



# 25

# Years of SONG



SOUTHERNERS ON NEW GROUND

## *Liberation in Our Lifetime*

## 2018 END OF YEAR REPORT



**SONG**  
SOUTHERNERS ON NEW GROUND

## *Greetings SONG Family and Friends,*

Octavia Butler told us that there are some years that ask questions and others that give answers. This year, we grappled with a lot of questions: What is our role in movement right now? How, with the boot of the state on our necks, do we build power with a base of badassess in these grim political times? How do we embody the vision we hold while dealing with the stark reality of our context and conditions?

We have one answer: US. Together we have been able to not just do more work, but to leverage the capacity of our Kinship Network to tackle these questions. We've declared a regional demand to #EndMoneyBail and pre-trial detention. We've listened to our people directly impacted by the unfair immigration system, answered the call in response to imprisoned and separated families at the border, and are building demands to melt ICE. We know that the answers lie in the daily experiences of our people. It is through this slow and respectful work of building relationships that we have honed our understanding and further clarified our role in the work that is at our feet. Through shared labor, we cultivate the trust to try untested strategies and formations. Some gave us life, some were a pain in the ass, but all provided the opportunity to learn and to sharpen our game.

"Us" includes more than SONG members. We wouldn't have accomplished half as much without our comrade organizations and coalitions rolling hard with us. We learned a lot about building strategies and co-developing members with Mijente. The National Bailout Collective demonstrates what can happen when there is a shared vision. AgitArte continues to shake up our political imagination and creativity as we share organizational development lessons to make us all stronger. Our decision to collaborate with the Transgender Law Center is reaffirmed by the expertise they bring and our willingness to build the path as we walk it together. Our leadership role in the Movement for Black Lives has allowed us to bring the experiences and work of Black, queer, Southern leaders into an ecology of brilliant Black-led organizations. We also have the gift of being in deep, long-standing relationship with the Georgia Latino Alliance for Human Rights, the Astraea Lesbian Foundation, the Audre Lorde Project, and so many other incredible ride-or-die organizations.

With all that we have done together, we do not have all the answers. Conservatives and the fringe right continue to rev up their attacks on our communities while moving a malicious agenda. They seek to steal and destroy the infrastructure we have built and the important and life-saving wins that we claim. They continue to separate, cage, and kill our people. They have organized themselves into the White House. Long before this administration, we decided that we would be a fighting organization and that our charge is to build a political home that can strengthen the resolve of our people to fight and win. We refuse to become weary in the face of fascism because our fight isn't about them. It has and will always be about us and our people.

To every person who makes up us, thank you for another year of showing up, of taking to the streets, of offering coins and meals. We are deeply grateful both for your sacred trust in SONG, as well as your principled critique and generous suggestions on how we can be better. See you in 2019!

*Mary Hooks*  
*Roberto Tijerina*  
Co-Directors



We dedicate this report to a visionary artist, cultural worker and SONG member Beatriz Carmen Mendoza (1980 - 2018). Beatriz created SONG's 20th anniversary lantern tree poster, our Free From Fear poster, illustrated the Cash Bail Blues cantastoria in collaboration with SONG members, and founded an artist residency at her farm called Sparklebark, as a retreat for other SONG members to share creative space. She transitioned far too soon.

**BEA, WE LOVE YOU, WE MISS YOU, AND THANK YOU.**





**“FOR OUR NEXT 25 YEARS** I dream of SONG communities, connected to each other, in every corner of the defeated Southern insurgency. With cash bail ended and immigration as a right, we move closer to Justice; powered by the hope we see in each others eyes. Sí, se puede!”

**- PAT HUSSAIN, SONG CO-FOUNDER**



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**“I HOPE WE WILL PROVIDE LEADERSHIP** in a united national effort to end tribalism and exclusion, replacing it with a comprehensive vision for how people can have self-determination and collective responsibility, while ensuring everyone is treated with respect, dignity, and fairness.”

**- SUZANNE PHARR, SONG CO-FOUNDER**



## SONG's Agenda

On grey mountaintops, through summer thunderstorms, in community centers, and in church halls, in 2018 we asked ourselves: What will it take to build a South rooted in abolition, Black feminism, respect for the land, and gender and sexual sovereignty? A South that is worthy of our people and that we can offer with pride to the generations of feisty LGBTQ activists and organizers and our children who come after us? What will it take to not just reactively put out fires but strategically make our own, rooted in our politics? After 25 years of service, we have an idea.

### **BUILD CAMPAIGNS WITH VISIONARY DEMANDS AND SHARP TACTICS TO MEET THE MOMENT**

This year, we re-committed to moving at our own pace, and to not be steamrolled by big advocacy shops and out-of-touch lawyers. Our goal has always been to do slow, steady, respectful work that makes room for those who are suffering the consequences of money bail, pretrial detention, and criminalization—so that we can develop and execute a strategy that eliminates politically motivated exploitation and over-policing of poor Black and Brown communities.

We are committed to moving away from risk assessment models sweeping the nation and move towards a needs assessment model with infinitely broader community-based support than we currently receive from our elected officials. As our folks have seen in Virginia, a statewide risk assessment model continues to stack up a laundry list of presumptions against bond to keep people inside of cages. Throughout the year, we introduced local visions for how to support our community with mental health care, addiction support, and housing support. SONG members and comrades across the country have sounded the alarm that our demands must be visionary and specific. If presumptions against bond or judicial discretion keep people in cages, it is not enough to just end money bail. We must altogether end pretrial detention, wherein people are detained before their trials because their families can't pay exorbitant bail costs.

This year, we have been blessed with the strategic vision of our comrades at Mijente and the Transgender Law Center's Black LGBTQIA+ Migrant Project to hold space for a deeper dive into conversations around how deportation and incarceration operate from the same framework of the Prison Industrial Complex. We have discerned which local and national fights we are best positioned to take on in order to abolish ICE—because we desperately need broader and stronger solidarity between Black, Brown, immigrant, and poor and working-class communities in deed and not just in word.



**“DURING THE NEXT QUARTER CENTURY** of SONG, we will own land, build communities and continue the tradition of loving on each other. Our determination to dismantle oppression and speak our truths Free From Fear, will generate hope for those not yet born.”

**- MISS CHERRY H**



**“WITH SONG IN ITS 25TH YEAR,** we still know there is no liberation in isolation. Our continued hope and activism for peace, justice, and equality come recognizing that we are all part of one another. Our multi-cultural, multi-racial, and anti-racist organizing can stop attacks on people and democracy.”

**- MANDY CARTER, SONG CO-FOUNDER**



## SONG's Agenda

### TRAIN UP HUNGRY, HUMBLE LEADERS WILLING TO DO WHAT IT TAKES.

Through our programs, including our ongoing Free From Fear campaigns, regional working groups, fellowship program, and regional Lorde's Werq; Black Leadership Development Cohort, we are training a new generation of Southern justice fighters. We've long known that we need leaders who are willing and prepared to engage in conflict and confrontation with the ultimate goal of real redistribution of power from the few to the many.

At Gaycation, our annual sweaty kinship gathering, we practiced holding a container for conflict transformation in the form of a "Struggle is Ceremony" tent. This tent included coaching on how to practice principled struggle with our comrades, chapters, and the alliances we form and participate in. Principled struggle is a practice that comes from Mao Tse-tung, a Chinese communist revolutionary. In his 1937 pamphlet, *Combat Liberalism*, he defines the practice of liberalism plainly: "To let things slide for the sake of peace and friendship when a person has clearly gone wrong . . . Or to touch on the matter lightly instead of going into it thoroughly, so as to keep on good terms. . . To say nothing to people to their faces but to gossip behind their backs. . . [T]o say as little as possible while knowing perfectly well what is wrong, to be worldly wise and play safe and seek only to avoid blame."

When we are principled in our struggle and our political lines are clear, our tensions and disagreements can build our resilience, courage, and political alignment. While we train up, we must remember that struggle and disagreement signify an opportunity to build and be in better relationship.

### FIND THE PEOPLE WHO ARE LOOKING FOR US AND INVITE THEM INTO THE WORK.

We must grow. SONG's theory of change necessitates that as we organize to shift power and build beloved community in the South—centering vision, hope, desire, and resiliency—we must also support institutionally oppressed people in building organizations and developing a base. This year, we have found our folks going door-to-door, canvassing in support of our End Money Bail campaigns, dancing at Latinx nights, and undertaking collective bail-out actions. Still, we need more people willing to talk to strangers, to grow in the service of movement, and to work. We also need more coordination, organization, and training on how to move a team of people in alignment with a shared goal, as well as how to stay accountable to each other.

After 25 years of cross-race, cross-class Southern organizing, we know that we all have a role to play to get free. In 2019, we intend to build and develop even more strategic campaigns to end money bail, pretrial detention, and to abolish ICE. We intend to strengthen our leadership development pipeline so that SONG leaders are addressing conflict with grace and a commitment to movement broadly, as well as building powerful chapters with the muscle to win. We intend to build out our regional working groups so that any LGBTQ Southerner with eyes on liberation can offer their time and talents to the work. This includes our newest rural and small-town working group and our political education working group, which will help shepherd SONG leaders through organization-wide political education and sharpen our abolitionist values and vision.

In this time of increasing threats to our self-determination as LGBTQ people, Black people, poor people, people of color, and immigrants, it is clearer than ever that we must cultivate the strength to build a movement that will fight for all of us.



**"I COUNT SONG AMONG THE THREE** great loves of my life, behind my children and my partner. That is because I know that without SONG so many people changing the South now would not have had the political home to connect the dots between our economics, race and sexual and gender sovereignty. Here's to another 25 years building the Southern leaders that the South needs."

**- KENDRA JOHNSON**

**"THAT OUR QUEER SOUTHERN KINDRED** get to live out our longing, desires, and manifest home to our greatest and deepest wholistic needs. That politically we set the table, with a vision of liberation that honors our full dignity and belonging."

**- JARDYN LAKE**



**"MY HOPE IS FOR SONG** to continue to be a feminist harbor for southern LGBTQI folks who are committed to justice and liberation for all! We are a growing political family and my endless hope is we continue to welcome folks like and unlike us to further the our collective homegrown solutions, visions and movements!"

**- PAULINA HELM-HERNANDEZ**

**"I ENVISION THE NEXT GENERATION** of SONG to harness the energy of legacy, strength and resolute we have cultivated as an organization. We carry a powerful shared history, and with supportive community leadership, we can dismantle the oppressive vice of patriarchy and forge a true Queer Liberation! ¡Viva la Revolución!"

**- ROBERT-JOHN HINOJOSA**





**“I SEE SONG BEING ABLE TO FULLY SUPPORT** its members and elders on some type of land with most of our needs if not all taken care of. Hopefully the world adapts to qtpoc led commune spaces and violence is unnecessary.”

**- MURPH**



**“WHAT ARE YOUR HOPES AND DREAMS** for the next 25 years of SONG within the vision of transforming the South? I dream that SONG has land, and our own southern spaces for people to train up and build together, make art, and thrive in the South! I dream that we are no longer incarcerated, criminalized and pathologized for who we are and that we are able to center our physical/emotional/psychic/spiritual and political well being!”

**- CARA PAGE**



**“THIS YEAR I MOVED BACK TO DURHAM,** and I have been so satisfied to be back in the South and to be rolling with SONG's Durham chapter and our work across the region. I continue to be inspired by the brilliance and dedication of a new generation of SONGsters and I look forward to our work together next year.”

**- MAB SEGREST, SONG CO-FOUNDER**



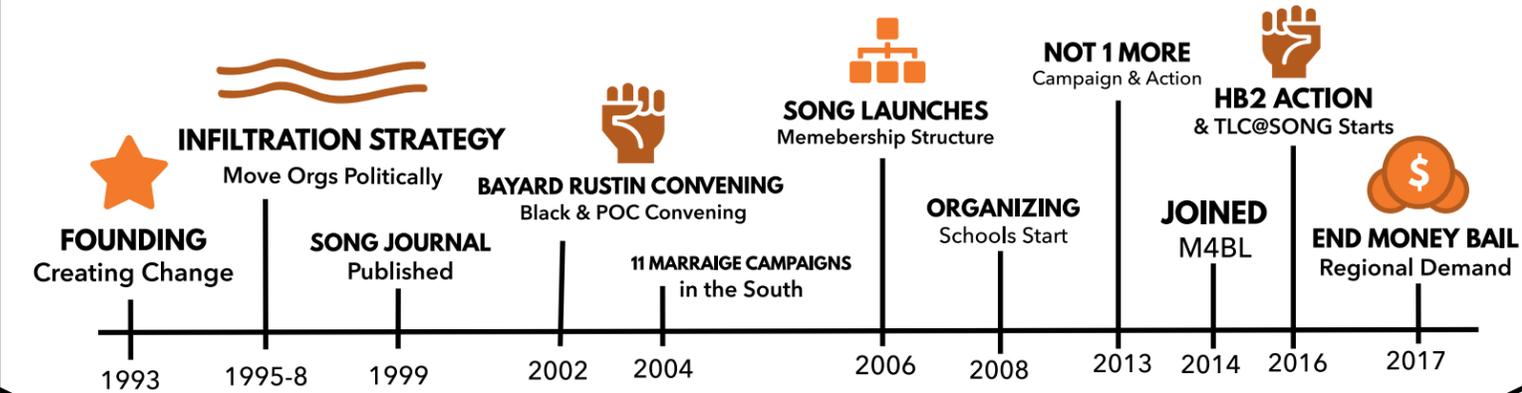
**“ASK ME HOW RIVERS AND OCEANS** change over 25 years, or how a steady breeze transforms the South. Similarly, ask me for a vision of a 50-year-old SONG with members not yet born, with dreams not yet dreamt. This openness to infinite possibility cradled in a kindred network, undaunted by past, present, and future horror, ever rising and rooting, awaits us in 2043 as it awaits us now.”

**- HIEU TRAN**



# SONG's Snapshot

**25** years of **SONG**  
SOUTHERNERS ON NEW GROUND



MILES TRAVELED BY MEMEBERS & STAFF:

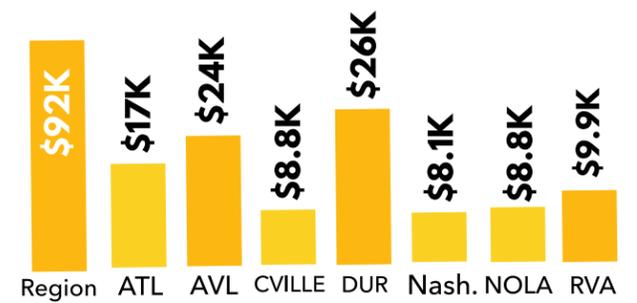
**276,960**

**SONG CHAPTERS:**

- Richmond, VA - Since 2013
- Durham, NC - Since 2013/14
- Atlanta, GA - Since 2015
- Nashville, TN - Since 2018
- Birmingham, AL - Since 2018

**MEMBER LEADERS: 167**

**WORKING GROUPS: 7**



**2018 DONATIONS**  
Black Mamas Bail Out Action



**“IN THE NEXT 25 YEARS,** I dream of SONG continuing to be a political home for visionary feminism, visionary queerness, and visionary politics. I dream of it as a place that develops the leadership of thousands of LGBTQ people, women of all walks of life, working class people, and Southerners.”

**- CAITLIN BREEDLOVE**



**25 YEARS AGO,** SONG was born out of a powerful desire for home and for kinship. Since then, we have searched for each other to break Southern LGBTQ isolation and to build whole lives for those of us coming home, finding home, and making home here in the South.

We know this land intimately. As Southern queer, trans, and GNC folks, we come from the valleys and hills; the beaches, swamps, bayous, and rivers; the dirt roads, abandoned mills, and quiet creeks that twist through our home towns. We hold in our collective memory the pain of this place: the lynchings, the bloody soil, and the stolen land that lies beneath our feet, as well as the molten layers of oppression and resistance that inform our collective work each day.

For years, we’ve dreamed of a South transformed into a place where we can walk the streets of our cities and towns deeply in love with each other, grounded in our joy and living beyond fear. Hundreds of SONG members and supporters have put their hands to the plow in service of this vision. Together we have built kinship and reshaped this place we call home through community organizing and campaign work, through cultural organizing and revolutionary art, through regional convenings and intimate front porch conversations, through friendships and the struggle that comes with loving one another fiercely.

Southern LGBTQ, working-class, Black, and immigrant people are no strangers to state violence, but in the last two years we have survived attacks on our families, our children, and our livelihoods unlike any we’ve seen in decades. The Trump administration and the right wing have joined forces to dismantle the social safety net, militarize the police, privatize healthcare, detain and deport our undocumented loved ones, and dehumanize our transgender kin. Their efforts to wreak havoc on our communities have brought new urgency to our intention to build a home and defend each other.

This is why SONG has come back to a long-held dream: the acquisition of land, by our people, and for our people, in the name of freedom, joy, and sanctuary. We need a space to gather and break bread; to dream, strategize, and care for each other; to heal and tend the Earth.

We imagine this land as an offering to movement: a home in the broadest sense where we can make our visions concrete. The dreaming of what all this land could be has already begun. We invite you—members and Southern comrades—to share your visions and questions with us at [takeaction@southernsonnewground.org](mailto:takeaction@southernsonnewground.org).

Will there be acres of gardens hand-tilled and tended by queer Southern farmers? Will we build an apiary in the forest and stir the honey into our tea? Will this be a place where we expand our political strategy over long weekends together and host convenings that build movement muscle? Will we breathe life into a people’s apothecary and create the balms we need in this time?

*We are standing at the threshold of this project, ready to break ground on the gardens and set foot into the structures that will incubate the dreams of Southern movement leaders for generations to come. Our goal is to raise \$1 million. Will you invest in this dream with us?*



**CLICK HERE TO DONATE**

**“A 25 YEAR HORIZON FEELS** very far and difficult to see especially when I look back across all that SONG has been, but the dream I would offer for SONG at 50 years is that we are an interdependent network of resilience communities practicing living in liberation together and taking forms as varied as our people and our landscape. I see children being nurtured in multi-generational and expansive communities where they know they belong and are loved by all. I see leadership circles committed to growing our capacity for connection and our awareness of interdependence. I see the saplings of liberation growing strong under the shade of SONG’s flourishing tree.”

**- AESHA RASHEED**



**“OVER THE NEXT QUARTER-CENTURY,** I pray that SONG enrolls hundreds of movement workers in work that ensures just policies and resources needed by Black, Latinx, Asian, Native queer people and our allies. I want to live to see a South where black and brown movement people across generation and gender love each other fiercely, listen to and learn from one another.”

**- CRAIG WASHINGTON**





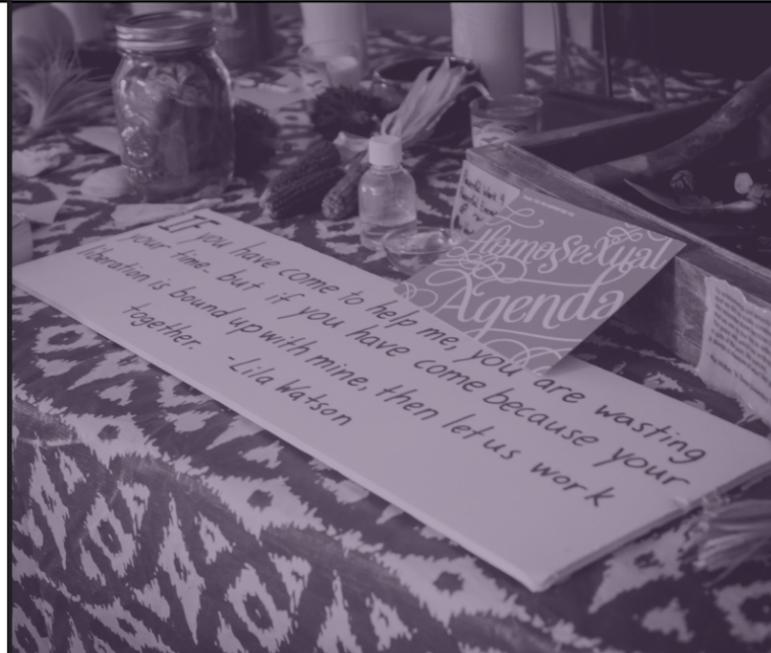
**“IN TIMES LIKE THESE, THE NECESSITY OF A** regional community of Dangerous Homosexuals, radical queers, freedom fighting trans and gender nonconforming folks, is undeniable. Centering the leadership of LGBTQUI folks in the South and building movement infrastructure and beloved community together is what will save this country. No one does that like Southerners on New Ground. Proud to be one in the number!”

**- ASH-LEE HENDERSON**



**“IN THE CURRENT POLITICAL STATE OF** things and with fast moving changes in technology and science, it’s hard to imagine what 25 years will look like from now. But one thing is clear - what we do now will affect tremendously where we are in 25 years, and toward that, SONG’s brilliant and creative leading edge work will be a beacon and a bedrock in building a transformed South and home for all of us.”

**- PAM MCMICHAEL, SONG CO-FOUNDER**



**“DEAR SWEET SONG, I LOVE YOU** for ALL of it. and we continue... \*As Sweet Honey in the Rock’s Stay on the Battlefield play\*”

**- KAI BARROW**



**OUR COMMUNITIES HAVE BEEN TESTED IN COUNTLESS WAYS** in 2018, but we are still here, shining, and able to continue our necessary work because of our members, supporters, and comrade organizations. And for that, we are incredibly grateful.

Thank you to all those who have put in long hours and showed up to meeting after meeting. Thanks to our chapters and crews who are running campaigns to end money bail across the South, along with building regional working groups. Thanks to our Bail Out crews helping us reunite Black families. Beyond thanks to our Forever SONG family for their love and support. Thank you to our donors who financially support our organization and help us keep the lights on. Thank you to all of our members who show their love for SONG across the region. Also, thank you to Pat Hussain, Pam McMichael, Suzanne Pharr, Mandy Carter, Mab Segrest, and our ancestor Joan Garner for building this vision, legacy, and dreaming of an organization that thousands call their political home.