



S  **NG**

SOUTHERNERS ON NEW GROUND

WE ORGANIZE
WE BUILD POWER
WE WIN

2019 END OF YEAR REPORT

We do this work for our people to exist in their full dignity, free from danger, free from ridicule and free from fear. We dedicate this report to Black trans women, those currently leading, fighting and building our communities and those who are now our ancestors guiding our steps. The abuse, exploitation and murders of Black trans women is a direct attack on our communities and existence.

To our Black trans ancestors guiding our steps: As you watch over us, may we understand anti-Black transmisogyny as a charge to support Black trans women as pillars of our community. May we honor your contributions in our lives and may we never forget your mark on this world. May we honor your memory through this work. May you rest in power and peace.

DANA MARTIN

JAZZALINE WARE

ASHANTI CARMON

MUHLAYSIA BOOKER

MICHELLE 'TAMIKA' WASHINGTON

PARIS CAMERON

CHYNAL LINDSEY

CHANEL SCURLOCK

ZOE SPEARS

DENALI BERRIES STUCKEY

TRACY SINGLE

BUBBA WALKER

KIKI FANTROY

JORDAN COFER

PEBBLES LADIME "DIME" DOE

BEE LOVE SLATER

JAMAGIO JAMAR BERRYMAN

ITALI MARLOWE

BRIANNA "BB" HILL

JOHANA 'JOA' MEDINA

LAYLEEN POLANCO

LETTER FROM THE CO-DIRECTORS

BELOVEDS,

What a year it has been! We are blessed to have made it and grateful for the many opportunities in which we have exercised our will to fight together. Undoubtedly, Southerners On New Ground is growing in ways that we couldn't have imagined a few years ago.

While many of us are glued to our devices carefully noting the antics playing out on Capitol Hill, there is as much, if not more, happening right in our own backyards. It's a never-ending episode of "White Men Gone Wild," spitting out the ideologies of white supremacy, patriarchy, misogyny, and xenophobia like chewed tobacco into a bottomless spittoon of unfettered capitalism and neoliberal economic policies. The platforms are new, but the strategy is not--starving the poor to feed the rich and using state violence and military force to squash revolt.

These actors may not all be from Southern plantations, who profited from the labor of enslaved Africans through bondage and cruelty to build their own wealth, but they are of the same lineage. A lineage that starts with the genocide and subjugation of Native peoples while stealing their land and continues to this day with the exploitation of migrant laborers in fields and food-processing plants. It's a lineage with a direct line from the patrolling system used to catch escaped enslaved Black people to the modern carceral system used to keep majority Black and brown bodies in cages.

Those in power are also beneficiaries of a well-executed Southern political strategy that has been in play since the 1960's. The goal of that strategy was to build the right-leaning white voter base and consolidate the political power of a white, imperialist, neo-liberal government on local, state, federal and international levels. The modern day executors of this strategy have competing and conflicting ideologies and goals, such as the separation of church and state and the role of government. Despite these contradictions, they are deeply aligned around core tenets and beliefs. This alignment streamlines their strategies where their politics diverge and contributes to the continuous success of their efforts.

At the center of their alignment is the belief that they are superior to Black, Indigenous and brown people and anyone who is not part of the white upper class status quo. This includes poor whites and some Jewish folks that refuse to assimilate into whiteness, who understand that their struggles are connected to Black and brown people. These upper class white folks are aligned in their desire to control, contain, and exploit our people for profit, either through our labor or our detention. They are aligned in, and skillful at, exploiting the wedge issues among those who are suffering under their regime. To uphold their ideologies, this lineage of people, from their ancestors to their modern-day heirs, have built the colonized and colonizing United States of America. They would have us rot in its corporations, media, institutions, policies, laws, and culture to feed their dominance.

We have to be clear in who we are and what we are doing. Some of the questions we have been wrestling with in SONG and movement are: What are our shared hopes, desires and points of alignment? Are we ready to take power? Are we clear that no one is free until everyone is free, and that any gains won at the expense of our people is at best hollow and temporary, and at worst replicates the methods of our oppressors? For all the queer magic manifesting in SONG, we are not immune to the fuckery and the bullshit. Some of it is visited upon us, and some of it is homegrown. 2020 will be a year to see how the Left will or will not unify to advance our vision of liberation. Will

we continue to move away from each other because we fail each others' litmus tests of political orthodoxy? Or will we center the steadfast work of building and maintaining relationships, taking political risks, and meeting the organizing moments in a way that is worthy of our people? Will we move at mass scale, with an understanding that no one organization, community or ideology can triumph alone and that it will take all of us to get free? Collective struggle in service to collective liberation is not mutually exclusive to centering our particular lived experiences. We must be prepared to do our part as both a movement-building and a unity-building organization, to recognize intervention and growth opportunities, move on them, and use them to create entry points into organizing work.

We can expect much more turmoil and the political climate may leave us feeling unsettled or dismayed. But this is not the time for us to be distracted or discouraged. More than anything, we must be committed to organizing, and willing to exert political will to do what must be done to bend the arc of justice towards freedom. We better know what time it is, y'all! Straight up, we must stop unprincipled struggle across movement. There are tensions and contradictions that we have yet to grapple with. Real talk, we must resonate together at a higher level. If we intend to do this work and win, we must quit with the navel gazing and purity politics. It's not a question of whether or not we need unity; the question is what are we willing to do to actually be united.

At SONG, we made a decision years ago that we were going to be a fighting organization. We were and remain steadfast in our charge to grow, not just in our scale, but in our resilience, our politics, our leadership, and our strategies. We refuse to be a one trick pony. We must shapeshift and transform when internal and external forces demand that we do so and be steady in our invitation to work with anyone willing to put their hand to the plow. We will continue to advance the work of the Free From Fear campaigns across the South in order to end pre-trial detention and melt I.C.E.

After months of counsel with Forever SONG family, SONG member leaders, movement OGs and sister organizations, we will be launching a 501c4 arm in 2020 to serve as new ammunition in our powerbuilding arsenal. We will move organizing strategies which will free us up to call some of our targets by their name and leave it on the dance floor in 2020.

We will continue to invest in our leadership development programs like The Lorde's Werq, The Kindred Fellowship Program and use our convening spaces as a training ground to sharpen our swords. We are super excited about Freedom Summer 2020, and mobilizing our base and our comrades inside of the Movement for Black Lives to put some boots on the ground in order to support local power building, weaken the carceral system, build the rigor and love for organizing, and honor the legacy of our comrades of 1964.

We also know that with growth comes growing pains and transitions. We take it all in stride because the ebbs and flows of movement remind us that this is part of our lineage: of resistance, of resilience, of rejoicing. We send sweet see-ya-laters to Roberto, who has been so generous with his life. We also embark into a new chapter with Serena, whose incredible leadership has given so much to this political home. To Jardyn, whose presence on SONG's board was such a sweet blessing. We welcome them into the beloved Forever SONG family!

We're ready for what's to come in 2020 and beyond, family. See y'all in the streets!

Mary Hooks & Roberto Tijerina

SONG CO-DIRECTORS

REFLECTIONS FROM OUR MEMBERS

“THE KEY LESSONS WE’VE LEARNED from moving campaign work in the last year is how jails and ICE work hand-in-hand and how the police departments collaborate. We’ve learned that we need a better systematic structure in our organization that encompasses self care and marginalized folks. We can’t move work without our people. I have learned that no matter how good an idea is, if you don’t have people to help you, and if you don’t have a good concise task to distribute, it will not work.”

GABBY SCOTT
ATLANTA CHAPTER MEMBER

“OUR WORK with Black Mamas post bail out has deepened in significant ways due to the fellows program. So much thanks to Serena Sebring for powerful leadership and for Serena and Kyla Hartsfield for chaining themselves to the gate of the jail to escalate pressure to end money bail.”

MAB SEGREST
SONG CO-FOUNDER & DURHAM MEMBER

“I THINK OUR CHAPTER, while having been around for a long time, has used a lot of 2019 to come back into alignment with each other, to figure out how we need to work internally in order to best build and move our campaign work forward. While sometimes it feels like growth has to look linear, I think we've learned to take the time to get in right relationship with each other and the communities we are working in and with.”

LAURA CHOW REEVE
RICHMOND CHAPTER MEMBER



SONG'S POLITICAL ANALYSIS

Almost three years ago, SONG demanded an end to money bail in the South under our Free From Fear campaign. The lessons learned, along with the conditions we were seeing across the region, called for an expansion in our demand to end pre-trial detention and melt I.C.E. We are continuously learning, sharpening our analysis, re-evaluating the political moment, and fighting to achieve abolitionist wins. The practice of money bail in our region as facilitated by the criminal legal system allows for the indefinite detention and caging of poor, Black, Brown and Indigenous people and our families. Our demand to Melt I.C.E. by ending all voluntary collaborations between local police and I.C.E. agencies is a call for us to recognize that the carceral state is a threat to us all. We recognize the importance of a multi-racial organizing framework that centers those most impacted by mass criminalization and deportation, and in that recognition, we seek to dismantle the false ideologies that silo and silence our kindred.

Our campaigns continue to deepen and grow as does our constituency, base, and membership. This growth has demanded that we do the work to shore up the necessary infrastructure for self-governance, autonomy, and accountability. As a result, our established and emerging chapters have broadened our campaign work and deepened our political analysis across the region.

In 2018, the Atlanta chapter won a bail reform ordinance that outlawed the use of cash bail at the municipal level for most misdemeanor, city-level, and "non-violent" offenses. While we know that this ordinance does not go far enough, this win drastically reduced the number of people detained in the Atlanta City Detention Center (ACDC) and set the stage

for this year's #CloseTheJailATL Alliance win! Because of grassroots organizations and community-led efforts, ACDC is officially being closed and repurposed into a Center for Equity. As a core member of the alliance, the Atlanta chapter of SONG is currently represented on the Task Force to Reimagine ACDC. Now, the chapter is pivoting to push for bail reform in Fulton County, where we have bailed out Black mamas for three consecutive years. SONG Atlanta members and volunteers have already reached a milestone of over 350 Fulton court observations in 2019 alone.

A deep love for our people and a spirit of unapologetic inquiry fueled SONG's Nashville chapter to develop a courtwatch program. As Nashville member leader Gicola Lane said, "Injustice happens in empty courtrooms." After observing 100+ first appearance bail hearings, our intention, language and ethos shifted from court observation to court support.

We learned that our presence is the first step to building a relationship with people directly impacted by money bail and pre-trial detention. We know all too well that the State could never show up for our people the way our kindred could. In that same vein, the Nashville chapter has a deep desire to strengthen our political analysis with a grounding in abolitionist theory. In August, the Nashville chapter launched a Political Education Working Group open to our membership and base that explored critical questions arising from our campaign work. These tools are key to our work as organizers and we must simultaneously sharpen our analysis and our practices to shift power.

SONG's Durham chapter flexed its grassroots fundraising muscle in the early part of the year by raising close to \$50,000 through partnership with the National Bail Out Collective for the Black Mama's Bail Out Action. Following the action, two members of the chapter made the decision to raise the stakes and put their bodies on the line to stop Black mamas from

going to jail. For twelve hours, they chained themselves to the gate of the Durham County Jail while members and coalition partners sang, chanted, and shut down an intersection. Two weeks later, the District Attorney released an open letter recommending judges deprioritize the use of money bail in the county of Durham. With this win comes new ground and new possibilities. The Durham chapter is now setting its sights on closing the jail altogether.

In Birmingham, our SONG chapter is demanding bail reform that includes implementation of a Needs Assessment that would increase people's ability to both get to court and access community-based legal support. This would include transportation assistance and the right for individuals to determine and adjust their own court dates. Both the Greensboro and Richmond chapters are continuing the intentional and steady work of building trust with one another, supporting the leadership of those most directly impacted, and base-building to invite community members to join the work.

Through our 3rd Black Mama's Bail Out Action, we bailed out 67 Black mamas and caregivers across the South with our highest chapter participation yet! Many of the crews that were a part of the action, including Knoxville, TN and Wilmington, NC are now in the process of launching Free From Fear campaigns and formalizing their chapter. Columbus, GA, Columbia, SC and New Orleans, LA are officially SONG chapters!

As our campaign work continues to take root and proliferate, we know that we must continue to invest in and support our members' leadership on the ground. Our 2019 Free From Fear Campaign Convergence brought together 79 campaign organizers from 14 cities and towns across the South for 3 days of training to support our local grassroots public pressure campaigns. At the convergence, we launched our brand new website enabling our members, supporters, donors, and comrades to engage with the breadth and depth of our history and current work. We also continue to draw

on the wisdom, insight and experience of our sister organization, AgitArte, by studying and utilizing guerilla and invisible theater tactics to demonstrate our courage, vision and creativity in the service of our strategy all across the region. The progression of our campaigns has taught us that we need a clear criterion for wins, and that we must proudly claim our wins in order to uplift the labor of our members. We are in an abolitionist fight to eliminate the idea that cages can be solutions to our problems. Alongside our comrades, we are building the potential to move our people from caging and criminalization to alternatives that are worthy of our people. To do this work, we need as many boots on the ground as possible. We intentionally expanded our organizing team to support burgeoning statewide work in Virginia, North Carolina, Tennessee, and Georgia.

As we grow, it is deeply important for us to stay grounded in traditions and practices that preserve our kinship network. As a membership-based organization centered in the Southern radical tradition, we continue to tend our cultural and spiritual soil. Music and chants are technologies that we employ to build community, remember and honor our lineages, connect to the spirituality of liberation work, and ground ourselves in our purpose for doing this work. Through our songs, we heal and we remember. Through our songs, we recall the practices of our ancestors. Through our songs, we reclaim our bodies, our minds and our spirits. Through our songs, we invite one another home.

As we prepare ourselves to continue to fight in 2020, it is important that we pause to reflect on lessons learned from this year's political fight. Our people are strong, brave, and in formation to change our communities. Our comrade, Mariame Kaba, reminds us, "Everything worthwhile is done with other people." It is our duty to break isolation and bring even more of our people into this work. We will continue sharpening our analysis of abolition while building the skills to keep our communities safe. These lessons pave a pathway that will lead us into 2020 with our boots on the ground and our eyes on liberation.



“IN GENERAL, one lesson we’ve learned is to be really clear about what we want and what we’re building, but also be open, and creating space to sit with it. Having time, capacity and space to dream of what we’re talking about and figure out how to integrate it in a way that isn’t carceral and isn’t intertwined with the current legal system. I think about this specifically in the context of the needs assessment work, to be able to sit with what we’re saying we want in terms of a needs assessment instead of a risk assessment.”

ERICA PERRY
NASHVILLE CHAPTER MEMBER



SONG

Queer South

“I THINK ONE THING our chapter has learned this year is how to gauge our limits to prevent over-extension and trying to be more intentional about building long-term relationships with formerly incarcerated folks through several local organizations, such as Free Hearts. Instead of re-creating the wheel, SONG Nashville is learning to continuously collaborate with other organizations that share our values, increasing the reach of our tiny but mighty presence.”

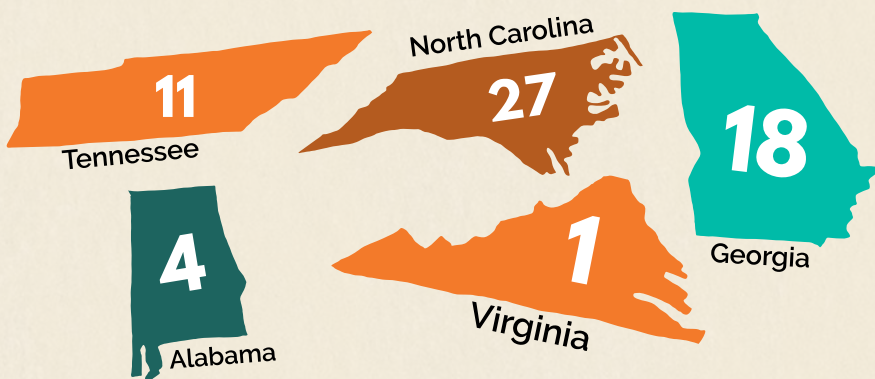
DEBORAH LILTON
NASHVILLE CHAPTER MEMBER

2019 SNAPSHOT

BLACK MAMA'S BAIL OUT ACTION

Until we **abolish bail** we have to free ourselves.

TOTAL MAMAS & CAREGIVERS BAILED OUT: 61



COALITIONS & ALLIANCES



MIJENTE
AGITARTE

NATIONAL BAIL OUT
CENTER FOR RESILIENT INDIVIDUALS, FAMILIES AND COMMUNITIES (CRIFC)

MOVEMENT FOR BLACK LIVES
TRANSGENDER LAW CENTER

GROWTH

429

MEMBERS & COUNTING

25 **10**

STAFF MEMBERS

FELLOWS

7 **35**

WORKING GROUPS

LORDE'S WERQ MEMBERS

MEMBERS AT CONVENINGS

127
GAYCATION

102
QUEER SOUTH REVIVAL

76
CAMPAIGN CONVERGENCE

19
ARTS & CULTURE TRAINING

24
QUEER SOUTH REVIVAL PRE-CONVENING

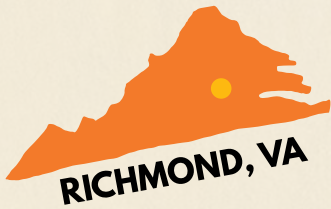
51
BAYARD RUSTIN

15
TGNC PRE-CONVENING

10
SMALL TOWN RURAL CONVENING

2019 SNAPSHOT

SONG CHAPTERS



RICHMOND, VA

MEMBER LEADERS: 7

WORK OF THE CHAPTER:

Black Mama Bail Out + Fellowship
Regular chapter meetings/events
Richmond Community Bail Fund coalition

WORKING GROUPS:

Arts and Culture
Basebuilding (GRITS - Greater Richmond Intentional Tabling Squad)



NASHVILLE, TN

MEMBER LEADERS: 15

WORK OF THE CHAPTER:

Court watched 100+ bail hearings
Direct Action to confront the Sheriff
Developed report on bail work
Statewide Black Mama's Bail Out Actions

WORKING GROUPS:

Abolitionist Political Education
Court Support/Courtwatch Leads
Social Services Crew
Arts & Culture Crew
Basebuilders
Campaign Research Squad



GREENSBORO, NC

MEMBER LEADERS: 10

WORK OF THE CHAPTER:

Black Mama Bail Out Action
Becoming a Chapter
Black Mama Bail Out Fellowship

WORKING GROUPS:

Basebuilding
Political Education
Communications



DURHAM, NC

MEMBER LEADERS: 15

WORK OF THE CHAPTER:

Black Mama Bail Out + Fellowship
Shut down Durham County Detention Center
Building base of Black members
Durham Beyond Policing coalition
Win! Change in local bail policy

WORKING GROUPS:

Arts and Culture
Research
Court Watching



BIRMINGHAM, AL

MEMBER LEADERS: 3

WORK OF THE CHAPTER:

Black Mama Bail Out Action
Needs Assessment Work
Brought in 6 new members

WORKING GROUPS:

Basebuilding



ATLANTA, GA


MEMBER LEADERS: 12

WORK OF THE CHAPTER:

Winnie Mandela Action
Magic School Bus guerrilla theatre
Infographic to display court watch data
Observed over 100 bail hearings
Interview with Atlanta municipal advocacy judge
Created report from synthesized bail data


WORKING GROUPS:

Membership
Commz & Culture
Campaigns



“DURING THE BAILOUTS, we learned how to navigate relationships with the deputy sheriff, jail receptionists, as well as guards. This was challenging because folks in these roles are agents of the state, however, after learning about the work of SONG and our campaigns to end money bail and pretrial detention, some were won over and helped increase our access to the jail where we bailed Mamas out.”

REBECCA KEEL
VIRGINIA STATEWIDE ORGANIZER

A group of people are shown in a celebratory mood, with their arms raised and hands clapping. The background is a vibrant teal color, accented with bright yellow abstract shapes that resemble stylized flames or energy bursts. The overall atmosphere is one of joy and achievement.

“THE LESSON is that we have to continue to grow our partnerships with people. Realizing that because we can't do this work all the time by ourselves, that our partnerships are very important to what we have to do. So I think we have learned to be smarter with our capacity, and to use our partnerships in ways that help increase our capacity instead of expanding capacity we do have and sort of putting it all in the wrong places.”

MARTAZE GAINES
NASHVILLE CHAPTER MEMBER

THANK YOU FROM SONG

Through all of the experimentation, challenges and wins, our communities continue to hold us and be everything we need. All of the work highlighted in this report, on social media and discussed in the world is credited to our people. All across the region, SONG members have shown that nothing is stronger than people power. From all of our members grinding to change the material conditions for future generations, to our supporters that throw down money for this liberation work, to our comrade organizations working with us in partnership and our Forever SONG family that remind us where we come from. Thank you. We are accountable to you, this legacy of work and this beloved community.

If you are reading this and are longing for a political home, we encourage you to join SONG or a movement building organization fighting for liberation.