers were evicted from the land and housing that their families had occupied for generations. SNCC organizers developed a Tent City off Route 80 on land purchased by the Lowndes County Christian Movement for Human Rights (LCCMHR). Hundreds of evicted Lowndes residents lived there for two years and continued organizing. They built the infrastructure to live, work, and protect themselves from daily racist violence. The experience strengthened their resolve to build independent political power.

LOWNDES COUNTY Freedom Organization

Alabama 1965

Organized by residents and members of SNCC (Student Nonviolence Coordinating Committee), Lowndes County Freedom Organization was an independent political and movement organization in the Black Belt of Alabama. The symbol of the whites-only Democratic party was a rooster, so illiterate white voters were instructed to "Vote for the rooster." When the Lowndes County Freedom Organization got their independent political party on the ballot, they had to chose a symbol. They chose a black panther.



The Lowndes County Freedom Organization held a convention to nominate a slate of candidates for the official local ballot. The process of nightly political education workshops on local governance combined with voter registration drives and mass meetings led up to the Convention. Twelve candidates stepped forward, six men and six women, some residents of Tent City. Though recognizing the courage of the candidates, the organizers and residents were clear that the most important effort was the organization as a people's party, not the individual offices.

The LCFO Convention was held on the grounds of the First Baptist Church and 900 registered voters cast ballots to nominate their candidates. "[T]hey adopted a freedom rights platform, selected candidates from the poor and working class, and practiced democratic decision making. In this way, the political education process gave rise to freedom politics. This new kind of political engagement coupled the movement's egalitarian organizing methods with the people's freedom rights agenda. The embrace of freedom politics by third-party supporters made the LCFO convention the high point of the Lowndes movement." from Hasan Jeffries' *Bloody Lowndes*.

Though the candidates were not successful at the polls, victories came later. "The fruits of our labor in the Alabama independent parties were not immediately reaped in the 1966 elections, but rather in 1970, when black people in a handful of counties won positions in local governments," wrote Gloria House in *Hands on the Freedom Plow*. The broader movement victory lay in the building of a clear, independent Black political base with new awareness and a resolve to dismantle the undemocratic oppression of the existing system and replace it with freedom politics starting at the most local level.

who **was involved**	Black sharecroppers in Alabama & Student Nonviolence Coordinating Committee members (SNCC)
why **it happened**	Jim Crow apartheid reversed the gains of Reconstruction and the minority whites terrorized the 80% Black population. As organizing intensified, violence pushed farmers off the land they had lived on for generations, and the people created Tent City. They lived, worked, and protected themselves there for over two years.
how **it worked**	Tent City required cooperation & daily self-defense against violence. Community agreement to fight white supremacy & violence led to collective action to organize an independent political party & run candidates for local office.
for what	Black power to control the infrastructure & resources in a majority Black county in the segregated Dixie South.

PAN AFRICAN CONGRESS

Tanzania 1974

In June 1974, the Sixth Pan African Congress (6PAC) was held in Tanzania, independent Africa's most progressive nation. Across much of the late 1960s and early 1970s, the U.S. Black Power Movement continued to put on display its pan-Africanist impulse. Though various efforts were made to boost Black popular and political support for African liberation, activists identified the lack of functional unity between Africa and its diaspora as a problem of increasing importance. In a context in which regions in Africa were still under colonial rule, not to mention independent nation states having little to show for their enormous efforts at nation building, Black Power activists feared that the commonalities between these various Black and African struggles were being greatly overlooked.

Of equal concern was a growing sense of marginality in the pan-Africanism movement due to the rapid shift to continental African leadership and as a result of decolonization. With their influential role in this movement dating back to its emergence in the late 19th century, African Americans were operating along its margins after 1945. The All African Peoples Conference of 1958 and the formation of the Organization of African Unity in 1963 marked this transition to African leadership and the shaping of a pan-Africanist politics specific to continental issues. African Americans hoped that by organizing and participating in an international conference on pan-African unity, greater inclusion, decision-making power, and a more clearly defined role in African affairs were to come.

Activists affiliated with the Center of Black Education (CBE), a Black Power organization based out of Washington, D.C., staffed the main organizing body for 6PAC. As early as 1972 it held a series of local and national meetings to identify four issues of mutual concern: the total liberation of Africa from colonialism and apartheid; the role of U.S. imperialism in Africa; the prevalence and growth of military regimes and anti-democratic rule in Africa; and issues of ideological conflict and disunity within various Black-led movements. When it came to the question of who was to be invited, 6PAC organizers foresaw a "people's congress" where governments would not hold a dominant position in the discussion on pan-African unity and its future directions. "If the congress was to be truly an all-inclusive affair then no group of African people can be excluded or included because of the policy of their respective governments."

All of these concerns, desires and stated goals were articulated in the position paper entitled "The Call," which was first published in February 5, 1972. The Temporary Secretariat was to serve as the "moving political force behind the Congress." It would also function in an administrative capacity, working on a "day to day basis in various regions of the world" through set-

"Every African engaged in combat against the ancient structures of imperialism

or the newly emergent forms of neocolonialism

will not succeed if he disassociates his combat from the struggle waged by all other Africans."

Official invitation to the Congress, 1971

ting up and overseeing regional committees in North America, Europe, the Caribbean and Africa. According to the Temporary Secretariat, it was believed that creating an organizational structure based on regions rather than nation-states would keep 6PAC framed as the people's conference.

In order to ensure a collective voice at 6PAC, African Americans mobilized on a grassroots level though the efforts of the North American Steering Committee. Between March 1972 and January 1974, it held 8 major regional planning sessions to hash out the African American position. At these sessions, Black Power leaders, African and Caribbean ambassadors, and representatives of African liberation movements gave speeches on topics ranging from the prospects and challenges of guerilla armed struggle to the impact of the Cold War on economic development to culture as a weapon of resistance. Breakout caucus sessions soon followed where racism, colonialism, and imperialism were debated based on circulated position papers. At the regional planning session at Kent State University in 1973, for example, over 45 organizations and 200 participants attended. In January 1974, elections for delegates and observers were held, resulting in the formation of the North American Delegation comprised of representatives from the Congress of African People (CAP), African Liberation Support Committee (ALSC), Malcolm X University, National Black Assembly, Midwesterner Coalition Society for Scientists and Technologies for African Development, Committee to Fund NewArk, to name but a few.

At the Sixth Pan African Congress, African Americans participated as delegates and observers. Official delegates such as Amiri Baraka of the Congress of African People, Owusu Saduakai of the African Liberation Support Committee and Lerone Bennet, a scholar and journalist, presented papers on cultural liberation and pan-African unity, political and material support for the liberation movements," and the link between racism and capitalism, respectively. Over the course of five days, they also participated in themed caucuses that produced resolutions on economic development, drought and famine, Portuguese colonialism, apartheid in South Africa, Palestinian self-determination, women's liberation, science and technology, and clean energy.

Although 6PAC failed to prevent state intervention and control of the proceedings, African American activists managed to create a global platform that allowed for active participation in the pan Africanism movement in Africa and the African Diaspora as well as laid the groundwork for African American antiapartheid activism in the 1980s.

who **was involved**	Black leaders and intellectuals in the U.S. preparing to converge with leaders from Africa and the global diaspora.
why **it happened**	A series of seven Pan African Congresses were initiated in 1919 by WEB DuBois and others to contend with colonialism, slavery, & political leadership. The 6th congress represents a convergence of movements to address divisions and imbalances within the PanAfrican movements around the world.
how **it worked**	The congress gathered Black leaders to discuss position papers & produce resolutions on major frontlines. In preparation, organizations in the U.S. mobilized hundreds into 8 regional planning sessions to determine the African-American position.
for what	The process allowed for U.S. based Black Americans to develop a global platform & laid the foundation for anti-apartheid & international organizing.

ZAPATISTA Liberation Movement

Mexico 1994

Over two decades after it first drew the attention of the world by attempting to overthrow the Mexican government, the Zapatista Movement for National Liberation (EZLN) continues to quietly resist capitalism and neoliberalism. On January 1, 1994 the Zapatistas became known internationally when they seized several cities in the Mexican state of Chiapas. Indigenous communities in Mexico had suffered for decades as a result of colonial oppression and the 1991 decision to eliminate constitutional rights to land. They purposely initiated their uprising on the same day that NAFTA, the North American Free Trade Agreement, went into effect. Their goal was to overthrow the government and create areas where Mexicans could govern themselves autonomously. The offensive lasted 12 days, and a peace agreement with the Mexican government, the San Andreas Accords, was eventually reached in 1996. Communication with the government ceased after it reneged on the promises it had made.

Today, the Zapatistas control territory in the northeastern part of Chiapas, which is divided into five regions called Caracoles. They resist by serving as an example for others to follow: they aspire to build a new system from the bottom up that revolves around the people. The Zapatistas receive no money or aid from the Mexican government; all resources are supplied by the community or outside benefactors. They have no prisons, and their education and healthcare systems are community run and maintained. Communal business collectives and cooperatives make goods to export and for local consumption.

In Zapatista territory, the Clandestine Revolutionary Indigenous Committee (CCRI) is the ultimate decision-making authority on military and political matters. Its members are mostly civilian, and at least one male and one female represents each of the eleven indigenous groups in Zapatista territory. Before any CCRI decisions can be implemented, all of the more than 1000 Zapatista communities must be consulted. These decisions are discussed in community assemblies which all community members 15 and older are required to attend. According to Starr, Martínez-Torres, and Rosset in their article "Participatory Democracy in Action", the assemblies typically proceed as follows:

"There is little imposed order or structure to the discussion; it proceeds organically until eventually two or three ideas or positions emerge and the coordinator summarizes them. The process continues in the same lively, chaotic manner until eventually someone asks, *'¿Acuerdo ya?'* (Do we have an agreement?)"

Each of the five Caracoles is governed by its own Junta de Buen Gobierno, or Good Governance Council. The Juntas are made up of rotating groups of members who come from each of the municipalities in the Caracol; delegates are sent from the councils of the municipalities and

"Because, friends and enemies, when rebellion is individual it is pretty.

But when it is collective and organized it is terrible and marvelous.

The former is the material of biographies; the latter is what makes history."

Subcomandante Marcos
2014 Comunique

every week one of four or five different groups of delegates takes its turn to serve on the Junta.

Overall, the Zapatista system of governance is designed so that every Zapatista can experience governance first hand, and not feel mystified or confused by the process.

In the late-1990's, the Zapatistas began hosting encuentros, or encounters, in order to share what they had accomplished with the world. The Encounter for Humanity and Against Neoliberalism was held in late July and early August of 1996. Thousands of activists came to Chiapas to discuss the impacts of neoliberalism, and ways to fight it and build alternatives. The 3000 attendees were divided among five sites, each of which discussed a different topic relating to the anti-capitalist struggle. Once at the sites, participants were divided again into four or five discussion groups.

In 1997, another encounter was held in Spain around the fight against neoliberalism. At the end of 2006, the First Encounter of Zapatista Peoples with peoples of the world was held in Zapatista territory. The encounter, which doubled as a celebration of the 13th anniversary of the 1994 uprising, was an opportunity for the Zapatistas to discuss the challenges and successes of autonomy.

After representatives from the caracoles spoke, international visitors were able to share some of their own experiences. The Second Encounter of Zapatista Peoples with Peoples of the World in mid-2007 served as another opportunity for the Zapatistas to teach, learn from, and build with national and international supporters.

The end of 2007 saw the convening of the Encounter of Zapatista Women and the Women of the World, where Zapatista women discussed political, social, and cultural issues with women from around Mexico and the globe. They talked about resistance, and the workings of the Zapatista movement, centering the experiences and contributions of Zapatista women and girls.

Named for Emiliano Zapata and the 1910 movement to reclaim land for the people who worked it, the Zapatistas are explicit in their efforts to dismantle neoliberalism and create a new world. They control 27 municipalities in Chiapas.

The Zapatista governance model, the written comuniques of Comandante Marcos, and the sustained resistance of the indigenous communities of Chiapas have influenced global movements for over two decades.

who **is involved**	Indigenous community members in Chiapas, Mexico
why **it happened**	The Zapatistas launched their offensive on January 1, 1994 to coincide with the implementation of NAFTA (N. American Free Trade Agreement). Indigenous communities lacked access to basic needs, education, & health. NAFTA accelerated land privatization & resource extraction. Zapatistas declared *Enough is Enough!*
how **it worked**	Community assemblies gather often to discuss & make decisions. Rotating Councils of Good Governance represent the five *caracoles* (zones) & make collective decisions.They operate autonomous schools, radio, clinics, banks, & security.
for what	Sovereign control over indigenous territories and freedom from the Mexican military & government oppression.

TAHRIR SQUARE
Cairo Egypt 2011

"So they continue, **building the city in the field** to complete its facilities; building the makeshift hospital, wherein lies the injured tended by volunteer doctors and nurses from the crowds of young people; building the city in the field for which people volunteered blankets and medicines, cotton and linen, food and water.

This is like a dream.

I live with these young men and women day & night, watching as they form committees to take on the work of daily cleaning the field to the transfer of the injured to hospital, to the provision of food and medicines, to defending the field and responding to the regime's lies in the media, to the nomination of names for the transitional government."

Nawal El Saadawi
Egyptian writer, militant, & former political prisoner

Egyptian dictator Hosni Mubarak rose to power in 1981, and went on to rule Egypt under a state of emergency for thirty years. The brutality of his police forces was widely known and acknowledged among members of the public. Inspired by the successful revolution in Tunisia, tens of thousands of Egyptians took to the streets on January 25, 2011 to call for an end to Mubarak's police state. Eighteen days later, on February 11, Mubarak stepped down.

Many have characterized the Egyptian uprising as "leaderless," and while it is true that there was not one individual or organization that claimed to represent the masses of protestors, the revolution was guided by a few key entities. The April 6 Youth Movement, which spearheaded the majority of the initial organizing, was influential. April 6 came out of a massive textile strike that occurred in April of 2008, and its members had been working to get another mass movement started ever since. In the years and months leading up to the uprising in 2011, April 6 members were trained in nonviolent direct action methods, and looked for inspiration to other nonviolent movements that had overthrown dictators. One April 6 member, Asmaa Mahfouz, recorded a video that would go viral in which she urged her fellow Egyptians to take action against the government. In the days before the protests began, April 6 mobilized ordinary Egyptians by distributing leaflets calling for popular participation in the January 25 demonstrations, and going into poor and working class neighborhoods to urge people to come to Tahrir Square. The "We are all Khaled Said" Facebook page was another crucial mobilization tool. Run by Wael Ghonim, the page was created to honor the memory of a

young Egyptian man who had been brutally beaten to death by police in 2010. Said's death is said to be one of the major catalysts of the popular anger that led to the revolution, and the Facebook page became a space to talk about and share information regarding the abuses of the Egyptian police. "We are all Khaled Said" also posted a call for Egyptians to protest on January 25, a holiday that was created to honor police in Egypt.

Once things were set in motion, the uprising took on a life of its own. Across the country, the people organized themselves. In Tahrir Square, makeshift clinics, food stalls, art areas, and a kindergarten were just a few of the spaces that the occupiers created. There were committees responsible for cleaning up, and for defending the square. Though Tahrir is the most well-known symbol of the Egyptian uprising, many more people were involved in the organizing of the popular committees that appeared around the country.

The popular committees started to form after Mubarak's regime began releasing convicts from prisons and withdrawing the police from the streets. The goal was to scare the public into pleading for the government's protection; however, the opposite occurred. In cities and towns across the country, people began to create neighborhood watch groups to protect their communities, which was an empowering experience for many Egyptians because it showed them that they could govern themselves. The committees were mostly composed of young men, and there was no central organizing body; each neighborhood's committee took shape in its own way. Many of the committees disbanded after the Supreme Council of Armed Forces (SCAF) took over from Mubarak, and the presence of security forces increased. Some that remained transformed themselves into neighborhood or citywide organizations; others joined forces and became the Popular Committees for the Defense of the Revolution (PCDR). PCDR, which had its first conference in April 2011 expressed the goal of "[educating and spreading] the principles of democracy to the people, [facilitating] the 'supervision and the participation by the people in societal affairs' and [involving] the Egyptian people in the nation building process."

Five years of tumultuous economic and social realities following Mubarek's resignation do not diminsh the success of the uprising. The role of the U.S. in controlling the aftermath through targeted aid packages, the heavy-handed military leadership acting as a counter-movement, and the difficulty in sustaining the popular mechanisms for governance provide important lessons to global liberation movements. The surge of action in 2011 inspired millions of Egyptians to continue to fight for social justice through the committees, organizations, and local participatory governance.

who **was involved**	Youth movements & organizers in Cairo Egypt & across the country rose up on January 25, 2011.
why **it happened**	Frustrated with the 30-year Hosni Mubarek dictatorship and military oppression, people began organizing. The murder of a young man while in police custody in June 2010 sparked outrage & initiated mobilizations. The Day of Revolt, Jan 25, coincided with Natl Police Day. The successful uprising resulted in Mubarek resigning.
how **it worked**	Community assemblies on Tahrir Square supported the tent city for 18 days of rebellion. Millions participated. The government suspended communications services, but people used other methods and set up medical tents, cultural events, & political discussions.
for what	Overthrow of the Mubarek regime, greater democracy, freedom of speech, social equality.

STATELESS DEMOCRACY

Kurdistan 2001 →

Map from Gulan Media, Kurdish newsource: www.gulan-media.com/english

who **is involved**	Millions of Kurdish people located in parts of Syria, Turkey, Iran and Iraq.
why **it happened**	Contending with centuries of oppression, displacement, & denial of national autonomy, the Kurds developed independent parties & social movements. Over the last 20 years, the Kurds have established a functional democracy & self-defense apparatus to advance a vision of multi-ethnic democratic confederalism.
how **it works**	In Rojava, the democracy project is a network of self-organized neighborhoods, cooperatives, & grassroots assemblies. General meetings determine work commissions (including ecology, education & protection) & send representatives at broader congresses every 2 years.
for what	Democratic autonomy beyond nation-states based on ecological and social principles against the encroachment of capitalism, patriarchy, and the state.

"Resistance is Life" - Kurdish slogan in Rojava

The Kurds call it a radical democracy project. Kurdistan is divided into four regions: occupied by Turkey in the North or Bakur, Iraq in the South or Bashur, Iran in the East or Rojhelat, and Syria in the West or Rojava. Without the protection of a nation-state while also under attack from militarized fundamentalists of all stripes, the Kurds have grown a significant base of power. People who have been displaced by war and disaster practice multiple forms of direct democracy, society-building, and alternative institutions.

Over the last 15 years the Kurdish Workers Party, a part of the larger and historic Kurdish Liberation Movement, has gone through ideological and practical shifts from a movement of oppressed people demanding an independent nation-state to growing a stateless democracy through radical grassroots democratic assemblies, people's defense units, and political education. Their innovations and accomplishments contribute to U.S.-based and global liberation struggles, particularly considering communities of people within nation states who are considered second class or non-citizens.

"Throughout history, the Kurds suffered all sorts of denial, oppression, destruction, genocide and assimilation. They were excluded from the statist order on two fronts: not only were they denied their own state, they were simultaneously excluded from the mechanisms of the state structures around them. Yet the experience of statelessness also helped protect many societal ethics and values, as well as a sense of community—especially in the rural and mountainous villages far from the cities.

To this day, Alevi-Kurdish villages in particular are characterized by processes of common solution-finding and reconciliation rituals for social disputes based on ethics and forgiveness to the benefit of the community. But while this form of life is quite prevalent in Kurdistan, there is also a conscious new effort to establish a political system centered around communal values—the system of Democratic Confederalism, built through democratic autonomy with the commune at its heart."
Dilar Dirik, Kurdish Liberation Movement.

600 Kurdish delegates from towns and cities initiated the Democratic Society Congress (DTK)

in 2007 in Ankara, a site in North Kurdistan within Turkey's borders, as an umbrella group to support the coordination of local, autonomous self-governing assemblies and organizations to inform and mandate the political parties across the region.

Millions of people participate in the assembly process to govern themselves at a broad scale across a self-determined political geography and share resources on a local level. Neighborhood assemblies send representatives to the city assemblies which send representatives to the province assemblies and on up into the broader Democratic Society Congress which relates to multiple political parties. The Kurds practice principles of shared power through co-leadership at every level including co-presidencies with gender equality: one woman, one man. Different commissions work to answer society's problems through building solutions on every front: ecology, economy, education, language, public affairs, religion, culture, science, protection, and governance. Organizational levels include local communities, civil society groups, social groups like women and youth commissions, and cultural practitioners.

Song and language are frontlines that the Kurdish movement center as critical to sustaining cultural roots and asserting autonomy. The Turkish government criminalizes Kurdish language classes in schools and imprisoned Abdullah Demirbas, a Kurdish mayor, in 2007 for offering services in all the local languages (he went to jail but ran again in 2009 and won with even more support). They fight within the legislative mechanisms to demand changes, but they also build parallel institutions to teach their language and practice their culture regardless of state legitimacy. The Social Movement Assembly of the 2009 Mesopotamian Social Forum in Amed in Bakur (also known as Diyarbakir, in Turkey-occupied Kurdistan) declared the right to the Kurdish language in public and educational spaces. However, this is still punishable by law in some part of Turkey.

Rojava or Syria-occupied Kurdistan represents the daily practice of community-based power though economic cooperatives, People's Protection Units (YPG) and women-led forces (YPJ). Rojava's municipalities are multicultural and multiracial with an intentional effort to ensure women's leadership. The current municipalities are represented by 30% Assyrians, 30% Kurds, 30% Arabs and 40% women.

When Syria's government withdrew from the region in 2012, the Kurdish movement filled the vacuum with local assemblies and regional control through three cantons (state-like regions). Without aid, they successfully fought off both the Assad-regime and the ISIS offensives for about two years; unfortunately, this grew into a war that continues today

This contested geography and people in a time of globalized war and migration crisis place the Kurdish struggle in a unique position. The opportunity to learn from and align with the Kurdish efforts to grow a strong people's governance and re-vision a liberated social contract strengthens the overall global struggle for justice.

"For the moment, at least, it is possible to speak of a transitional dual system

in which the democratic self-administration of Rojava lays out revolutionary and ecological principles,

carefully maneuvering them in war and real politics,

while the grassroots movement organizes the population from below."

Dilar Dirik
Kurdish Women's Movement

SOUTHERN FREEDOM MOVEMENT

U.S. South 2012 →

The SMA represents a growing force of coordinated, decentralized movement building in communities affected by policing, economic crisis, ecological disaster, and displacement. The Southern Movement Assembly evolved from a partnership of eight organizations in the U.S. South to a broad collaboration of 14 anchor groups and hundreds of participating organizations.

The first Southern Movement Assembly, held in Lowndes County, Alabama in September 2012, centered the remembering of historic resistance and frontline battles for political participation. 250 people from 13 states camped for a night on the grounds of Tent City and listened to elders speak about organizing with sharecroppers for voting rights and developing autonomous political organizations. The power of the convergence and process regenerated the Southern Freedom Movement in the 21st century.

Five regional assemblies have been organized over the last four years with many frontline and community assemblies happening during shared campaigns and organizing drives across 25 sites in one of the largest geographic regions in the U.S. Participants in the assemblies include Up South partners, like Detroit where Black migration continues to shape culture and political repression, and Global South partners like Puerto Rico where communities contend with similar patterns of neoliberal destruction. The assembly allows a deeper learning between and among communities and has sharpened the organizing of formerly incarcerated people and their families, LGBTQ and queer communities, Black youth, Gulf South communities, immigrant farmworkers, and rural Appalachians.

Birthed in the collective experience of Hurricane Katrina and the Gulf Coast disaster that unfolded over the 10 years since 2005, the Southern Movement Assembly represents a shared commitment to rebuild movement infrastructure that is able to respond to and prevent disasters of all kinds.

The SMA demonstrates a growing groundforce of governance, community-led communication, and movement education infrastructure that supports and lifts up organizing on multiple issues simultaneously. Thousands of people within a relatively fragmented social movement landscape are coming together to develop a more cohesive understanding of the political landscape. The SMA is a practice that includes annual large scale assemblies as well as cycles of seasonal organizing in home communities.

A Governance Council meets weekly to strategize and share what is happening across a diverse field. Work teams develop and implement plans to advance shared campaigns and initiatives, and organizers de-

"The only thing we have to contribute to intervene on 500 years of colonialism, I believe, is Movement. It's all we have.

Other forces have the military, governments, banks, lots of money. We don't have that, but I don't want those things.

I want a movement and the power of each other. That's what we have here today."

Emery Wright
Project South, spoken at the opening of Southern Movement Assembly III in Dothan, AL 2013

velop rapid response deployments to support local leadership in crisis, including recent police killings in 2015 or movement moments like the acquittal of Trayvon Martin's murderer in 2013 *(example on page 35)*. Exchanges to build capacity are ongoing. Public actions are either coordinated simultaneously in multiple sites or convergences when the participants come together to show force.

As the process grows, the Southern organizations relate to the power of shared movement histories. During Reconstruction, formerly enslaved communities strengthened a continuum of movement governance when they built 10,000 schools and elected more Black men to local, state, and federal positions in the South than at any other time in American history. Fannie Lou Hamer, a Mississippi sharecropper and organizer who was part of the Mississippi Democratic Freedom Party of 1964, said, "*Nobody is Free Until Everybody is Free.*" Her words are a call to action over half a century later.

The Southern Movement Assembly shares a commitment to resist the forces that seek to keep people oppressed and divided. Leadership recognizes that movements have the responsibility to transform the concept that "we are stronger together" from an idea into a reality. The Southern Movement Assembly is a powerful vehicle for movement governance driven by people's power on the path towards collective liberation.

who **is involved**	Southern movement leaders working on the frontlines of poverty, displacement, environmental disaster, racism, & violence.
why **it happened**	After witnessing and experiencing the disaster of Hurricane Katrina and the inability of movement to respond effectively, Southern leaders initiated regional strategies to build stronger infrastructure to respond to growing crises on every frontline.
how **it works**	A Governance Council meets weekly by phone to govern the SMA process. Leaders meet between assemblies & form work teams. Participants across many states organize delegations to represent at annual assemblies. Synthesis determines shared action plans.
for what	To practice movement governance and build long-term infrastructure for self-determined communities to coordinate and build mechanisms for liberated education, communications, and power.

BEFORE

ORGANIZE a planning team of 4-10 people who meet to determine the goals, the agenda, and the recruitment strategy for the PMA.

INVITE people who are most affected by the issues your PMA addresses, members of your organization, and community representatives.

PREPARE the agenda, create the facilitation plan, support the facilitators, create the materials, and prepare the documenation plan.

PREPARE the participants with information about assemblies & expectations.

SET UP the space. Create an atmosphere that is welcoming. Place materials, maps, flipcharts, & art around the room. Consider the set-up of chairs and tables. Prepare sign-in table, food areas, water stations, breakout spaces, and work stations.

DURING

WELCOME the participants, acknowledge the planning team & hosts of the space. Create way for people to know who is present & why they are there.

SET the context of the PMA. Through speakers or exercises, discuss the purpose of gathering, goals of the assembly, the problems you are addressing, and the agenda.

NAME agreements, guidelines, and protocol for the assembly.

PRESENT analysis & historical background of the situation you are facing.

DISCUSS visions for a future where those problems are solved.

CREATE plan of action to move closer to those visions.

PROVIDE food, spaces for informal dialogue, and support for healing.

MAKE clear commitments to take action.

AFTER

COLLECT the documentation, sign-in sheets, notes, materials, photos, videos, and surveys.

SYNTHESIZE the notes, declarations, and reportbacks into a draft that captures the essence of the discussion, highlights new and shared ideas, and names clear action steps.

DEBRIEF with the facilitators, planning team, and organizers to evaluate lessons learned,

COMMUNICATE with all the participants. Share contact information, synthesis, pictures, videos, and quotes from the assembly.

COMMUNICATE with the broader community so that people know what was accomplished, what is happening next, and how they can get involved.

ORGANIZE to accomplish the goals and commitments set forth at the assembly. Establish or re-invigorate teams, working groups, and committees.

HOW IT WORKS

Organizing a PMA

The PMA is an organizing strategy. The PMA is an ongoing process to practice and exercise power at the community level, across frontlines, and as social movements.

The PMA puts the trust and leadership in the people assembled to make decisions together. It is not about a single leader, organization, or pre-determined goal.

The **Before / During / After** cycle reflects the organizing process. Preparation, facilitation, participation, reflection, and follow-up is critical to advancing from one stage of development to the next. As each PMA is organized, it should build on the previous lessons and accumulate knowledge towards future gains.

EVERYONE HAS A ROLE

facilitation

Teams of facilitators are familiar with both the agenda and the organizing process.

Multiple facilitators play different roles. Greeting, presenting, overall flow, small groups or frontline assemblies, and synthesis require prepared facilitation.

cultural work

Artists & culture bearers engage the cultural practices of the place and create opportunities for culture to infuse the experience.

organizers

Organizers recruit participants, register delegations, follow up with interested folks, and make sure that connections are made.

documentation

Notetakers participate in the large & small group spaces. Photographers & videographers prepare to capture the dynamism of the assembly.

space support

Work teams and participants contribute to coordinating food, travel, lodging, and logistics of the space.

participation

Different from a conference or workshop space, all participants are responsible for active engagement in the process, the dialogues, the logistics, and the synthesis.

Preparing participants for the experience creates a smoother flow.

facilitation guide:
components & basic agenda of an assembly

sections	goals	ways to do it
Welcome & Opening	Set the tone Find out who is present Name the purpose of the assembly	Song, prayer, or ceremony Elders from the community speak to the movement and history of the place Delegations name themselves & their goals Maps on the wall, people identify locations
Agreements	Establish working guidelines Create parameters to support the goals	Present basic guidelines out loud Print guidelines in program & material Write up the guidelines, visible in the space
Describe the Problem(s)	Provide political context Name the oppressive systems communities are contending with	Discussion or exercises that surface the problems that people & systems face Panel of speakers describe specific issues Fishbowl of participants address critical questions to create the situational analysis
Discuss Visions, Solutions, & Strategies	Create space for participants to think beyond the problem Generate ideas that are transformative & affect long-term systems change	Small groups discuss particular issues or fronts of struggle Frontline assemblies generate visions & proposals for action Create worksheet with 3-4 questions for groups to talk through
Reportback	Provide opportunity for participants to share work Ensure that the large assembly gets a sense of the whole	Fishbowl activity, 1-2 representatives speak to each other while whole assembly listens Groups present one by one Groups present creative reportbacks or skits
Synthesize	Collect the information, analysis, visions, and strategies generated during the assembly	Small team is developed to discuss particular issues or fronts of struggle towards synthesis Frontline assemblies generate ideas Representatives from each group discuss the vision, strategies, & actions of the Assembly
Commitments to Action	Decide on next steps Create shared action plans Name the impact the group wants to have	Organizations & participants commit to particular strategies Individuals declare specific commitments Work groups are developed & tasks are distributed
Closing	Reflect the power of the assembly Name the accomplishments Represent the commitments moving forward	Circle the participants so that everyone sees one another & can feel the power of the whole assembly Close with songs, chants, prayers, or ceremony

SAMPLE AGENDA

Based on Climate Justice Assembly, New Orleans, 2016

Appreciations to Gulf Coast Center for Law & Policy

Opening

Welcome & Appreciations
Agenda Review, Meeting Goals & Community Agreements

Honor the People & the Work
Community Representatives connect climate crisis to tribal sovereignty, body autonomy, public health, & immigrant rights

Prepare space
Sign in Sheets & Flipcharts
Stadium circle seating
Chairs up front
Food & Water stations
Movement banners hung

Phase 1

SET the CONTEXT
Impact of Extraction Industries on Human Rights

Human Right to Water & Oil/Gas Leases in Gulf
Two presentations that highlight concerns of Gulf Coast frontline, describe the oil and gas leases and their impact on climate and communities. Connect local realities to global examples (Flint MI crisis, global droughts). Introduce opportunities for collective action.

Multiple voices, perspectives, and experiences reflect the reality of who is impacted by the problem

Phase 2

VISIONS FOR THE FUTURE
Small Group Strategy Sessions
Assess the frontline reality:
Q#1: How does oil/ gas drilling impact your community (good and bad)?
Q#2: What would your community look like without oil/gas drilling?
Vision for sustainable future (people + planet):
Q#3: What could our communities look like with renewable energy?
Q#4: What should we do to ensure healthier communities in the next 90 days?
In the next year? In the next 3 years?
Report Back to Large Group

Small groups of 4-5 assign roles *(facilitator, timekeeper, notetaker, person to report)*

Phase 3

COMMIT TO ACTIONS

Facilitation Team presents: Synthesized Collective Plans for Action

Use Dot-Mocracy to determine priorities
Each participant selects 2-3 priorities they are willing to work on
Top 5 choices are selected as priorities to move forward

Movement Music & African Drumming while Facilitation Team synthesizes action plans

Closing

Review Action Steps
Evaluate what went well & identify changes for next time
Drumming & DJs close out the space

Break down space
Collect Sign-in Sheets
Collect notes & f lipcharts
Facilitation team debrief

TOOLS & TIPS

DOCUMENTATION

Notetaking, film, & photography

Documentation records movement history & people's knowledge. Documentation allows for a cumulative effect that carries decisions & analysis forward.

Based on the Agenda, determine which parts of the Assembly need verbatim notetaking, generalized notes, video, and/or photography.

Prioritize points of the agenda that present heavy content, small group work, and large group commitments.

Assign notetakers or create an open list for participants to sign up for tasks. Make sure to track who is taking notes, photos, or videos for each part and how to contact them afterwards.

Develop a team with a point person who will collect ALL notes, photos, and video.

Specific Information to include while Notetaking:

- Name, date, & time
- Name(s) of the facilitator(s)
- Number of the participants
- Stated goals of the session
- What actually happened *(a presentation, go-around when each person spoke; creation of a product to present to a larger group)*
- Key points of the Political Landscape and Movement Analysis developed
- Key moments of consolidation (agreement) and division (disagreement)
- The strategic directions discussed and the commitments determined

Southern Movement Assembly I, Lowndes County, Alabama - September 2012

SMALL GROUP FACILITATION

Questions to consider in preparation for the Assembly

What are the goals in breaking up into small groups?

(examples: deeper discussions, address specific issues/topics, work on specific & differentiated strategies, break up by regional/local groups, etc.)

What is the ideal size of the small groups and how many can you have?

How will you break-up into groups?

(examples: random count off by the # of groups you want, separate by specific interests, or self-select into groups)

Who is facilitating each group?

(examples: prepared facilitators, self-selected, representatives from particular organizations or communities)

What are the specific questions that the small group is discussing?

Would worksheets be helpful? What questions and prompts should be included?

(example: a chart of questions that the facilitator can follow, includes a basic agenda for the small group & clear instructions for what the groups is bringing back)

What are the groups bringing back to the larger group?

(clear resolutions, priority action steps, proposals for action, commitments, etc.)

CHILDRENS ASSEMBLY

History and global liberation movements demonstrate the critical role of children in movement spaces. The Childrens Assembly is not childcare. It is a constructive space facilitated so that children ages 2-12 have a meaningful experience that mirrors the questions and issues that the youth and adults are working on in the Assembly. Participants in the Southern Movement Childrens Assemblies have engaged elders about the Jim Crow era, painted murals to contribute to local schools, and developed video interviews with adult participants focusing on key questions of that particular Assembly. Participants of the Childens Assembly contribute what they have learned during the Movement Council at the end of the PMA.

Pictured: Gwen Patton interviewed by Childrens Assembly in Lowndes County, Alabama - September 2012

What is SYNTHESIS

Synthesis is the decision-making process of the PMA.

Synthesis requires rigorous attention to all the information that emerges from an Assembly.

Synthesis is the new knowledge that is produced at the Assembly and serves as the community mandate to be applied in shared action plans to move towards the visions of those assembled.

synthesis: a combination of ideas to form a theory or system

2 metaphors to describe synthesis:

BAKING A CAKE Bakers begin with different ingredients (milk, sugar, flour) that are combined in specific and particular ways. Heat is added to produce something different than any one of the ingredients. The cake is the synthesis of careful and measured combination.

MUSICAL GROUP Musicians each play a particular instrument, but each has to pay close attention to the other players in order to find a synchronicity and to create a new sound. The song is the synthesis of their knowledge, attention, & skill. The song expresses collective willingness to collaborate and share rhythm.

Key components of Synthesis:

WEIGHT > strength of assertions and positions

FREQUENCY > number of times that a particular theme or idea is surfaced

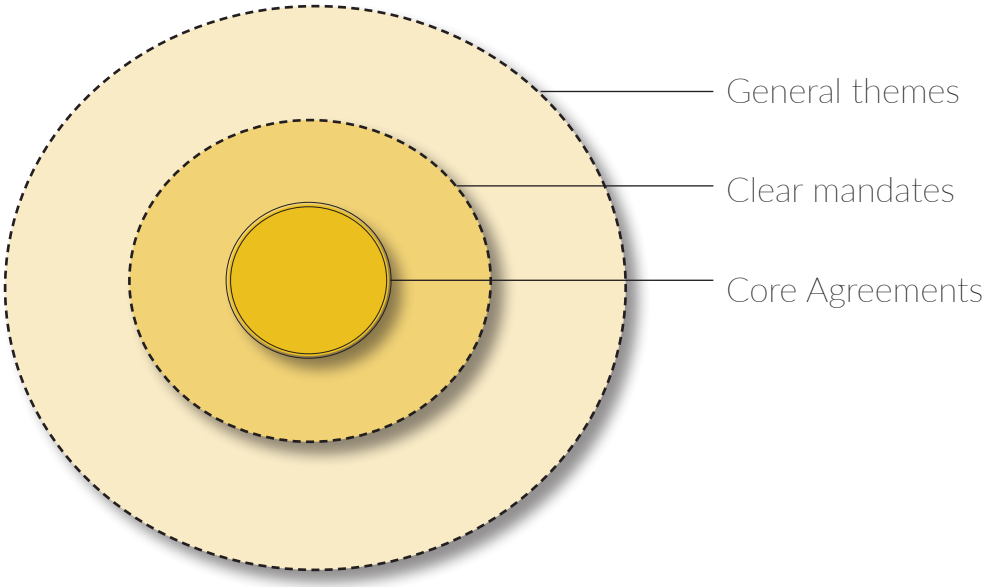
VOLUME > when certain ideas or assertions are “loud” or “echo” in the room

Synthesis Assembly at the U.S. Social Forum II, Detroit MI - June 2010. Two representatives from each PMA (over 50)

A small team of people can be designated to generate synthesis and/or facilitate a process to generate it from the small and larger groups.

It is important to remember that synthesis is NOT about what you think, it's about what the group thinks. It is not a summary of what happened but a three-dimensional account of the agreements, analysis, and political alignment created during the Assembly.

How to do it



Listen:

For themes that consistently emerge and for critical questions that surface.

For agreements that echo in the assembly. Agreements could be about particular ideas, positions, or action steps that consistently resonate with the whole group.

For ideas or suggestions that come from people with deep experience on frontlines, in movement work, and communities most affected by systems of oppression.

participated in the Synthesis Assembly to develop a collective movement agenda to present at the National PMA on the final day.

THE CIRCLE

To close Peoples Movement Assemblies, participants form a wide and complete circle.

The circle is part of the methodology of the Assembly.
Practically, the circle allows all participants to see one another. All participants are a part of the circle, no one is left out or marginalized. The dynamic of seeing the whole creates space for people to embody a sense of accountability and collective power.

The circle allows all voices to be heard and helps identify both who is present and who is missing *(and who needs to be included next time)*. Commitments from each delegation are expressed through declarations of lead, support, or solidarity positions on agreements.

The circle represents political alignment generated at the Assembly rather than a political line. As a closing, the circle represents the power of coming together and that each person strengthens the whole.

"Culture is not usually seen as a strategy to win. But our opposition knows that if you strip the culture, you can control the people. How do we snuff out the oppressive culture and make our culture the culture of the multitudes, the dominant voice?"

Mya Hunter, SpiritHouse

From Commitments to Action

Organizations and communities are responsible for implementing the specific agreements made at the Assembly. Agreements become action when combined with commitment to coordination and support.

The Peoples Movement Assembly produces:

Recognition : Movements require self-recognition to exercise power as a collective force. People who are marginalized from public and political spaces participate in the PMA as movement actors and decision-makers.

Shared Practices, Language, & Analysis : The PMA produces shared language, concepts, and ideas that drive political work and match the changing conditions.

Synthesis & Agreements : Movements evolve when fueled by collective agreements, visionary agendas, and bold demands from the bottom-up.

Changed Landscape : The PMA produces new realities due to people exercising power and new levels of infrastructure and governance that re-shape the political landscape.

Accumulation : Movements require the accumulation of ideas, lessons, and practices, and the PMA offers an effective vehicle to build upon the previous and towards the next, rather than a one-time event or convening.

Collective Action : The PMA asserts the desire and political will to build power through organized action. The plans include short-term action towards a specific end and/or long-term commitments to participating in working groups, educational endeavors, or joint campaigns.

ASSEMBLY IN ACTION : On July 14, 2013, the verdict that acquitted George Zimmerman for the murder of Trayvon Martin dropped. Two months earlier, over 250 members of the Southern Movement Assembly (SMA) gathered in Jacksonville FL, the home of the District Attorney Angela Corey and Marissa Alexander, a Black mother who was serving 20 years for firing a warning shot at an abusive ex-husband without harming anyone.

The leaders of the SMA spoke on their weekly governance call the Monday after the verdict and within a week organized a **122-Mile Walk for Dignity from Jacksonville to Sanford FL,** where Trayvon was murdered. The two demands were to Fire Angela Corey & Free Marissa Alexander.

In a movement moment that catalyzed rage and resistance across the country, hundreds of people, churches, and community groups participated in this massive week-long effort directly on the frontlines.

Within a year and a half, Marissa's conviction was over-turned and a new trial ordered. The SMA's long-term organizing strategy positioned the groups to make effective rapid response in a time of urgency.

Walk for Dignity on Day 5, July 2013

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