



# **BETTER TOGETHER IN THE SOUTH:** Building Movements across Race, Gender, and Sexual Orientation

A BRIEFING PAPER

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**APPLIED RESEARCH CENTER**

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# Executive Summary

**T**his briefing paper, *Better Together in the South: Building Movements across Race, Gender, and Sexual Orientation*, builds upon the research presented in Applied Research Center's 2010 *Better Together* report by looking specifically at the challenges and opportunities that arise when we connect movements, organizations, constituencies, and issues for racial justice with those for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender (LGBT) liberation in the U.S. South. As mainstream media has dedicated relatively little attention to covering the barriers encountered, and the progress made, by LGBT organizations and activists in southern "Bible Belt" states, this paper highlights trends and organizing initiatives affecting the lives of Southern LGBT people of color.

For the past several years, Applied Research Center (ARC) has coordinated the *Better Together* program—a multifaceted initiative that combines research, media, and leadership development to strengthen and inform efforts to advance racial justice and LGBT liberation, by elevating possibilities for equity and inclusion, social and economic justice, and human rights. The program is supported and made possible by a grant from the Arcus Foundation.

Changes in racial composition and migration patterns contribute to both cultural and political change in the South, with significant implications for national policy change. Through a series of interviews, surveys, and convenings with Southern leaders, and through research on recent developments in the region, we identify demographics changes, noteworthy trends, and successes and setbacks affecting the lives of LGBT people and people of color across twelve Southern states: Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia,

Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, and Virginia.

Relative to most other regions in the nation, there is a dearth of progressive legislation in the South. Indeed, when it comes to LGBT and racial equity, the South looks like a progressive policy desert. But that's only one side of the story; a closer examination of on-the-ground community efforts reveals that, even amidst this policy desert, there are many flourishing oases of deep experience, courageous and creative organizing, and promising practices focused on activating and uniting marginalized communities into formidable forces for social change. Many of the insights and models developed in the South—though often given little attention by the national media, mainstream LGBT, and traditional civil rights organizations and philanthropic institutions—could substantively contribute to broader movement-building strategies for our nation.

A surprising array of grassroots organizations are engaged in innovative and intersectional work across the South, fueling LGBT acceptance and cultural change. They incorporate strategies such as inclusionary and multi-issue framing; explicitly addressing race to build multi-racial cohesion and power; and creatively using cultural expressions such as storytelling, personal testimonies, and the arts to elevate the voices of LGBT people of color. Many of these efforts and strategies that centralize, rather than marginalize, communities of color in LGBT issues in the South have nationwide resonance and relevance and, given adequate resourcing as well as appropriate tools and channels for sharing best practices, they could continue to take transformative projects to a greater scale to expand their reach and impact.

New opportunities have the potential to abound in the South if emerging and ongoing efforts can be supported, expanded, and sustained. That is why, after consulting with a variety of organizations in the region, ARC initiated a Better Together Southern Leadership and Action Cohort—a new opportunity for a diverse set of leaders to further develop capacities, skills, and connections to enhance the important work that already exists in their respective communities. For the next phase of the Better Together project, ARC established a working partnership with Southerners on New Ground (SONG), a 20-year-old, well-respected and well-networked hub of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Queer (LGBTQ) liberation activists in the South, who work to build a political home for Southerners across race, class, gender, sexuality, and culture. SONG and ARC collaborated on the recruitment and selection of twenty-two leaders and organizers from eleven organizations, spanning ten states. We also added an additional collaborator as a training partner: Western States Center, a movement-building organization in the northwest United States that coordinates the Uniting Communities program. Similar in goals to Better Together, the Uniting Communities program is a highly successful initiative that builds strategic connections across race, sexual orientation, and gender identity. The synergy of this collaboration has presented new opportunities for cross-fertilization of experience, as well as insight, tools, and resource sharing.

The Better Together Southern Leadership Cohort highlights three key themes for progressive movement building in the South, all of which emerged from interviews and consultations that preceded the launch of the cohort. These themes are intersectionality, unity and visibility. To illustrate these themes in action, and to lift up transformative models of intersectional organizing in the South, we present brief profiles of four organizations: the Freedom Center for Social Justice (FCSJ) in Charlotte, working at the intersections of race, religion, faith, sexuality and gender identity; BreakOUT! in New Orleans, addressing the

criminalization of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Questioning (LGBTQ) youth of color; SPARK in Atlanta, building a powerful and LGBT-inclusive reproductive justice movement; and The Center for Artistic Revolution (CAR) in Arkansas, developing youth leadership to advance equitable treatment and economic justice.

This paper highlights recommendations for advancing future strategies for Southern change, which echo and expand upon lessons and recommendations identified in the 2010 Better Together Report. These recommendations are:

1. Increase support for strategic political analysis, organizing, advocacy, campaigns, and efforts that link racial justice, LGBT liberation, and economic justice.
2. Invest in tools that reach beyond specific policy fights like marriage equality to engage long-term capacity development, ongoing coalition building, and integrated cultural organizing.
3. Develop and support LGBT leaders of color in the South.
4. Expand media visibility, communications capacity, and the cultural/artistic expressions of LGBT people of color and those working at the intersection of race, gender, and sexuality.
5. Support strategies to build the infrastructure, financial resources, and sustainability of movement-building organizations in the South, in order to empower them to weather short-term challenges and to better position them for long-term substantive impact.

“There are five consistently poor areas in the United States, with three being in the South. In every state in the South, there are large populations of students who live below the poverty level in public schools. The South has spent the least per pupil in expenditures; we have the lowest graduation rate and the highest military enlistment. Additionally, there is unfinished resentment across the Black-White divide and now over queer and transgender issues. In the midst of these challenges, we have made great progress but still have more to go. Despite having pockets of discrimination and violence directed toward LGBT people, we as queers are more out and more comfortable in our skin.”

– Pam McMichael, Director of The Highlander Research and Education Center

## Southern Context

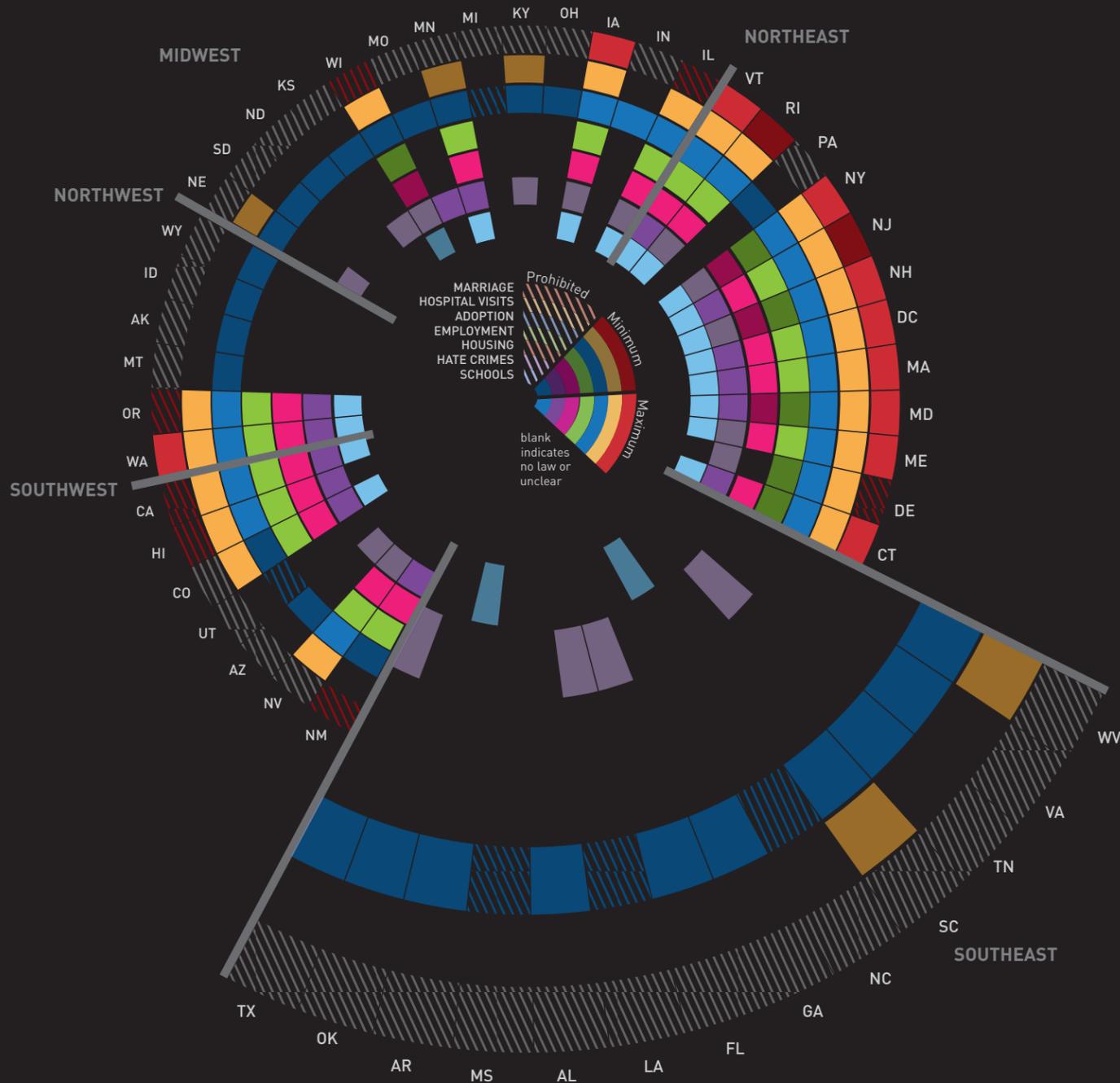
Following the results of the 2012 Election, James Esseks, director of the Lesbian Gay Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) Project of the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU), declared November 6 to be “a watershed moment for gay and lesbian families in America.”<sup>1</sup> Results from this election cycle not only propelled Barack Obama—the first sitting president to endorse same-sex marriage—into a second term, but also saw, for the first time, the unprecedented passage of same-sex marriage in three states by popular vote. Echoing Esseks’ sentiments were statements by leaders of the two largest LGBT organizations in the United States: Lambda Legal and the Human Rights Campaign, who characterized November 6

as an “astounding day” and “milestone year” that signified a historic shift for LGBT people in American history.<sup>2</sup>

While the success of marriage equality in Maine, Maryland, and Washington—which followed in the footsteps of six states and the District of Columbia that legalized same-sex marriage through judicial or legislative decisions<sup>3</sup>—were the largest victories celebrated by gay rights advocates, other notable referendum achievements for LGBT inclusion were also won on November 6. Wisconsin voters elected Tammy Baldwin as the country’s first openly gay U.S. Senator; Minnesota voters rejected a ballot initiative that aimed to limit the definition of marriage to a heterosexual union in

EXHIBIT A  
LGBT RIGHTS IN THE US:  
**State by State**

Gay rights laws in America have evolved to allow — but in some cases ban — rights for gay, lesbian and transgender people on a range of issues, including marriage, hospital visitation, adoption, housing, employment and school bullying. Gay rights issues vary by state and follow trends by region.



	TX	OK	AR	MS	AL	LA	FL
<b>MARRIAGE</b>	Same sex marriage is illegal or banned.	Same sex marriage is illegal or banned.	Same sex marriage is illegal or banned.	Same sex marriage is illegal or banned.	Same sex marriage is illegal or banned.	Same sex marriage is illegal or banned.	Same sex marriage is illegal or banned.
<b>HOSPITAL VISITATION</b>	No extended rights or law is unclear.	No extended rights or law is unclear.	No extended rights or law is unclear.	No extended rights or law is unclear.	No extended rights or law is unclear.	No extended rights or law is unclear.	No extended rights or law is unclear.
<b>ADOPTION</b>	Allows adoption by a single person.	Allows adoption by a single person.	Allows adoption by a single person.	Allows adoption by a single person, but bans joint adoption by same sex partners.	Allows adoption by a single person.	Allows adoption by a single person, but bans joint adoption by same sex partners.	Allows adoption by a single person.
<b>EMPLOYMENT</b>	No protection against discrimination or law is unclear.	No protection against discrimination or law is unclear.	No protection against discrimination or the law is unclear.	No protection against discrimination or the law is unclear.	No protection against discrimination or law is unclear.	No protection against discrimination or the law is unclear.	No protection against discrimination or the law is unclear.
<b>HOUSING</b>	No protection against discrimination or law is unclear.	No protection against discrimination or law is unclear.	No protection against discrimination or the law is unclear.	No protection against discrimination or the law is unclear.	No protection against discrimination or law is unclear.	No protection against discrimination or the law is unclear.	No protection against discrimination or the law is unclear.
<b>HATE CRIMES</b>	Law addresses hate crimes based on orientation.	No explicit inclusion or the law is unclear.	No explicit inclusion or the law is unclear.	No explicit inclusion or the law is unclear.	No explicit inclusion or the law is unclear.	Law addresses hate crimes related to sexual orientation.	Law addresses hate crimes related to sexual orientation.
<b>SCHOOLS</b>	No protection or the law is unclear.	No protection or the law is unclear.	Prohibits harassment based on gender identity or sexual orientation.	No protection or the law is unclear.	No protection or the law is unclear.	No protection or the law is unclear.	No protection or the law is unclear.
	GA	NC	SC	TN	VA	WV	
<b>MARRIAGE</b>	Same sex marriage is illegal or banned.	Same sex marriage is illegal or banned.	Same sex marriage is illegal or banned.	Same sex marriage is illegal or banned.	Same sex marriage is illegal or banned.	Same sex marriage is illegal or banned.	
<b>HOSPITAL VISITATION</b>	No extended rights or law is unclear.	Allows designated visitors.	No extended rights or law is unclear.	No extended rights or law is unclear.	Allows designated visitors.	Allows designated visitors.	
<b>ADOPTION</b>	Allows adoption by a single person.	Allows adoption by a single person, but bans joint adoption by same sex partners.	Allows adoption by a single person.	Allows adoption by a single person.	Allows adoption by a single person, but bans joint adoption by same sex partners.	Allows adoption by a single person.	
<b>EMPLOYMENT</b>	No protection against discrimination or law is unclear.	No protection against discrimination or the law is unclear.	No protection against discrimination or law is unclear.	No protection against discrimination or the law is unclear.	No protection against discrimination or the law is unclear.	No protection against discrimination or the law is unclear.	
<b>HOUSING</b>	No protection against discrimination or law is unclear.	No protection against discrimination or the law is unclear.	No protection against discrimination or law is unclear.	No protection against discrimination or the law is unclear.	No protection against discrimination or the law is unclear.	No protection against discrimination or the law is unclear.	
<b>HATE CRIMES</b>	No explicit inclusion or the law is unclear.	No explicit inclusion or the law is unclear.	No explicit inclusion or the law is unclear.	Law addresses hate crimes related to sexual orientation.	No explicit inclusion or the law is unclear.	No explicit inclusion or the law is unclear.	
<b>SCHOOLS</b>	No protection or the law is unclear.	Prohibits harassment on gender identity or sexual orientation.	No protection or the law is unclear.	No protection or the law is unclear.	No protection or the law is unclear.	No protection or the law is unclear.	

originally published may 2012 at <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/interactive/2012/may/08/gay-rights-united-states>

the state's constitution; and Iowa voters retained Supreme Court Justice David Wiggins, despite an aggressive campaign by marriage equality opponents.<sup>4</sup>

These victories provided gay rights advocates—as well as the general public—tangible evidence of a progressive shift in national public opinion regarding the status and recognition of LGBT Americans. Highlighting the momentum, Esseks observes, “In a remarkably short time, we have seen courts start to rule in favor of the freedom to marry, then legislatures affirm it, and now the people vote for it as well. Today's election illustrates both the astonishing pace of change on this issue, as well as America's commitment to fairness for everyone.”<sup>5</sup>

However, despite the November 2012 election successes for the LGBT movement, progress has not been shared evenly across all of the states. Most of the legal and policy gains have occurred in the Midwest, the West, and Northeast coastal areas of the United States—areas of the country widely cited as strongholds for LGBT equality. In contrast, building a progressive atmosphere for LGBT people of color has been daunting in the Southern United States, where a deeply-rooted conservative social and racial environment challenges LGBT Southerners to do effective regional organizing.

Exhibit A, an infographic that depicts LGBT policy by state and region, reveals the stark reality of this unevenness. The dearth of progressive LGBT policy in the region makes the South look like a progressive policy desert; at first glance, one might conclude that little to no forward movement or transformation is occurring across the southern region when it comes to LGBT rights. Yet the policy picture alone can be deceptive.

A closer look reveals many oases of groundbreaking work that centralize cultural organizing in order to build climates conducive to progressive policymaking, as well as to inoculate against right-wing policy agendas. These Southern LGBT and racial justice efforts are firmly rooted in grassroots communities boldly asserting their rightful presence, forging new connections in unlikely places, sustaining lives and nourishing spirits, and generating new hopes and possibilities. A vibrant array of organizing experiences and initiatives, as well as numerous insights and models, deserve more attention from the wider national social justice community.

From groups like the North Carolina-based Freedom Center for Social Justice that integrates theology and social justice to organize low-income queer and transgender communities of color, to Arkansas' Center for Artistic Revolution that explicitly uses creative and cultural work to enhance political organizing around race, class, gender, and sexuality, the South is creating new paths for transformative and restorative change at the intersection of racial justice and LGBT advocacy. The mainstream media and the national social justice and philanthropic communities often miss these efforts. For instance, the 2012 publication, “As the South Goes: Philanthropy and Social Justice in the South” by Grantmakers for Southern Progress, reports that national funders frequently overlook Southern strategies for human services, community development, and organizing in favor of national policy advocacy.<sup>6</sup>

The LGBT-related policy terrain is compounded by the racial and economic climate of the South, presenting formidable challenges for community-based strategies, progressive organizing, and electoral efforts. Some of the racial flashpoints in recent years have been draconian anti-immigrant legislation (e.g., Alabama and Georgia) and intense

<sup>1</sup> “Voters in Minnesota Reject Discriminatory Amendment Denying Marriage for Same-Sex Couples,” American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU), last modified November 7, 2012, <http://www.aclu.org/lgbt-rights/voters-minnesota-reject-discriminatory-amendment-denying-marriage-same-sex-couples>.

<sup>2</sup> Kevin Cathcart, “Lambda Legal: ‘Blockbuster at the Ballot Box,’” Lambda Legal Defense and Education Fund, last modified November 7, 2012, [http://www.lambdalegal.org/news/us\\_20121107\\_lambda-legal-blockbuster-at-ballot-box](http://www.lambdalegal.org/news/us_20121107_lambda-legal-blockbuster-at-ballot-box);

Erik Eckholm, “As Victories Pile Up, Gay Rights Advocates Cheer ‘Milestone Year,’” The New York Times, last modified November 7, 2012, [http://www.nytimes.com/2012/11/08/us/same-sex-marriage-gains-cheer-gay-rights-advocates.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2012/11/08/us/same-sex-marriage-gains-cheer-gay-rights-advocates.html?_r=0).

<sup>3</sup> Due to legislation or court orders rather than popular vote, same-sex marriage was passed in the states of New York, Connecticut, Iowa, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, and Vermont. See “US Polls: Supporters of Gay Marriage Seal Victory, Look Ahead,” Firstpost, last

modified November 8, 2012, <http://www.firstpost.com/world/us-polls-supporters-of-gay-marriage-seal-victory-look-ahead-518680.html>.

<sup>4</sup> “A Big Leap for Marriage Equality,” The New York Times, last modified November 7, 2012, [http://www.nytimes.com/2012/11/08/opinion/a-big-leap-for-marriage-equality.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2012/11/08/opinion/a-big-leap-for-marriage-equality.html?_r=0); Julie Bolcer, “Iowa Retains Judge Who Joined Marriage Equality Ruling,” The Advocate, last modified November 7, 2012, <http://www.theadvocate.com/politics/election/2012/11/07/iowa-retains-judge-who-joined-marriage>

equality-ruling. Wiggins was one of the seven Supreme Court justices who ruled unanimously in the *Varnum v. Brien* (2009) decision that legalized same-sex marriage in Iowa. In 2010, opponents to marriage equality were successful in recalling three of the seven judges from their position on Iowa's Supreme Court.

<sup>5</sup> James Esseks, “Voters in Minnesota Reject Discriminatory Amendment.”

<sup>6</sup> Grantmakers for Southern Progress is a network of funders seeking to strengthen philanthropic infrastructure in the South.

voter suppression efforts targeted at people of color and young people (e.g., Florida). Meanwhile, Southern states continue to lead the nation with the highest incarceration rates (Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama and Texas, in that order, hold the top four positions)<sup>7</sup>, with people of color persistently over-represented.

The Southern economic picture also reveals not only deep, but deepening, poverty. Ten of the eleven states in the nation where at least one in every ten children are in extreme poverty are in the South.<sup>8</sup> In 2010, among the 50 states and District of Columbia, 12 of the top 20 with the highest poverty rates are in the South. And among U.S. geographic regions, the South experienced the greatest increase in poverty from 2009 to 2010, climbing 1.2 percent.<sup>9</sup> Southern States are solidly “Right-to-Work” states, leaving workers with less ability to organize unions that can demand better wages and policies favorable to workers.

Progressive policy advancement in the U.S. as a whole is contingent upon political movement in the South, which helps to drive national trends. One-third of the Electoral College votes for the U.S. president are from the South, and this percentage is expected to grow in the years ahead. The U.S. congressional delegation from the South also continues to be a conservative stronghold in the national arena. These conservative political conditions are exacerbated by the fact that core constituencies of poor people of color live in the South, and that LGBT communities are particularly vulnerable to poverty, employment segregation, and codified discrimination. But, like the rest of the country, the South is changing demographically—driving both cultural and political change, and opening up new political opportunities. For example:

- From 2000 to 2010, both Virginia and North Carolina went from being 72 percent white to 65 percent white. Prior to Obama’s candidacy, Virginia hadn’t sided with a Democrat presidential candidate since 1964, and North Carolina hadn’t since 1976, but both states flipped from red to blue in support of Obama in 2008. North Carolina flipped again to narrowly support the Republican Mitt Romney in 2012, but changing demographics continue to make it a battleground purple state. Florida also flipped to blue in the last two election cycles, further revealing cracks in the solidly conservative South, and numbering the days of the long-standing Republican “Southern strategy,” which banked on winning the South solely on white votes. Unprecedented turnout by voters of color in the 2012 general election, despite aggressive voter suppression efforts, indicate new electoral possibilities.<sup>10</sup>
- Mississippi leads the nation in the percentage of same-sex couples raising children, based on a report by the Williams Institute that used 2010 U.S. Census data. Nationally, 22 percent of same-sex couples are raising children, compared to 33 percent in Mississippi.<sup>11</sup>
- Nine of twelve of the states with the fastest growing Latino communities are in the South.<sup>12</sup> And, according to Ana Perez, the National Movement Director for Presente.org, Latinos between the ages of 18 and 27 are shown to have political orientations geared more towards social justice than older Latinos. Latino youth are less religious, are intermarrying at faster rates, and are solidly progressive—with 70 percent identifying as Democrats.

For more information, see [http://c.ymcn.com/sites/www.ncgrantmakers.org/resource/resmgr/2013\\_annual\\_meeting/grantmakers\\_for\\_southern\\_pro.pdf](http://c.ymcn.com/sites/www.ncgrantmakers.org/resource/resmgr/2013_annual_meeting/grantmakers_for_southern_pro.pdf)

<sup>7</sup> The Sentencing Project, Trends in U.S. Corrections, State and Federal Prison Population, 1925-2011., page 5. [http://sentencingproject.org/doc/publications/inc\\_Trends\\_in\\_Corrections\\_Fact\\_sheet.pdf](http://sentencingproject.org/doc/publications/inc_Trends_in_Corrections_Fact_sheet.pdf)

<sup>8</sup> Steve Suits, Southern Education Foundation, “The Worst of Times: Children in Extreme Poverty in the South and Nation,” June 29, 2010. <http://www.southernspaces.org/2010/worst-times-children-extreme-poverty-south-and-nation>

<sup>9</sup> Sue Sturgis, Facing South, “Latest Census Numbers Show Deepening Southern Poverty,” Sep. 16, 2011. <http://www.southernstudies.org/2011/09/latest-census-numbers-show-deepening-southern-poverty.html>

<sup>10</sup> Bill Barrow, “As Demographics Change, An End To The Solid South,” Breaking News and Opinion on The Huffington Post. [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/08/20/no-longer-a-solid-south\\_n\\_1810536.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/08/20/no-longer-a-solid-south_n_1810536.html) (accessed May 14, 2013).

<sup>11</sup> JFP Staff, “Mississippi Leads Nation in Percentage of Same-Sex Parents,” Jackson Free Press. [www.jacksonfreepress.com/news/2011/aug/26/mississippi-leads-nation-in-percentage-of-same/](http://www.jacksonfreepress.com/news/2011/aug/26/mississippi-leads-nation-in-percentage-of-same/) (accessed May 14, 2013).

<sup>12</sup> Sue Sturgis, “Facing South director discusses region’s changing demographics, politics on Democracy Now,” The Institute for Southern Studies. <http://www.southernstudies.org/2012/09/facing-south-director-discusses-regions-changing-demographics-politics-on-democracy-now.html> (accessed May 15, 2013).

- From 2000 to 2010, Southern states saw significant increases in people identifying as multi-racial, including a 100 percent increase in North and South Carolina, an 82 percent increase in Mississippi, and a 77 percent and 74 percent increase in Kentucky and Tennessee, respectively.<sup>13</sup>
- Record numbers of young African-Americans are moving back to the South, reversing the out-migration patterns between World War I and 1970. Southern black population is now at 57 percent, the highest it's been in half a century. 40 percent of black folks moving to the South are ages 21-40, and constitute a voting bloc that visibly flexed its political muscle in the 2008 presidential election in North Carolina, Virginia, and Florida. Organizations like SONG centralize the concept of “coming home to the South” for LGBT people of color in order to acknowledge these migration trends, and to interrupt the idea that one must leave the South for Northern or bi-coastal cities in order to escape homophobia, transphobia, and racism.<sup>14</sup>

“SONG does not want us—as LGBTQ family in this country—to continue the trend of the ‘bubbles’ versus the deserts. Some parts of the countries have a lot more community infrastructure, social outlets, resources, and services for LGBTQ communities to take care of one another. However, many of us are told our lives will ‘get better’ if we just move somewhere else—great places like the Bay Area—but some of us will never have money to do that. Yet, in the South we have no basic protections under the law, and in most small towns like mine, if you Google ‘gay and Goldsboro’ you get zero hits. You get no parties, no clinics, and no youth groups. Nothing. And yet we are here, we are queer, and we are a part of you.” – Caitlin Breedlove, Co-Director, Southerners on New Ground

Against the backdrop of these trends, Southern culture continues to lift a vital and alchemic mixture of history, resistance, resilience, religion, and race. Activists and advocates for racial and LGBT liberation in the South are maximizing the opportunities presented by these changing racial demographics and political orientations, and are innovating and experimenting with new strategies for social change practice.

LGBT Southerners are living their lives, raising families, holding down jobs, and struggling to make ends meet—a far cry from the popular media image of white and well-off gays and lesbians (never bi and trans) living materialistic lives in urban and northern gay enclaves.<sup>16</sup>

Many courageous young and older people, new immigrants, people of color, and LGBT-identified people stand both out of the limelight and at the forefront of change in the South, strong in their full and varied identities, claiming a home in their communities, and continually staking new ground. “Being Southern means knowing particular layers of Southern histories that have been transformative for many centuries,” observes Dr. Alexis Pauline-Gumbs, founder of the Queer Black Mobile Homecoming Project. “These histories—oftentimes the riskiest, most tangible, and more ‘flesh meets the metal’—constitute the current playing ground for what may be theoretical debate elsewhere.”

Change in the South can have both a short and long-term arc, characterized by an ongoing cycle of successes and setbacks that reflect the depth of the region’s entrenched conservative history, as well as its resilient progressive struggles. In the following section, we present a scan of the policy terrain. It is not a comprehensive review, but rather one that provides a snapshot of some flashpoints, events, and opportunities for change.

<sup>13</sup> Center for American Progress, “Infographic: The New Demographics,” Center for American Progress. <http://www.americanprogress.org/issues/race/news/2011/04/04/9471/infographic-the-new-demographics/> [accessed May 15, 2013].

<sup>14</sup> Chris Kromm, “Black Belt Power: African-Americans come back South, change political landscape,” The Institute for Southern Studies. <http://www.southernstudies.org/2011/09/black-power-african-americans-come-back-south-shake-up-southern-politics.html> [accessed May 15, 2013].

<sup>15</sup> Miz Chris, “This Weekend in the YaY! Area through May 5,” Oakland Local. <http://oaklandlocal.com/posts/2013/05/weekend-yay-area-through-may-5-lac> [accessed May 15, 2013].

<sup>16</sup> Donna Ladd, “Mississippi Leads Nation in Percentage of Same-Sex Parents,” Jackson Free Press. <http://www.jacksonfreepress.com/news/2011/aug/26/mississippi-leads-nation-in-percentage-of-same/> [accessed May 15, 2013].

“SONG does not want us—as LGBTQ family in this country—to continue the trend of the ‘bubbles’ versus the deserts. Some parts of the countries have a lot more community infrastructure, social outlets, resources, and services for LGBTQ communities to take care of one another. However, many of us are told our lives will ‘get better’ if we just move somewhere else—great places like the Bay Area—but some of us will never have money to do that. Yet, in the South we have no basic protections under the law, and in most small towns like mine, if you Google ‘gay and Goldsboro’ you get zero hits. You get no parties, no clinics, and no youth groups. Nothing. And yet we are here, we are queer, and we are a part of you.”<sup>15</sup>

– Caitlin Breedlove, Co-Director, Southerners on New Ground

POLICY LANDSCAPE:  
**The U.S. South**

This sampling of policy scans across twelve states in the South illustrates a plethora of issues that have significant implications for people of color and LGBT communities. Having to work in a hostile environment that functions as the testing ground for divisive right-wing policies, many Southerners are actively creating empowered queer and trans-friendly spaces that build capacity and community for LGBT folks of color, and enable them to stay at home in the South. In the following section, state-by-state examples of a setback and a success are highlighted to illustrate the reality and complexity of the policy environment that LGBT communities and people of color face.

**TEXAS**

**SETBACK:** State law mandates that HIV and AIDS educational materials for persons under 18 years of age must state that “homosexual conduct is not an acceptable lifestyle and is a criminal offense.”

**SUCCESS:** In 2013, SB 237 is introduced in the state senate to add sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression to anti-discrimination protections in employment.

**ARKANSAS**

**SETBACK:** Constitutional Amendment 3, passed in 2004 with overwhelming support, mandates that marriage is only valid between a man and a woman.

**SUCCESS:** In November 2012, Eureka Springs becomes the first Arkansas city to officially endorse same-sex unions, though they are still prohibited by the state constitution.

**LOUISIANA**

**SETBACK:** SB 217, known as the “Backdoor Bigotry Bill,” aims to restrict cities and parishes from enacting policies and contracts that expand anti-discrimination laws.

**SUCCESS:** In 2012, the University of Louisiana defends and maintains its LGBT studies program.

**TENNESSEE**

**SETBACK:** Controversial “Don’t Say Gay” bill continues to be proposed, opposed, and resurrected, and if passed, will restrict teachers from discussing sexuality in grade levels pre-K-8.

**SUCCESS:** In 2012, transgender rights advocates helped defeat state legislative bills (SB 2282/HB 2270), aimed at criminalizing transgender individuals’ use of bathrooms that don’t align with their designated sex at birth.

**KENTUCKY**

**SETBACK:** HB 279, Kentucky’s dubious “Religious Freedom Act,” passed in March 2013, institutes discrimination against LGBTQ people under the framework of religious liberty.

**SUCCESS:** In January 2013, the tiny town of Vicco bans gay discrimination.

**MISSISSIPPI**

**SETBACK:** In March 2012, Mississippians trying to rally in Jackson to support LGBT equality are turned away by the police.

**SUCCESS:** The Advancement Project has been holding regional Action Camps for LGBT youth and, in January 2013, releases a report exposing the true costs of the state’s expansive school-to-prison pipeline.

**ALABAMA**

**SETBACK:** HB 56, passed in 2011, is regarded as the strictest anti-illegal immigration law in the United States.

**SUCCESS:** Southern Poverty Law Center and allies establish hotline, and document the ways HB 56 catalyzes vigilantism, racism, and profiling.

**VIRGINIA**

**SETBACK:** On February 2013, a Virginia bill aimed at protecting the state’s LGBT employees from discrimination gets tabled in committee.

**SUCCESS:** In March 2013, Tracy Thorne-Begland is instated in the Richmond City Court as Virginia’s first openly gay judge.

**NORTH CAROLINA**

**SETBACK:** In May 2012, North Carolina approves Amendment One, a constitutional amendment defining marriage solely as a union between a man and a woman.

**SUCCESS:** SONG and allied organizations help build a team of registered volunteers, who in turn help bring out to the polls 823,000 people who voted against Amendment One.

**SOUTH CAROLINA**

**SETBACK:** A 2010 survey by South Carolina Equality finds that 48 percent of the state’s gay and transgender youth respondents experience bullying in state schools.

**SUCCESS:** The Workplace Fairness Act, H. 4025, if passed, would protect all workers from workplace discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity.

**GEORGIA**

**SETBACK:** In May 2011, Atlanta governor Nathan Deal signed into law HB 87, a copycat of Arizona’s anti-immigrant measure.

**SUCCESS:** SOMOS Georgia/We Are Georgia connects immigrant and LGBT rights to help prevent the criminalization of driving, and of working with people who are undocumented.

**FLORIDA**

**SETBACK:** SB 2086, passed in May 2011, is a restrictive voting measure that curtails early voting and suppresses the voting rights of students.

**SUCCESS:** In May 2013, former Governor Charlie Crist announces his support for gay marriage, after previously supporting Florida’s 2008 gay marriage ban.

# Policy Scan Of Twelve Southern States

The recent history of policies in twelve states across the South illuminates how concerns affecting LGBT people of color vary within and across state borders. Additionally, these policies demonstrate how issues influencing racial justice and LGBT equity become more robust once the focus becomes regional rather than national; while some states are fighting for the right of same-sex marriage, a large number of southern states are dealing with political and social climates that affect the livelihood and basic survival of LGBT people of color around issues of immigration, religion, voter registration, police brutality, and school safety. A scan of hate crime laws across Southern states, for example, shows a wide range and variance in coverage, inclusivity, and protections against sexuality and gender-based violence:

Texas, Louisiana, Kentucky, Tennessee, and Florida have hate crime laws that include crimes based on sexual orientation, but not on gender identity.

North Carolina, Alabama, Mississippi, and Virginia have hate crime laws that do not include crimes based on sexual orientation or gender identity.

Georgia, South Carolina, and Arkansas do not have state-level hate crime laws.

No southern states included in this study have statewide laws with explicitly transgender-inclusive nondiscrimination laws.

This sampling of policy scans across twelve states in the South illustrates a plethora of issues that have significant implications for people of color and LGBT communities. Having to work in a hostile environment that functions as the testing ground for divisive right-wing policies, many Southerners are actively creating empowered queer and

trans-friendly spaces that build capacity and community for LGBT folks of color, and enable them to stay at home in the South. In the following section, state-by-state examples of a setback and a success are highlighted to illustrate the reality and complexity of the policy environment that LGBT communities and people of color face.

## ALABAMA

**SETBACK:** Passed in June 2011, HB 56 is regarded as the strictest anti-illegal immigration law in the United States, stating that if police have any “reasonable suspicion” that a person is undocumented, an attempt must be made to determine their legal status.

**SUCCESS:** In response to the passage of HB 56, the Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC) and its allies establish a data collection effort through a hotline that allows residents to report how the law affects them. SPLC then releases a report documenting the ways in which HB 56 catalyzes vigilantism, racism, and profiling.

## ARKANSAS

**SETBACK:** Sections 9-11-107 of the Arkansas Code state that marriage is only valid between a man and a woman. Passed by Constitutional Amendment 3 in 2004, the ban of same-sex marriage garners 75% of the vote in the general election.

**SUCCESS:** In 2012, despite the prohibition of same-sex unions, Eureka Springs becomes the first city in Arkansas to officially endorse the idea by a vote of the city council.

## FLORIDA

**SETBACK:** SB 2086, passed in May 2011, is a new restrictive voting measure that curtails early voting, and suppresses the voting rights of students. SB 2086 facilitates conditions that make voter suppression in Florida among the worst in the nation; in the recent presidential election, some Floridians had to wait six or more hours to cast a vote, while many poll workers were ill-informed about the proper use of provisional ballots.

**SUCCESS:** Changing from his conservative stance when he signed a petition that helped secure an anti-gay amendment in 2008, former governor Charlie Crist now comes out in favor of same-sex marriage. As stated by Nadine Smith, Executive Director of Equality Florida, “His position on this issue reflects the evolution of Florida voters. The clear majority now supports full legal recognition of marriage equality, and that support is growing rapidly, regardless of political party, age, or religious identification.”<sup>17</sup>

## GEORGIA

**SETBACK:** In May 2011, Atlanta governor Nathan Deal signs into law HB 87, better known as the copycat of the Arizona “Show Me Your Papers” bill. The law implements legal justification for racial profiling by creating requirements that businesses must ensure that new hires are eligible to work in the United States, and by empowering police to investigate the immigration status of people of color.

**SUCCESS:** In response to HB 87, SONG joins forces with the Georgia Alliance for Human Rights (GLAHR) to form SOMOS Georgia/We Are Georgia—the state’s largest immigrant rights group. While the organization is unable to stop the sections of HB 87 that legalize profiling, they successfully frame the attack on immigrant rights as an LGBTQ issue, and prevent from passing a draconian clause on “harboring,” which would have made it a crime to work with or drive in cars with undocumented people.

## KENTUCKY

**SETBACK:** HB 279, Kentucky’s dubious “Religious Freedom Act” institutes discrimination against LGBTQ people under the framework of religious liberty. The bill gives people the right to claim religious liberty as any defense, and denies services to LGBTQ families based on personal religious preferences.<sup>18</sup>

**SUCCESS:** In January 2013, the town of Vicco, with a population of 334 residents, may be smallest town in the United States to ban gay discrimination.<sup>19</sup> Vicco became the fourth city in the state to pass an equality-bearing law, following Lexington and Louisville in 1999, and Covington in 2003.<sup>20</sup>

## LOUISIANA

**SETBACK:** SB 217, known as the “Backdoor Bigotry Bill,” would bar cities, parishes, and agencies from enacting ordinances, policies or public contracts that expand state and federal anti-discrimination laws. This would violate Louisi-

<sup>17</sup> Sue Hoffman, “Media Statement: Charlie Crist Supports Marriage Equality for Gay Couples,” Equality Florida. <http://eqfl.org/node/2490> [accessed May 14, 2013].

<sup>18</sup> David Badash, “Look: Kentucky Governor Vetoes Anti-Gay ‘Religious Freedom’ Bill,” The New Civil Rights Movement. [http://thenewcivilrightsmove-](http://thenewcivilrightsmovement.com/look-kentucky-governor-)

[vetoed-anti-gay-religious-freedom-bill/politics/2013/03/22/63033](http://vetoed-anti-gay-religious-freedom-bill/politics/2013/03/22/63033) [accessed May 14, 2013].

<sup>19</sup> “Governor’s Veto Falls. HB 279 Passes in Kentucky,” Ace Weekly. <http://www.aceweekly.com/2013/03/governors-veto-falls-hb-279-passes-in-kentucky/> [accessed May 15, 2013].

<sup>20</sup> “Vicco, Smallest Town in Kentucky, Passes LGBT Non-Discrimination Law,” The Huffington Post. <http://www.huffingtonpost.com/blackberry/p.html?id=2544392> [accessed May 17, 2013]

<sup>21</sup> The Huffington Post, “Jeff Landry, Louisiana State Representative, Wants University’s LGBT Studies Minor Dropped,” The Huffington Post Gay Voices. <http://>

[www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/08/27/jeff-landry-louisiana-representative-lgbt-studies-minor\\_n\\_1834134.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/08/27/jeff-landry-louisiana-representative-lgbt-studies-minor_n_1834134.html) [accessed May 15, 2013].

ana's Home Rule Charter, by preventing local governments from enumerating and expanding civil rights protections.

**SUCCESS:** Louisiana lawmaker Jeff Landry faces heavy backlash after pressing University of Louisiana to drop its LGBT studies minor with claims that the subject matter furthers political agendas at the expense of preparing students for future careers. Despite pressure from Landry, University of Louisiana defends the LGBT studies minor, and continues to offer it to students as a program of study.<sup>21</sup>

## MISSISSIPPI

**SETBACK:** On March 1, gay Mississippians try to rally in Jackson to draw attention to the need for LGBT equality, but are turned away by the police. Although they have a permit for a march in the city, Mississippi police tell them it is "illegal to be openly gay in the state."<sup>22</sup>

**SUCCESS:** The Advancement Project, in its recent report *Handcuffs on Success: The Extreme School Discipline Crisis in Mississippi*, exposes the true costs of the expansive school-to-prison pipeline operating in the state. The Advancement Project's work in Mississippi also involves hosting regional Action Camps for LGBT youth, which help activate youth leaders to interrupt criminalization of LGBT youth of color, unfair zero-tolerance measures, and punishment for violations of gender-specific dress codes.<sup>23</sup>

## NORTH CAROLINA

**SETBACK:** In May 2012, North Carolina approves Amendment One, a constitutional amendment defining marriage solely as a union between a man and a woman, becoming the 30th state to prohibit same-sex marriages. 61 percent of North Carolinians vote in favor of the bill.

**SUCCESS:** Despite widespread conservative electoral support for the legislation, there is statewide grassroots mobilization against the amendment. Southerners On New Ground (SONG) and the North Carolina NAACP speak out visibly against the "wedge amendment," and reframe the issue as a "fight about our families and dignity"—not just gay marriage. SONG and allied organizations help build a team of 16,000 registered volunteers, who in turn help bring out to the polls 823,000 people who voted against Amendment One.<sup>24</sup>

## SOUTH CAROLINA

**SETBACK:** A 2010 survey conducted by South Carolina Equality finds that 48% of respondents experience bullying in state schools, indicating that the state's gay and transgender youth experience more than twice the national average of bullying and harassment.

**SUCCESS:** The Workplace Fairness Act, H. 4025 is introduced in the legislature by state Rep. James Smith, a leading employment and civil rights law attorney. If passed, H. 4025 will protect all workers from workplace discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity.<sup>25</sup>

## TEXAS

**SETBACK:** Although the Texas Department of State Health Services has developed model education programs on HIV and AIDS, state law requires that the "materials in the education programs intended for persons younger than 18 years of age... state that homosexual conduct is not an acceptable lifestyle and is a criminal offense [...]"<sup>26</sup>

**SUCCESS:** SB 237, introduced by San Antonio Democratic Senator Leticia Van de Putte in January 2013, would

<sup>22</sup> Zach Magee, "Press Release: LGBT March in Mississippi Shut Down by Police," GetEQUAL.org. <http://getequal.org/blog/2012/03/01/press-release-lgbt-march-in-mississippi-shut-down-by-police/> [accessed May 15, 2013].

<sup>23</sup> The Advancement Project, "Handcuffs on Success: The Extreme School Discipline Crisis in Mississippi," The Advancement Project. [b3cdn.net/advancement/bd691fe41faa4ff809\\_u9m6bfb3v.pdf](http://b3cdn.net/advancement/bd691fe41faa4ff809_u9m6bfb3v.pdf) [accessed May 14, 2013].

<sup>24</sup> "SONG's End of Year Love Letter 2012." Southerners On New Ground. <http://southernersonnewground.org/2012/12/songs-letter/> [accessed May 15, 2013].

<sup>26</sup> "83(R) SB 538 - Introduced version - Bill Text." TLO. <http://www.legis.state.tx.us/tlodocs/83R/billtext/html/SB005381.htm> [accessed May 18, 2013].

<sup>25</sup> Matt Comer, "South Carolina lawmaker to introduce LGBT non-discrimination bill," LGBTQ Nation. <http://www.lgbtqnation.com/2013/04/south-carolina-lawmaker-to-introduce-lgbt-non-discrimination-bill/> [accessed May 14, 2013].

add sexual orientation and gender identity/expression to the protections offered against employment discrimination in Texas. While the bill is not expected to pass, Senator Van de Putte says in an op-ed that its proposal highlights problems with LGBT discrimination.<sup>27</sup>

## TENNESSEE

**SETBACK:** Tennessee's controversial Classroom Protection Act, also known as the "Don't Say Gay" bill has been proposed, opposed, and resurrected several times. This bill would stop teachers from discussing sexuality with their students at grade levels pre-K-8. The latest amendment mandates that parents and guardians be notified if a student is suspected of being LGBT-identified.

**SUCCESS:** SB 2282 and HB 2279, also known as the "Bathroom Harassment Act," are withdrawn in early 2012, soon after being introduced and having failed to pass. The bills seek to criminalize transgender individuals using restrooms that do not align with their designated sex at birth. Currently, transgender people in Tennessee are unable to change their sex on government issued IDs, including birth certificates.<sup>28</sup>

## VIRGINIA

**SETBACK:** On February 12, 2013, a Virginia House of Delegates subcommittee votes to table SB 701, a bill aimed to protect the state's LGBT employees by adding a non-discrimination policy into the Code of Virginia.

**SUCCESS:** Despite setbacks in legislative policies at the state level, March 2013 witnesses the investiture of Tracy Thorne-Begland as Virginia's first openly gay judge in the Richmond City Court.

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<sup>27</sup> Joseph McCormick, "US: Texas bill introduced to tackle anti-LGBT workplace discrimination," PinkNews.co.uk. <http://www.pinknews.co.uk/2013/04/16/us-texas-bill-introduced-to-tackle-anti-lgbt-workplace-discrimination/> (accessed May 14, 2013).

<sup>28</sup> Monica Roberts, "TransGriot: Unjust Transphobic Bills Introduced In Tennessee," TransGriot. <http://transgriot.blogspot.com/2012/01/unjust-transphobic-bills-introduced-in.html> (accessed May 15, 2013).  
— "Tennessee Senate Bill 2282." LegiScan. <http://legiscan.com/TN/bill/SB2282/2011> (accessed May 15, 2013).

# Better Together 2013

## Southern Leadership and Action Cohort

In its 2010 Better Together report, Applied Research Center examined the relationships between racial justice organizations and LGBT communities across the country, finding numerous opportunities, challenges, and barriers faced by organizations working to connect racial justice and LGBT liberation efforts. In 2012, ARC released a set of case studies that documented four national organizations that work at the intersections of race, gender, and sexuality, each of whom generate exemplary intersectional possibilities for their members and bases.

To further build upon this work, ARC—with the support of the Arcus Foundation, a leading global foundation advancing LGBT equality, social justice, and conservation—explored a regional-based strategy for deepening these strategic connections, especially in areas of the country outside of the West and Northeast (which have the most LGBT rights infrastructure, media attention, and policy gains). In extensive interviews, research, and consultations, Southern-based leaders expressed sustained interest to go deeper in terms of capacity building, leadership development, and media visibility. As a result of this interest, ARC decided to create a new learning opportunity for a selected cohort of Southern region leaders interested in building deeper connections, sharing insights, and strengthening their work.

To create the new Southern leadership cohort, ARC established a partnership with Southerners on New Ground (SONG) and the Western States Center. SONG is a 20-year-old, regional, queer liberation organization made up of people of color, immigrants, undocumented people, people with disabilities, and working class, rural, and small-town LGBTQ people in the South. Western States Cen-

ter is a movement-building organization in the northwest United States that has been coordinating the Uniting Communities program. With goals similar to Better Together, the Uniting Communities program is a highly successful initiative that builds strategic connections across race, sexual orientation, and gender identity. The synergy of three organizations collaborating on the development of this new Southern leadership cohort has presented new opportunities for a cross-fertilization of experience, insight, tools, and resource sharing.

ARC, in partnership with SONG and Western States Center, conducted heavy recruitment for the 2013 Better Together Southern Leadership and Action cohort, and received positive responses and numerous inquiries from applicants from all over the Southern region. Twenty-two leaders and organizers from eleven organizations spanning ten states were selected, and the cohort was launched in December 2012, with its first convening held alongside the National Gay Lesbian Task Force's Creating Change 2013 Conference in Atlanta, Georgia.

The Better Together Southern Cohort is a leadership development program made up of organizations and individuals in the South who are interested in exploring ways to deepen and expand the vital work of unifying issues and communities. Amidst continuing attacks on basic rights, and attempts to divide and scapegoat communities, this program builds upon the efforts of organizations that are already working to create new connections and to frame issues that bridge racial justice, LGBTQ equality, and economic equity.

## THE GOALS OF THE COHORT :

1. To deepen regional efforts in the South to connect racial justice and LGBTQ rights;
2. To incubate experimentation, collaboration, and innovation around the three themes of intersectionality, unity, and visibility;
3. To enhance media skills and capacity, and to test inclusionary issue framing;
4. To expand the visibility of LGBTQ leaders of color in the South;
5. To cultivate new collaborations and long-term relationships between partner groups; and
6. To document success stories, best practices, and lessons—to share with a national audience.

Cohort activities include a series of regional retreats, strategic planning, strategic coaching, peer learning through regularly scheduled cohort conference calls, as well as documentation of progress, stories, and success. The synergy of this collaboration has presented new opportunities for cross-fertilization of experiences, insights, tools, and strategies.

# Better Together Southern Leadership and Action Cohort – ORGANIZATIONAL PARTICIPANTS, 2013

## Advancement Project

*DC / National*

Advancement Project is a multi-racial civil rights organization created to develop and inspire community-based solutions, based on the same high-quality legal analysis and public education campaigns that produced the landmark civil rights victories of earlier eras.

## Bayard Rustin Center for LGBTQA Activism, Awareness and Reconciliation

*NC*

The Bayard Rustin Center for LGBTQA Activism, Awareness and Reconciliation at Guilford College in North Carolina provides a safe gathering place for queer and trans students and their allies, maintains an extensive library about related issues, and holds meetings, special events, symposia, and programs for the Guilford student community, as well as external LGBT partners.

## BreakOUT!

*LA*

BreakOUT! fights the criminalization of LGBTQ youth who are directly impacted by the criminal or juvenile justice system in New Orleans, and builds the power of LGBTQ youth through organizing, healing justice, and leadership development programs.

## Center for Artistic Revolution

*AR*

CAR uses a holistic combination of progressive education, organizing skills, advocacy, and creative/cultural work to create a fair Arkansas where all people have equitable access to fair treatment, a democratic political process, and economic and environmental justice.

## Equality Florida

*FL*

Equality Florida is the largest civil rights organization dedicated to securing full equality for Florida's lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) community. Through lobbying, grass-roots organizing, education, and coalition building, Equality Florida is changing Florida so that no one suffers harassment or discrimination on the basis of their sexual orientation or gender identity.

## Fairness Campaign

*KY*

The Fairness Campaign is a broad-based community effort dedicated to equal rights. The Fairness Campaign seeks to dismantle oppression and build an inclusive community where all individuals are valued and empowered to reach their full potential.

## Freedom Center for Social Justice

*NC*

FCSJ's mission is to enhance the quality of life by increasing healthy options and opportunities available to low income communities, communities of color, sexual minorities and youth.

## Mississippi Safe Schools Coalition

*MS*

The mission of the Mississippi Safe Schools Coalition is to ensure that all students have a safe learning environment by protecting students' constitutional rights, ending homophobia, transphobia, sexism, and all forms of discrimination, and fostering acceptance of students through public education and advocacy.

## Southeast Immigrant Rights Network

*TN / regional*

SEIRN seeks to build just and inclusive communities throughout the region by supporting immigrant organizations, fostering regional collaboration and peer exchange, strengthening alliances within the progressive movement, and facilitating joint analysis and action on issues of common concern.

## Southern Poverty Law Center

*AL / regional*

The Southern Poverty Law Center is a nonprofit civil rights organization dedicated to fighting hate and bigotry, and to seeking justice for the most vulnerable members of society.

## SPARK

*GA*

SPARK collaborates with individuals, communities, and organizations to grow and sustain a powerful reproductive justice movement in Georgia and the South.

# Key Themes for Southern Movement Building

**T**hrough numerous interviews, consultations, and convenings held in conjunction with the creation of the 2013 Better Together Southern Leadership and Action Cohort, three key themes have surfaced that characterize the success of current efforts, as well as what is needed for future growth. The themes of intersectionality, unity, and visibility have emerged as integral to movement building and sustainability for LGBT people of color in the South.

Intersectionality involves making conceptual and strategic connections across issues and identities. Instead of addressing race, religion, sexuality, gender, and class as parallel or competing dynamics, they are considered together in cross-cutting and complimentary ways. Though each of the dynamics has distinct manifestations that cannot be falsely equated, both differences and similarities are interrogated and illuminated so that people can understand each other more deeply and fully. Instead of people having to compartmentalize different aspects of their identities, an intersectional analysis allows people to be seen and understood as their whole selves. This is especially critical for people of color who are LGBT-identified. And, because people tend to be simultaneously affected by multiple issues, a narrow focus on single issues hardly reflects people's lived realities, where challenges regarding race, gender identity and expression, and sexuality are often compounded by economic, immigration, class, and other pertinent issues.

Building an intersectional analysis is no simple task. It requires intentionality and organizational commitment to create the time, space, and safety for authentic connections and candid conversations. It cannot be rushed or forced. It

involves sharing histories, experiences, and culture before reflecting on commonalities—all without minimizing differences. It is no accident that the two current co-coordinators of SONG previously worked at the Highlander Center, a historic home for popular education in the South, where inclusive and interactive space is intentionally created to raise collective consciousness for social transformation.

## EXAMPLES OF INTERSECTIONALITY PRACTICES

In Tennessee, Asher Kolieboi, co-director of the 2010 Soulforce Equality Ride and founder of Legalize Trans\*, is currently in the process of starting a project in Nashville that specifically aims to bridge the identities of queer people of faith and color. The goals of the organization are to educate those in the Black Church community about LGBT issues, and to support LGBT people who are in the Black Church. As stated by Kolieboi, "We are coming to the project with an intentional look at faith, gender, race, and class because these intersections have been overlooked by the larger Black community and the LGBT community." Because of his prior experience working with a multi-faith organization that did not try to adopt an intersectional lens until five years after being an established organization, Kolieboi has been adamant in ensuring an intersectional approach for his organization.

“Although I learned being intentionally inclusive in the beginning is difficult,” Kolieboi states, “it yields better results and stronger collaborations. I now know that it is imperative to have as many stakeholders as possible in the process and vision of creating an organization.”

- Despite the brutality of the Atlanta attack by three men who screamed “faggot” while beating Brandon White in February 2012, gay rights advocates, including human rights attorney Kung Li, Xochitl Bervera from Social Justice Leadership, and SONG members issued statements to lessen the harsh prison sentences of White’s attackers—all black males—in order to stop the cycle of overrepresentation of people of color within the prison system. While many saw these calls for lesser prison sentences as not holding the perpetrators accountable for violence directed towards Brandon, these activists understood and situated the case as part of a longer history of violence aimed toward LGBT people of color, immigrants, rural, and working class people in the South. As stated by SONG, “We know that prisons are not institutions that push people to change and transform patterns of violence. They are cages for poor people and people of color, that serve those who profit from their labor.”
- The Fairness Campaign in Kentucky has a long institutional history of building power for LGBTQ liberation in Louisville, where the organization has successfully secured legislation prohibiting employment discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity. For more than 20 years, the Fairness Campaign has routinely mobilized around the intersections of race, gender, sexuality, and class. For example, they work towards living-wage legislation for public workers, who are primarily people of color. Effectively working in coalition with other organizations, they helped defeat an Arizona style anti-immigrant copycat bill in the Kentucky legislature.

Despite these successes, there’s a significant disconnect between the mainstream national LGBT movement and the southern grassroots organizations that address LGBT issues. Instead of prioritizing marriage equality as the most important issue of the day, many local groups are working to address more “bread and butter” economic and survival issues—such as transgender employment discrimination and rights, LGBT youth criminalization and incarceration issues, the punitive treatment of immigrants, and access to high-quality and safe schools.

The mainstream LGBT movement often lacks sufficient leadership of color, an explicit critical race analysis, and an economic analysis. Developing an inclusive and intersectional analysis is key to speaking to the lived experiences and realities of LGBT people of color in the South.

Additionally, the premise that racial justice and LGBT equality are fundamentally detached is the primary obstacle to effective engagement and collaboration for LGBT people of color. In national LGBT organizations that seek to represent a broad constituency of members, people of color often feel ignored when policies are advocated for that are not contextual or even pertinent to their lived experiences. Similarly, within racial justice organizations, LGBT individuals frequently fall through the cracks when issues of sexuality or gender identity and expression go unaddressed. Given the prevalence of categorical thinking that tends to pit race or sexuality against other axes of difference, more intersectional approaches are needed that take into account how race, class, gender, sexual orientation, religion, immigrant status, and (dis)ability influence public policy and grassroots organizing. Moreover, it is necessary to find policy solutions that will empower LGBT people of color, rather than fragment them.

During the Amendment One anti-LGBT marriage ballot initiative, Rev. William Barber, President of the North Carolina chapter of the NAACP, demonstrated the power and possibilities of using an intersectional analysis to unify people across race, religion, and sexuality. In his Open

Letter to all North Carolinians in September 2011, Barber wrote: ...“The ultra-conservative sponsors push their anti-gay amendment with one hand, and their restrictions on our voting rights with the other. They would write discrimination into our Constitution with one hand, but violate it by withholding enough funds for children to get a sound basic education...No matter our color. No matter our faith tradition. Those who stand for love and justice are not about to fall for their trick.”<sup>29</sup>

An intentionally intersectional analysis and strategy is essential for building unity, in order that multi-racial, multi-issue, and multi-generational efforts to generate collective power can be built and sustained. Again and again, in interviews with leaders and activists in the South, we heard the message that one of the biggest challenges facing movement building for LGBT people of color is not just capacity building, but establishing an inclusive framework to create a coalition of people from different backgrounds along the lines of race, sexuality, gender, class, age, religion, immigrant status, and (dis)ability.

While the concerns facing LGBT people of color in the South vary from state to state, several arenas are ripe for further intersectional work, such as connecting black and brown communities; connecting LGBT and faith communities; connecting health issues (such as reproductive rights and HIV/AIDS) to LGBT and race issues; connecting cisgender people to people who are trans- and gender-variant; connecting young people to older people to build cross-generational movement spaces; and addressing the criminalization of LGBT youth, specifically youth of color. Unity involves building authentic relationships of understanding and trust within and across organizations and communities, in order to pursue mutual interests and aspirations, and to collectively garner enough power and clout to make demands for progressive change stick.

<sup>29</sup> William Barber, “NC NAACP’s Open Letter to North Carolinians: reject marriage amendment that narrows – not expands – civil rights,” Pam’s House Blend.

<http://pamshouseblend.firedoglake.com/2011/09/10/nc-naacps-open-letter-to-north-carolinians-reject-marriage-amendment-that-narrows-not-expands-civil-rights/> (accessed May 15, 2013).

While intersectionality focuses on connecting ideas, unity focuses on connecting people; effective movement-building addresses both simultaneously.

When we include diverse or divided communities in a common conversation about mutual values, interests, and stakes, we can arrive at larger issue frames that speak to a broader base. Engaging and uniting a broad base of people builds the power needed for sustainable progressive change.

While intersectionality focuses on connecting ideas, unity focuses on connecting people; effective movement-building addresses both simultaneously.

To be successful, organizing in the South must be deeply relational. Southern organizing involves house visits, shared meals, kitchen table and porch conversations, as well as social time. Community-based organizations and churches are key vehicles for connection. As found in the 2010 Better Together report, grounded local and regional relationships and collaborations can produce more power for all marginalized constituencies.

Since religion continues to play a dominant role in the ideological and cultural landscape of the Bible-belt South, community organizing strategies must often include ways to engage faith-based communities, and incorporate ways to validate people’s whole selves, including their sexuality, gender identity and expression, and spirituality. While LGBT identities have been a topic of conversation veiled in religious discourse of “abomination” and “sin,” a handful of southern denominations have started to do the difficult work of reclaiming faith for queer believers. In challenging the often patriarchal and heteronormative power relations and teachings present in many Christian churches, LGBT individuals in the South are gradually making progress toward achieving a type of religious “citizenship” in their places of institutionalized worship. Unifying values like love,

“On top of identifying the issues we advocate, we should also look at the values we represent.”<sup>30</sup>

– JeShawna Wholley of the National Black Justice Coalition (NBJC)

dignity, fairness, and inclusion are deeply felt, widely shared, and can be key connectors across issues and communities. Additionally, to build multi-racial unity and power, issues of race must be actively, explicitly, and continually addressed. Race, when not addressed, will be used to divide, wedge and discriminate. Community-based organizing in the South that interweaves dynamics of race, gender, sexuality, class, and religion is a key model for engaging and empowering people in their own communities.

## EXAMPLES OF UNIFYING PRACTICES

- As a constitutional marriage amendment battle loomed in 2007, Equality Florida, in partnership with the National Black Justice Coalition, took the lead in creating dialogue between Black church leaders and the LGBT community through a project called In Spirit and In Truth. Finding increased support from Black faith leadership as a result of the project, Equality Florida plans to expand the program to include outreach to Latino communities. “On top of identifying the issues we advocate, we should also look at the values we represent,” stated JeShawna Wholley of the National Black Justice Coalition (NBJC).
- Kentucky’s Fairness Campaign established a committee called Faith Leaders for Fairness, comprised of an interfaith alliance of people of faith working for equality in Kentucky. As stated by Meg Lu, a member of the Fairness Campaign’s Dismantling Racism Committee, “In these denominations we see little tolerance for LGBT lifestyles which, in turn, causes division within communities and for individuals, which often forces folks to choose between staying in the closet about their identities, or facing rejection from their families and communities.” Strategically, the Faith Leaders for Fairness have visibly advocated for the passage of a statewide Fairness law, protecting all Kentuckians from discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity in employment, housing, and public accommodations.
- Working at the intersection of racial justice and LGBT issues for the past several years, the Advancement Project’s “Ending the Schoolhouse to Jailhouse Track Program,” in partnership with the Gay-Straight Alliance Network (GSA Network) and the Alliance for Educational Justice (AEJ), brings together youth leaders and other activists working to dismantle the “School-to-Prison Pipeline” to build relationships across the country, including the South. The Advancement Project’s work demonstrates how increased use of out-of-school suspensions, expulsions, and arrests have disproportionately affected students of color, LGBT students, and students with disabilities. As Alana Greer, staff attorney of Advancement Project, states, “As advocacy communities, we need to work together to end the push-out crisis and ensure that all students have access to a safe and supportive school environment.”
- The Southeast Immigrant Rights Network (SEIRN), established in 2006, is at the forefront of bridging diverse groups of organizers and activists to respond to opportunities and threats aimed at immigrant and refugee communities, while strengthening the presence of Southern voices within the national immigrant rights movement. The issue of immigrant rights, especially in the Southeast, sits at the intersectionality of race, class, gender, and sexuality. Organizations

<sup>30</sup> Interview with Jeshawna Wholley, by Darren Arquero.

like SEIRN understand the importance of connecting immigrant rights to a broader progressive social justice and LGBT rights movement, and are committed to building grassroots immigrant leadership within and beyond the South.

Regional movement-building intermediary organizations such as SONG, Project South, and Highlander Center play an important role in supporting, convening, and connecting community-based organizations and leaders. They also function to mobilize unifying platforms for connection and base-building in communities where traditional organizational infrastructure (such as resource centers, shelters, or nonprofits) do not exist. For example, in recent years, Project South has anchored the Southern Movement Alliance, a collaboration of eight Southern organizations developing a common political, economic, and social analysis as well as collective action for building power in the South. For people living in small towns and rural areas where LGBT people can become isolated in light of the fact that few spaces and services cater to their needs, regional camps, retreats, and alliance-building gatherings are critical places for connecting, learning, and becoming politicized.

Visibility involves the public expression of a community's humanity, diversity, values, unity, and power. Marginalized people—people of color, low-income people, LGBT people, immigrants, people with prior convictions—too often face an array of barriers that keep them isolated and invisible. This is especially compounded in the South, where progressive institutions and infrastructure are far more sparse, compared to other areas of the country. Even if organizations are effective in their work to foster intersectionality and unity, without visibility they miss opportunities for influence, impact, and reach. With rapid changes in communications technologies and social media, visibility also translates to power. The nation's major media centers, New York and Los Angeles, are located far from the South, and often ignore or dismiss Southern storytelling—leaving media coverage of the South either lacking or full of worn stereotypes. Many social justice groups in the South lack the staffing, technology, and infrastructure to project their own narratives to wider audiences, contributing to limited visibility.

Different kinds of media—including use of the arts, storytelling, and other cultural expressions—need to be further developed and more widely utilized to reach the hearts and minds of audiences. While conventional media outlets are major channels for political influence, visibility also involves taking up public and cultural space. This space can be claimed locally and regionally, through a range of activities that lie outside the purview of traditional media and communications, and are therefore more accessible to community stakeholders. These activities can include theatre, performance and dance, visual art, filmmaking, music, and other forms of creative cultural production. For example, the drag ball scene, especially in Georgia but also on college campuses throughout the South, involves cultural and social events with an explicit political agenda, helping to change norms regarding gender identity and expression within communities of color. The South abounds with opportunities where LGBT people of color are claiming visible, vocal, and cultural space.

## EXAMPLES OF VISIBILITY PRACTICES

- Parker Hurley, director The Bayard Rustin Center for LGBTQ+ Activism, Education & Reconciliation at Guilford College, is also the current director of the Trans\* People of Color Coalition (TPOCC). TPOCC is one of the few Southern social justice organizations that promotes the interest of Trans People of Color. TPOCC inspires and nurtures collaboration among communities of color dedicated to anti-racism and fighting transphobia, and to the empowerment of transgender persons of color. TPOCC works to strengthen and mobilize individuals, families, and communities by changing laws, educating the public, and building social and economic strength among all persons of color.
- In addition to Asher Kolieboi's faith-based organizing in Tennessee, his professional and personal commitment to highlighting voices in the South can also be seen in (Un)heard: Transmasculine People of Color Speak!, an artistic campaign that seeks to collect the stories of transmasculine-identified (FTM, transmen, genderqueer, studs, AGs, etc.) people of color. The

campaign focuses on the narratives of those who have been silenced within greater circles of LGBT organizing that provide little space for transgender voices. The project has already appeared at several conferences and colleges/universities across the nation, including Rutgers, Princeton, and the University of Cincinnati. Before beginning (Un)heard, Kolieboi helped to co-found Queer Sol, an Austin, Texas-based multi-disciplinary arts collective for queer and trans people of color. The organization started a monthly open mic night for people of color, and curated a special performance of the Queer People of Color and Allies monologue at the University of Texas, Austin.

Visibility also takes into consideration public and private spaces, where marginalized people of color show up and are seen, and LGBT voices of color speak up and are heard. The politics of visibility consider which stories are told, repeated, reproduced, validated, and echoed, as well as the ability of LGBT-identified people to be out in safe and supportive physical spaces.

Visibility is not just about how to be public, but also about who is seen and heard. In the mainstream media and LGBT equality movement, the leadership and voices of young, LGBT, Southern, people of color are consistently lacking. If the movement is to grow, the leadership and faces must change, in order to represent the multi-faceted and innovative work of the South. Young LGBT people of color—who often embody and embrace the very intersections needed to connect and unite a broader movement for social justice, regionally and beyond—are well suited to lead. For example, undocumented youth leaders in the immigrant rights movement in the South have created strong partnerships with the movement for LGBT equity. This has much to do with the fact that many youth leaders themselves identify as queer, according to Felipe Sousa-Rodriguez of GetEQUAL Florida.<sup>31</sup>

Queer Southern youth of color are creating their own autonomous spaces around gender expression and safety that dovetail with cultural production and organizing.

<sup>31</sup> Information from ARC's Better Together Pre-Conference Meeting at Face Race, Atlanta, Georgia.

These welcoming spaces provide young LGBT activists with opportunities to work alongside veteran organizers, allowing for an infusion of political education, as new generations of young leaders begin their journeys towards justice. If replicated more widely, imagine the potential these accessible spaces can provide for marginalized young people of color to have real voice and visibility. And imagine how this youth leadership, if given the opportunity to flourish, could reshape local, regional, and even national social justice movements.

## PROMISING PRACTICES

Although there is a progressive policy desert in the South, we still find many oases of notable work flourishing in unlikely places. This work is uniquely tailored to the Southern context, built upon one-on-one relationships, steeped in people's lived experiences and local cultural traditions, and mindful of the ever-present dynamics of race and religion. The following examples demonstrate how intersectionality, unity, and visibility are integral to solidarity and movement-building for LGBT people of color in the South.

### A. FREEDOM CENTER FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE

The Freedom Center for Social Justice (FCSJ) is a service and advocacy organization in Charlotte, North Carolina that works at the intersections of race, religion and faith, sexuality, gender, and class. The FCSJ is housed in the building of the Unity Fellowship Church in Charlotte, and shares values, visions, and supports with the church's congregation. Bishop Tonyia Rawls is both the Founding Pastor of the Unity Fellowship Church, as well as the founder of the Freedom Center.

As a powerful voice for marginalized communities in North Carolina, Bishop Rawls and her wife, Gwendolyn Rawls, speak out vocally against exclusionary and discriminatory climates and conditions that affect their congregation, comprised of mostly LGBT-identified black and brown folks. Bishop Rawls and her congregation strive to create space, language, practices, and precedent for queer and

trans families and individuals to reclaim their whole identities—and they root these efforts within the larger traditions of religion and organizing in the South. In doing so, they function as an exemplary model for social change practice at the nexus of community organizing, service provision, advocacy, faith, and worship.

The FCSJ's stated mission is to enhance the quality of life by increasing the number of healthy options and opportunities available to low-income communities, communities of color, sexual minorities, and youth. Bishop Rawls established the Freedom Center with the hope of building an institution that could counter the vast inequities faced by LGBT people in general—and people of color in particular—in North Carolina.

FCSJ runs a series of projects dedicated to improving the lives and conditions of queer and trans folk. In developing and launching these programs, Bishop Rawls has been intentional about centralizing the experiences and challenges of those routinely made invisible and marginalized from mainstream LGBT discourses, funding streams, and coverage—namely trans folks of color. The FCSJ convened the TransFaith in Color Summits in 2010 and 2011, which attracted and connected hundreds of trans people to welcoming and affirming houses of worship. Now renamed as The Transgender Faith and Action Network (TFAN), this program functions to “support the work that past attendees and others are doing within organizations and communities to raise awareness, change policies, heal, network, and culture shift.”<sup>32</sup>

TFAN is currently one of the primary mechanisms connecting trans folk of color in the South to spaces of worship and faith-based practices in ways that are affirming, anti-oppressive, and mindful of trauma and healing within a Southern context. Through TFAN, trans folks of color who wish to engage in faith-based praxis can attend local events supported by FCSJ, and can be connected to opportunities for education, networking, and resource sharing.

The Freedom Center also coordinates and houses the Transgender Employment Program and a new LGBT Law Center. The Transgender Employment program aims to interrupt the high rates of unemployment and workplace discrimination for transgender and gender variant community members by providing employment support, career counseling, job readiness training, and job placement for trans folks. In the South, trans folks of color are excessively marginalized and vulnerable to hostile workplaces, especially since the majority of Southern states do not legally protect against workplace discrimination claims that are based on sexual orientation or gender identity and expression. The program effectively leverages relationships with national and regional partners and employers in order to facilitate job placement and security for trans folks. This effort is informed by a larger economic justice framework at the Freedom Center, since the FCSJ leadership understands that LGBT communities in the South are continuously aging into poverty as a result of structural and cyclical economic barriers, disenfranchisement, and challenges related to building and sustaining wealth.

The FCSJ LGBT Law Center is a newly-expanding program at FCSJ, which aims to provide direct legal and litigation services, community education, and resources to LGBT folks of color in North Carolina. The legal team helps dismantle barriers to employment through direct assistance and legal clinics that address topics like legal name changes, employment discrimination, family law, and employer trainings. As a legal service provider, the LGBT Law Center is informed by the systemic criminalization and unjust targeting of LGBT communities, immigrants, and youth of color in the South. It is designed to be a functional response to the increasing presence of privatized prisons, detention centers, and jails in the South, which are spaces of contention since they simultaneously provide gainful employment to economically depressed cities and towns, while also contributing to the criminalization, profiling, policing, and harassment of black and brown folks, including immigrants. The Law Center also educates the business and legal community in North Carolina about LGBT and racial justice issues, in order to cultivate model, progressive workplaces that are racially just and LGBT-friendly.<sup>33</sup>

<sup>32</sup> “The Transgender Faith and Action Network,” Freedom Center for Social Justice. <http://fcsj.org/main/the-transgender-faith-and-action-network/> [accessed May 15, 2013].

<sup>33</sup> “The LGBT Law Center,” Freedom Center for Social Justice. <http://fcsj.org/main/the-freedom-center-for-social-justice-lgbt-law-center/> [accessed May 15, 2013].

“In a juvenile courtroom in Louisiana in 2009, a transgender youth was threatened with detention and contempt of court simply for wearing feminine clothing and jewelry at her court hearing.”

– Wesley Ware, director of BreakOUT!

The FCSJ programs, in combination with Bishop Rawls’ intentional efforts to weave together faith and religion as frameworks for social justice, are indicative of innovative, intersectional, and unifying efforts to build power among LGBT folks of color in the South. Particularly notable and exemplary are the ways in which FCSJ operates on a human continuum of social service provision, direct assistance, education, organizing, advocacy, and refuge. LGBT people of color and allies in North Carolina can come home to the Freedom Center to be empowered through social and legal services that tackle barriers to education, employment, wealth and asset creation, and a host of other challenges in their lives. Unity Fellowship Church Charlotte provides them an affirming house of worship that engages their hearts, minds, spirits, and bodies, and brings them into their full humanity and voice.

Such multi-faceted programs that combine service provision, education, advocacy, organizing, and religious/faith-based efforts are often ignored by mainstream philanthropic institutions and national media, which tend to be focused on singular efforts for national policy change. We find it remiss to do so, because innovative models like these can be replicable, instructive, and valuable for social change efforts elsewhere in the country. By delving into the rich, messy, complex, and rewarding crossroads of religion, race, class, gender, and sexuality, the Freedom Center for Social Justice is not only paving the way for cultural shifts, but is also tangibly improving the lives of its LGBT clients and congregation.

## B. BreakOUT!

For transgender people of color, gender expression/identity is highly policed by both society and law enforcement, where both physical and verbal abuse and criminalization can result from presenting as the “wrong” gender.

BreakOUT! is a Southern organization that deals directly with this issue.

As a Louisiana-based organization that seeks to end the criminalization of queer and trans youth, BreakOUT! organizes predominantly LGBTQ youth of color between the ages of 13-24, who are most adversely impacted by the criminal justice system in New Orleans. Through weekly “Building Our Power” meetings, members learn about LGBTQ radical history, political repression, the history of the prison industrial complex in the South, “Racism and Oppression 101,” and other social justice issues pertinent to the interests of the youth themselves. In addition to the specific political education provided by BreakOUT!, members also learn ways to challenge and confront issues they deem most vital to their livelihoods, by developing skills in organizing, campaign development, base-building, power mapping, strategy development, and more. All in all, BreakOUT! facilitates leadership development by building upon youths’ lived experience and knowledge—as experts on the myriad injustices that they face on a day-to-day basis.

Through his experiences as director of BreakOUT!, Wesley Ware has seen firsthand how the criminal justice system punishes not only people of color, but also those who are gender non-conforming— primarily black transgender women. Following a recent investigative report by the Department of Justice that found the New Orleans Police Department (NOPD) to be the most corrupt police force in the nation, BreakOUT! implemented the We Deserve Better! campaign to fight the harmful and discriminatory policing practice targeting LGBTQ youth.<sup>34</sup> This campaign advocated for the creation of a model LGBTQ policy within the NOPD; an LGBTQ training for the

NOPD based on best practices; and the creation of an advisory board to the NOPD comprised of LGBTQ youth who are directly impacted by police targeting and profiling. As Ware states, “Often, LGBT advocacy and juvenile justice are seen as two issues with little relevance to one another, but for court-involved LGBT youth of color in Louisiana, they result in one lived experience.”

As part of the We Deserve Better! campaign, BreakOUT! made a video directed toward NOPD, to demand accountability to LGBTQ youth of color. Additionally, they pushed for a series of public meetings with the NOPD to discuss drafts of the LGBTQ policy, which was developed by BreakOUT! members. BreakOUT! also advocated for a community engagement process around policing reforms, that included a wide range of community members, organizations, and stakeholders. When they learned that NOPD was planning to pass a policy without adequate involvement from BreakOUT! or other community members, BreakOUT! sent almost 300 emails to the Police Chief and the Mayor to pressure them into engaging impacted communities. In March 2013, BreakOUT! secured a meeting with the NOPD to review their draft policy, which was lacking in scope and did not adequately protect the rights of LGBTQ youth. BreakOUT! then mobilized representatives of 18 organizations in New Orleans to deliver a statement to the Police Department, calling for an open meeting to solicit community feedback to the LGBTQ policy.<sup>35</sup> This rally included constituents normally excluded from mainstream LGBTQ organizing, such as undocumented Latino workers, black young mothers, black gay and lesbian youth, transgender women, Vietnamese American students, and others. In all stages of campaign development, BreakOUT! engaged impacted communities, implemented a race-explicit lens, and made an effort to elevate intersectional and unifying values.<sup>36</sup>

Another example of this unifying work is the relationship BreakOUT! established with the Congress of Day Laborers, an organization comprised primarily of undocumented Latino workers who moved to New Orleans to rebuild the city after Hurricane Katrina. Through the use of a Spanish-language translator, the two organizations were able to bring together groups of people who would have otherwise never been able to “break bread.” Story circles were held between members of both organizations to discuss the similarities and differences of their experiences in being marginalized/criminalized as people of color, which, in turn, developed a solidarity that has resulted in undocumented Latino workers speaking in support of black transgender women at City Council meetings, and vice versa. In addition, BreakOUT! and the Congress of Day Laborers partnered in a community I.D. project, attended actions with one another to expose horrific conditions at local prisons, and demanding an end to deportations at the federal building for Immigration and Customs Enforcement in Louisiana. As Ware states, “though both groups have had to do a lot of internal education before bringing our members together, the relationship that has resulted has been transformative for all.”<sup>37</sup>

BreakOUT! demonstrates what is possible when we build dedicated and sustained leadership around issues that are hidden or silenced by mainstream progressive organizations. BreakOUT!, by identifying the gulf of difference in experiences and lives between non-transgender LGB youth and transgender youth, provides a unique and innovative model for LGBTQ youth organizing in the Deep South. Despite having an extremely small staff and sparse resources and funding, BreakOUT! has been instrumental in forging new alliances with unexpected constituencies in New Orleans. Youth members have leveraged new possibilities for decriminalizing LGBTQ communities of color, and have readily expanded LGBTQ issue framing in Louisiana around immigration, low-wage worker rights, transgender

<sup>34</sup> U.S. Department of State Civil Rights Division, “Investigation of the New Orleans Police Department.” [www.justice.gov/crt/about/spl/nopd\\_report.pdf](http://www.justice.gov/crt/about/spl/nopd_report.pdf) (accessed May 15, 2013).

<sup>35</sup> Wesley Ware, e-mail correspondence to Nayanara Sen, May 20, 2013.

<sup>36</sup> Wesley Ware, “NOPD Locks Doors in Face of Community: Organizations Prevented from Engagement on Police Reform,” BreakOUT!. [www.youthbreakout.org/sites/breakout.drupalgardens.com/files/201305/BreakOUT!%20Press%20Release.pdf](http://www.youthbreakout.org/sites/breakout.drupalgardens.com/files/201305/BreakOUT!%20Press%20Release.pdf) (accessed May 15, 2013).

<sup>37</sup> From application for Better Together Southern Cohort, accessed May 15, 2013.

rights, youth organizing, racial justice, and criminal justice. This is no small feat, and gives testimony to how innovative movement-building work could be scaled and sustained in the South if there was adequate media visibility and attention, as well as funding and resource allocation.

### C. SPARK REPRODUCTIVE JUSTICE NOW

Based in Atlanta, Georgia, SPARK Reproductive Justice NOW (SPARK, formerly Georgians for Choice) began as a meeting place for pro-choice organizations to discuss legislative strategy on reproductive justice. Unlike other LGBT of color organizations that tend to focus on political, economic, and social rights, SPARK is an exceptional example of prioritizing reproductive justice as it impacts communities of color. By using an intersectional analysis that locates individuals, families, and communities as sites for resistance, SPARK empowers everyday Georgians to make decisions regarding the integrity and protection of their bodies, sexualities, and gender identities/expressions.

Before becoming SPARK, Georgians for Choice was comprised of a coalition of 50 member organizations working in a variety of progressive fields—ranging from reproductive rights/justice and domestic violence to LGBTQ and racial politics. As stated by SPARK:

“As our coalition grew, we realized we needed a broader framework encompassing the complexities of women’s, girls’, and Georgian’s lives beyond “choice.” While “choice” is important, many Georgians were given choices that were not just. People were asked to choose between health care and putting food on the table. Mothers were asked to choose between their jobs and childcare. Youth were asked to choose between access to sexual health services and parental notification. We saw that for many Georgians the language of “choice” did not always resonate — they wanted justice.”<sup>38</sup>

<sup>38</sup> “History,” SPARK. <http://www.sparkrj.org/about/history/> (accessed May 14, 2013).

Additionally, at the time of its founding in the mid-1980s, women of color began to advance a reproductive justice framework on the national scale that placed more emphasis on “justice” rather than “choice,” in which the former term was seen to allow for broader movement-building of reproductive health, with such issues as immigrant rights, environmental justice, and sexual violence. As a result, the new name (SPARK Reproductive Justice NOW) reflected a paradigm shift in thinking and grassroots organizing from a “choice” framework to a reproductive justice framework, and allowed for a shift in focus from single-issue politics to an intersectional and holistic approach to political organizing.

Since its founding in 1985, SPARK has implemented programs that combine organizing/advocacy, leadership development, political/peer education, and base-building/mobilization in order to grow and sustain a powerful Southern-based reproductive justice movement. For example, the Fierce Youth Reclaiming & Empowering (FYRE) program engages LGBTQ youth of color in Atlanta—and state-wide—in the reproductive justice rights movement. In 2012, the FYRE program held its first conference, IGNITE 2012: Queer & Trans Youth of Color Convening, which sought to bridge the gap between urban and rural queer youth. SPARK considered the conference to be a successful gathering, with 85 attendees including 30 percent from rural areas throughout the Southern region.

The youth organizing of SPARK also makes visible the stories and voices of LGBTQ youth of color through Media Camp workshops. These workshops provide opportunities for Southern LGBTQ youth of color, ages 24 and under, to design, develop, and create their own media resources. “By providing queer and trans youth of color with hands-on experience working with various media forms,” as stated by SPARK, “we hope to encourage and inspire them to critique mass media by reclaiming their own histories and lived experiences, and to allow them the opportunity to build new relationships with other Southern queer youth.” As a result of the 2010 Media Camp, three short films were produced that focus around the topics of sex and sexual health, coming out, and bullying and power. These films were not only screened throughout Atlanta but also served

as the foundation for a workshop at the 2011 Allied Media Conference, focusing on queer and trans youth creating their own media. Additionally, for the 2011 Media Camp, LGBTQ youth examined the connections between intimacy, art, and activism under the theme Exploring Intimacy: Using Our Stories to Build Power. The Media Camp examined how art—specifically photography—can be used as a catalyst for social change.

Moreover, SPARK's success in political mobilization gives voice to formerly-incarcerated women. In particular, SPARK worked directly with a diverse constituency of reproductive rights advocates and people of color during the 2012 Georgia legislative session, with hopes to end the shackling of incarcerated women during childbirth. Not only did SPARK organize women directly impacted, but they were also able to mobilize LGBTQ individuals under the shared vision of "racial uplift and chosen family." This unity resulted in a successful hearing at the state capitol. As stated by Tonya Williams, member of SPARK's Board of Directors, "Georgia must prohibit this practice to ensure that birthing inmates across state and local correctional systems are constitutionally protected."<sup>39</sup>

Lastly, through the organization's work with the ACLU of Georgia and Trans(forming), SPARK was able to create the Georgia Name Change Kit, the first and only streamlined source of information regarding the name change process for transgender people in Georgia. To date, the kit has been distributed to over 100 individuals, as well as in the legal clinics conducted by SPARK, which has helped guide 20 individuals through the name change process.

There are only a handful of organizations nationally working at the intersections of reproductive justice, health and wellness, racial justice, and LGBTQ liberation. SPARK shines among these, as a Southern organization that is leading the way towards inspired, intersectional, unifying, and visible work that centralizes marginalized voices,

<sup>39</sup> "SPARK demands an end to shackling pregnant women; Releases "Giving Birth Behind Bars" Resource," SPARK. From February 23, 2011 announcement on SPARK's listserv, accessed on May 14, 2013.

disrupts dominant media narratives, and expands the frame on issues that are traditionally excluded from mainstream LGBTQ movement issue development, such as shackling of immigrant women, developing media and art-centered campaigns, and skills-building for youth. As an active member of the 2013 Better Together Cohort, SPARK is experimenting with new strategies, tools, and techniques in organizing, media creation and dissemination, and capacity-building for their constituents of color.

#### D. CENTER FOR ARTISTIC REVOLUTION

Founded in 2003 by LGBTQ activists and straight allies in Little Rock, Arkansas, the Center for Artistic Revolution (CAR) employs a holistic combination of progressive education and organizing skills to advocate on behalf of both LGBTQ individuals and people of color, primarily through creative and cultural work. CAR is one of the few organizations in Arkansas that infuses organizational strategies with cultural production, believing that such partnership creates a deeper level of pride, commitment, and retention of participants in the movement toward LGBTQ liberation and justice.

As member of the Arkansas Citizens First Congress (CFC), a coalition of 55 grassroots organizations that work on a variety of issues that include immigration, civil rights, wage parity, and racial justice, CAR has been one of the few voices in CFC that is LGBTQ-centric—sparking an ongoing conversation around the idea of what is justice and who has access to community resources. Through active participation in CFC, CAR continues its emphasis on the commonality of constructs meant to keep many Arkansans from equitable access to fair and just treatment, and demonstrates how those constructs intersect with racism, homophobia, and transphobia.

With multiple programs across the fields of race, sexuality, and gender, CAR's commitment to intersectional work is meant to "build bridges of understanding and collaboration between diverse communities, and to dismantle the 'isms' and the phobias that continue to disenfranchise,

oppress, and exclude people. In this way we build the real relationships that allow us all to move forward in the question for the well being, fair treatment, and equality for ALL Arkansans.”<sup>40</sup>

For CAR, a strong emphasis is placed on youth programs that nurture the development and retention of young people in the LGBTQ movement. One such program is the Diverse Youth for Social Change (DYSC), which targets adolescents and young adults from 13-22 in order to provide tools and skills necessary to improve their quality of life—whether personal, home, school, or community. DYSC operates on curricula developed in-house at CAR through collaborations with peer facilitators and adult program mentors. Randi Romo, Executive Director of CAR, states, “The DYSC curriculum is what we call ‘life skills-social justice curriculum.’ One minute young folks are learning about how to keep a checkbook, and the next minute they are learning about the intersections of various oppressions.”<sup>41</sup> DYSC centralizes intersectional analysis in youth leadership development, and encourages youth to show up as leaders on issues that may not at first glance seem to be pertinent, but are significantly intertwined with LGBTQ, racial justice, and youth liberation.

For example, in the recent 2013 legislative session, Arkansas experienced extreme conservative attacks on women’s reproductive rights. The fight culminated in Arkansas adopting the country’s most restrictive and punitive ban on abortion.<sup>42</sup> During this time, CAR’s leadership was instrumental in advocating for the establishment of a civil rights commission for the state, which could have addressed LGBTQ liberation, reproductive rights, and racial justice as civil rights considerations. CAR was also involved in a fight for securing in-state tuition for undocumented youth. DYSC youth members were prepared for these advocacy and policy change efforts by CAR, and were present in the legislature as active participants, stakeholders, and leaders.

Very similar to BreakOUT!’s programs that emphasize leadership development of LGBTQ youth of color, CAR focuses on a holistic combination of training in the development of grassroots organizing, activism, advocacy skills, and cultural work for young LGBTQ Arkansans.

CAR was also the first host site for the Southeastern Queer Youth Activist Camp in 2012, which is one of the only gatherings of it’s kind in the region. It is an interactive summer camp designed for queer youth and allies in the South, coordinated in partnership with GSA Network, Georgia Safe Schools Coalition, and two other Better Together cohort members—Mississippi Safe Schools Coalition, and the Southern Poverty Law Center. The Southeastern Queer Youth Activist Camp brought together approximately 50 youth from Mississippi, Alabama, Tennessee, Georgia, and Arkansas, and is gearing up to be an annual event targeted to LGBTQ youth and straight allies. CAR continues to play a leadership role in this regional gathering and summer camp.<sup>43</sup>

Another dynamic program centering on the livelihood of LGBTQ youth is Rainbow Camp, for LGBTQ and allied youth ages 13-22. Rainbow Camp is premised on a relational model of organizing in which LGBTQ youth build relationships among their peers in an environment separated from the modern influences of technology and social media. As further elaborated by CAR:

“The purpose of the camps is to disconnect our youth participants completely from cities, cell phones, computers, and all media. They are able to be all of who they are in a safe environment with peers and mentors as they get an ‘earth charge’—getting grounded while learning how to rely on themselves in a healthy and strong way, and also learning how to support one another.”<sup>44</sup>

<sup>41</sup> Randi Romo, e-mail correspondence to Darren Arquero and Nayantara Sen, May 16, 2013.

<sup>42</sup> Erik Eckholm, “Arkansas Adopts a Ban on Abortions After 12 Weeks,” *The New York Times*, March 6, 2013. <http://>

[www.nytimes.com/2013/03/07/us/arkansas-adopts-restrictive-abortion-law.html?pagewanted=all&\\_r=1](http://www.nytimes.com/2013/03/07/us/arkansas-adopts-restrictive-abortion-law.html?pagewanted=all&_r=1) [accessed March 16, 2013]. In May 2013, the 9th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals struck down the Arkansas’ ban on abortions after 20 weeks of pregnancy.

<sup>43</sup> “2012 Southeastern LGBT Activist Camp - Little Rock, Arkansas,” Mississippi Safe Schools Coalition. [dl.dropboxusercontent.com/u/6353526/Camp/2012.html](http://dl.dropboxusercontent.com/u/6353526/Camp/2012.html) [accessed March 16, 2013].

<sup>44</sup> “Rainbow Camp,” Center for Artistic Revolution. <http://www.artisticrevolution.org/programs/rainbow-camp> [accessed May 16, 2013].

CAR's ongoing youth programming and track record with hosting two successful Rainbow Camp events demonstrates the organization's dedication in empowering young adults to bring their whole selves to a space that promotes personal healing and well-being.

Now in their tenth year of operation, CAR's success can be attributed to their relentless effort in empowering youth as leaders rather than participants in the LGBTQ movement of the state. By placing emphasis on relationship-building between LGBTQ and non-LGBTQ youth, CAR aims to create sustainable relationships that allow for meaningful conversations and grassroots organizing, when fighting against the oppression that afflicts the lives of LGBTQ Southerners.

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The four organizational vignettes presented above each address, in their own way, the themes of intersectionality, unity, and visibility. Each of the themes are reflected through a variety of practices that many of these organizations engage in, as listed below.

## INTERSECTIONALITY PRACTICES

- A deliberate priority and process for addressing intersectionality across issues, constituencies, and identities.
- A willingness to address and affirm people's full identities so they can bring their whole selves into social change efforts.
- An organic approach to social change, tailored to addressing the basic and unique needs of people's communities, often involving a combination of approaches such as service provision, advocacy, organizing, community-building, and artistic/cultural expression.

## UNITY PRACTICES

- A priority of including and centering some of the most marginalized people in their base, and connecting them to other communities.
- A willingness to engage in creative, collaborative relationships and active partnerships with a variety of organizations, to build mutual strength and power.

## VISIBILITY PRACTICES

- An attentiveness to creating safe space and to taking up public space that affirms and asserts community members' rightful place and presence.
- An emphasis on community organizing, empowerment, and leadership development—including the prioritization of youth empowerment.

# Recommendations

Each of the organizations profiled above accomplish much with little, but this is not a sustainable state of affairs. In fact, each of these groups only has a few paid or fulltime staff. With more infrastructure—additional staffing, more stable and sustainable funding streams, and enhanced communications capacities to expand their visibility and reach—they could have even greater impact as key movers and models for social change.

1. **Increase support for strategic political analysis that links racial justice, LGBT liberation, and economic justice.** Opportunities for regional analysis and strategy are needed—connecting rural, small town, and urban communities and experiences. More regional convenings and collaborations can foster new relationships and ideas that can broaden the impact and visibility of local innovation, experimentation, and organizing efforts.
2. **Invest in tools that reach beyond specific policy fights like marriage equality to engage long-term capacity development, ongoing coalition building, and integrated cultural organizing.** We will most effectively unify diverse communities by developing further strategies for organizing, framing issues more inclusively, highlighting stories and values more prominently, and dialoging across difference in order to surface mutual interests.
3. **Develop and support LGBT leaders of color in the South.** Young LGBT people of color often embody and embrace the very intersections needed

to connect and unite a broader movement for social justice—regionally and nationally.

4. **Expand media visibility, communications capacity, and the cultural/artistic expressions of LGBT people of color and those working at the intersection of race, gender and sexuality.** Utilizing the arts and others forms of cultural expression will be key for reaching peoples' hearts and minds, and for engaging diverse audiences.
5. **Support strategies to build the infrastructure, wealth, and sustainability of movement-building organizations in the South, in order to empower them to weather short-term challenges and to better position them for long-term substantive impact.** Much innovative work occurs out of sight of national media outlets and funders, which constrains the ability for Southern groups to adequately fund and resource the exceptional organizing, communication, leadership development, and regional strategy needed to take their work to a greater scale. Given the South's pivotal role in national politics, a realistic resourcing of long-term movement building, aimed at achieving deep cultural and policy change, warrants serious attention.

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