



## **2014 End of Year Report SOUTHERNERS ON NEW GROUND**

250 Georgia Avenue Suite 315  
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[www.southernersonnewground.org](http://www.southernersonnewground.org)



## DEARLY BELOVED SONG FAMILY,

As LGBTQ people, violence and repression mark and shape so many of our lives. Living as people of color, small town dwellers, immigrants, women and folks workin' to make a buck, we carry the history and the reality of this daily. But we are also fighting back. This year brought new opportunities to do that, with new partners, and in new ways. LGBTQ people are not outsiders, we are not 'things', and we are tired of being asked to prove that we are not 'criminals.' We live in a country that criminalizes our very existence and works to starve us out, economically and physically, from power. Because of these conditions, and *despite* these conditions, we continue to stay rooted in our vision of Queer Liberation. This year has been a call and response, an invitation for us all to ***come out, destroy fear and unleash power*** through collective work and collective action.

In 2014 we witnessed: the murders of Michael Brown, Yvette Smith, and many other people of color by the police, the trials attacking Marissa Alexander and Monica Jones, both congressional and presidential stalling on passing meaningful legislation that would decriminalize immigrants, and the rise in violence against transgender, gay, and lesbian people (See the 2013 Report by the National Coalition of Anti-Violence Programs at <http://bit.ly/2013AVPreport>). We watched President Obama sign an executive order prohibiting federal contractors from discrimination based on sexual orientation or gender identity, the Supreme Court's actions that led LGBTQ couples to flock to local court houses to marry, the beauty of thousands converging for the Climate Justice March, and the sustained uprising in Ferguson, grounded in youth, hip-hop, Black, and queer women of color leadership, and a different vision for the future.



At SONG, we enter the beginning of our third decade of rabble rousing in the South for Queer Liberation inside of these rapidly shifting sands of politics and economics. Amidst the stories we have been told about our places and roles in society based on our races, our genders, our economic standings, and our sexualities, we face increasing violence embedded in our communities. It would seem an impossible mountain was before us but, despite these challenges, we are graced by the possibilities of creating our futures together. Real courage and risk taking in organizing like we have seen this year, especially from leaders of color, proves over and over again that we are stronger, braver, and more powerful than we are taught to believe.

We know that organizations like SONG are needed as much now, if not more, than we were in 1993. How do we know? The growth of our membership in size and involvement, the light we felt at Gaycation 2014 and our Bayard Rustin People of Color Convening, and the support our membership received for #ShutdownICE and #BlackLivesMatter actions. The response to our work shows us that we need to continue to build an organization that is fortified, stable, agile and responsive to both our crises and our desires.

In this moment we need flexible and courageous leaders who think broadly across communities and issues *and* who can focus in on impactful and clear campaign demands. It is crucial that we have organizers who are connected to each other, who struggle together and support each other, and who can train new leaders. We need campaigns with vision, heart, courage and strategy to give us the opportunity to confront power face to face, with wins that matter concretely to our communities, and with opportunities to build our muscle to change the conditions of our daily lives while we advance the transformation of society. SONG's focus has been on growing not just for growth's sake but instead to meet these needs.

In many ways, as gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, and queer people, we are more visible in the public eye than ever before. This visibility relies on our coming out in the name of our dignity and the trailblazing power and work of leaders like Laverne Cox and Cece McDonald. But just as our silence has never protected us, visibility in the public sphere alone does not grant us the freedom and liberation that we desire. While we celebrate the sanctioned partnerships of many of our loved ones, and all the work that it has taken to get here, we face many ongoing challenges: lack of access to basic protections under the law; poverty due to homophobia, transphobia and racism; access to relevant healthcare and mental health services; and the deep need we have to live free from fear and violence, criminalization and deportation. ***But the moment is ripe!*** We have the opportunity to decide *on our own terms* what kind of movement we will be. Will marriage be enough for us? Will we stand by as some of us build white picket fences and others of us are thrown behind prison bars?

We know this is not enough. We believe in the power of building off the best of our LGBTQ history and legacy. We believe in the possibility of liberation in our lifetime! We believe in the power of the collective us to build many ways of getting to a future where we live free from fear! As you read more about our work in 2014 below, we hope that you will continue to engage us and push us to be the organization of joy, power, and vision of LGBTQ Southerners for 2015 and beyond.

With love and gratitude,  
SONG Staff

**Save the date for Gaycation 2015 June 11<sup>th</sup> through 14<sup>th</sup>**

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# The Year In Review

Over 2014, SONG's membership has engaged key fights in local sites that we have been working in over the past few years. These included the call for police accountability over the shooting of Jesus Huerta in Durham, NC; the struggle to end the harmful development of Shockoe Bottom in Richmond, VA, that would have included the uprooting of a slave burial ground; and the effort to undo the politicized budget cuts in South Carolina that targeted LGBTQ curriculum in state funded institutions. This work reminds us of the importance of gathering not just to connect with one another but to also build our skills to confront power that wages fear and to create Beloved Community. Though these campaigns are different from each other, in each site our members had the chance to learn about campaign building while addressing important wins and demands.

Together as we took on these hot-button local political battles, we also faced the realities of racial profiling, hyper-policing, violence, and the incarceration and deportation of our communities based on race, class, gender, sexuality, and immigration status. So, for the past year, we have been building to better address this central LGBTQ issue of our time, the criminalization of our people. Likewise, we heard the deep desire from *you* for more ways to get involved with SONG in your local communities and regionally.

Because SONG believes that change is connected to our ability to build leaders to take collective action for self-determination, in 2014 we buckled down on building an organization that is stronger, more responsive, and visionary to confront the systems and institutions we face daily that function to cage, deport, and control our lives, our bodies, and our decisions. In order to do this, we have focused on refining SONG to support a regional membership that is connected to one another and that is equipped with the skills and political and spiritual will to initiate and strengthen organizing to confront power.

## Campaigns, Coalitions, and Alliances

The **Not1More Deportation Campaign** is a national campaign that allows SONG to align and take action with other grassroots organizations committed to ending the policing, caging, and deportation of undocumented people. With the campaign we have:

- Shifted the national dialogue from Comprehensive Immigration Reform to ending deportations
- Participated in civil disobedience, marches, and rallies across the region from Fairfax, VA, to Atlanta, GA
- Led the effort to get more than 50 LGBTQ organizations across the country to endorse the campaign
- Successfully engaged the Congressional Equality Caucus, with Familia: Trans Queer Liberation Movement, through bold action, to issue a letter to President Obama for full LGBTQ inclusion in any expanded administrative relief package for undocumented immigrants

**Local ICE Detainer Campaigns**, as part of our work with the Not1More Deportation Campaign, are a part of our ongoing coalition and alliance work to end local police enforcement of federal ICE (Immigration & Customs Enforcement) detainers which have been found to often violate the Fourth Amendment. We are:

- Co-anchoring a campaign with the Georgia Latino Alliance for Human Rights (GLAHR) in the GA #Not1More Coalition which led to a victory to end enforcement of ICE holds in Fulton County, GA
- Co-anchoring a campaign in Harrisonburg, VA, to end local enforcement of ICE holds
- Working to support the expansion of other local campaigns in both Georgia and Virginia

**Free From Fear Campaigns** In the second half of 2014 we are building local Free From Fear Campaigns that are connected to regional and national strategy to shift the power and culture in Southern cities with populations of 250,000 or less. We are doing this by:

- Piloting a local campaign in Durham, NC, to build a Free From Fear anti-discrimination ordinance that holds the police and city council accountable for profiling based on race, gender, sexual orientation, and immigration status. It institutes policy at the municipal level that ends these practices and changes the culture of how we think about public safety
- Working with SONG membership in other cities across the South to assess the possibility of building more Free From Fear Campaigns
- Joining the Get Your Rights Network to work with and learn from other LGBTQ people of color led organizations that have been combating criminalization for decades
- Continuing to play a strategic role in the Southern Movement Assembly (SMA) to connect to other regional organizations that are working on issues around criminalization

### **Strategic Coalitions & Alliances**

All of our work remains committed to advancing national and international liberation movements. We believe that many of the policy and system change work we seek to advance has to happen in collaboration with other organizations and groups that share our values and represent other affected communities. We are proud to work with:

- Southeast Immigrant Rights Network
- Southern Movement Assembly
- Transgender Law Center
- Black Lives Matter
- Federal LGBTQ Criminal Justice Advocacy Coalition
- Get Your Rights Network
- Local and statewide organizations like the Georgia Latino Alliance for Human Rights in the Georgia Not1More Coalition and the North Carolina NAACP in both Moral Mondays and Freedom Summer

## Culture, Kinship, and Communications

### Strengthening A Southern LGBTQ Kinship Network

**Gaycation 2014** in southern Georgia brought together over 120 members of our intergenerational, multi-racial, Southern base for three nights of LGBTQ Southern magic from elder story circles, to late night twerking competitions by the pool, to political discussions and skill shares.

**The Bayard Rustin LGBTQ People of Color Convening**, held at the Highlander Center in Tennessee, brought together over 30 LGBTQ people of color from SONG membership between the ages of 19 and 65. Our time together illuminated issues of criminalization in our communities, connected us more deeply to each other across the region, and provided a much-needed space for healing.

**Out South**, a 90 person multi-racial gathering of Southern LGBTQ leaders, will come together at the Penn Center in South Carolina in December 2014 to build shared strategies, analysis, and organizing skills for Southern LGBTQ-led organizing.

### Building Tools & Training to Support Local Organizing

**Organizing Schools** Back by popular demand, we've overhauled our flagship program to better meet the needs of our membership and to lay the essential groundwork for future organizing. This three-day training builds concrete organizing skills, shared political analysis, and culture and resiliency tools. We are currently working to host organizing schools in Yadkinville, NC, Harrisonburg, VA, and Atlanta, GA.

#### **People's Movement Assemblies & Town Halls**

"Hot & Bothered" Town Halls in Durham, NC, and Atlanta, GA, work to engage local LGBTQ people to build collective consciousness and solutions to the conditions of criminalization.

**Multi-Lingual Capacity** is one key way SONG is working to build an organization that doesn't just fight for, but includes in its leadership, those directly affected and targeted for their immigration status. We are strengthening our resources and infrastructure to make this possible.

### Strategic Communications

As we organize with others, we do strategic communications to amplify our shared values, our stories, our struggles and victories in the region and nationally. This helps us to broaden our reach in places where people are the most isolated, and to give folks the tools they need to grow where they are.

- Small Town South Report downloaded and viewed over 700 times
- Blue Ribbon Commission report released in coalition with the #Not1More Deportation Campaign
- Social media engagement and media coverage from #shutdownICE, LGBTQ Equality Caucus, and #blacklivesmatter actions that reached tens of thousands
- Soon to be released *Liberation In Our Lifetime: 20 Years of Southerners On New Ground*, commemorative book

## Take Action with SONG in 2015



**How can you help?** Become a monthly donor to SONG, make a one-time donation, or become a member and join a Southern LGBTQ membership that is working the build the future we know is possible! It's easy! Visit our [website](#) and click the "donate" button!

**Already a member?** SONG members are the backbone of this organization! Consider joining one or more of our regional crews that help strengthen SONG to confront power, build a kinship network, and transform the politics and culture of the South. Got any of these skills?

**Campaign Organizing:** Identifying problems, cutting issues, and building local power to fight back against unjust systems and policies. If you have campaign experience and want to get involved, contact [kate@southernersonnewground.org](mailto:kate@southernersonnewground.org)

**Communications:** Writing and copy-editing, media relation's support, graphic designing, caption writing, photography, video editing, etc. Contact [serena@southernersonnewground.org](mailto:serena@southernersonnewground.org)

**Culture Jammerz:** Screen printing, artists, thespians, musicians, culture crafters, dancers, and more! Contact [kate@southernersonnewground.org](mailto:kate@southernersonnewground.org)

**Fundraising:** Planning fundraising events, engaging donors, and supporting regional grassroots fundraising efforts. Contact [elias@southernersonnewground.org](mailto:elias@southernersonnewground.org)

**Sexy 'Terps:** Interpreters, translators, and trainers to help us build our multi-lingual capacity. Contact [salem@southernersonnewground.org](mailto:salem@southernersonnewground.org)