



Southerners On New Ground

WORKSHOP

GUERRILLA ACTIVISM 101

Originally presented at the Trans Faith in Color Conference, August 2012

TIME: 1 Hour 15 Minutes to 2 Hours

GOAL: To connect us to the history of the queer liberation movement in the U.S., to understand what a movement and guerilla activism are, and to connect and brainstorm with one another about issues affecting our communities

TOOLS AND MATERIALS:

Big paper, tape, markers

OPENING: 10 Minutes

Welcome, What is SONG?

Introduce facilitators—If you have time, do group introductions. If not, ask people to say their name when they speak, due to limited time.

FRAMING QUESTIONS: 20 Minutes

ONE: Ask the group, popcorn style,

“What is an example of something WE have as LGBTQ people that we did not have 50 years ago(Could be a sense of community, a resource, a right, etc.)?”

The facilitator should record the groups’ responses on big paper. (10 Minutes)

TWO: This time, go through the list the group created and ask, popcorn style,

“HOW do you think we got these things?” (10 Minutes)

POLITICAL EDUCATION: 30 Minutes

ONE: What is a Movement? (10 Minutes)

There are many definitions of social movements. Feel free to use one that makes sense to you or draw out a diagram (ask SONG Staff for support around this).

Social movements impact and change people’s lives. For example, what changed out of the Civil Rights Movement? Black people got to drink out of a water fountain without getting our heads cracked. But, this also allowed for more space for people to create more possibility, and assert our muscle and people power.

- Social movements are defined by their ability to move large numbers of people to action to achieve structural and cultural transformation on a national or global scale.

- Engaging a diverse range of communities and approaches simultaneously, social movements unite people through shared strategy, principles, and goals.
- Building a social movement requires: increasing the capacity of individuals, organizations, alliances and sectors to be more strategic, collaborative, and sustainable.
- Social Movements are organized, yet informal entities that are engaged in extra-institutional conflict that is organized/oriented towards a goal.
- These goals can be either aimed at a specific and narrow policy or be more broadly aimed at cultural change.

TWO: Stonewall Riot and Act Up (20 Minutes)
What are they? Why do they matter?

This is a historical narrative of the Stonewall Riot and Act Up. Use this information to facilitate this section in whatever way makes sense to you. Make it interactive. Use pictures, videos, etc., to help tell the story. We like to ask folks to close their eyes and imagine the scene while we tell the story.

Stonewall Riot

- In 1950's and 1960's the legal system criminalized LGBTQ people very severely, particularly trans and gender non-conforming people
- In 1950's most homophile groups favored less confrontational methods and promoted assimilation (trying to prove we are like straight people and non-trans people to say we are OK)
- In 1960's many felt new energy to exert power due to the climate of Civil Rights Movement, Women's Movement, etc.
- The first Stonewall Riot was in June 1969 at Stonewall Inn in NYC.
- *IMAGINE IT: It is one a.m. Hot, humid, summer night. You are dancing with your boo, or on the look out for someone. You are dressed as yourself, for whatever that means—but you are probably a transwoman in her finest, a butch woman in a full suit, or a femme non-trans woman who is a sex worker and has had a long night of work. You might be having a drink. You are trying to relax. All of a sudden, the lights come on. The music stops. The police yell: "Police! We are taking the Bar!" You realize the person at the end of the bar having a drink is an undercover cop. The cops start to push you towards the men's line up, or women's line up. You know you are being pushed in the wrong line. This is not the first time this has happened to you. You realize you might be raped in jail. You realize your picture might be in the paper. Your mother might see it, or your boss. You might lose your job. You feel tired. You feel pissed off. You realize you don't have a lot to lose. WHAT DO YOU DO?*
- FIGHT BACK! And that's what they did. As Michael Fader said who was there:

"We all had a collective feeling like we'd had enough of this kind of shit. It wasn't anything tangible anybody said to anyone else, it was just kind of like everything over the years had come to a head on that one particular night in the one particular place, and it was not an organized demonstration.... Everyone in the crowd felt that we were never going to go back. It was like the last straw. It was time to reclaim something that had always been taken from us.... All kinds of people, all different reasons, but mostly it was total outrage, anger, sorrow, everything combined, and everything just kind of ran its course. It was the police who were doing most of the destruction. We were really trying to get back in and break free. And we felt that we had freedom at last, or freedom to at least show that we demanded freedom. We weren't going to be walking meekly in the night and letting them shove us around—it's like standing your

ground for the first time and in a really strong way, and that's what caught the police by surprise. There was something in the air, freedom a long time overdue, and we're going to fight for it. It took different forms, but the bottom line was, we weren't going to go away. And we didn't."

- As the police were arresting people, a large LGBTQ crowd swelled outside the bar, and one unknown butch lesbian was beat in the head by a cop with a bully club and she looked at the crowd and said: "Why don't you guys do something?". Someone called out: 'Gay Power!' Someone else started singing: "We Shall Overcome" and the crowd overwhelmed the cops and took the bar, freeing the chained LGBTQ people in the paddy wagons.

****DEBRIEF with the group and ask for reflections before moving to the next section.**

Act Up

- Founded in 1987, ACT UP stands for 'AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power'
- The goals: to bring about legislation (laws), medical research and treatment, and policies that end AIDS by slowing deaths and increasing health of HIV+positive people
- *IMAGINE: You are 22 years old. You were kicked out of your house at 14 when your mom found you kissing another little boy. You found your way to an underground gay bar. You built a family with other LGBTQ people—most of them young, queer, effeminate men like you. Three months ago your boyfriend, Darien, got pneumonia and large spots on his legs. Now he is dead. He is the 8th person you have lost to the disease you now know that the government knows all about but does not care about because they think it is a 'gay plague.'* You know they are not doing research, they are not even trying to find out how to stop its spread. In your heart you know that if you don't do something, if the community does not do something, everyone you love will die of this disease and you probably will too. **WHAT DO YOU DO?**
- FIGHT BACK!
- And that's what they did....in 1987 250 ACT UP members had their first demonstration at Wall Street to demand greater access to experimental AIDS drugs and for the US to have a coordinated plan to put \$ to fight the disease. 17 are arrested
- Many demonstrations follow—combining people power with getting lots of media attention
- ACT UP uses the slogan 'Silence = Death'—this catches on and the symbol of the pink triangle becomes widely recognized across the country
- In 1989, one ACT UP protest is named biggest at that time since Vietnam War—that same year 7 members of ACT UP break into the NY Stock Exchange and chain themselves to the VIP balcony with a sign that says "SELL WELLCOME"—Wellcome was the drug company that was charging \$10,000 a year per person for AZT. Within days the cost per person drops to \$6,400
- ACT UP protests greed over people, the Churches that blame AIDS on people, government institutions that are not helping, and misinformation spread by magazines like Cosmopolitan.
- In 1991 they hold the 'Day of Desperation'—saying \$ for AIDS meds, not war.
- ACT UP was never a non-profit but a series of groups that all connected to one coordinating committee
- Many attribute the work of ACT UP as one of the main factors contributing to the development of the AZT cocktail—a combination of medicines that has changed the course of human history by saving and prolonging millions of lives, of people on every continent on this planet. People straight, gay, trans, non-trans, of all races, nationalities, ages and ethnicities. A few thousand LGBTQ people did all that!

PRACTICE & ACTION (15 Minutes)

Emphasize that The Stonewall Riots and Act Up are examples of **Guerilla Activism** that was a response to harsh conditions that LGBTQ people were living through. Shift the group from the historical political education to the connection to them, their communities, and the issues that they face.

ONE: Turn to the person next to you and talk about one big problem that exists in your community that needs direct, immediate action. (5 Minutes)

TWO: Bring the pairs focus back to the larger group. Have them share ideas of what needs to be addressed and possible next steps (10 Minutes)

CLOSING (5 Minutes)

Wrap up by reflecting and overviewing the workshop. Let folks know how to get in contact with you.

**Have questions, need support or technical assistance on this tool?
Contact us at ignite@southernersonnewground.org or 404-549-8628**