

# Gulf South Rising 2015



The Seas Are Rising... AND SO ARE WE!

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Gulf South Rising was a regional movement of coordinated actions and events to highlight the impact of the global climate crisis on the Gulf South region. Through collaborative events and actions around strategic dates in 2015, Gulf South Rising demanded a just transition away from extractive industries, discriminatory policies, and unjust practices that hinder equitable recovery from disaster and impede the development of sustainable communities.

This year-long initiative

- 1) built regional movement infrastructure;
- 2) connected and convened frontline communities around collective healing and ecological equity;
- 3) advanced regional efforts of indigenous tribal and land sovereignty and
- 4) shifted the regional narrative from resilience to resistance.



The Gulf South Rising (GSR) Strategy Document was created through a five-year community process anchored by the Gulf Coast Center for Law & Policy using People’s Movement Assemblies (PMAs) as the method for community-based issue mapping and agenda setting. The PMA process allowed frontline community members of the Gulf South to collectively identify their own problems and vision their own solutions. Notes and decisions from five years of these PMAs across the region were synthesized into the Gulf South Rising strategy document. The Gulf South Rising Strategy Document principles for moving together, defined broad goals and specific objectives for the initiative, and structured collective regional actions around the 2015 calendar year.

The year 2015 was a movement year for the Gulf South and the Nation. Important “Movement Dates” included 50 years since the Selma March, 10 years since Hurricane Katrina, 5 years since the BP Deepwater Horizon Explosion, 40 years since the end of the Vietnam War, 50 years since the Voting Rights Act, and many more. Through shared work around these “Movement Dates” the Gulf South Rising initiative aimed to amplify the good work continuously being done in the Gulf South and connect authentic community across the region.

While crafted around commemorations. The Gulf South Rising initiative was strategically more than the sum of its parts. A regional collective of residents developed and supported leadership on the ground through the shared work of many of these commemorations. The GSR initiative created a culture of engagement and decision-making rooted in true democracy, trained local advocates on the intersection of climate change and social justice, and ensured that stories were told authentically by the people of the Gulf South. Gulf South Rising collectivized the 2015 movement energy in the region to support self-determination at the grassroots level for Gulf South communities. Participants in this 12-month initiative have determined that the Gulf South is Rising.

# ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The movement and successes of Gulf South Rising would not have been possible without the work and support of so many friends and allies:

The Louisiana GSR facilitation team including: Bette Billiot, Grace Morris, Emilia Aguinaga, Emma Collin, Eric Harrison, Nick Stracco, Erik Elshire, Tyrone "Brotha T" Henry, Mannie King, Karen Ocker, Devin Martin, Ernest Johnson, Big Chief Shaka Zulu, and Craig MaGraff.

The Mississippi facilitation team including: Jennifer Crosslin, Ya-sin Shabazz, Ms. Ruth Story, and Thao Vu.

Honorable leaders in the region who live by their moral path including: Chief Thomas Dardar, Rev. Paul Beadle, and Rev. Deanna Vandiver.

Powerful Black women leaders in the Gulf South region that gave love and advice when it was needed including: Monique Harden, Esq., Ranie Thompson, Esq., Beverly Wright, PhD, Kathy Eglund, Mary Joseph, Barbara Major, Kimberely Richards, PhD, Sheila Webb, PhD, Sarah Walker, Sharon Hanshaw, Teresa Bettis, Carol Bebel, Cassandra Welchlin, and Glenda Perryman.

GSR volunteers that did not have to do all they did including: Cathy Kunkle, Stephanie Guilloud, Ife Kilimanjaro, Ash-Lee Woodard-Henderson, and Maria Victoire

Groups that used their work to support our work: Project South, the Southern Movement Assembly Governance Council, US Climate Action Network, Sierra Club, Movement Generation, Fourth World Movement, Alternate ROOTS, the Center for Social Inclusion, the Better Future Project, Loyola Law School and the Young Climate Leaders Network

Allies who continue to push national work toward the people on the frontlines including: Rob Friedman, Everette Harvey-Thompson, Becki Clayborn, Rae Breaux, Gopal Dayaneni, Quinton Sankofa, Keya Chatterjee, Craig Altemose, Rita Valenti, Kat Clark, Will Cordery, and Anthony Giancatarino

The organizations funding work on the ground including: Kendeda Fund, New Economy Coalition, Solidaire Funders, Chorus Foundation, Surdna Foundation, and the Foundation for Louisiana.

Countless others who claimed the banner of Gulf South Rising to work for justice in their own communities.

*The Gulf South is rising because of your support and commitment to this region.  
Thank you for valuing us!*

Gulf South Rising report designed by Jan Sutherland Wells of Mind Wind Images

# PARTICIPANTS

[1st Unitarian Church, New Orleans – New Orleans, LA](#)  
[350 Louisiana](#)

[350.org](#) – Southeast Region, USA

**Advancing Equity & Opportunity Coalition – Southeast, USA\***

[Advocates for Environmental Human Rights](#) – New Orleans, LA  
[Alabama Rivers Alliance](#) – Birmingham, AL  
[Alabama Sustainable Agriculture Network](#) – Birmingham, AL  
[Alternate ROOTS](#) – Southeast Regional  
[Bayou Interfaith Shared Organizing \(BISCO\)](#) – Thibodaux, LA

**Black Spring NOLA – New Orleans, LA\***

[Black Youth Project](#) – NOLA – New Orleans, LA  
[Catalyst Miami](#) – Miami, FL  
[Center for Ethical Living and Social Justice Renewal](#) – New Orleans, LA  
[Coastal Women for Change](#) – Biloxi, MS  
[Community In-power and Development Association Inc](#) – Port Arthur, TX  
[Community Justice Project, Inc.](#) – Miami, FL  
[Cry You One Ensemble](#) – New Orleans, LA  
[Deep South Center for Environmental Justice at Dillard University](#) – New Orleans, LA  
[Divest Tulane](#) – New Orleans, LA  
[Do it 4 Da Youth – Artist Development School](#) – New Orleans, LA  
[East St. Tammany – NAACP](#) – Slidell, LA

[EEECHO](#) – Gulfport, MS

[European Dissent](#) – New Orleans, LA

[Fight for 15](#) – Louisiana – New Orleans, LA

[Florida New Majority](#) – Miami, FL

[Florida Young Democrats](#) – Miami, FL

[Greater New Orleans Fair Housing Action Center](#) – New Orleans, LA

[Greater New Orleans Organizers Roundtable](#) – New Orleans, LA

**[Gulf Coast Center for Law & Policy](#) – Slidell, LA**

**(Gulf South Regional Anchor)**

[Gulf Future Coalition](#) – Gulf Coast South Regional

[Gulf Restoration Network](#) – New Orleans, LA

[Gulfport Branch – NAACP](#) – Gulfport, MS

[GO FISH Coalition](#) – Southeast, LA

[Hijra House](#) – Bay St. Louis MS

[Immaculate Heart, CDC](#) – Lucedale, MS

[Junebug Theater Company](#) – New Orleans, LA

[Louisiana Oystermen's Association](#) – LA

[Mary Queen of Vietnam Community Development Corporation](#)

– New Orleans, LA

[Mississippi Coalition of Vietnamese Fisherfolk and Families](#) – Biloxi, MS

**National Council of Elders – Southern Cohort, USA\***

[Nfungotah, Inc.](#) – New Orleans, LA

[Oseola McCarty Youth Development Center](#) – Hattiesburg, MS

[Peace by Piece/AFSC](#) – New Orleans, LA

[Poarch Band of Creek Indians](#) – Alabama

**National Council of Elders – Southern Cohort, USA (continued)**

[Public Lab](#) – New Orleans, LA

[Project South](#) – Southeast Region & Atlanta, GA

[S.T.E.P.S Coalition](#) – Biloxi, MS

[Seminole Nation](#) – Hollywood, FL

[Sierra Club Chapter](#) – Mobile, AL

[Sierra Club Chapter](#) – New Orleans, LA

[So-called Media](#) – New Orleans, LA

[South Alabama Center for Fair Housing](#) – Mobile, AL

[Southern Movement Assembly](#) – Southern, USA

[Southwest Workers' Union](#) – San Antonio, TX

[t.e.j.a.s.](#) – Houston TX

[The Ordinary People Society \(TOPS\)](#) – Dothan, AL

[The Star Institute](#) – New Orleans, LA

[Tulane Environmental Law Clinic at Tulane University](#) – New Orleans, LA

[United Houma Nation](#) – South Louisiana

[University Sin Fronteras](#) – TX, GA, FL, & Regional

[VAYLA](#) – New Orleans, LA

[Voice of the Ex-offender \(VOTE\)](#) – New Orleans, LA

[Women With a Vision](#) – New Orleans, LA

[WordPlay NOLA](#) – New Orleans, LA

[Workplace Justice Project at Loyola College of Law](#) – New Orleans, LA

[Zion Traveler Cooperative](#) – Braithwaite, LA

**National Allies Of Gulf South Rising\***

[350.org](#)

[American Friends Service Committee](#)

[Amnesty International, USA](#)

[ATD Fourth World Movement](#)

[BCS/National Society of Black Engineers](#)

[Center for Law, Energy & the Environment at UC Berkeley](#)

[Center for Social Inclusion](#)

[Climate Justice Alliance](#)

[Color of Change](#)

[Core Align](#) – Memphis, TN

[Power Shift Network](#)

[Environmental Action Network](#)

[Food & Water Watch](#)

[Georgia WAND](#)

[Greenpeace](#)

[Movement Generation](#)

[National Nurses United](#)

[National Nurses Organizing Committee](#)

[Natural Resources Defense Council](#)

[Oxfam America](#)

[Sierra Club](#)

[Sierra Club Student Coalition](#)

[Union of Concerned Scientists](#)

[US Climate Action Network \(USCAN\)](#)

[Young Climate Leaders Network](#)

\*Anchors in each state are highlighted

# THE MOVEMENT AND THE MOMENT



*Power and Healing from the Gulf South Frontlines*

By Colette Pichon Battle, Executive Director, Gulf Coast Center for Law & Policy

A year-long, five-state effort of the anchor organizations of the 2015 Gulf South Rising initiative was simultaneously the greatest accomplishment and most difficult challenge of my organizing journey. A year-long, five-state regional effort rooted in the intersecting issues of climate justice had not been done before, certainly not in the South. This was a personal and movement turning point, and I was up for the challenge.

Across the Nation for the 2010 US Social Forum in Detroit, hundreds of People's Movement Assemblies (PMAs) took place across the nation, including two held in Louisiana and Mississippi earlier that year. What started as a process to inform the layers of injustice found in disaster recovery morphed into a regional analysis of the ecological impacts of fossil fuel extraction and refining in the US. The Gulf delegation called for equity and justice in disaster recovery, and in doing so realized the importance of expanding the focus to working for Ecological Equity and Climate Justice. In the following years, PMAs were held throughout the Gulf region and the issues and ideas brought up in those local gatherings of frontline communities were unified to create the Gulf South Rising strategy document. This document served as a guide for the process of seeding a Gulf South regional movement in 2015. The 12-month grassroots-led Gulf South Rising initiative acted as a singular declaratory beacon to honor the past, present, and future regional reality of the Gulf South.

We are a nation in pain. And while the South is clearly a main entry point of our collective national wound, the whole body is experiencing the trauma of the injury. Amid the fire and trauma of leading this work, I was blessed to find water and healing in the frontline communities with which we worked. The five-year BP remembrance ceremony at the Mississippi River and Rhythmic Alchemy at Congo Square were efforts from community leaders that prioritized healing as part of movement work. To follow the lead of the frontlines is to acknowledge that real change will take long-term investment in the collective healing of our selves, our relationship to one another, and our relationship to Mother Earth.

The 2015 Gulf South Rising initiative, like all organizing efforts, was not perfect. It represented good vision, good process, and achievable work that could seed positive change in the US South - a strategic region for shifting national systems. While helping to lead this initiative, I faced scrutiny, challenge, aggression, and attacks rooted in the hierarchical binaries of race, gender, geography, and privilege. This tumultuous journey led me to conversations with many Southern Black women movement leaders, all of whom recounted the wounds and scars from their work. In each leadership story, the attacks were real and from the most unexpected places.

If I had not experienced the disrespect and subsequent trauma of anti-Black, anti-woman, and anti-Southern leadership, I would not have believed it existed. Activists who move from pain and anger often inflict trauma. Funders moving from the intersection of guilt and privilege inflict trauma. Organizers moving from ego and self-righteousness inflict trauma. We often hurt each other when we could bring that fire to destroy the systems that create and allow these unlivable injustices.

Gulf South Rising was our promise to ourselves and a declaration to the world: We can choose to stop attacking each other and build self-governance that builds our power and our love for each other. Regardless of the challenges we face, we are not helpless victims. We are the result of hundreds of years of ecological degradation and social control in this country and throughout the Global South. We are not good opportunities for charity, we are the rightful shareholders in building true democracy. We call for accountability from all who extract, control, and use the natural resources, people, and innovation that come from this place. To recognize our continuous ability to survive or "bounce back from adversity" is not honor. To honor this land and the people of the Gulf South would be to change the systems that extract, oppress, and destroy our communities. We collectively conjure the spirit of resistance that emanates from this land and the people of this region. The time is now. The climate is changing. ***The seas are rising... AND SO ARE WE!***

# THE MOVEMENT AND THE MOMENT

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*Initiating Resistance: Gulf South Rising 2015 & the Southern Freedom Movement*  
By Stephanie Guilloud, Co-Director, Project South

After Hurricane Katrina, Southern leaders came together and made a commitment to build a stronger Southern movement in the face of the environmental, economic, and social catastrophe unfolding in the Gulf Coast. That commitment drove new strategies of convergence and organizing. The Gulf South Rising initiative reflects the collective vision generated through five years of People's Movement Assemblies that gathered communities affected by climate shifts, ecological disaster, and environmental racism.

Accomplishments forged in this new moment included massive movement convergences through two US Social Forums and the evolution of an organizing strategy called the People's Movement Assembly, inspired by global liberation movements. Katrina, and the many crises that followed, taught us that we need an infrastructure to gather people on the frontlines, determine our shared plans of action, and govern our social movements from the ground up.

After the BP Oil Spill, a Gulf Coast Climate Justice Assembly determined shared demands from Vietnamese fisherfolk, shrimpers, and Black communities that recognized the generational impact of the crisis. Through many assemblies in rural towns, with Black women often leading the process, the Gulf South communities envisioned community-controlled funds to access in times of disaster, held international tribunals on the effects of climate and ecological damage, and made a commitment to initiating a year-long effort to commemorate the moments that transformed so many of us.

Project South acted as partner, fiscal sponsor, and movement supporter to the Gulf South Rising initiative throughout 2015, and we were proud and excited to co-facilitate the fifth Southern Movement Assembly (SMA) in Congo Square with the 14 other anchor organizations that govern the SMA process. Over 400 people, from 100 organizations from all over the South and the country, participated in the SMA and learned the first-hand lessons of the hurricanes and the 10 years of resistance that followed.

The Gulf South Rising initiative cultivated an infrastructure of connected and synchronized organizers who developed shared practices throughout 2015 by working together. As one example, the K10 Week of Action amplified a narrative of people's resistance to counter the idea of resilience and survival as our only desires. Visions of new economies, a just transition, political power, and youth movements grew from the shared wound of trauma and disaster and from the sacred ground of Congo Square, where generations of people resisting slavery and colonialism have gathered for centuries.

Project South believes in the power and knowledge of local leadership to define the issues and invites principled participation for action. We were proud to be a part of Gulf South Rising. As a movement organization, we recognize that Gulf South Rising represented an incredible standard for decentralized, coordinated, and locally-led organizing. What better tribute to a moment and to a people who have developed strategies for so many decades of the Southern Freedom Movement.

# THE MOVEMENT AND THE MOMENT



*Green Groups: We can do better*  
By Grace Morris, Organizer, Sierra Club

*"We're about lifting up the local voice." "This process always reminds me that I don't know half as much as I think I do." "We -- the little we and the big we -- get stronger when we build honest, healing relationships with each other." "People don't show up to an issue; they show up for each other." – #GulfSouthRising participants' collective wisdom, captured in tweets during meetings.*

How do white folks like me who work for green organizations live our values?

Principled, accountable practice is one critical piece for me, and Gulf South Rising was a litmus test.

Within the conversation on climate, the Right has its climate denial cohort. The Left has a climate crowd that denies an inter-sectional justice analysis and rejects or declines to follow equitable, accountable processes rooted in local, Indigenous, Black community leadership. Two sides of a racist, patriarchal, violent, extractive proverbial coin.

Gulf South Rising, a year-long intersectional climate justice initiative, was an invitation to work with, follow, and fund local, Southern, Indigenous, and Black people who have been doing the work. Gulf South Rising was a statement of solidarity and a way of moving together. Guided by the Jemez Principles of Democratic Organizing, Gulf South Rising worked to (1) build regional movement infrastructure; (2) connect and convene frontline communities around ecological justice and collective healing; (3) advance regional efforts of Indigenous and tribal land sovereignty; and (4) shift the narrative from resilience to resistance.

In a movement moment of "we need everyone," anti-racist accountable organizing that shifts power Greater New Orleans Organizers' Roundtable slogan: "Anti-racist organizing \* Shifting power \* Accountability" is critical. Who we work with is the work. How we do the work is the work.

Currently, the mainstream environmental movement that engages in conversations of climate justice is blue-state heavy and policy-focused or communications-tactics-focused or think-tank-focused. A blue-state theory of change flies in the face of the six Jemez Principles. #1) **Be inclusive, #2) Emphasis on bottom-up organizing, and #3) Let people speak for themselves:** why write off millions of people on the frontlines of the climate crisis? Imagine what a red-state, Southern climate justice movement will do.

The progressive Left doesn't believe in trickle-down economics; why does it practice trickle-down change? The money needs to hit the ground. Resources intended to support (communications, research, policy advocacy, training, actions) need to be on equitable terms, lifting up local plans and work. #4) **Work together in solidarity and mutuality and #5) Build just relationships among ourselves.** Funding needs to go to local people of color working with, and accountable to, local communities of color. Culture shift will happen when culture workers are resourced. When I say I can't always live my values or follow the Jemez Principles, this is a big one. I work, on a partnership level, with people and organizations who aren't resourced like me. Without equitable funding, partnerships are not fair, and this personally is an area where I have work to do to be better. There are so many people of color doing fantastic work in the frontlines of the climate crisis who don't have dollars, whose work and contributions are not equally valued. To the people who are already funding the frontline, I salute you. One thing to fund right now: the [#GSR Community Controlled Fund](#).

The invitation to join Gulf South Rising became a line in the sand – Who would follow local, Southern, Black and Indigenous frontline community leadership? Who saw the opportunity and responded "Yes!" to building it?

**#6) Commitment to self-transformation:** "As we change societies, we must change from operating on the mode of individualism to community-centeredness. We must 'walk our talk.'"

The 2015 Gulf South Rising initiative is over, but the work continues and visions of a just and equitable world are before us. The people are still here. You are still here. And the invitation stands.

## 4. GULF SOUTH RISING'S GOALS

### 1) Build regional movement infrastructure.



May 2015 in Fairhope, AL, Leaders from across the Gulf Coast at GSR's Ecological Justice Training hosted by Movement Generation. *Photo credit: May Nguyen*

### 2) Connect and convene frontline communities around collective healing and ecological equity.



Leaders from Houma, Slidell and New Orleans, LA come together at the protest and march held in New Orleans commemorating five years since the BP drilling disaster. *Photo credit: Karen Ocker*



## 5. MOVEMENT BUILDING THROUGH SHARED WORK

### A. Bayou Rising 2014

THE UNITED HOUMA NATION  
AND  
GULF COAST CENTER FOR LAW & POLICY  
INVITE YOU TO JOIN US AT:

# #BAYOURISING

*The Seas Are Rising... And So Are We!*

**Monday, December 8, 2014**  
**Dulac Community Center**  
**125 Coast Guard Rd, Dulac, LA 70353**

**Event Schedule:**

- 6AM- Huntin' Fishin' and Trappin (limited space- register early)**
- 8AM- Culture, Crafts and Coffee**
- 11AM- Community Climate Change Panel**
- 1PM- Bayou Boil (Bring your side dish or dessert!)**
- 3PM- Movement Building Sessions**
- 5PM- Zydeco Fais Do Dough Fundraiser (All proceeds go to the United Houma Nation)**

To register for this event or for more information, visit: [www.gccp.org](http://www.gccp.org)  
Deadline to register is Friday, December 5, 2014 at 12pmCST.

**Registration is required for non-tribal members**

Event Co-sponsors:  
Gulf Future Coalition, Crescent City Media Group,  
Young Climate Leaders Network, Clanton Chapel United Methodist Church,  
Bayou InterFaith Shared Community Organizing (BISCO), Villa Da God Productions, LLC.

**NOTE: All events are family friendly and alcohol-free!**

Bayou Rising was a collaboration between the Gulf Coast Center for Law & Policy, the Young Climate Leaders Network, and the United Houma Nation. It served as both the kickoff event for Gulf South Rising and the launch of a regional petition calling for federal recognition for the United Houma Nation. Held in Dulac, Louisiana, the December 2014 event brought together tribal members, regional leaders, local advocates, and representatives of national organizations to create a space for shared learning around the ecological and cultural significance of South Louisiana.

The day-long event began before dawn with guests out on shrimping boats with tribal members, seeing first-hand the impacts of coastal erosion and sea level rise in South Louisiana. Workshops throughout the event included analysis and skills trainings. Food for the event was caught in Louisiana's wetlands and prepared by local families.

Bayou Rising served both as a sobering reminder of the gravity of what is at stake and as a catalyst for movement building in 2015. Bayou Rising expressed solidarity with regional efforts of Indigenous sovereignty as it launched the GSR initiative to do the same.

## 1. Gulf South Rising: 2015 as a Movement Year

### B. Gulf South Resistance in the Face of Disaster: Haiti 5, Texas Refinery Explosion 10

By commemorating 5 years since the Haiti earthquake, and 10 years since the BP/Texas City Explosion, Gulf South Rising acknowledged unity of a regional geography and promoted resistance in the face of disaster. Impacts of a warming Gulf of Mexico connect communities of the Gulf South region to the Caribbean, thus intertwining stories of the Gulf South and Global South. Extraction from the Global South supplies the needs of the Global North just as extraction from the Gulf South sustains many of the energy needs of the US, inevitably causing disasters like the Texas City refinery explosion. Leveraging new media and online networks, leaders across the region uplifted the ongoing work of Gulf South movements working toward collective liberation. GSR highlighted both the disproportionate impact of extractive economies and the profound legacy of resistance in our region with a critique of inequitable recovery in the face of disaster.



GSR supported a petition to the US government to [Reunite Haitian Families through immigration reform](http://www.reunitehaitianfamilies.com/reform). Photo credit: The Black Immigration Network



Courtlyn Robinson from the University of Alabama-Birmingham at Selma 50. Photo credit: Adam Wylie Johnston

#### January 12, 2015: 5-Year Commemoration of the Haiti Earthquake

Communities of the Gulf South are connected to the fate of the Caribbean. Understood throughout the region are the myriad challenges in widespread disaster recovery. Through a collective decision making process, local GSR leaders agreed to remember the 7.0 magnitude earthquake of 2010 that killed 250,000 people and left millions homeless in Haiti. The Gulf South shares not only a common geography with Haiti but also a generational history and legacy of Black resistance. In solidarity with the survivors of Haiti and in loving memory of those who died, GSR committed to uplift the Haitian grassroots leadership and highlight the truth about recovery in Haiti five years later. The GSR regional listserv was created and called on allies to learn, connect, act, and support our Haitian neighbors across the Gulf of Mexico in their continued work toward equity in disaster recovery and Black liberation. GSR highlighted the work of Haitian-American grassroots organizations working on justice for communities on the frontline of the 2010 Haiti Earthquake, including [Fanm Ayisyen nan Miyam](#) and [Black Immigration Network](#).

#### March 23, 2015: 10-Year Commemoration of the BP/Texas City Refinery Explosion

GSR aimed to highlight the real cost of extractive economies for communities and workers in the Gulf South. Five years before the Deepwater Horizon oil drilling disaster, a BP oil refinery explosion in Texas City, Texas, killed 15 people and injured 180 others. Frontline residents of the Gulf South understand the impact of disasters associated with the extraction, transportation and refining of fossil fuels. Also known are the economic challenges of a region dependent on extractive industries. In solidarity with the survivors of the Texas City explosion and in loving memory of those who died, GSR called for a shift toward valuing workers and the long-term health of our communities over the temporary and polluting jobs that injure us and our communities for generations. The decision to include this event in GSR followed the leadership of [Texas Environmental Justice Advocacy Services](#) (TEJAS) whose work continues to show that unsafe refinery conditions persist today. TEJAS advocates for neighborhoods just across the [fenceline](#) from polluting industry in East Texas.

## 2. BP/ Deepwater Horizon 5

An overarching goal of the 2015 GSR initiative was to unite a region that has been historically divided by race, poverty, and politics. Commemorating five years of recovery from the BP/ Deepwater Horizon drilling disaster required acknowledging the shared reality of the region. GSR coordinated common narratives and goals from across the region, including from frontline communities in Louisiana, Alabama, Texas, and Mississippi. [See more on our website.](#)

### **April 16 - 20, 2015:** Come Fish Off My Boat - Coastal LA, MS, and AL

In locations including Biloxi, MS; Bay St. Louis, MS; Houma, LA; Venice, LA; Bayou LaBatre, AL; and Coden, AL, "Come Fish Off My Boat" provided experiential learning with Vietnamese leaders and regional organizers fighting for justice in their communities for the last five years. The [Mississippi Coalition of Vietnamese American Fisherfolk and Families](#) hosted these meaningful excursions on the Gulf for participants



Clarence Duplessis, fisherman, speaks out about the BP Drilling Disaster: "BP has taken the heart out of this community. Everyone used to be at the marina...now the marina is dead." Photo credit: Grace Morris

companies that they are not welcome in the Gulf South and that its residents are no longer willing to sacrifice clean air, clean water, and biodiverse wildlife habitats for corporate profits.

to see first-hand how fisherfolk are still impacted by the BP drilling disaster. Leaders such as Thao Vu of Biloxi, MS called for those participants to engage in political processes to bring justice to the region.

### **April 19, 2015:** Public Demonstration - South Padre Island, TX

Community members protested the five proposed liquefied natural gas (LNG) export terminals proposed for the Port of Brownsville. Demonstrations highlighted the BP Deepwater Horizon explosion and the millions of gallons of heavy crude oil polluting the shores of five states and two countries as the worst environmental disaster in US history. Frontline leaders gathered to tell fossil fuel

**April 20, 2015: Community Session –** Fishing Communities, Plaquemines Parish, LA  
 The Deepwater Horizon Oil drilling disaster disproportionately impacted Vietnamese fishing communities and oystermen of South Louisiana. In coastal Plaquemines Parish, where fishing is a [primary industry](#), GSR supported a community conversation and People’s Movement Assembly of impacted fisherfolk. For this event, GSR partnered with local Gulf South residents including Rev. Tyrone Edwards of [Zion Travelers Cooperative](#) and Monique Harden of [Advocates for Environmental Human Rights](#) on this event. The [Gulf Coast Center for Law & Policy](#) facilitated processes to develop a plan of action and priorities for achieving justice.



Louisiana Oystermen Association president Byron Encalade talks about the immediate and ongoing effects of the BP / Deepwater Horizon drilling disaster.



Protest and march in downtown New Orleans.

**April 20, 2015: Protest and March -** New Orleans, LA  
 Residents of South Louisiana gathered in the New Orleans French Quarter for a rally and march. The public rally welcomed tourists to learn about the ongoing impact of the BP/ Deepwater Horizon drilling disaster on South Louisiana communities. Speakers included frontline leaders representing Black oystermen, Vietnamese fisherfolk, and South Louisiana’s Indigenous communities. The rally ended with a ceremony at the Mississippi River to remember the rig workers killed in the 2010 explosion: 12 roses were dropped into the Mississippi River - one for each life lost and one for the future of our coast. For more information on the New Orleans events, see coverage by [WWL](#), [WWNO](#), and [nola.com](#). For pictures of events across the Gulf Coast, visit our [BP 5 page](#).

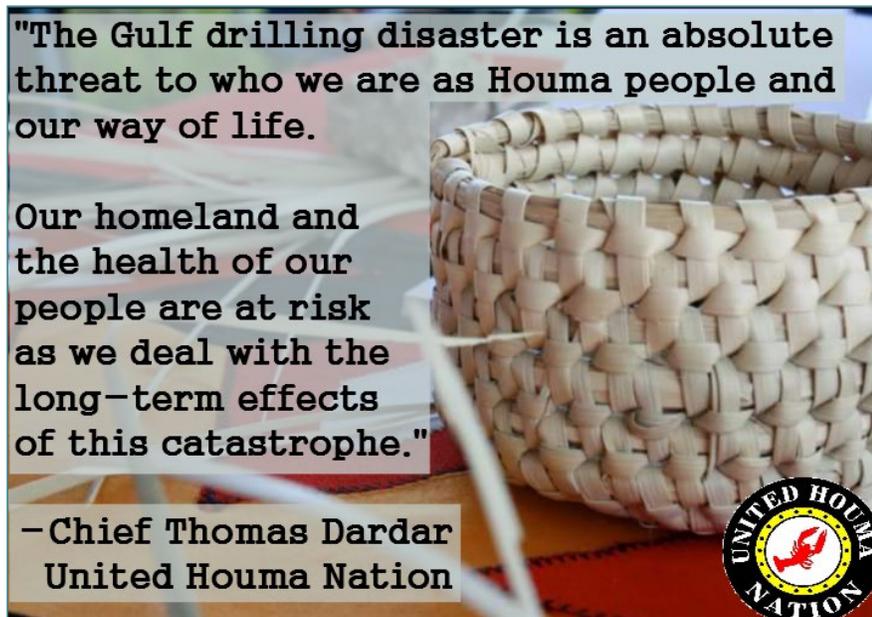
**April 20, 2015:** Interfaith Memorial and Jazz Funeral - Houston, TX

Led by GSR participant organization [Gulf Future Coalition](#) members, residents from across the Gulf South region gathered near BP's headquarters for an interfaith memorial and jazz funeral procession to mourn the

losses caused by the BP oil drilling disaster in the Gulf of Mexico. These losses include human lives, animal lives, economic livelihoods, and truth. Frontline leaders demanded that BP be held accountable and tell the truth, and advocated for the region to seek a just transition to a Gulf region where cultures and ecosystems are valued and protected.



A meme from the New Orleans Fight for \$15 campaign featuring the Gulf South Rising commemoration of BP5.



The voice of twice-elected Principal Chief Thomas Dardar Jr. was uplifted via social media in conjunction with the petition for federal recognition of the United Houma Nation.

**April 20, 2015:** Water Ceremony and Sunset Vigil - Pensacola, FL  
 Frontline community leaders held a Gulf-healing ceremony and sunset vigil to commemorate the fifth anniversary of the ecocide wrought by the BP oil drilling disaster. Florida leaders Kim Schulz and Jennie Spanos used #GulfSouthRising to invite communities across the Gulf Coast together to restore, protect, and defend our nation's unique Gulf Coast cultures and ecosystems. With traditional drums, leaders performed a water ceremony at sunset and symbolically drummed out the era of fossil fuels. Participants and dressed in black to show mourning and to resemble an oil spill.

**Plaquemines Parish  
Fishermen & Fishing Communities**

**FIVE YEARS AFTER THE BP OIL DRILLING DISASTER**

**BP, you promised to  
make our fishing  
communities whole,  
but you put us in a  
hole!**

**Fishing communities  
struggle to make a living.**

**BP disaster wiped out  
oyster harvest jobs in  
Point à la Hache.**

**Panel Discussions  
Fishermen Testimonies  
Video Presentation  
Plan of Action**

**April 20, 2015 | 10 am – 2 pm**  
**Rev. Percy M. Griffin Community Center**  
**15577 Highway 15 in Davant, Louisiana**

**For more information, call, text or email**  
**Rev. Tyrone Edwards**  
**504-473-2996 (cell)**  
**ziontcc15@yahoo.com**

***\*free country meal provided\****

**Sponsors**  
**Louisiana Oystermen Association**  
**Fishermen & Concerned Citizens Association**  
**Zion Travelers Cooperative Center**  
**Advocates for Environmental Human Rights • Oxfam America**  
**Gulf Coast Center for Law & Policy**

Flyer for People's Movement Assembly in Plaquemines Parish, LA.

### 3. Extraction, Violence, and Displacement: Vietnam War 40, Indochina Act 40

Extractive practices - including imperialism, militarism, and war - continue to displace people around the world. Forced displacement of people makes them targets for recurring social extraction and unjust treatment. Loss of home, land and citizenship increases the likelihood that people will engage in extractive low-wage labor, which in turn puts them at disproportionate risk of toxic exposure or inequitable treatment.

#### **April 30, 2015:** 40-Year Commemoration of the End of the Vietnam War

Mass displacement of people often means the dismantling of families, the loss of culture, and generational instability in search of resettlement. The Vietnam War brutally displaced hundreds of thousands of people from their homes, many of whom relocated to the Gulf South. Wars like the Vietnam War extract bodies and turn them into soldiers, take public money for private contracts, and sacrifice ecological and human health by using chemical weapons. Agent orange, a toxic herbicide, was sprayed over Vietnamese lands without regard for human health, much like dispersants were sprayed on oil in the Gulf after the BP oil drilling disaster.

#### **May 21, 2015:** 40-Year Commemoration of the Indochina Act

Through the Indochina Act of 1975, approximately 130,000 refugees from Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos were granted the right to permanently live and establish their livelihoods in the United States. Many of those folks chose to reestablish their lives on the Gulf Coast due to the similarity of ecosystems. A majority of the Asian/Asian-American communities in the Gulf South are connected to commercial fishing, making them particularly vulnerable to disruptions in the coastal ecology. Today resettled refugees and their descendants encircle the Gulf of Mexico, living on the coast from South Texas to South Florida, with significant populations in New Orleans East, LA; East Biloxi, MS; and Bayou La Batre, AL. Many of the children born in Vietnam and brought to the US have not had the support they need to engage in the social and political systems that govern their existence. GSR acknowledged that granting the privilege of residency to refugees does not negate the obligation of accountability for the root causes of the initial displacement.



Thao Vu, of the Mississippi Coalition for Vietnamese-American Fisher Folks and Families, and Captain Vien Do point out oyster beds in the Gulf on a "Come Fish Off My Boat" trip.

Photo credit: Mississippi Coalition for Vietnamese-American Fisher Folks and Families.

#### 4. Movement Successes: Honoring Gulf South Direct Action & Policy Victories: Selma 50, ADA 25, VRA 50

The GSR initiative remembered 25 years of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA, passed July 26, 1990) and 50 years of the Voting Rights Act (VRA, passed August 6, 1965). The ADA sought equality for disabled individuals and the VRA sought equal voting rights for Black people. Both acts were founded on principles,



Jacqui Patterson, Director of the NAACP Climate and Environmental Justice Department, at the march commemorating 50 years since the original Selma march. Photo credit: Grace Morris

strategy, and gains resulting from the Civil Rights Movement, which leveraged direct action to secure transformative policy changes. From the "Capitol Crawl" (March 12, 1990) where 'disabled' activists crawled up the 100 steps of the US Capitol Building, to the Selma to Montgomery March (March 5-9, 1965), organizers for both acts used a broad strategy and direct action to gain access: access to physical spaces, access to democratic processes, and access to full citizenship. These policy successes served as a reminder of tangible wins for equity and justice in our people-centered movements, while concurrently reminding us of the need to protect victories. Twenty-five years after the ADA there is an increase in the percentage of Americans disabled by war, dangerous industries, and long-term mental impacts of surviving climate-based disasters. Almost 50 years after the VRA was passed, it was gutted by the Supreme Court, thus demonstrating that racism is still an impediment to democracy. GSR participants celebrated these victories of organizers who came before, while also acknowledging that there is more work to do.

**March 5-9, 2015:** 50-Year Commemoration of the Selma to Montgomery March

The GSR calendar intentionally included the commemoration of the Edmund Pettus Bridge Crossing. The 2015 march highlighted the legacy of resistance in the Gulf South, and demonstrated how Black liberation has always been an integral part of national social change.

President Barack Obama and civil rights leaders participated in the 50-year commemoration acknowledging that, as stated on the [Selma Bridge Crossing Jubilee](#) website, “Selma and the Alabama Black Belt were the battlegrounds for the Voting Rights Movement that resulted in the passage of the Voting Rights Act of 1965. Alabamians stood up and peacefully fought for the right to vote.” Pastor Kenneth Glasgow leads GSR partner organization [The Ordinary People Society](#) (TOPS), which advocates for formerly incarcerated people in Alabama and Georgia. Pastor Glasgow serves on the [Selma Bridge Crossing Jubilee Committee](#) that anchors the Selma March commemoration every year. Following the call of local leaders in Alabama, members of the [Southern Movement Assembly](#) brought a delegation of 100 community leaders to the 50-year commemoration and participated in the Backwards March to highlight “going back to get things right” and include formerly and currently incarcerated people in the movement for social justice. These events were designed to demonstrate both the great progress in US race relations and the tremendous work that remains to be done. For more information, see Project South’s report on [www.southtosouth.org: Every Day is Selma: Report from the Southern Movement Assembly 1965-2015](#).

**July 26, 2015:** 25-Year Commemoration of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990

The Civil Rights Movement served as a foundation for many equal rights movements across the United States. The Americans with Disabilities Act was passed in 1990 and was the nation’s first comprehensive civil rights law addressing the needs of people with mental and physical disabilities. This event was added to the calendar of events by GSR participant [Alliance Institute](#).

**August 6, 2015:** 50-Year Commemoration of the Voting Rights Act of 1965

The Civil Rights Act of 1964 was a hard-fought and momentous victory. Following strategic, coordinated, movement-driven resistance in the Gulf South, the Voting Rights Act was passed the following year to address gaps in the protection of voter suppression. This landmark federal legislation embodies the intersectional nature of justice, as it outlaws discrimination in voting on the basis of race, religion, sex, and national origin. The US Department of Justice considers the VRA to be the most effective piece of civil rights legislation ever enacted in the nation. GSR partner organizations leading on issues of voting rights in the region include [Crescent City Media Group](#), [Voice of the Ex-Offender](#) (VOTE) and [VAYLA of New Orleans](#).

## 5. 10-Year Commemoration of Hurricane Katrina (K10)

The GSR Katrina 10 Week of Action (also referred to as K10) was a powerful collection of events led by frontline leaders of the region. Local organizations had their own plans, and GSR dedicated its collective work to honoring community power and highlighting the issues of inequity that persisted ten years after Hurricane Katrina. GSR's role in K10 was to offer support around logistics, fundraising, and communication in order to practice the art of following local frontline leadership. Local GSR facilitation teams coordinated and collectivized work developed by impacted communities.

As a movement collective, the GSR initiative did not independently organize any of the events that comprised the Katrina 10 Week of Action, but rather aimed to: 1) offer capacity to local anchor organizations around planning and implementation of meaningful local equity-based events; 2) support and unite local leadership in the Gulf South; and 3) facilitate the creation of a common narrative rooted in ecological justice and a Southern regional legacy of resistance - all as methods to build long-term movement infrastructure in the Gulf South.

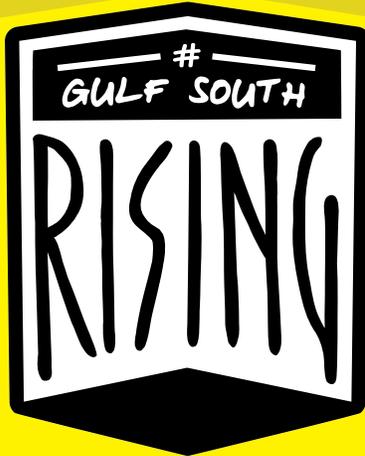


Entrance to Armstrong Park, where Congo Square is located and where the Southern Movement Assembly V and Rhythmic Alchemy took place.

Photo credit: Jovan Julien.

In New Orleans, LA, the Gulf South Rising collective worked intentionally to lift up local Black leadership and the legacy of resistance of Gulf South communities on the frontlines of climate change. K10 also included an extended, intentional, community-based [messaging process](#) that uplifted [20 local spokespeople](#). The Week of Action included a deliberate reclamation of public spaces and resources, and emphasized community-based policing and security.

More than 13 events, led by frontline community leaders, took place from August 21 through August 30 in multiple locations across the Gulf South from Coden, AL to Biloxi, MS to New Orleans, LA. The Week of Action featured healing and performance arts, policy forums, film screenings, teach-ins, youth gatherings, movement spaces, and the intentional networking of frontline communities from across the Gulf South around ecological justice and healing.



# KATRINA 10 WEEK OF ACTION

THE SEAS ARE RISING AND SO ARE WE

## AUGUST

**21-26** **SUMMIT**  
SUNSHINE AFTER THE STORM

**22** **FILM + FORUM**  
'RESILIENCE' 'RECOVERY' + REALITY

**24** **GATHERING**  
COMMEMORATION POTLUCK

**27** **FORUM**  
10 YEARS LATER WE'RE STILL RECOVERING

**27-28** **ASSEMBLY**  
SOUTHERN MOVEMENT ASSEMBLY V

**28** **SUMMIT**  
CLIMATE JUSTICE CONVERGENCE

**28-29** **FESTIVAL**  
LOWER 9 RESILIENCE FESTIVAL

**28-30** **PROTEST + VIGIL**  
SURVIVOR'S TENT VILLAGE CITY

**28-30** **VISUAL OPERA**  
ECOHYBRIDITY - LOVE SONG FOR NOLA

**29** **FILM + FORUM**  
KATRINA X FILM PREMIERE

**29** **GATHERING**  
BRINGING BACK THE BAYOU

**29** **GATHERING**  
RHYTHMIC ALCHEMY HEALING + RECOVERY

**29-30** **REMEMBRANCE**  
KATRINA 10TH HEALING + REMEMBRANCE

#GULFSOUTH RISING

### SUNSHINE AFTER THE STORM

FRI 9AM - WED 2PM EEECHO + NAACP GULF REGION  
GOOD DEEDS COMMUNITY CENTER - GULFPORT, MS

### 'RESILIENCE' 'RECOVERY' + REALITY

2PM - 4:30PM GNDORT  
ASHE CULTURAL ARTS CENTER - NEW ORLEANS, LA

### KATRINA 10 COMMEMORATION POTLUCK

5:30PM - 2PM STEPS COALITION  
BILOXI CIVIC CENTER, MS

### 10 YEARS LATER WE'RE STILL RECOVERING

6PM - 8:30PM #BLACKLIVESMATTER FFLIC  
ASHE CULTURAL ARTS CENTER - NEW ORLEANS, LA

### SOUTHERN MOVEMENT ASSEMBLY V YOUTH ASSEMBLY

THURS 2-6PM FRI 9AM - 6PM FRI 2-5PM  
CONGO SQUARE/ARMSTRONG PARK GCCLA

### GSR CLIMATE JUSTICE CONVERGENCE

9AM - 5PM DEEP SOUTH CENTER FOR EJ  
DILLARD UNIVERSITY - NEW ORLEANS, LA

### LOWER 9 RESILIENCE FESTIVAL

FRI 9AM - 6PM SAT 11AM - 7:30PM LOWER 9  
PETE SANCHEZ CENTER - NEW ORLEANS, LA RESILIENCE  
FESTIVAL

### SURVIVOR'S VILLAGE TENT CITY

ALL DAY - NEW ORLEANS, LA SURVIVOR'S VILLAGE  
ST. BERNARD AVE. NEUTRAL GROUND BTW. MILTON + FOY ST.

### ECOHYBRIDITY - LOVE SONG FOR NOLA

FRI 7PM - 9PM SAT ALL DAY SUN 12PM - 3PM  
VARIOUS LOCATIONS GALLERY OF THE STREETS

### KATRINA X FILM PREMIER AND PANEL DISCUSSION

6PM - 8PM - NEW ORLEANS, LA PEACE BY PIECE NOLA  
ZEITGEIST MULTIDISCIPLINARY ARTS CENTER

### BRINGING BACK THE BAYOU: 10 YEARS

11AM - 9PM CRC + SOUTH BAY PROJECT  
COASTAL RESPONSE CENTER - CODEN, AL

### RHYTHMIC ALCHEMY - HEALING + RECOVERY

12PM - 12AM NFUNGOTAH, INC  
CONGO SQUARE/ARMSTRONG PARK - NEW ORLEANS, LA

### KATRINA 10TH HEALING + REMEMBRANCE

SAT 12PM - TIL SUN. 1PM - 7PM CONGO SQUARE + ASHE  
CONGO SQUARE - NEW ORLEANS, LA PRESERVATION + CULTURAL  
SOCIETY ARTS CENTER

FOR MORE INFO + TO REGISTER VISIT

[WWW.GULFSOUTH RISING.ORG](http://WWW.GULFSOUTH RISING.ORG)

### Healing and Recovery: Rhythmic Alchemy

Rooted in principles of self-determination, a question was posed in community meetings leading up to the K10 Week of Action: How do those who were directly impacted by Hurricane Katrina want to commemorate 10 years since the storm? In contrast with rallies and protests that many national groups were planning, community members overwhelmingly responded by stating the importance of having a space to heal.



Nfungotah, Inc. answered this call and presented Rhythmic Alchemy in historic Congo Square on Saturday, August 29, 2015. This restorative experience for the mind, body, and spirit was rooted in authentic African, Native American, and South Louisianan culture and healing traditions. It honored 10 years of needed recovery and healing since Hurricane Katrina.

A dynamic collective of local leading artists, seasoned healers, and community resource providers offered a day of performances, information sessions, movement classes, and children's activities. Through drumming, spoken word, live muralists, cultural dance, DJs, cultural exhibits, Second Line, masquerade, and collective movement, Rhythmic Alchemy provided a transformational experience for Katrina survivors and the general public. The event was streamed online, offered live broadcasts from Haitian Radio Gonbo Kreyol, and featured advocates from the Democratic Republic of Congo, Mississippi Delta, New Orleans, Cote D'Ivoire, Honduras, and the Black Lives Matter Movement.

Flyer for Rhythmic Alchemy.

The intention of the day was to address both the need for recovery in New Orleans as the city commemorated 10 years post-Katrina and a historic call for healing of the African Diaspora. "Rhythmic Alchemy invokes holistic wellness among its kinship communities through a global message of healing and recovery. We have transformed Armstrong Park into intentional healing spaces using traditional knowledge of healing and communal recovery." -Tyrone Henry (Brotha T), Nfungotah, Inc.



New Orleans artist Craig Magraff painting during Rhythmic Alchemy.

## Southern Movement Assembly V:

*"When Hurricane Katrina hit and the government authorities left people to die, what became clear to many of us was that, regardless of what the existing power structure was doing, we needed to have a parallel system that can respond. And for us that's social movement."*

- Emery Wright, Co-Director of Project South, facilitative anchor of the Southern Movement Assembly.

The Southern Movement Assembly is an organizing process and convergence space that centers the voices and experiences of grassroots leadership on multiple frontlines. SMA organizations take actions locally and regionally to confront poverty, racism, and violence and to build political power in our communities. The Assembly is a movement governance process that combines political education, discussion, planning, action, and synthesis. In 2015 the SMA was called to action by the Gulf Coast for Law & Policy, an SMA anchor, Gulf Coast Center for Law & Policy, to participate in the GSR initiative.

The Southern Movement Assembly V (SMA V) converged on Congo Square in New Orleans on August 27-28, 2015. Over 400 organizers representing more than 100 organizations from across 13 states in the South gathered to determine next steps on multiple frontlines including just transition practices, building a people's democracy, activating racial justice in our communities, and strengthening youth movements. The participants continue to work together on a shared action plan called the Southern Peoples Initiatives.

For more information, see article by [Truth Out](#) and [www.southtosouth.org](http://www.southtosouth.org).



Participants of the Southern Movement Assembly.  
Photo credit: Jovan Julien

## 6. Coastal Communities as Frontline Communities: St. Augustine 450 & Hurricane Rita 10

### September 7-9, 2015: 450-Year Commemoration of St. Augustine Colonization

GSR was deeply rooted in the fight for Indigenous and tribal land sovereignty. Advocating for land sovereignty linked grassroots campaigns around federal recognition for some of the region's oldest tribes with grassroots movements for the Human Right to Return after climate-based disasters, the right to remain on generational land, and the right to resist disaster gentrification. The Seminole Nation of Florida draws from a rich history of multi-racial alliance building and resistance. Commemoration of St. Augustine's colonization was added to the Gulf South Rising calendar by a Florida Seminole elder, Bobby C. Billie, at Florida at the Extreme Extractive Energy summit in Biloxi, Mississippi, in early 2015. A spiritual leader, elder Billie is a member of the Council of the Original Miccosukee Simanolee Nation of Aboriginal People and organizes with [Resist 450](#). On the 450 year commemoration of the arrival of Spanish colonizers to Florida, [Resist 450 protested](#) a reenactment of the scene from boats and the shore, calling for an acknowledgment of the genocide of Native peoples.

Gulf South communities have a long history with land appropriation and imperialism. The oldest city in the US, St. Augustine, Florida, was built on the site of an ancient Native American village after Spanish explorers landed there on September 8, 1565. The city served as the capital of Spanish Florida for over 200 years. Once Spain ceded Florida to the US in 1819, the federal government called for Seminoles to be removed from the Florida territory and displaced to reservations west of the Mississippi River. This forced displacement was the catalyst for the Seminole Wars. A Spanish military fort built as part of the initial colonization became a jail for Comanche, Cheyenne, Apache, and other Native American prisoners of war from out West, including Geronimo's wives and children. Hundreds of years later, in 1964, Martin Luther King, Jr. took part in direct actions anchored in St. Augustine. There to support local campaigns to end racial segregation, he and other civil rights leaders were confronted with violence by the Ku Klux Klan and other whites with violence. Dr. King was arrested for trying to eat in a segregated restaurant. Coupled with direct action and policy organizing throughout the South, the national attention to the St. Augustine protests helped to force the Senate to end an 83-day filibuster of the Civil Rights Act in 1964.

### September 18, 2015: 10-Year Commemoration of Hurricane Rita

GSR acknowledged that there is a climate crisis that is fueling stronger, more frequent storms. The 2005 Atlantic/Gulf hurricane season was the most active hurricane season ever recorded and shattered numerous records. The 18th named storm and 10th hurricane of 2005 was Hurricane Rita. Hurricane Rita was the fourth most intense Atlantic hurricane ever recorded and made landfall on South Louisiana less than one month after Hurricane Katrina. Rita tore through the Cajun parishes of [Southwestern Louisiana](#) and the counties of Eastern Texas. The storm re-flooded the 9th Ward in New Orleans and caused massive damage spanning from St. Bernard to Cameron Parish. GSR participating organizations [Bayou Interfaith Shared Community Organizing \(BISCO\)](#) and [The United Houma Nation](#) are two coastal groups working directly on the severe impacts from Hurricane Rita 10 years later.

*"In Terrebonne and Lafourche Parishes, more than 20% of our families live in poverty. These frontline communities are hit first by climate-based and extractive industry disasters with little means to fully recover. Members of BISCO are going to be in the presence of the highest official of the Catholic Church. To hear Pope Francis speak about climate change and its connection to poverty strengthens our faith that we can change the minds of so many politicians in this region that continue to choose to deny our reality."*  
- Sharon Gauthé, Executive Director of BISCO

GSR leveraged new media and regional networks to call for partners to support these groups by signing the [Petition for Federal Recognition for the United Houma Nation](#) and funneling financial donation requests to groups on the ground.

## C. Gulf South Rising Delegation to Paris (COP21)

Thirty-one delegates from the Gulf South traveled as part of the [GSR COP 21](#) delegation to Paris, France, and participated in the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) 21st Conference of Parties (COP21) from November 30 until December 6, 2015. Local community leaders shared their unique Gulf South perspective with global communities on the frontlines of climate change and brought back stories from people working for ecological equity and climate justice around the world. GSR's delegation to Paris prioritized Indigenous leadership and created a mobile community that furthered ecological equity and served as the culmination of the 2015 GSR initiative. Airfare, lodging, and meals were provided for the entire delegation through supporting grants from philanthropic partners and individual donors. For more about GSR's trip to COP21, [read the GSR COP21 report](#).

### 1. Why Paris 2015?

As affirmed by the GSR initiative, 2015 was a decisive year for the climate justice movement in the Gulf South and around the world. From hurricanes to oil-drilling disasters, the Gulf states have already been experiencing many severe impacts resulting from decades of unaccountable extraction and inequity in climate-based disaster recovery. As the effects of climate change continue and intensify, global leaders promised a new climate agreement through the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) Conference Of Parties (COP) held in Paris in late 2015. The legally binding Paris Agreement on climate change has now been signed by more than 150 world leaders.

COP21/Paris was a movement-building moment. GSR organized to put frontline communities in the center of this global focal point to deepen relationships and alliances. COP21 was an opportunity to hear the voices of frontline communities bearing the brunt of the climate and economic crisis and the corporate practices that drive it. Comprised of grassroots and frontline community leaders, the GSR delegation wanted to build off of the strength and lessons learned from GSR's 2015 events, to put frontline voices at the center, and to have the most strategic impact possible.



Members of the delegation entering the Climate Generations Area at COP21.

## 2. The Gulf South Rising Delegation

The delegation was comprised of community members, staff, and allies from outside the region. GSR's invitation to be on the delegation was open to the general Gulf South Community and targeted invitations were made to individuals who had engaged with the GSR initiative during 2015. Community members were asked to complete an application and were ranked based on previous engagement with GSR and membership in a frontline community. Of the 31 individuals in the delegation, 24 were leaders from communities at the frontlines of climate change in Texas, Louisiana, Mississippi, and Florida. Of the 24 leaders, seven individuals were identified as priority delegates, and three of these were credentialed to attend the accredited COP21 zone as official observers of the negotiations.



Members of the delegation on tour in Paris.  
Photo credit: So-Called Media

“

This is about us showing the world that we are rising and standing together.

”



Thomas Dardar Jr.,  
Principal Chief of  
the United Houma  
Nation Tribe

Mary Gutierrez,  
Executive Director  
Earth Ethics, Inc.

## 6. #GULFSOUTHRISING MESSAGING & MEDIA

### A. Messaging Through Community-Based Collective Processes

Gulf South Rising's K10 [messaging](#) was developed through open, bottom-up community processes. Open facilitation team meetings developed consensus-based processes to create and prioritize messaging. While GSR meetings were open to the public and all participants made valuable contributions, final decisions regarding messaging were made by local people from the Gulf South. The Gulf South Rising slogan "The seas are rising... AND SO ARE WE" was developed through a community process in the Fall of 2014 as local leaders in Louisiana prepared to host the People's Climate Festival in New Orleans and support delegates from Louisiana's universities to the People's Climate March in New York. The slogan is rooted in the GSR principle of changing the regional narrative from resilience to resistance. See more of GSR's messaging in action on [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#), and [www.gulfsoutrising.org](http://www.gulfsoutrising.org).

### B. Media Attention: Gulf South Rising in the News

Facing South: [Bayou Rising Draws Attention to Climate Change Impacts on Louisiana's Coast](#)

Earth Island Journal: [Gulf Coast Activists Band Together to Fight Climate Change and Extractive Industries](#)

Insideclimate News: [After Katrina, New Orleans' Climate Conundrum: Fight or Flight?](#)

New Orleans Public Radio: [Activists Challenge Concept Of 'Resilience,' Advocate For Change](#)

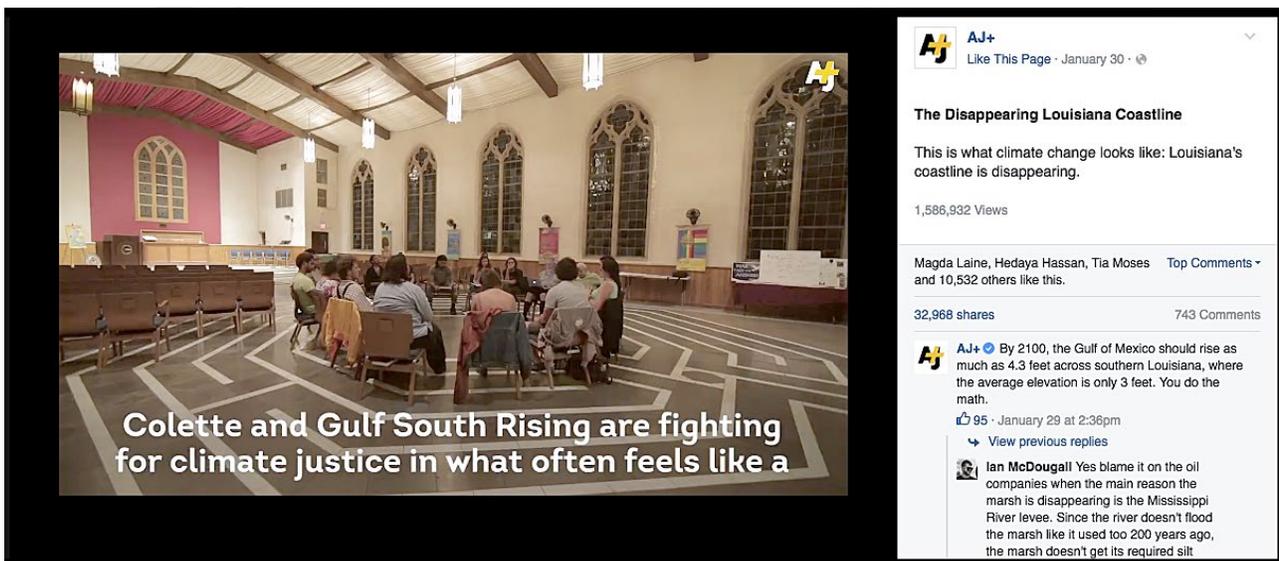
Democracy Now: [An Unequal Recovery in New Orleans: Racial Disparities Grow in City 10 Years After Katrina](#)

Bustle: [Gulf South Rising Activists Say Hurricane Katrina's 10th Anniversary Brings Awareness To Once Invisible Issues](#)

Center for Social Inclusion: [Post-Katrina: How Gulf Coast Communities are Taking Action](#)

New Orleans Public Radio: From Paris: [Houma Chief Seeks Support For Tribe](#)

Nola.com: [BP oil spill 5-year anniversary march in New Orleans](#)



The image is a composite. On the left, a photograph shows a group of people sitting in a church sanctuary, engaged in a community meeting. The sanctuary has a high ceiling with wooden beams and large stained-glass windows. A pink banner is visible in the background. On the right, a video player interface from AJ+ is shown. The video title is "The Disappearing Louisiana Coastline" and the description reads: "This is what climate change looks like: Louisiana's coastline is disappearing." The video has 1,586,932 views. Below the video, there are comments and shares. One comment from Ian McDougall says: "Yes blame it on the oil companies when the main reason the marsh is disappearing is the Mississippi River levee. Since the river doesn't flood the marsh like it used to 200 years ago, the marsh doesn't get its required silt".

An [AJ+ video](#) featuring Gulf South Rising with more than 1.5 million views.



## PARTICIPANT REFLECTION: FUNDING REGIONAL MOVEMENT INFRASTRUCTURE:

By *Kaydrienne Young*,  
Founding Member of the Miami Climate Alliance

I have felt the weight of the nonprofit industrial complex far too many times in my short 25 years of life. From the moment I began supporting grassroots community building, I've felt pressured. Pressured to collect "x" amount of petitions by "y", pressured to recruit this many people to demonstrate this to elected officials, etc. After a while, I got tired of succumbing to pressure to materialize my desire to help build a better future into someone else's definition of the solution - a solution that was too often defined by moneyed interests. To many it may not come as a surprise, but the non-profit industrial complex is real and it is out here burning out passionate people while constraining the way we build relationships with the work, and the world.

Hearing about the Katrina 10 Week of Action was a breath of fresh air; in my mind it set a powerful precedent. It was powerful to see Gulf South Rising stand up to business-as-usual by raising money from large national organizations and unapologetically redirecting them, not to further political goals, but to create a space for solace in music, giving thanks, and breathing easy. Resources were used to embolden a vision of healing devised not by

organizers with the privilege of opting into the struggle, but by members of frontline communities. It was reaffirming to see the community hold ownership. I thought that if Katrina 10 was any indication of what experiencing COP 21 as a part of the GSR delegation would be like, then I was all the way in for the ride.

That's why GSR is home base. GSR provided a space for people from all across the Gulf South to come together in solidarity with one another, but and it also provided a space for connecting with the Global South with whom we share the burden of the fossil fuel industry. GSR is a multigenerational and intersectional space where I could feel safe in my vulnerability, free in my indignation, and full in good company. I saw with clarity, the importance of creating open spaces for synergy to ebb and flow naturally. Gulf South Rising helped me see the importance of owning our history, narrative, and visions of the future - so that we can be heard.



Kaydrienne Young representing Gulf South Rising in Washington D.C. Photo credit: Emma Collin



K10 Week of Action recruitment meme shared via GSR's Twitter account and re-tweeted by GSR participating organization 350 Louisiana.



Bill McKibben of 350.org, Principal Chief Thomas Dardar of the United Houma Nation, Thao Vu of Mississippi Coalition for Vietnamese-American Fisher Folks and Families, Dr. Beverly Wright of Dillard University, and Colette Pichon Battle of Gulf Coast Center for Law & Policy.

## VII. FUNDRAISING AND FINANCIAL REPORTS

Despite ten years of recovery from the Nation's largest disasters, frontline residents of the Gulf South are often the last to receive dollars to support the critical work and daily expenses associated with creating systems-change and accessing justice. The Gulf South Rising initiative had one clear goal around fundraising - get the money to the ground. What could not be allowed to happen in 2015 was fundraising efforts by groups outside the region without supporting the work being done by frontline organizations in the Gulf South.

In addition, GSR worked to challenge the varying excuses often given for not funding community-level work in the South. While the goal was to raise dollars connected to a budget for action, the vision was to offer an alternative narrative to show the good and transformative work that can happen when dollars hit the frontlines. GSR did not raise all of the predicted budget to support a 12 month, five state initiative. Nonetheless, this grassroots regional effort was successful in raising significant dollars - all of which landed directly on the Gulf South frontlines.

### A. Financial Reports

The graph below shows the dollars collected through GSR fiscal agents. Not reflected in the financial accounting below are the valuations for staff time, donated meals, and other invaluable contributions to this effort. Because the goal of GSR was to funnel dollars directly to frontline community organizations, some dollars that supported work associated with GSR are not reported here. Each individual organization has the responsibility to confirm dollars received through their reporting process. This reporting confirms only the dollars received by Gulf South Rising anchor organizations and fiscal agents.

<b>Total 2015 Gulf South Rising Financial Report</b>	
<b>Events/Actions</b>	<b>Amount Raised/Comments</b>
Spring Leadership Training	\$11,000.00 Movement Generation Training for GSR frontline leadership. Not reflected, the cost of airline tickets for Texas participants paid for by 350.org.
BP5	\$27,150.00 Dollars were controlled by the Gulf Future Coalition.
Katrina 10	\$79,500.00 Dollars directly to organizations are reported separately.
CoP21/Paris delegation	\$53,566.00
GSR Operations	\$165,939.00
Community Controlled Fund	\$8,459.00 General donations not tied to an event or marked specifically to support GSR operations were placed in a community controlled fund.
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$345,614.00</b>

<b>Financial Report - Sierra Club • K10 Week of Action</b>	
\$5,000 - March/2nd line organizer	\$19,000 - L9 festival costs
\$5,000 - L9 Festival organizer	\$29,000 - March/2nd line event costs
\$5,000 - Rhythmic Alchemy organizer	\$34,000 - Rhythmic Alchemy event costs
\$15,000 - GCCLP/GSR coordinator	
<b>\$112,000 - Total cash investment by Sierra Club</b>	

**1. Fiscal Sponsor - Project South \$316,463.00**

**Paris/ COP 21 - \$43,566.00**

Individual Donors \$17,000  
 Natural Resource Defense Council \$1,000  
 Grassroots Global Justice \$16,166  
 Grassroots Global Justice \$1,000  
 Foundation for Louisiana \$8,400

**K10 - \$89,500.00**

Individual Donors \$9,000  
 Movement Strategy Center/CJA \$5,000  
 SEIU \$20,000  
 Union of Concerned Scientists \$10,000  
 Natural Resources Defense Council \$10,000  
 Needmor Fund \$5,000  
 Proteus Fund/ Solidaire \$20,500  
 Ecological Justice Training- \$11,000.00

Individual Donors \$11,000

**GSR General Operations- \$140,939.00**

Individual Support \$35,646  
 RN Response Network \$5,000  
 Better Future Project \$293  
 Kendeda Fund \$50,000  
 Surdna Foundation \$50,000

**2. Fiscal Sponsor - Gulf Future Coalition via Mind Power Collective- \$27,150.00 • BP 5 Events**

**Funder Committed Sent/When Disbursed To/When**

NRDC \$5,000 4/17/2015 Mind Power Collective  
 Sierra Club \$4,000 4/17/2015 Mind Power Collective  
[350.org](http://350.org) \$1,500 4/9/2015 Via Everribbon [TSB]  
 Greenpeace \$5,000 4/25/2015 Mind Power Collective  
 Chorus \$5,500 4/20/2015 \$5000 MPC;  
 \$1500 via Everribbon [TSB]  
 GRN E-Appeal \$500 N/A Paid via direct expenses  
 on GRN credit card  
 SCEN \$350 4/8/2015 Via Everribbon [TSB]  
 Rising Tide \$1,000 4/13/2015 Via Everribbon [TSB]  
 EverRibbon \$7,150 As of 5/5/15 TSB

**TOTAL \$27,150**

GCCI \$500 Not Received AL CFOMB via MPC

For questions about these disbursements contact [Jayeesha Dutta](#).

## VIII. OUTCOMES OF THE 2015 GULF SOUTH RISING

*“The movement building beyond the GSR calendar of events was the real intention of 2015.”*

### 1. Gulf South Rising Built Regional Movement Infrastructure

#### A. GSR Developed local leadership through the Creation of Community & Culture.

Gulf South Rising built regional movement infrastructure by cultivating new leaders and connecting seasoned justice leaders to the intersecting issues associated with climate disruption. Participants fully engaged in GSR received training tailored to the region and gained experience developing democratic processes for self-governance. By creating inclusive, intergenerational organizing spaces, GSR played a vital role in developing next generation climate justice leaders.



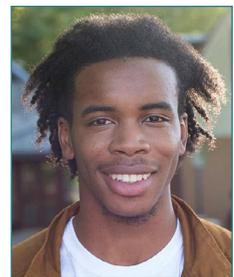
#### PARTICIPANT REFLECTION: COMMUNITY IS OUR WEALTH:

By *Eric Harrison*,  
GSR facilitation team member- Louisiana native

The reason people went back home after the storms was community. A lot of poor people where I'm from don't have any money, but we do have wealth in our community. Gulf South Rising formed a community. The whole way that we [Gulf South Rising] went about was completely revolutionary in my mind. We gathered people that are not normally engaged in this type of work, we engaged them, we provided information, and the group collectively generated great ideas that we wouldn't have been able to get by ourselves. Gulf South Rising took a lot of meetings, a lot of talking, a lot of words, and a lot of time. But it was worth it. In the next phase of the world, top-down processes won't work. I think this is the only process that will work. To deal with climate change and climate disasters in a real way, we need to empower people to make their own decisions. And I know that next generation leaders have fresh new innovative ideas and they, and we, need everyone to stand behind us and follow leadership.

#### PARTICIPANT REFLECTION: WHO HAS ACCESS TO RESOURCES IN OUR COMMUNITY:

By *Troy Robertson*,  
GSR facilitation team member- Louisiana native



The climate crisis helps me understand who has access to resources and recovery. I watched Black people be criminalized in the middle of Hurricane Katrina. When they refer to [Hurricane Katrina] as a natural disaster, we must understand that the storm was, but most of the damage was man-made. Gulf South Rising gave me an understanding of the way to use democratic processes to recapture our own narrative. We know what's best for ourselves. Sometimes, and especially during times of crisis, people are forced to make decisions quickly. And it feels like the people making decisions aren't thinking about the people most impacted. Gulf South Rising was a long, long process, but it felt like the right way to do it.”

- Louisiana native and GSR facilitation team member- Troy Robertson.

*NOTE: Troy Robertson's college thesis of May 2016 titled “The Illusion of Recovery in New Orleans: Displaced, Misplaced, and Replaced” acknowledges and thanks “the community organizers in New Orleans who introduced me to a world of possibilities and equipped me with the tools to be a changemaker in society.”*

### **B. GSR trained frontline leadership on climate justice and ecological equity.**

GSR trainings throughout 2015 further cultivated local leadership, knowledge, and skills in the region. Movement Generation tailored an ecological justice and strategy training specifically for 25 GSR participants from Texas, Louisiana, Mississippi, and Alabama. The Gulf Coast Center for Law & Policy offered a Climate Justice 101 training to 30 residents from across South Louisiana in Ironton, LA, a historic community in South Louisiana founded by freed enslaved people. GSR organizers hosted a social media training in New Orleans during the lead up to the Katrina 10 Week of Action, teaching local event organizers how to effectively use Twitter, Facebook, and Periscope.

The Union of Concerned Scientists collaborated with the Deep South Center for Environmental Justice and the Gulf Coast Center for Law & Policy to host the GSR Climate Change Community Training for 40 frontline leaders from all five Gulf South states. The GSR Climate Change Community Training served as a free and open-to-the-public space to build skills related to connecting Gulf South lived experiences to climate science, and to strengthening the Gulf South network rooted in climate justice and ecological equity. Weekly GSR meetings trained local residents in processes for democratic facilitation and collective decision-making.



Community members from across the Gulf Coast at the GSR Climate Change Community Training.

### **C. GSR created a Community Controlled Fund.**

All dollars raised in 2015 that did not go directly to local organizers and events (as outlined above in financial reporting) are presently held in the GSR Community Controlled Fund. GSR as a broader initiative concluded with the end of 2015, but community meetings continue into 2016 for a collective decision-making process on how to manage and use the GSR Community Controlled Fund. Building this infrastructure for the GSR Community Controlled Fund is creating a model for community controlled funds that could be replicated and adapted across the Gulf South.



GSR Ecological Justice Training in Fairhope, Alabama May 2015. • Photo credit: May Nguyen

## 2016 GSR Community Controlled Fund Statement of Purpose

The collectively established GSR statement of purpose, adopted via consensus on 5/24/16, reads: The Gulf South Rising Community Controlled Fund GSR CCF sets precedents for new funding mechanisms promoting just transitions away from extractive practices while dismantling oppressive structures which harm our communities and, ultimately, our ecology. The GSR CCF exists to restore communities and to honor the legacy of strength and resistance in the Gulf South.

We believe people on and of the land should control what happens to the land; the people of the South must control what happens in the South. This regenerating, community-controlled fund provides resources to foster power and promote togetherness in the region (TX, LA, MS, AL, FL). The fund exists to return power to historically marginalized communities through collective control of dollars, assets, skills and information. We work against racism, homophobia, transphobia, sexism, ableism, classism, ageism and other forms of discrimination which have been used to divide our communities internally and exclude valuable members of our communities from the larger world. We prioritize Black and Indigenous communities of the Gulf South, and we aim to impact and connect the often over-looked, common interests of Gulf South and Global South communities.

We invest in furthering ecological equity. We fund innovative approaches to ensure that the basic needs (air, water, food, housing, healthcare) of Gulf South residents on the frontlines of climate change are met in balance with our ecology. Our dollars are our love in action and we use them to create and grow regenerative spaces of power and collective healing.

Learn more in the [Gulf South Rising Community Controlled Fund July 2016 Report](#).

[Donate to the #GSR Community Controlled Fund here.](#)

## 2. Gulf South Rising connected and convened frontline communities around collective healing and ecological equity.

### A. GSR offered a weekly practice of the Jemez Principles.

Gulf South Rising used the Jemez Principles for Democratic Organizing as fundamental and guiding principles for collective work. Every weekly meeting began by reviewing the principles: 1) Be Inclusive; 2) Emphasis on Bottom-Up Organizing; 3) Let People Speak for Themselves; 4) Work together in Solidarity and Mutuality; 5) Build Just Relationships Among Ourselves; and 6) Commitment to Self-Transformation. Over the course of a year of shared work, GSR leaders began to deepen their understanding and transform themselves and relationships. The GSR Delegation to Paris for COP21 added additional guidelines that reflected the group's experience in other organizing spaces, cultural practices, and ideas about democratic organizing. Among our list: "open and close with a cultural item," "listen to understand," and "collective duty to keep our space an oppression free zone."

### B. GSR connected Black and Indigenous leadership in the Gulf South.

Despite sharing coastal ecologies, histories of systemic marginalization, and rich cultures rooted in survival, Black and Indigenous leadership in the Gulf South has remained largely divided. GSR sought to confront the forces that have generationally pitted tribes and Black communities against each other and hold a space for healing and connection. During the Katrina 10 Week of Action, in a beautiful coming together of cultures, tribal leadership of Black Mardi Gras Indian tribes and Indigenous Native American tribes met for the first time in the sacred space of Congo Square. GSR served as a catalyst for relationship-building in 2015 and helped lay the groundwork for long-term organizing work between Black and Indigenous communities in the Gulf South.

## PARTICIPANT REFLECTION: WE ARE STRONGER TOGETHER:

*By Bette Biliot, Executive Assistant to Principal Chief, United Houma Nation*

Being a part of the Gulf South Rising movement over the 2015 year was a growing experience for me. I owe GSR a great deal of gratitude for teaching me how to become a more effective leader and facilitator - both within GSR and in my own community. The people that I have met through this organizing work have become mentors, role models and - much more than that - my lifelong friends.

From the older, wiser leaders who have fought tirelessly for justice in their communities since well before my time, to the young ones just getting their feet wet, my GSR family has taught me that our struggles and strengths bind us all together. We are stronger together, especially in the diversity of our color, background, and culture.



### 3. Gulf South Rising advanced regional efforts of Indigenous tribal and land sovereignty.

#### A. GSR promoted the petition for federal recognition of the United Houma Nation.

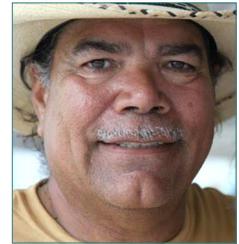
Promoting this petition at many GSR events, allies of the Gulf South learned more about the Indigenous struggles of South Louisiana.

#### B. GSR supported place-based learning of the Poarch Band of Creek Indians.

Community learning sessions and honor ceremony were led by Ralph McCullers of Poarch Band of the Muskogee-Creek Nation in Alabama. Connected to the Movement Generation training in Fairhope, Alabama, GSR leadership grounded learning about ecological equity and traditional ecological knowledge from the first nations of that place.

#### C. GSR practiced following local indigenous leadership.

Principal Chief Thomas Dardar of the United Houma Nation was chosen as the GSR priority delegate representing the GSR delegation inside the COP 21 negotiations and in formal interviews about the Gulf South. All delegates agreed to lift up the struggle of the United Houma Nation as connections were made with advocates from across the globe.



### PARTICIPANT REFLECTION: RESPECTING CULTURE:

*By Principal Chief Thomas Dardar Jr., United Houma Nation*

Gulf South Rising played a big part in getting the United Houma Nation's story and our petition for federal recognition out into the world. Gulf South Rising recognized the importance of us telling our own story, and expanded the spaces to which we have access. Having the United Houma Nation represented by its Principal Chief at COP21 in Paris was monumental for our tribe, and it would not have happened without Gulf South Rising.

Engaging with Gulf South Rising was humbling. The United Houma Nation and its members have historically been marginalized and devalued. Gulf South Rising elevated our collective voice and gave us back some of the dignity that has historically been taken away from us. I felt respect and honor for our culture; I felt supported in our struggle. Not only did this respect, recognition and support give me great joy, they strengthened my resolve to continue fighting for my tribe.

Connecting through Gulf South Rising to other individuals from the Gulf South and the Global South allowed me to realize that the United Houma Nation is not alone in its struggle for equity and survival. By talking to and connecting with others, I realized that the same injustices are taking place all over our region, and around the world. This realization has changed how I talk to people about the United Houma Nation's plight -- I can now connect our struggle to other injustices and to the struggles of other Indigenous communities experiencing violence against them. Knowing that we are not alone in our fight for justice keeps me going.

Being in Gulf South Rising spaces, what most stuck out to me was the respect that was afforded to everyone, and the true feeling of love and appreciation. It felt like being with family. Sitting in that circle, having those one-on-one conversations and building those relationships was an incredibly powerful experience. Sitting with these folks enriched my life. I feel like my family has grown, and I am grateful for the authentic support this newfound family has already shown the United Houma Nation.

## 4. Gulf South Rising shifted the narrative

### A. GSR help to create and spread a unifying regional designation: “Gulf South.”

GSR was developed with an awareness and analysis of how the language and narrative used on the ground and by external groups determines who has access to resources, particularly after disasters. After 2005, and in response to the narrow geographic focus used by external groups, there was an attempt to use the “Gulf Coast” designation as a united front to mitigate the power of New Orleans and highlight damage to Mississippi, Alabama and Florida. However, while a conversation centered on the coast can include New Orleans, Biloxi, and Mobile - it in turn creates division in the northern part of Gulf states, excluding cities like Baton Rouge, Jackson, and Montgomery - all of which hold political power for entire states. This type of exclusion also creates competition in the region for resources, media attention and political will. As a result, GSR organizers saw the need to craft an inclusive narrative that could unite the entirety of all five states based on their shared reality and shared fate. GSR acknowledged that climate-based disasters are not limited to the storms of the Gulf Coast. GSR explicitly included inland areas like Montgomery, and communities not on the Gulf of Mexico, like Miami. These decisions were made with an understanding of the broad legacy of the region as a whole, and of the opportunity to unite the entire Gulf South to build power.

### B. GSR shifted the narrative from resilience to resistance.

“Resilience” has become a commonplace term. It is used widely especially when describing communities that (often against all odds) bounce back after being struck by natural and man-made disaster again and again. GSR events acknowledged the truth of resiliency to describe the communities of the Gulf South. Using resiliency as a starting place, GSR called for communities to acknowledge that contribution of the South to the nation and the world. The work of GSR was to engage frontline communities in a sankofa shift from our present state of resilience to our past roots in resistance.

## PARTICIPANT REFLECTION: HOLISTIC PERSPECTIVE:

By *Ya-Sin Shabazz, Director- Hijra House*  
*GSR facilitation team member -Mississippi native*

Gulf South Rising birthed a whole new aspect of our work at Hijra House, an aspect that will be at the forefront of our work going forward. Hijra House’s work had been largely locally-focused and centered around creating jobs and business opportunities for Black men. Gulf South Rising’s trainings and workshops on climate change and climate justice provided a deeper understanding and insight into a much broader system and helped us understand the connection between climate and issues of social justice and equity. Hijra House now has a more holistic perspective - we have expanded our purview to go beyond creating jobs to demanding and working towards a just transition that lifts up people on the frontlines of climate change and inequity, and that furthers justice, public health, and the protection of our coast.

We are talking about building structures in which the collective ownership of resources is possible; structures that protects us against, and leave us better prepared to deal with, future climate disasters. The Just Transition PMA that Hijra House is hosting in the fall of 2016 quite simply would not have happened without Gulf South Rising - it is a direct result of GSR’s trainings and workshops.



### **C. GSR introduced “Just Transition” to build movement and a shared analysis for frontline communities.**

GSR trainings and events forged regional relationships while simultaneously creating a common language and shared analysis of the intersection issues and impact of climate change on the Gulf South. This shared understanding is the foundation upon which work could be collectively done. Central to this common understanding was the concept of a “just transition” tailored to acknowledge a Southern reality. Within the GSR initiative, the demand was a just transition away from extractive industries, discriminatory policies and unjust practices that hinder equitable recovery from disaster and impedes the development of sustainable communities. Two Mississippi leaders, Ya-sin Shabazz of Hijra House and Jennifer Crosslin of [STEPS Coalition](#) and the GSR delegation to COP21, supported by GSR anchor organization [Gulf Coast Center for Law & Policy](#), will host People’s Movement Assemblies in the fall of 2016. Rooted in practices of community-level self-determination, these PMAs will focus on just transition and climate justice.

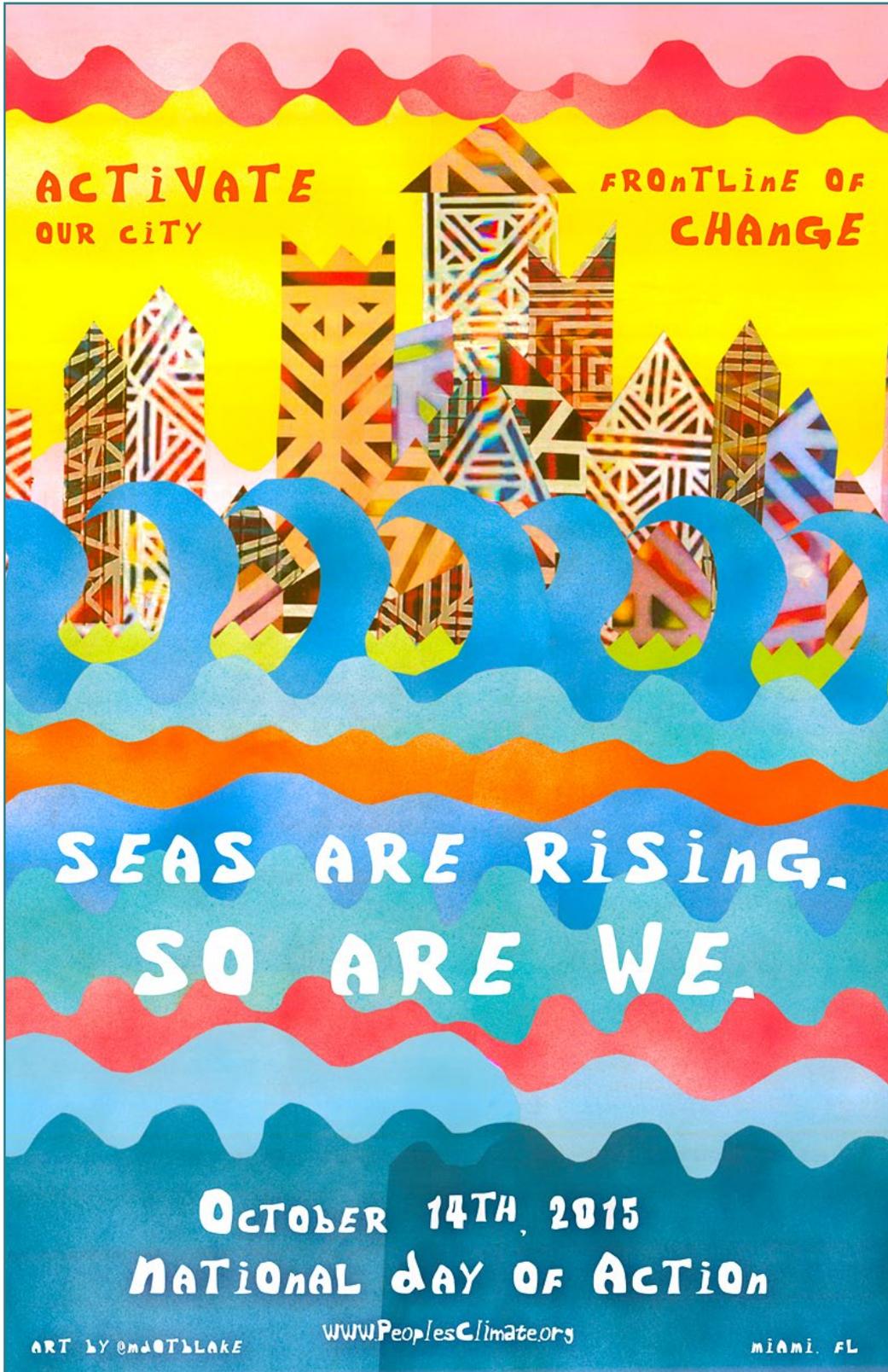
### **D. GSR created community-based messaging across the region.**

GSR was grounded in bottom-up processes and letting people speak for themselves. The messaging, talking points, and language for social and traditional media for most GSR commemorations took many meetings to generate - valuing all voices and prioritizing those from the Gulf South. Community-based messaging included: “Commemoration” vs. “Anniversary”. In weekly meetings preceding GSR commemorations of the Deepwater Horizon Spill, community members (including coastal fisherfolks) collectively decided to use the word “commemoration” rather than “anniversary” for the events organized.

“Commemoration” more adequately reflected the pain caused by the oil spill and its ongoing negative impacts. This somber tone extended to other dates acknowledged by GSR; there was no reason to celebrate the anniversary of events that resulted in the short- and long-term oppression of communities along the Gulf South. GSR participants reclaimed their own narrative and stories. While many national organizations (and local governments) planned events for the “Anniversary of Hurricane Katrina”, GSR coordinated collective messaging processes, rooted in principles of self-determination, that gave space and recognition to silenced people and their stories. This messaging process allowed community members to connect over shared experiences and to put these experiences at the center of a shared narrative, rather than on the margins or absent altogether.

***E. The Seas Are Rising... And So Are We!*** “*The seas are rising and so are we!*” was a declaration made in all five Gulf South states throughout 2015. Beyond shifting the narrative from resilience to resistance and bringing a climate analysis into a diverse array of organizing spaces, this call, and GSR messaging more broadly, united stories and work across the entire Gulf South region. As one example, the Miami Climate Alliance was able to leverage GSR as an organizing tool to connect their work to a broader narrative of justice in the region.

The 2015 Miami Climate March, used “The seas are rising and so are we!” as one unifying call, and used climate justice as a unifying framework which allowed organizations working on the Miami Climate March - including [New Florida Majority](#), [Catalyst Miami](#), the [CLEO Institute](#), [The Imperial Open Mic](#), [Roots Collective](#), [Institute for Civic Engagement and Democracy](#), [Floridians for Solar Choice](#), [Madre Tierra Collective](#), [Fanm Ayisyen](#), and [Urban Paradise Guild](#) - to connect their issues and the communities they work with, resulting in a bigger, more powerful movement moment. The US Climate Action Network used the slogan as a national galvanizing call for its conference in Miami. And the slogan was used to bring in a Gulf South voice to national protests against offshore oil and gas drilling during the 2016 Breakfree actions in Washington, DC.



Poster designed by Marcus Black of Little Haiti, Miami.

## 5. GSR had unanticipated positive impacts.

### A. Gulf South Rising uplifted Organizing Work and Opportunities in the Gulf South.

Although not always visible to folks outside the region, there is (and has been) good justice work happening in the Gulf South. GSR sought to uplift that work and bring attention to local, intergenerationally-rooted people serving their communities. Events like the Katrina 10 Week of Action leveraged national attention to the region to tell an authentic story from local, Gulf South people.

### PARTICIPANT REFLECTION: COLLABORATION AND COORDINATION:

By *Kendall King*,  
Coalition Chair, Virginia Environmental Student Coalition



Gulf South Rising was a beacon of Southern organizing for us in Virginia, an area more often steered by trends from D.C. or further North. For me, the Katrina 10 Week of Action was the first organizing space that was not dominated by White people, truly rooted in place, and with good food. There was one mic for so many different voices at the Southern Movement Assembly, and it was clear that collaboration and coordination created space for everyone. I left Gulf South Rising carrying the spirit of democracy, creativity, and resistance that the weekend radiated.

### B. New Orleans Climate Summit: Equitable Adaptation in Coastal Urban Areas.

Throughout 2015, GSR set out to increase awareness and understanding of the climate crisis in order to mobilize individuals to take action and join the fight for climate justice. The 30-person GSR delegation to Paris was comprised of climate leaders from across the Gulf who were trained to better understand climate science and how to communicate its impacts from their own Gulf South reality. Interactions with leaders from other countries broadened their understanding of the global climate crisis and its impact on Global South communities. As a result, these 30 leaders left Paris with a deepened sense of purpose to educate others about climate change and take action to prevent the worst of its effects.



GSR leaders built community by sharing meals together and debriefing daily events in the house shared by all delegates - Paris, France.



GSR messaging and participants from Florida, Mississippi and Louisiana in Washington, DC in May 2016.



GSR delegates with New Orleans Mayor Mitch Landrieu and priority delegate Chief Thomas Dardar in the Paris airport.

On the return trip, GSR delegates from New Orleans spoke to New Orleans Mayor Mitch Landrieu in the Paris airport. Armed with new information gathered through GSR trainings and through their experiences at the COP21, the delegation informed Mayor Landrieu of their concerns around climate change as residents of the Gulf South. Leaders stressed the urgency of addressing the climate crisis and the need to take action locally in Louisiana. After listening and talking to the delegates, Mayor Landrieu committed to hold a climate summit in New Orleans - the first of its kind in 2016. The City of New Orleans held its first climate-related programming, the Equitable Climate Adaptation in Coastal Urban Areas Workshop, in May of 2016.



New Orleans native and GSR delegate Craig MaGraff started the conversation with Mayor Landrieu. Photo credit: Maria Victoire.



**Together, we will demand equity in Miami's climate crisis.**

Dear

David McDougal here from Miami Climate Alliance, the Steering Team for the conference, and Florida New Majority to let you in on some exciting efforts happening in Miami.

This year, we're taking to the streets to support our 80+ local organization-led efforts to demand that the county and local governments stop stalling in executing the recommendations of the sea level rise committee. We'd love your support as we continue the call that equity is brought to forefront of Miami's resiliency planning process. Our efforts this week **resulted in a resolution** being introduced and now we're turning out today at City Hall to show our broad support. We can't wait to have you by our side in just a few weeks!

*Below please find some of the basic logistics of our **USCAN/Miami Climate Alliance mass action at lunchtime on June 14th** and two other reminders about the conference.*

**THE SEAS ARE RISING. SO ARE WE.**

US Climate Action Network email featuring GSR messaging.



**AlternateROOTS  
Regional Gathering**

**A CALL TO ACTION:  
FROM RESILIENCE TO  
RESISTANCE**

**Thursday, 09.17.2015, 6:00 PM  
thru  
Sunday, 09.20.2015, 1:00PM  
NEW ORLEANS, LA**

**For more information contact  
Kesha McKey: [kcmckey@cox.net](mailto:kcmckey@cox.net)  
[www.alternateroots.org](http://www.alternateroots.org)  
404.577.1079**



Alternate Roots flyer featuring GSR messaging and photos from K10 Week of Action.

## IX. LESSONS LEARNED

Part of organizing in the frontlines is acknowledging that movement is always developing and growing. While the 2015 Gulf South Rising initiative has come to an end, the leaders cultivated and the projects seeded continue to move forward. Outcomes of the 2015 Gulf South Rising initiative act as ongoing processes to engage community leaders from across the Gulf South around lessons learned and opportunities to make real and lasting change for the region's frontline communities. The following are a small sample of valuable lessons learned.

### **1. Movements that shift culture, systems and realities require real resources and capacity.**

It takes real funding to reach an entire region; the Gulf South spans a quarter of the US topography. GSR's operations plan originally called for two local, full-time organizers in each of the five Gulf South states to coordinate and support movement building. Instead, the organizing work of the year was almost completely unpaid, led by volunteers, and anchored in Southeast Louisiana. GSR efforts also solidified the difficulty in simultaneous fundraising and organizing. As we learned, a better approach would be to raise a majority of the dollars needed ahead of time and execute the work with a fully funded budget. The lack of resources and capacity was evident in GSR administrative and organizing shortcomings. Anchor organizations bore a tremendous burden fronting dollars that were pledged to support GSR events. Philanthropic dollars were limited to events while staffing and general operation were left unfunded. The lack of funding was prohibitive for language-access technologies needed to build with coastal Vietnamese and Spanish-speaking communities; lack of travel resources impeded building more deeply with Florida and Texas Indigenous communities; and across the region GSR facilitation leaders did not have the capacity to follow up with many organizations that could have anchored events and deserve to be uplifted for their good work. The capacity for consistent in-person connections would have likely decreased misunderstandings and ensured time for better processing and planning. Regional conference calls were enough to stay connected; organizing required more time and trained staff.

### **2. Cultivating frontline leadership takes time.**

GSR revealed the need for real investment and development of leadership at the grassroots level. The highly trained, highly informed people in the movement are generally from a privileged class, and privilege is connected to the racial hierarchy. Work from the ground is generally required to meet the standards of those with relative privilege rather than being tailored to the standards of the frontline. Authentic grassroots leaders from limited access to processes or frameworks are generally expected to possess the skills and perform at a level of those privileged enough to choose to work in movement spaces. Other grassroots leaders able to engage are relegated to soundbytes and charismatic mouthpieces- performers of the movement. This dynamic maintains a broader cycle of oppression that must be dismantled in justice movements. Cultivating Southern frontline leadership means directly confronting intergenerational oppression and trauma. In addition, a 21st century analysis and deep understanding of the rooted political, social, and economic system of anti-Black racism that still permeates society and movements today. The growth of frontline leaders from the Gulf South will not look the same as the process of developing leadership elsewhere. Like southern food, cultivating frontline leadership takes time- but it is worth it!

### **3. Move at a healing speed.**

Working on the frontlines of climate change in the Gulf South necessarily means working in communities that have experienced multiple social traumas. Leaders from the frontline are often “created” out of necessity during these traumatic events. Many have no access to formal healing spaces. Movement work requires regular community meetings to act as collective healing spaces. GSR was able to best accomplish its goals when the group moved at a healing speed - even if that meant delaying short-term objectives, deadlines, or deliverables. When moving quickly for the sake of meeting deadlines and time constraints, GSR struggled to function as a healing space and further its goals.

### **4. Technology is no substitute for authentic relationship-building.**

Technology can absolutely be a tool in movement building. However, the number of “likes” or opened e-mails cannot become a standard for successful organizing. Technology should serve as a catalyst for long-term relationship building not as a means for meaningful connection. People reached by email or social media are low-hanging fruit and should be identified and cultivated for the movement. The “work,” however, requires connecting with people most likely to be negatively impacted by existing systems or institutions. To work together the first action of the organizer is to listen - from there trust can be built. Trust takes time; in-person time should be supported by technology not dependent upon it.

## X. RECOMMENDATIONS

The 2015 Gulf South Rising initiative is just the beginning of climate justice and ecological equity work from this nationally vital region. It stands as a regional accomplishment led by frontline community leaders and supported by regional and national allies. This was a good first step in what is sure to be a long journey. From that first step, power has been built and many valuable lessons have been learned. For all who wish to support movement building in the Gulf South and the good work in the region the following recommendations are offered for consideration.

### A. Frontline Leaders

- **Declare your power.** Reject the victimized narrative. Being a target is not the same as being a victim. Charity is what you receive when there is no fault. Justice is what must be demanded when there are clear systems put in place to create and maintain inequity. We need everyone in this climate change fight. When you fight, do so from a place of power and dignity.
- **Speak truth to power.** One of the toughest moments in movement work is speaking truth to power, especially when decision-makers might be made uncomfortable or made to feel guilty for a broader system beneficial to them and detrimental to you. However, silence offers a level of consent for things to remain the same. While we do not always have to yell, true leaders must accept the responsibility of speaking your truth and building power from the grassroots.
- **Value and preserve the traditions of your culture.** In general, future problems hope for future innovation. But the climate crisis will require massive amounts of people to learn or remember how to live in better balance with the earth. Traditional ecological knowledge will be the root of long-term solutions to the global climate crisis. In developing community-led solutions, frontline communities need only seek the wisdom of frontline traditions to uplift. Reject the false valuation of mass culture and dependence on technology to save us. Instead seek the knowledge of your grandmothers and grandfathers and value the place, cultures and life-sustaining practices of your people.

### B. Community Organizations

- **Acknowledge the climate crisis.** Climate change is real and will impact your work and the people you care about. Incorporate an analysis of the climate crisis and its intersectionality with frontline community struggle into your work.
- **Create your work around the power of the community.** Work should not be based on only the “needs” of a community, but should be connected to the value and resources that the community has control over. Charity will not build power.
- **Work with community members to build your workplan.** Learn and employ processes that allow those you serve to determine what they vision for their future (e.g., PMA). Take the time to collectively build your budgets and work around a collective plan and process.
- **Reject models of leadership that depend on one leader.** Reject traditions that require people to blindly follow one vision. These processes have effectively left frontlines vulnerable and unable to move to action. Do the work to develop a community team and a process where everyone can be equally valued.

### C. Justice Movement

- **Adopt an intersectional analysis for movement-building.** Change does not occur with people coming to support your issue. Change comes from identifying places where more than one issue can be positively impacted. The global climate crisis intersects all social justice issues. It is one of many entry points to achieve broader structural shifts.
- **Build knowledge about the climate crisis.** Create space for the communities you serve to understand the climate crisis and its impact on marginalized communities. Using your current work, take the time to build strategies of response and recovery for the inevitable climate-based challenges of the future. Develop trainings rooted in climate science. And take the time analyze false solutions to minimize communities being pitted against each other out of fear.
- **Organizing vs. Activism.** Commit to the type of organizing that changes systems, not simply activism that raises an issue or challenges a moment in time. Without evidence of real systems change, there is no good reason to join the movement. Media hits, protests, banners and even policy wins can no longer be the sole measure of success. Real and positive impact on the lives of frontline people must be at the center of all successes declared. Activists play a role in movement. Organizers build movement.

### D. National Climate Movement and National Environmental Groups

- **Commit to changes that build frontline power.** Commit to changing the systems negatively impacting the Earth and the life that lives on it. Local groups cannot afford to fight another national actor with ties to extractive and polluting industries. Your role is to collectivize the power emanating from the ground and offer protection to the frontlines when possible. Acknowledge the difference between discrimination and anti-Black racism and modify your work to dismantle them both. Shift the system to benefit those most impacted and all will benefit.
- **Anti-racism is not diversity.** Train your staff and management in anti-racist organizing and adopt the Jemez Principles to guide your work. This is always difficult. But it is not more difficult than the reality that so many frontline communities have to deal with daily. A commitment to be anti-racist in this work is a pathway to self-transformation and will make the movement stronger.
- **Check your privilege.** Privilege is the most harmful when wielded unknowingly. And acknowledging privilege is most insincere when it requires approval or gratitude. There are no awards for doing the right thing. Accolades come for extraordinary action.
- **Support LOCAL frontline leadership.** Support leaders working from a place of home and on the frontline - even when what they do is different and even when the pace is slower. Invest in authentic leadership of a region. Invest in the people with long-term commitments to a place, not short term fervor for an issue.

## E. Philanthropy

- **Fund the Gulf South using an intersectional analysis.** US-based philanthropic institutions committed to addressing the climate crisis and stopping extreme energy extraction should shift their programs to invest deeply in the Gulf South region and support groups that are working to confront some of the largest energy companies in the world. Prioritize funding that can address multiple justice issues at one time.
- **Invest in long-term, authentic leadership development.** Fund leaders working in their own communities and on the frontline -- even when the pace and process of their work differs from funding timelines. Invest in people with long-term commitments to a place, not short term fervor for an issue. Fellowship programs that support the development of next generation leaders and support respite for current leaders on the frontline will change the world.
- **More than a 501(c)(3) is needed.** The justice fights compounded by climate change are insurmountable with a 501(c)(3) charitable tax structure. While good for accounting, this requirement necessarily rejects the work of frontline leadership and hinders the ability to change the systems in which many of the injustices are rooted. Innovate a process to support work that exists and moves outside of a 501(c)(3) charitable structure. Real work can be accomplished outside of a corporate structure.
- **Fund Community Funds.** Support the development of community-controlled financing institutions and projects. The Gulf South Rising Community Controlled Fund is one of many alternative forms of ensuring dollars are not just in the community, but are democratically controlled by community. During disaster this level of community control is imperative. In developing a vision for the future, this type of community financial control helps build collective power for shared liberation.