

October 31, 2005



Dear Colleague,

We are pleased to share with you the new companion pieces which are a part of the third installment of Occasional Papers released by the Funders' Collaborative on Youth Organizing — *At a Crossroads: Youth Organizing in the Midwest* by Melissa Spatz, and *Traditions and Innovations: Youth Organizing in the Southwest* by Daniel Hosang.

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These papers are part of a series examining the local and regional contexts that have inspired, shaped and challenged youth organizing practice. Each paper is the product of many minds and was developed by planning bodies representing a mix of local practitioner, intermediary and foundation perspectives. In this collaborative spirit, we hope that these papers become interactive platforms for further dialogue, reflection and healthy debate.

Both works represent a glimpse into the world of youth organizing in these regions. While they are groundbreaking, it is important to note that they are not comprehensive mappings; they cannot represent all of the work happening in the Midwest or the Southwest. There is not just one definition of youth organizing, one perspective, or one response to the myriad issues facing young people. Youth organizing is a dynamic, ever-evolving field, and these works represent an important foray into understanding what's happening in the Midwest and Southwest.

We hope that you seize the opportunity for debate and dialogue that will serve to add to and round out our understanding of youth social justice work. We strongly encourage discussions to surface additional discoveries, gaps or different perspectives that the FCYO would be excited to receive and disseminate in electronic addendums.

For those of you newer to youth organizing, we encourage you to read the other installments of our Occasional Paper Series which include foundational papers on youth organizing and regional looks at California and the South. They can be found on our website at www.fcyo.org.

We are eager to hear your thoughts and reactions and encourage you to share them with us.

The Funders' Collaborative on Youth Organizing

80
no.

OCCASIONAL PAPERS SERIES ON YOUTH ORGANIZING

Traditions and Innovations

Youth Organizing in the Southwest

ABOUT THE FUNDERS' COLLABORATIVE ON YOUTH ORGANIZING

The Funders' Collaborative on Youth Organizing (FCYO) is a collective of national, regional and local foundations and youth organizing practitioners dedicated to advancing youth organizing as a strategy for youth development and social justice. The mission of the FCYO is to substantially increase the philanthropic investment in and strengthen the organizational capacities of youth organizing groups across the country.

The main goals of the FCYO are to:

- Increase the level of funding directed towards youth organizing groups;
- Support youth organizing groups to develop stable and sustainable organizations; and
- Increase the awareness and understanding of youth organizing among funders and community organizations.

For more information about the FCYO, visit <http://www.fcyo.org>.

ABOUT THE OCCASIONAL PAPERS SERIES ON YOUTH ORGANIZING

The Occasional Papers Series is edited and published by the Funders' Collaborative on Youth Organizing, and conceived and developed in close partnership with a Committee of funders, intermediaries and youth organizing practitioners. The Committee for this paper included:

- Bruce Astrein, Arizona Community Foundation
- Bianca Encinias, Southwest Network for Environmental and Economic Justice
- Soyun Park, One Nation Enlightened
- Pam Martinez, Padres Unidos
- David Portillo, Denver Foundation
- Maeghan Collins, Brett Family Foundation

This paper would not have been possible without the dedication, contributions and sharp insights of each Committee member. The FCYO offers its deepest thanks to them and all those who were interviewed or consulted. Thanks to the Brett Family Foundation, New Mexico Community Foundation and Denver Foundation for making stipends available for practitioners' time and commitment to this project, and to the Hill-Snowdon Foundation, Panta Rhea Foundation, and Needmor Fund for their generous support of the publication of this Series.

Traditions and Innovations

Youth Organizing in the Southwest

BY DANIEL HOSANG

no. 08

OCCASIONAL PAPERS SERIES ON YOUTH ORGANIZING • 2005

SERIES PREFACE

Since 2000, the FCYO has supported youth organizing as part of our goal to develop the generations of leadership necessary to build and transform our communities for the better. The tenacious efforts of this field have helped to reframe discussions around our society's treatment of young people: Pressing public schools to provide quality opportunities to learn and develop civic-minded youth. Shifting the prison system's focus to support and develop, not just punish and demean court-involved youth. Negotiating terms of economic productivity to mutually profit businesses, communities and the environment for the long haul. Involving those most affected — youth and families — in the design and decision-making in each of these systems.

But while funding has been instrumental in supporting the successes of youth organizing, it has not kept pace in untapping its fuller potential.

In 2002, the FCYO began the Occasional Papers to respond to this gap, and promote learning and dialogue among foundations, community groups and other interested parties. Readers should revisit Papers 1 through 4 for grounding in youth organizing definitions and components, and its link to youth development.

This next installment uses those concepts as departure points for continuing our regional studies, which trace the logic of youth organizing's development in specific contexts, cultures and conditions. In 2004, we explored two places — the South and California. Whether a "region" has a coherent identity is debatable. Still, this place-based dissection brings us closer to work that by definition is grounded in and led by communities.

While each has its own emphases, Papers 7 and 8 about the Midwest and Southwest also explore the same leading questions: What context prompted and enabled youth organizing in the region? What distinct priorities and approaches of youth organizing emerged out of this context?

In *At a Crossroads: Youth Organizing in the Midwest*, Melissa Spatz challenges the notion of a homogenous Midwest, to map the contours of a growing and increasingly varied field in and beyond Chicago. In *Traditions and Innovations: Youth Organizing in the Southwest*, Daniel Hosang transports readers to the Southwest — rich in physical beauty, culture and activist history on one hand, and violence, contention and historical oppression on the other. Both authors identify the contributions and qualities of local organizing. By no means comprehensive, each paper examines this ever-evolving field from a given moment in time, and is deeply informed by youth, practitioners, intermediaries and funders.

While youth organizing approaches are fluid, its values of justice and equity remain constant. The FCYO's commitment to these values has further cemented our belief in youth organizing. Indeed, youth and their allies are holding up mirrors for us to reflect hard. They remind us that we live in distressing times, as they and their families face unrelenting assaults — in schools, homes, workplaces, jails and on streets. Let us focus in on these reflections, and listen to youth who tell us, "Youth deserve more. And we're willing to get out there to say it and prove it...We're trying to make things better too."

Patricia Soung, *Program Director, Outreach and Education*
Funders' Collaborative on Youth Organizing
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INTRODUCTION

The realities facing many young people, their families and communities in the Southwest¹ are increasingly grim. Consider, for example:

- Arizona, which boasts the nation's worst teenage school drop-out rate, and ranks near the bottom in employment and education rates for teens and young adults. In that state, immigrant youth without proper documents face the loss of critical health and welfare benefits because of a successful 2004 ballot initiative banning such assistance.
- New Mexico and Arizona, where coal mining and other extractive industries in the rural regions seek to take away invaluable water rights belonging to families for generations, and highly toxic "Superfund" waste sites sit perilously close to residential communities. Similarly, urban sprawl and road projects in Albuquerque, New Mexico threaten two thousand-year-old Petroglyph sites, especially sacred to the region's large and dynamic Native communities.
- Denver, Colorado, where the end of court-ordered school busing has rapidly and dramatically resegregated many of the city's high schools. Growing numbers of Black and Latino students leave schools holding suspension notices and court referrals rather than diplomas, thanks to "zero tolerance" policies passed by the school district which criminalize many non-violent infractions, including "trespassing" (being on the wrong floor at the wrong time) in one's own school.
- Texas, where 40 percent of children and youth residing in 20 counties along the US-Mexico border live below the poverty line, more than double the

¹ The "Southwest" as a geographic region can be defined in a number of ways. This report focuses on youth organizing examples in Texas, Colorado, Arizona and New Mexico, which share important political conditions and inheritances. Several of the region's training and networking groups also work with organizations in Utah and California. For a discussion of youth organizing work in the latter, see Ryan Pintado-Vertner's *The West Coast Story: The Emergence of Youth Organizing in California* (2004), Funders' Collaborative on Youth Organizing Occasional Paper Number 5.

The social justice struggles of the Southwest are “guided by strong foundational values of dignity and respect — thinking about land and people together.”

national rate.² Aggressive, highly-militarized enforcement of the region by the border patrol and local police can force parents to skip work and keep their kids out of school in response to rumors of a neighborhood or workplace sweep.

Yet against this crisis-driven climate, extraordinary examples of collective struggle, survival and action involving young people, their families and their communities also flourish. In Albuquerque, for instance, youth organizers such as Destiny Swisher, 17, and other members of the grassroots group, Young Women United, are advocating for school-based health and sex education awareness programs responsive to issues facing young women of color. At their regular “Circle of Strength” meetings, organizers combine peer education, political inquiry and discussion to promote personal and collective development.

Or follow Dan Rosen, 19, and other youth members of Native Movement, a Flagstaff, Arizona-based collective of cultural workers, trainers and activists. Their organizing focuses on water rights, sacred site protection and other issues that are critical to the surrounding indigenous, often rural communities. But they devote equal energies to projects such as building a community-owned bread oven and expanding spaces for youth to perform and celebrate diverse forms of cultural expression from hip hop to tribal dances. Rosen echoes many of the region’s organizers in describing the social justice struggles of the Southwest as “guided by strong foundational values of dignity and respect — thinking about land and people together.”

In Denver, listen to Eddie Montoya, 18, explain how he and other members of Jovenes Unidos, the youth component of the organization Padres Unidos, surveyed hundreds of their classmates at North High School, 80 percent of whom are Latino, about their experiences and aspirations. Montoya reports that “students said they had never met with their college counselors, they felt the classes weren’t challenging and they kept getting harassed by the cops for small things.” Months of research led to a student-authored report and policy proposal to end their school’s reliance on zero tolerance discipline policies and to increase access to higher education opportunities.³

And in El Paso, Texas, find Elizabeth Camargo, a youth organizer with the Border Network for Human Rights, training dozens of young leaders to document abuses of authority and discriminatory policy at the border — often presenting their findings using forms of popular theater and art. Camargo explains, “Youth and children feel the greatest social impacts” of oppression and persecution around the

border, and involving and developing young people has become a critical component of the organization's overall strategy.

These and dozens of other examples of social justice organizing involving young people continue to thrive in the Southwest today. Their undertakings involve not only fending off aggressive attacks on their communities — anti-immigrant practices and legislation, civil rights abuses in urban schools, assaults on Native American cultural and political autonomy — but also forging proactive visions and policies for justice, equity and sustainability. The region's groups have formed innovative multi-state networks, issue-coalitions, and collectivized trainings to reduce the isolation and dispersion they often face, and to build stronger, wider bases of grassroots power.

For those committed to developing the leadership of young people and the transformation of communities, the Southwest holds enormous promise and opportunity. This paper surveys the rich examples of social justice organizing led or driven by young people that are unfolding within the region's diverse communities. The paper begins by tracing some of the historical origins of political, social and economic conditions that have shaped contemporary Southwest politics and culture, and explores their current legacies. It then explores the region's traditions of resistance to economic, political and cultural domination and its relation to contemporary social justice work today. This serves as a basis for a review of some of the contemporary youth activism in the region, and its distinctions, similarities and challenges. After briefly surveying patterns of foundation support for youth organizing, the paper concludes with a set of recommendations for advancing youth-led social justice work in the Southwest.

THE LEGACY OF COLONIZATION IN THE HISTORY OF THE SOUTHWEST

No factor sets the terms for life in the region today more so than the legacy from 500 years of colonialism and land conquest.

As almost any Southwest organizer today is quick to point out, the current conditions facing young people and their families cannot be understood without reckoning with some of the central forces and events in the region's history. No factor sets the terms for life in the region today more so than the legacy from 500 years of colonialism and land conquest.

The territory of present-day Texas, Colorado, Arizona and New Mexico has only been a part of the United States for the last 150 years. Diverse indigenous societies, including Hopi, Navajo and Pueblo peoples, were the only inhabitants of the region until Spanish conquistadors, and later missionaries, landed gentry, and settlers arrived in the area in the late 1500s and claimed the territory as a colony. The Spanish system of land grants awarded sections of land to settlers, mostly for ranching and agriculture. Native groups, while suffering terrifying losses in population, land and resources as a result of Spanish violence and appropriation during this period, continued to inhabit significant portions of the region; their societies both resisted and adapted to the new settler populations. By 1821, when the new nation of Mexico, which included most of present-day United States Southwest, won its independence from Spain, hundreds of years of intermarriage and social and cultural fusion between Spanish and Native peoples formed the basis of a new and distinct Mexican society and culture, though many indigenous groups continued to live in discrete, independent societies.

Starting in the 1820s, Anglo Americans began settling in Texas and other parts of northern Mexico, often using organized violence and justifications of white racial supremacy to back their claims. Already engaged in brutal "Indian Wars" driving Native peoples away from the eastern part of the continent, the United States declared war on Mexico in 1846 and launched a military invasion that stretched to Mexico City; by 1852 the United States forced the cessation of present-day California, Texas, New Mexico, Arizona, Utah and Colorado.

U.S. control of the region resulted in four important consequences whose impacts remain to this day. First, extraction of the territory's rich natural resource reserves intensified; large-scale mining operations flourished in Arizona, New Mexico and Colorado in particular. In general, such mining economies exact a lasting toll on large workforces and the natural environment, and force surrounding communities into relations of economic dependency that persist in today's economy. In addition, like the commercial agricultural operations (such as cotton farming) which flourished in Texas, these enterprises tended to produce extreme levels of wealth and poverty, were enormously susceptible to dramatic economic swings as commodity prices rose and fell, and almost always depended on a racially stratified labor force, with Mexican and Native workers laboring in the most dangerous conditions for the lowest wages.

Second, military campaigns against Native societies continued in full force, driving tribal groups onto smaller, more barren land that formed the basis of the current Indian reservation system. At the same time, Anglo settlers and the governments they established began challenging and appropriating land claims which had been exercised by Mexican families for many generations, even though such claims were specifically safeguarded by the 1848 Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, which ended the War against Mexico. Disputes over such land grant inheritances and related water and grazing rights continue to this day.

Third, United States control accelerated the diversification of the region's population. Railroad lines completed in the late 19th century encouraged waves of white Americans to settle in the area, and mining and agricultural work continued to draw Mexican workers across the newly enshrined US/Mexico border. In addition, large numbers of African Americans also made homes in Texas, and to a lesser extent, Colorado and other parts of the region. This pattern and history of regular demographic transformation strongly informs contemporary conditions.

A final impact of United States takeover was the imposition of white racial authority across the region. Not all white people enjoyed elite status; legions of white sharecroppers in Texas and copper miners in Arizona, for example, were exploited. But on the whole, the social vision which originally drove United States occupation and appropriation of the Southwest held Anglo cultural practices and values as innately superior and more advanced than other groups deemed "racially inferior," and came to be considered the "natural" order of Southwestern society by most Anglos.

Organizing today for self-determination often centers around preserving language, religion and other cultural practices, and demanding recognition for the complexity and autonomy of these traditions.

In its more authoritative forms, this order was imposed by banning or regulating tribal languages and customs, removing Native children from their communities, outlawing the use of Spanish in certain communities, or posting “No Mexicans Allowed” signs in local establishments. Cultural authority had subtle forms as well — such as celebrating Mexican and Native traditions in quaint, but backwards terms that render non-Anglo society as politically and historically marginal. Sometimes this control took the form of explicit political exclusion: Native Americans in New Mexico and Arizona could not vote by law until 1948; African Americans faced similar obstacles throughout the 1960s in Texas. Consequently, organizing today for self-determination often centers around preserving language, religion and other cultural practices, and demanding recognition for the complexity and autonomy of these traditions.

THE CONTEXT OF CONTEMPORARY YOUTH ORGANIZING: HISTORICAL LEGACIES, NEW DEVELOPMENTS

The Southwest's history of colonialism, land and economic structures, and white racial authority has unmistakably shaped the contemporary landscape. In renovated forms, these forces shape many of the conditions for youth organizing in the region today. Three of the leading consequences and conditions are discussed below.

EXTRACTION AND EXPLOITATION

One important challenge addressed by youth organizers in the Southwest today is the region's continued reliance on large scale, highly concentrated industries that stifle economic diversification and sustainability, wreck havoc on the environment, and worsen existing social and economic inequalities. The factors which drew copper mining companies to Colorado and Arizona 125 years ago mirror the conditions today that attract giant technology firms such as Intel to New Mexico, maquiladoras (low-wage factories) to the border region, and military bases and nuclear testing sites across the Southwest: a sizable workforce with few job alternatives; weak environmental and labor regulations; and large tracts of controllable land and natural resources.

Thus even though the regional economy overall expanded during the last decade, this growth has not reduced inequality: youth employment rates in Arizona, Texas and New Mexico rank in the bottom 20 percent in the country, and overall wage rates in the region are well below the national average. In response, many social justice groups in the Southwest root their analysis and organizing campaigns in principles and visions of regional economic and environmental equity and sustainability, rather than just local growth.

Extractive industries also continue to flourish and devastate the environment. In Arizona, the Peabody Coal Company's strip mining operations deplete millions of gallons of pristine water annually to transport coal to electricity generation stations hundreds of miles away. Water levels on the nearby Navajo and Hopi

reservations are drawing dangerously low and toxic accidents related to the coal transport occur frequently, threatening natural springs used for religious practices, as well as basic local livestock, agriculture, and drinking water. In addition, the legacy of uranium mining in the Southwest continues to haunt thousands of workers with deadly injury and disease, and force surrounding communities (heavily concentrated on reservation lands) to deal with enormous quantities of radioactive waste discarded near mining sites.

Such unrelenting industries have threatened more sustainable, often incompatible practices, such as the northern New Mexico acequia (water irrigation ditch) tradition of communal water management and indigenous approaches of marrying human and natural ecologies. Today, organizing against industrial ranching and grazing practices, strip mining, and the appropriation of land and water rights are more than just competitions for scarce resources; they often represent an alternative vision to land use, rooted in principles of stewardship and sustainability.

VIOLENCE AND MILITARIZATION

In the mid-19th century, military power enabled the United States to appropriate nearly half of Mexico's territory and drive indigenous people from their ancestral lands. Intimidation and violence continued to be used as tactics by mining and agricultural companies to break strikes, or by local police and vigilantes to enforce Anglo water and land claims, long after this period of territorial consolidation.

Today, youth of color and their communities especially face a renewed wave of militarization, redirecting public resources towards policing and surveillance, addressing social and economic crisis through law enforcement, detention and punishment, and sometimes permitting violent abuses of authority. For example, young people in Albuquerque describe patterns of harassment from security guards and police in malls and streets under the guise of "anti-gang" ordinances targeting Black and Latino youth; the school board recently attempted to arm police officers patrolling schools. The Southwest has followed a national trend in building dozens of new prisons and juvenile detention facilities, and Texas in particular has one of the nation's worst records of prosecuting and sentencing young people as adults. The racial disparities marking this trend are unmistakable. African Americans make up 3.7% of Colorado's population but represent 22.4% of its prison inmates; the state has built 12 new prisons (and funded four private prisons) in the last 15 years.⁴

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In addition, the United States/Mexico border increasingly feels like a militarized zone, with the integration of border patrol and immigration enforcement into the Department of Homeland Security. Heavily armed soldiers deploy the latest surveillance technology to apprehend, detain and often interrogate hundreds of thousands of people each year. As a result, many people must cross the border at its most dangerous points, such as the Sonoran desert along the Arizona border, which now claims more than 200 lives each year, according to the Coalición de Derechos Humanos/Alianza Indígena Sin Fronteras, a justice organization monitoring border issues. Border Network for Human Rights organizer Elizabeth Camarago explains that local police and border patrol agents “will go into schools, neighborhoods and workplaces asking for papers.” At the same time, vigilante groups such as the “Minute Men” have begun to descend on these border regions, brandishing their guns to remind border crossers of the violence they may face.

Hundreds of miles from the border, immigrants from Mexico and other Latin American countries must also contend with organized neighborhood and workplace sweeps, and the increasing threat of collaboration between immigration authorities and local police and other public officials. In 2004, Colorado Republican Tom Tancredo infamously called for the deportation of a young high school student whose struggles to attend college without proper immigration documents were profiled by a local newspaper. In social justice work, undocumented youth and adults face constant threat of exposure, detention and deportation because of their activism.

Finally, military installations, including weapons and research labs and personnel bases, have flourished in the Southwest since the Second World War. Texas, Arizona and New Mexico in particular house a vast constellation of military facilities, whose operations have tremendous economic, environmental and health impacts on surrounding communities. One major organizing issue focuses on forcing the U.S. military to remove toxins at its former and current facilities. Military recruiters also flood high schools and shopping malls frequented by low-income youth and youth of color.

IMMIGRATION, POPULATION TRANSFORMATION AND RACIAL EXCLUSION

While every state in the region has experienced population gains during the last 15 years, many parts of the Southwest today are undergoing dramatic demographic transformations. People of color constitute the majority of the population in New Mexico and just over half the population of Texas, but comprise minorities in Arizona

People of color constitute the majority of the population in New Mexico and just over half the population of Texas, but comprise minorities in Arizona and Colorado.

and Colorado. According to the 2000 census, Arizona, Texas and New Mexico have the third, fourth and fifth largest populations of Native Americans in the country, respectively. A warm, arid climate, relatively low housing costs, and steady job growth has attracted both retirees and young working families from other parts of the country, especially California and the Northeast. Urban regions such as Houston and, to a lesser extent, Denver, are also home to growing Vietnamese and Chinese communities. The largest numbers of new residents arrive from Mexico and Central America, seeking to secure better economic opportunities, to rejoin family, or escape political instability.

TABLE 1: YEAR 2003 POPULATION CHARACTERISTICS OF FOUR SOUTHWESTERN STATES

	TEXAS	ARIZONA	NEW MEXICO	COLORADO	UNITED STATES
Total Population	22,118,509	5,580,811	1,874,614	4,550,688	290,809,777
Black	12 %	3%	2%	4%	12%
Non-Hispanic White	50%	64%	45%	75%	70%
Asian	3%	2%	1%	2%	4%
Hispanic	34%	25%	42%	17%	13%
Native American	1%	5%	10%	1%	1%
Foreign Born	14%	13%	8%	9%	11 %

Source: United States Census. Percentage totals are rounded. Texas figure represents 2005 adjustment.

Especially during the last 150 years, labor needs and the search for new land and opportunities have continually transformed the Southwestern population. But the region's legacy of racial exclusion, towards people of Mexican descent in particular, is fertile ground for the hostile and sometimes violent anti-immigrant politics today.

Language rights and bilingual education programs are a key arena for such conflicts. Texas, Arizona and New Mexico rank second, third and fourth respectively in the percentage of young people who speak a language other than English at home, fueled by both the influx of new immigrants but also by the importance of preserving and speaking native languages in long-standing communities in the region.⁵ In 1998, national conservative activist Linda Chavez backed a number of Albuquerque families in a lawsuit against the school district, seeking to end bilingual education programs and dismantle a state Multicultural Education Act. Social justice groups in the

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region intervened in the suit to protect and enhance bilingual education programs. Similarly, Colorado organizers, including several youth groups, defeated a statewide anti-bilingual education amendment in 2002, building a diverse statewide coalition of white, African American and Latino voters and organizations.

Access to education and social services for undocumented immigrant families also looms as a major issue. Arizona voters adopted legislation in 2004 to prevent state and local agencies from providing most health and human services to residents who could not prove their lawful immigration status. As federal law also ties the receipt of welfare benefits to immigration status, and more localities pledge to criminally prosecute those who allegedly violate immigration laws, undocumented and unauthorized immigrant families and youth cannot access programs such as unemployment insurance, food stamps, Medicare and Medicaid, and child health insurance that assist others in difficult times. Without work authorization, employment options for youth and adults are always tenuous. In addition, publicly-subsidized college tuition, the lifeblood of state colleges and university systems, has been effectively denied to undocumented students who otherwise qualify for admission. Youth and community organizations across the Southwest (and many other parts of the country) have rallied in support of the "DREAM Act" to ban such discrimination.

The growth in immigrant communities has also stirred political tension between recently arrived and long-standing communities of color. These communities often face different political challenges within the labor market, social services, public education and civic life more generally. Many community organizations in the Southwest committed to organizing both recent immigrants and long-time residents must adapt to these challenges by deliberately addressing tensions within their organization, ensuring meetings and materials are adequately translated into appropriate languages, and facilitating engagement and relationship building across different groups.

Finally, racial disparities and civil rights violations continue to structure much of the Southwest, especially in the provision of health services and public education. Forty percent of Native youth in New Mexico have no health insurance, compared to only 15 percent of white youth.⁶ Young women of color organizers in Albuquerque point out that statewide "abstinence only" sex education programs fuel high teen pregnancy rates, especially for women of color who have less access to other forms of reproductive health and information.

“Racial tracking” in public schools also continues to confront youth; in multiracial urban school districts like Denver, Colorado and Tucson, Arizona, white students tend to be concentrated in accelerated, college prep classes, while most Black, Latino and Native students in particular are placed in less rigorous classes. Recent developments in federal education policy also have racially disparate impacts. Instead of long-term curriculum reform and funding increases, the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act focuses on standards-based testing and achievement incentives and sanctions, which rewards suburban, already well-resourced schools with a predominantly white student body. Meanwhile, despite NCLB’s purported aim to support minority students, urban schools with large numbers of students of color that lack the adequate teachers, curriculum, supplies, and facilities to meet the legislation’s demands, face constant restructuring and penalties as a result.

In addition, especially as the percentages of students of color attending public schools has climbed during the last 15 years, voters and taxpayers have proved increasingly unwilling to increase public education budgets. In 1992, Colorado voters approved a constitutional amendment that limits the state’s ability to adequately fund public schools and other services by capping spending. Today, though the state ranks among the top ten states in median family income, it is among the bottom ten in K-12 school spending.⁷

THE EMERGENCE OF YOUTH ORGANIZING IN THE SOUTHWEST: TRADITIONS AND INNOVATIONS

The history of colonization and political, economic and cultural oppression in the Southwest has been matched by an equally long tradition of resistance and organizing for self-determination in which young people have played prominent roles.

The history of colonization and political, economic and cultural oppression in the Southwest has been matched by an equally long tradition of resistance and organizing for self-determination in which young people have played prominent roles. These traditions reflect many of the key themes in the region — struggles over land, natural resources and the environment, immigration, racial politics and cultural identity, and conflicts over the border. While this resistance spans many hundreds of years, several examples from the late 20th century are particularly relevant to understanding the landscape of youth organizing groups today.

LAND AND RESOURCE RIGHTS

As Richard Moore of the Southwest Network for Economic and Environmental Justice (SNEEJ) points out, the legacy of the land grant system has meant that, in contrast to many other regions of the country, many people of color in New Mexico and other parts of the Southwest actually “own things — land, water rights — at least a little piece,” and have struggled bitterly to defend or reclaim it from public and private appropriation. In the early 1960s, militant activists such as Reies Lopez Tijerina helped form La Alianza Federal de Mercedes (the Federal Land Grant Alliance), to reclaim rural land titles held by the federal government as national forests. Drawing support from both elders and a new generation of youth activists, La Alianza backed land claims guaranteed by the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, demonstrating the continued impact of Southwestern legacies of conquest. As Paula Garcia, Executive Director of the New Mexico Acequia Association writes in an article titled “La Lucha Es Tu Herencia” (The Struggle Is Your Inheritance), “Every family and every village in New Mexico”

hears stories of land theft and appropriation; growing up amidst struggles to preserve communally held water rights and family land claims drew Garcia and many others into such activism today.⁸ Youth, adults and elders continue to organize in defense of land grant claims, water rights (acequias), or more recent conflicts over rural and urban gentrification fueled by a new wave of professionals moving into Southwestern cities and towns.

The National Indian Youth Council, Inc. (NIYC), founded in 1961 in Gallup, New Mexico, used similarly dynamic organizing and civil rights strategies to assert native land rights and environmental protections. The NIYC joined progressive formations such as the Poor People's Campaign and sponsored demonstrations and fish-ins nationally to protest state attempts to take away Indian fishing rights guaranteed by federal treaties. It achieved international recognition for stopping the construction of a \$6 billion coal gasification plant on the Navajo Reservation. Throughout the 1970s, chapters of the Coalition for Navajo Liberation struggled against uranium mining and other destructive encroachments on indigenous lands across the Southwest. Their efforts combined both reclamations and celebrations of traditional spiritual and cultural practices with organizing actions inspired by the broader Civil Rights era, such as mass demonstrations.

IDENTITY AND POLITICS: RACE, CULTURE AND FAMILIES

In 1966, a young Denver organizer named Rodolfo "Corky" Gonzales founded the Crusade for Justice, an organization that ultimately drew thousands of young activists from across the Southwest around a highly politicized and nationalist Chicano identity. This identity united diverse people of Mexican descent behind a critique of Anglo and United States political, economic and cultural domination and declared a proud affiliation with long-standing Mexican and indigenous cultural traditions and values. Gonzales' famed 1967 poem "I am Joaquin/Yo Soy Joaquin" powerfully acknowledged the contradictory inheritances of Chicanos in the Southwest, ("The Victor, and Vanquished, I have killed, and have been killed...") while forging a unified and robust political vision for La Raza — denouncing imperialism and racial oppression broadly and calling for the return of occupied lands, political autonomy, and cultural renewal for Chicanos. The Crusade's landmark 1969 Chicano Youth Liberation Conference in Denver produced *Él Plan Espiritual de Aztlán*, which proclaimed the United States Southwest as the national and cultural homeland of

“There’s no generation gap; we develop leadership from every level, from grade school to high school to college to the adult.”

Chicanos. The Crusade also organized locally in Denver, supporting and coordinating walkouts at West High and other schools in the 1960s to end discrimination against Chicano youth and demand educational equity; dozens of other schools in Colorado and in Texas cities such as Houston and Abilene also witnessed such actions. When police harassment and brutality emerged as another leading issue, the organizing work of groups such as the Crusade and the Black Berets set the stage for contemporary organizing around racial profiling and other police conduct issues today. In fact, 35 years later many of those same Crusade organizers support Denver youth as they aim to reform overly punitive school discipline policies, or ensure basic rights to eat lunch during school hours.

While youth activists played a fundamental role in these and other struggles, their actions drew support and leadership across multiple generations. In a 1970 interview, Corky Gonzales explained that the Crusade for Justice involved “the whole family unit, from the smallest baby to the oldest person in the organization. There’s no generation gap; we develop leadership from every level, from grade school to high school to college to the adult.”

In part, this intergenerational approach stemmed from the functional role of elders in many communities as important sources of information, political experience, and cultural history. But in addition, “youth issues” were in fact issues facing whole communities. The land and labor systems prevalent in the Southwest meant that *families* served as the cornerstone of activism. For example, the strikes, boycotts and pickets of the 1970s initiated by Texas and Arizona farmworkers necessarily involved entire families and multiple generations who migrated and labored together in the fields. Struggles over land grants and water rights had resources at stake that belonged to families rather than individuals.

Sofia Martinez, an organizer with Concerned Citizens of Wagon Mound and Mora County and a teacher and journalist with more than two decades of activist experience in New Mexico, explains that many of the groups she worked with moved beyond organizing approaches that focused on issue campaigns alone. Because, as she explains, “someone always has to feed the kids,” the organizations she helped build were more “intergenerational and family-style,” offering, for example, activities for children and youth in addition to the campaign work. Within this approach, still prevalent in many organizations in the region, children and youth are exposed to and participate in activist work at young ages, though not necessarily through formal leadership development or training programs.

The legacy of social justice organizing rooted in or influenced by Chicano and Native cultural identities in particular also continues to singularly influence youth organizing today.

The legacy of social justice organizing rooted in or influenced by Chicano and Native cultural identities in particular also continues to singularly influence youth organizing today. Many Chicanos active in the high profile struggles of the late 1960s and early 1970s remained in their communities to work on anti-poverty, economic development and social justice issues for the long haul; dozens of groups in the region today have included leaders who cut their activist teeth during this time.

In addition, this history has shaped various and distinct racial and cultural categories and labels that inform youth organizing. For example, while in other parts of the country, 'Latino' is a widely used, standardized term of identification referring broadly to people with origins in Latin America, it is not the only term of self-identification used in the Southwest. 'Chicano/a' or 'Xicano/a' continues to evolve as a dynamic and diverse category of identity. Its various inflections have grown to include feminist and women of color critiques of homophobia and sexism—as evident in the writing of activists such as Cherrie Moraga and Gloria Anzaldua, deeper explorations of indigenous cultural traditions, and even engagements with hip hop culture. Others prefer 'Mexicano/a' to identify Mexico as their homeland, whether born there or not. These terms are neither mutually exclusive nor impervious to change, but are critical in understanding some of the cultural and racial politics which animate youth organizing in the region.

ENVIRONMENTAL AND ECONOMIC JUSTICE, SUSTAINABILITY AND EQUITY

Finally, in the last fifteen years, organizing around environmental justice and environmental racism has proven one of the Southwest's most significant and enduring contributions towards national movement-building. The 1989 Interdenominational Hearings on Toxics in Minority Communities conducted by the Southwest Organizing Project (SWOP) and National Council of Churches helped popularize the concept of environmental racism and draw attention to the impact of toxics born by communities of color. The region's long tradition of defining the environment broadly ("where we live, work, and play") challenged mainstream environmental organizations and advocates to focus on more than habitat and wildlife preservation.

A 1990 Regional Activist Dialogue drew over 80 representatives from nearly three dozen organizations based in grassroots communities of color to build a regional movement around environmental and economic justice. This historic meeting led to the formation of the Southwest Network for Environmental and Economic Justice (SNEEJ).

The steady growth in binational and cross-border justice work is a second area of important innovation with Southwestern roots. In the 1960s and 1970s, some prominent Chicano and Mexican American civil rights organizations were slow to champion the rights of recently arrived immigrants; collaboration between growers and the border patrol to use undocumented workers to break farmworker strikes exacerbated these divides. But social justice organizations in the region began challenging these practices, working in the last decade in particular to unify the struggles of recent immigrants from Mexico and Central America with more established Chicano communities. Today, Southwestern groups regularly attend exchanges, trainings and strategy sessions outside the United States to further strengthen these alliances.

Finally, the wave of farm worker organizing in both California and across the Southwest during the 1960s and 1970s in particular proved to be an important influence on a generation of youth activists in the region. United Farm Worker (UFW) boycott committees emerged across the Southwest, and the union's strikes, marches and walkouts catalyzed organizing work around other issues as well.

THE EMERGENCE OF YOUTH ORGANIZING IN THE SOUTHWEST DURING THE 1990S: APPROACHES AND MODELS

Many parts of the Southwest stand at a critical crossroads. Powerful efforts are organized to militarize the border, further marginalize and exploit immigrants, weaken environmental protections and workplace standards, and draw funding away from public education and other public services. This context, combined with the legacies and persistence of youth activism in the region, set the stage in the 1990s for a conspicuous growth in social justice activism in which young people played prominent leadership roles. With their own vision for the Southwest and their communities, youth organizers continue to work in close alliance with adults on issues from environmental justice to school funding to women's rights.

As political attacks on youth of color in particular intensified — including a proliferation of reproductive rights restrictions, growths in juvenile arrests and sentencing, and public education and service cuts — social justice organizations have sought to create more systematic approaches to developing young leaders. At the same time, public funding for community organizing approaches dropped (especially during the Reagan administration) and private foundations began to support community organizing strategies more intentionally, including youth-led work. As a result, much (though not all) of the youth organizing in the region today is supported by non-profit organizations which rely on philanthropic funding sources.

Importantly, the vast majority of groups organizing youth in the region devote tremendous energies towards a broad range of community-building, cultural awareness and political education activities that are not often prioritized within place or neighborhood-based community organizing models, such as cultural “healing” and peer discussion groups, community mural projects, and learning visits to social justice groups outside the US. Finally, in an era when specialized, constituency-specific approaches have increasingly become more common in the non-profit sector (for example, addressing “children” and “youth” issues in isolation from families and communities), long-time organizers and newly minted activists alike in the Southwest

regularly stress the role of movement-building — uniting and putting into motion diverse but interconnected communities — as central to the region’s organizing traditions and practices.

ADULT-YOUTH RELATIONS AND SOCIAL JUSTICE ORGANIZING IN THE SOUTHWEST

Given the importance and legacy of organizing across multiple generations in the Southwest, the recent upsurge in youth organizing both adheres to and departs from these traditions. This growing, non-profit based youth social justice work has evolved into several, sometimes overlapping approaches. The first and perhaps most dominant approach includes **youth-specific organizing projects that emerged from and remain closely tied to adult-based groups**. Frequently, these projects grew from requests by the children of adult members and leadership to have more formal roles and voices in the organization. The Southwest’s own tradition of building social movements around family and kinship structures meant that young people often organized alongside their parents and grandparents. These close links allow emerging youth projects to draw from the staff and other organizational resources of more established social justice groups, while still providing opportunities for youth to identify and pursue their own issues of concern.

The Southwest Organizing Project, for example, often included the children of adult members when it began organizing around housing and voting rights in Albuquerque and other parts of New Mexico in the early 1980s. Celia Fraire, an 18-year old SWOP intern, began attending meetings with her mother as a child. Fraire explains that she and other youth members began to seek their own spaces within the organization to receive training and organize around some of the issues they specifically faced. By the mid-1990s, they founded Jovenes Unidos to address policies such as a series of overly draconian anti-gang and curfew ordinances. Jovenes Unidos now supports its own youth internships and training programs, but still remains closely integrated to SWOP’s overall structure.

In Denver, Padres Unidos had been organizing parents around issues of school discipline and education quality for several years without a youth specific component. But Padres co-director Pam Martinez explains that during a campaign against suspensions and expulsions at a local middle school “youth kept coming to the meetings with their parents and eventually wanted their own organization.” Their youth group, also called Jovenes Unidos, soon formed and initiated youth-led

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campaigns, meetings and trainings, while also participating in campaigns with adult members. Martinez says that these exchanges are mutually important. “Politically, the youth often ‘get it’ first — they talk about race, gender, imperialism, and globalization...sometimes in ways that are more advanced than the adults.”

Similarly, Austin, Texas-based People Organized in Defense of the Earth & her Resources (PODER) initiated Young Scholars for Justice in 2000, drawing from the leadership of youth who had come through the organization. Librado Almanza, 20, the son of PODER director Susana Almanza, says that he literally “grew up going to organizing meetings and actions with my mother” and siblings, and eventually helped start the PODER youth component. Today he serves as the Technology Coordinator for the organization. PODER youth organizer Erika Gonzalez adds that the youth component has brought “a lot more creative energy and a lot more edge in the work that we do” while giving the organization “more of a family feel” as youth members sometimes bring their own children.

Other Texas groups, such as the Southwest Workers Union and the Border Network for Human Rights, also initiated youth-specific components that continue to work closely with the adult-based organization. Border Network youth organizer Elizabeth Camargo says that “we realized we have to give that space of trust and confidence to the youth, so they had the opportunity to voice their concerns.”

A second and related model of youth organizing can be found in **intergenerational organizations** which continue to organize youth, adults and elders together in a single group, even as youth activists sometimes take the lead. As Che Lopez, co-director of the Southwest Workers Union (SWU) in San Antonio points out, when the issues themselves affect broad families and communities, it makes little sense to isolate or separate youth, adults and elders from one another. “Youth know intimately what happens” when their parents are paid low wages or when their parents’ “jobs move across the border where they pay \$2 to \$3 a day.” As a result, SWU youth members outreach and educate community members, and have made presentations about a local living wage campaign. “The issue affects everyone,” Lopez says, requiring an “integrated strategy” that brings communities together.

Similarly, since its founding in 1996, the Albuquerque-based SAGE Council has involved youth members in all of its public forums, actions, and strategic

planning around a long-term campaign to protect sacred Petroglyph sites threatened by a proposed road project. Leona Morgan, a young activist with the SAGE Council, emphasized the importance of “cultural transmission for the younger generation” that happens through such activities. The group sponsored events such as a youth summit, but never created a discrete space for youth members (though it is in the process of developing such spaces today). Other groups with strong indigenous ties, including Calpullit Tlapacalli, Kalpulli Izkalli, and Alianza Indigena Sin Fronteras employ a similar approach. Young activists played a major role in the Black Mesa Water Coalition’s campaign against the Peabody Coal Company’s encroachment of water rights on Navajo and Hopi lands, and like the SAGE Council, helped organize youth summits. Other rural-based organizations such as Concerned Citizens of Wagon Mound and Mora County, the Colonias Development Council and the New Mexico Acequia Association, which protects claims to traditional water rights and organizes against their commodification, also bring youth, adults, and elders together in a single organization.

By contrast, **independent youth-led projects**, unaffiliated with adult organizations, while more prevalent in cities such as Los Angeles, Oakland, San Francisco, Philadelphia and New York City, generally remain an exception in the Southwest. In Albuquerque, a multiracial group of women of color from their early teens to 30s work with Young Women United (YWU) to organize around issues of health and violence against women. Within a few years, the group began “Circle of Strength”, a youth component for teen women of color, which led a multi-year campaign to bring

“We’re now a youth-driven organization, and having this independence allows us more control over the political message we develop, the campaigns we choose and how we build our movement.”

sex education and other health resources into Albuquerque public schools. YWU continues to organize joint and separate activities for both groups of women, drawing in some ways from an intergenerational model. YWU member Destiny Swisher explains that this approach makes sure that “youth aren’t overpowered by adults in the room” so that they can learn “to work with their peers.”

Similarly, in Denver, the youth organizing group, Students 4 Justice, actually began as a component of a statewide, adult-led progressive coalition. A few years ago, the group spun off from its original sponsor. Seeking more autonomy, it combined with Streets United, a sister police accountability organizing project, and reorganized under the name One Nation Enlightened (ONE). ONE director Soyun Park says “We’re now a youth-driven organization, and having this independence allows us more control over the political message we develop, the campaigns we choose and how we

build our movement.”

TRAINING AND MOVEMENT-BUILDING NETWORKS

Finally, during the 1990s two important networking, training and movement building organizations began working out of Albuquerque. YouthAction, founded in 1987 in Washington, D.C. to specifically nurture and support youth organizing nationally, moved its offices to Albuquerque in 1995. Two years later, it began a Southwest regional program to complement its national training and capacity-building work and continues to provide organizing trainings and staff and leader exchanges. During the last three years, Youth Action convened regional meetings for youth organizers in Tucson, San Antonio, El Paso and Denver, as well as national convenings elsewhere.

In 1993, youth from affiliate organizations of the Southwest Network for Environmental and Economic Justice (SNEEJ) initiated the Youth Leadership and Development Campaign to meet training and organizing needs across the region. While SNEEJ and many of its members remain deeply committed to organizing across generational divides, its youth programs, including a Summer Youth Placement Program and a Youth Organizing & Training Institute, provide training and development opportunities specifically for youth leaders within affiliate groups.

In addition, Native Movement, a collective of trainers, activists and cultural workers coordinated by veteran organizer Evon Peter, moved its base of operations last year to Flagstaff, Arizona. Peter conducts dozens of trainings and workshops around the Southwest each year, primarily for Native youth, that emphasize both organizing skills and the importance of sustaining indigenous cultural practices. He explains that one of Native Movement's goals is to provide support for smaller groups of activists so that they can receive support from foundations and other outside groups without spending too much time “sitting in an office and figuring out how to jump through hoops.” Peters says frankly, “The way I see it, we've been colonized enough.”

BUILDING FOR THE FUTURE: YOUTH ORGANIZING TRENDS AND THEMES WITHIN THE SOUTHWEST

Youth organizing across the Southwest exists in diverse geographic locales. There are clusters of youth organizing and intergenerational groups in urban areas such as Denver (including One Nation Enlightened/Students 4 Justice, Padres Unidos/Jovenes Unidos, and Metropolitan Organizing Project/Voices Heard); and Albuquerque (including Young Women United, Kalpulli Izkalli, SWOP and SAGE Council in addition to the headquarters of regionally-based SNEEJ and nationally-based Youth Action). Strong local or regional youth organizing is also underway in the Texas cities of San Antonio (Southwest Workers Union and Esperanza Center for Peace and Justice), El Paso (Border Network for Human Rights), and Austin (People Organized in Defense of the Earth and her Resources).

Organizing in smaller, sometimes rural communities involving young people is especially strong in New Mexico, and includes the New Mexico Acequia Association, which focuses on traditional water rights; Concerned Citizens of Wagon Mound and Mora County, an environmental justice organization; and the Colonias Development Council, which addresses multiple issues in the small communities along the border. In addition, Native groups involving youth in their organizing work include: Diné CARE, an all-Navajo environmental organization; Native Movement, based in Flagstaff, Arizona; the Black Mesa Water Coalition in Northeastern Arizona; and the Gila River Alliance for a Clean Environment (GRACE), which focuses on environmental issues on the Gila River Reservation in Arizona. In Tuscon, Arizona, Alianza Indigena Sin Fronteras/Derecho Humanos focuses on intergenerational border justice work; and the Social Justice Education Project, a new collaboration between students from Cholla High School and the University of Arizona, uses action research to investigate education inequities facing students of color.

In addition, while most of the above organizations have strong cultural development and identity components, two organizations which place a particularly strong emphasis on this work from an indigenous perspective include Calpulli Tlapalcalli in San Benito, Texas and Tonatierra in Phoenix.

With this sample in mind, it is also possible to trace some broad patterns of continuity and coherence among groups doing this work in the region.

NEW VALUES AND VISIONS

Youth organizing groups in the Southwest do not simply oppose the attacks facing young people and their families in the region or seek to win modest policy reforms. Nearly every group also seeks to proactively transform the broader terrain of ideas and values over the long haul. These long-term, transformative frameworks — around workers rights, environmental justice, and racial equity — guide the work of many organizations in the region.

For example, the border justice work championed by groups such as the Southwest Workers Union and SNEEJ, rather than just calling for ‘guest worker’ programs or other reform measures, challenge the very authority and validity of the border itself, demanding that safe passage rooted in human rights replace the current wave of militarization in the region. Similarly, groups such as Tonatierra, Alianza Indigena Sin Fronteras, Calpulli Tlapacalli and the Border Network for Human Rights often situate their organizing demands within various international human rights frameworks in order to elevate the broader principles of self-determination and community-driven empowerment. The environmental justice work of groups such as Diné Care and the Black Mesa Water Coalition are founded on an incisive critique of the commodification of natural resources rooted in seeing human society as integrated with and not apart from the natural environment.

In addition, youth organizing groups in urban regions in particular often ground their organizing campaign in a proactive vision of racial justice and equity. In Denver, Students 4 Justice (S4J) organizer Jeremiah Black, a junior at East High School, explains that this approach means connecting different issues together, such as the way “cops harass youth in school, why we’re always being sent to certain classes, and why so many people end up with either a crappy job or wind up in jail.” S4J is currently pressing for a “restorative justice” approach to change the culture of discipline in Denver high schools, in which trust and reconciliation replace current “zero tolerance” school discipline policies. This campaign was built upon their earlier campaign to fight racial tracking of students of color away from college-aimed courses and into “General” or “Special Education” classes with fewer post-high school opportunities.

While the Bay Area, Chicago and New York City often can attract talented political activists from other parts of the country, many regions of the Southwest, especially rural communities, have traditionally drawn fewer transplants, and must develop leaders and organizers from their own ranks.

Several groups in the Southwest have made passage of the federal DREAM Act, which facilitates access to college for undocumented immigrant students, a major priority of their recent work. At press conferences and demonstrations, groups like Jovenes Unidos in Denver and PODER in Texas use this issue to advance positive and proactive solutions to the myriad crisis challenging undocumented high school students.

NEW LEADERSHIP

Many youth organizing groups in the Southwest take their mission to cultivate and develop a new generation of regional leadership extremely seriously, and devote significant time and resources towards meeting this goal. While the Bay Area, Chicago and New York City often can attract talented political activists from other parts of the country, many regions of the Southwest, especially rural communities, have traditionally drawn fewer transplants, and must develop leaders and organizers from their own ranks.

For example, SNEEJ convenes youth organizers and leaders from many of its affiliate organizations for a week-long Youth Organizing Training Institute each summer, giving participants an opportunity to reflect upon and collectivize their experiences; a Summer Placement Program provides an opportunity for youth from affiliate organizations to work for ten weeks at their local organization and receive a stipend. These programs are particularly valuable for youth working in rural communities, who have far fewer opportunities to meet with activist peers than those in larger urban settings. Sofia Martinez, who works with Concerned Citizens of Wagon Mound and Mora County, says that programs such as SNEEJ's Training Institute provide critical learning and development experiences to youth from her organization, including the chance to travel to new communities to meet with and observe other social justice groups. Youth Action also regularly organizes clusters of organizations from across the Southwest for shared training and networking activities and has conducted a Southwest Mapping project to document the work of youth organizing groups in the region. The group's frequent publications and training materials, while distributed to organizations nationally, have been particularly important tools for Southwestern groups as well.

The long-term goal is to create the basis of unity between different generations.

In addition, many individual groups have created formalized leadership development programs to support their own members and leaders. Young Women United's "Circle of Strength", its strongest component working with youth ages 13-18, holds meetings alternating between campaign work and facilitated discussions about key issues important to members. PODER, Students 4 Justice, and Padres Unidos/Jovenes Unidos each sponsor systematic summer leadership development programs to bring together and train a core of youth organizing leaders.

While these projects all create some space for young people to define their own issues and take on meaningful positions of power, they are not designed to set youth wholly apart from or against the adults and elders in their communities. That is, while these programs may provide spaces to encourage and facilitate youth participation, they do not assert conflicts between adults and youth in the same community as the central or most important challenge they face. To the contrary, the long-term goal is to create the basis of unity between different generations, resulting in what SWOP's Executive Director, Robby Rodriguez, describes as a "healthy tension that sometimes exists between youth and adults."

Forging such unity is particularly important in intergenerational social justice work occurring on reservations, in which the strengthening of ties and relations between youth and elders is a primary goal. Ultimately, as the Southwest Workers Union's Che Lopez explains, the priority is to provide youth with the space, skills and opportunities to build their own capacities, while "transferring important lessons and experiences from the movement" to them.

MULTI-FACETED ORGANIZATIONS

The organizational models and approaches developed in the Southwest often do not adhere to a place-based community organizing framework (often associated with the work of Saul Alinsky), in which groups address non-divisive, neighborhood issues, and generally limit their activities to collective action organizing campaigns. Instead, they have innovated approaches which fuse culture and identity, personal development, and issue-based organizing into a single approach.

For example, youth organizing groups supported by the Colonias Development Council (CDC) in southern New Mexico have waged successful efforts to bring focus to civil rights violations by the border patrol and win new public

Young people living in colonias along the border, which often lack basic water and sanitation systems, face an incredible dearth of services, and relevant community organizations cannot simply confine themselves to direct action organizing campaigns alone.

funding for youth services. But young people living in colonias along the border, which often lack basic water and sanitation systems, face an incredible dearth of services, and relevant community organizations cannot simply confine themselves to direct action organizing campaigns alone. Like other Southwestern groups, the CDC also sponsors mural projects, youth-focused social events, and even its own recreation center to help meet these needs. Larger cities in the Southwest still tend to lack the established youth development and youth service infrastructures and programs found in the Bay Area and the urban regions of the Northeast. Thus, groups such as the Border Network for Human Rights, Kalpulli Izkalli, the Southwest Workers Union, and SWOP also use popular arts projects and other activities as critical tools to engage and develop youth members.

In addition, the region's legacy of struggle for language rights and cultural autonomy in particular means that groups frequently cite spiritual regeneration, identity development and cultural expression as equally important to their work. Youth activists with Native Movement view organizing to protect water rights and sacred sites and building a community bread oven as equally relevant (and even connected) activities in achieving their

broader mission of collective self-empowerment. Similarly, other groups based in and identified with Chicano/a or Mexicano/a communities situate their work in the history of those collective identities and struggles. Issues of gender and sexuality are also receiving more systematic attention. SNEEJ convenes a Women's Commission drawing affiliates from across the region, and Young Women United and Cambio, also based in Albuquerque, focus in particular on the intersections of race, gender and sexuality.

While these models fusing culture and identity, personal development, and issue-based organizing into a single approach are predominant in the Southwest, there are examples of different approaches. In Denver, the Metropolitan Organization of People (MOP), which operates a faith-based, parents organizing component, began the youth group, Voices Heard, to organize students around issues in their schools. As Voices Heard's Hans Anggraito, 16, explains, "the group takes on a range of issues from small to big that involve students' rights and respect" such as getting more student bathrooms opened, starting a campus beautification program, and advocating for passage of the DREAM Act. While these issue-based campaigns may not operate from a strongly articulated racial justice analysis or focus on cultural identity issues among the membership, their orientation on more local, place-based concerns is valuable.

CHALLENGES, TENSIONS, AND OPPORTUNITIES

The impressive expansion of youth organizing in the Southwest during the last fifteen years suggests the region has become an important hub of intergenerational and youth-led social justice organizing. Yet the region still faces a series of ongoing challenges as it attempts to increase the scope and scale of its work.

Geographic dispersion. In urban regions such as the Bay Area, Los Angeles, Chicago and New York City, a half-dozen or more youth organizing groups lie within an hour's travel of each other, and can meet regularly to strategize, conduct trainings, and provide mutual support for actions and demonstrations. By contrast, outside of Denver, Albuquerque, and Austin, many youth organizing groups in the Southwest remain geographically isolated from one another, requiring far more advanced planning for collaborative activities. This challenge is even more serious for organizing groups based on reservations and in rural communities. Networking through conference calls and the Internet can help lessen some of the isolation facing these groups, but it cannot replace face-to-face meetings and exchanges. Therefore, funding and other support for such activities continues to be crucial.

Access to training and organizational development resources. Many groups in the Southwest, especially in comparison to other regions of the country, have limited access to the important resources which sustain social justice organizations such as grassroots organizing training, staff development resources, media advocacy, fundraising, communications trainings, and board development. While YouthAction and SNEEJ have provided critical resources and support to youth organizing groups in the region, they cannot be expected to meet all of the training and organizational development needs in the Southwest. This does not mean that entirely new training and intermediary organizations should be established. Groups in the region have diverse needs, and some may feel more comfortable receiving assistance from organizations with particular expertise based outside of the Southwest. Whatever approaches are pursued, there is a clear need to increase access to a broad range of training and organizational development resources.

Increasing funding without overwhelming local organizing. Groups that organize in rural communities and on reservations often operate with part-time or volunteer staff, sometimes out of their own homes, and often without well developed board or fundraising structures. These organizations do critical work in response to urgent crisis that deserves the support of funders and others committed to youth organizing work. But for small groups driven by volunteers and part-time staff, such funding can be a double-edged sword; while increasing the organizational capacity in the short run, it may also burden already overworked leaders with extensive administrative and reporting requirements. A balance between these two concerns must be struck, and could be addressed by regranting through established local organizations that have existing administrative capacities.

Ensuring smooth leadership transitions. Most youth organizing groups in the Southwest initiated by adult organizations have dedicated resources and opportunities for their youth members to assume new leadership and decision-making roles in their respective organizations. Moreover, mentorship of new leaders and organizers is a key component of their work, as these groups support youth organizing in part to ensure the continuation of talented, trained and committed organizers to lead their organizations. But as veteran activists who founded and still direct social justice organizations move out of their positions to fulfill other important social justice movement roles, these groups will have to manage the challenges which always accompany such transitions. To be sure, a gifted and capable group of homegrown leaders and organizers seems ready to assume such responsibilities, but for the most part, these transitions have yet to take place.

Documenting and reflecting on lessons learned. As this paper has argued, the Southwest has been the site of innovative and creative organizing and movement-building work. Functioning at times with minimal resources, groups in the region have advanced their efforts by forging creative campaigns, training and popular education curricula, and developing insightful political analysis. Groups within and outside the Southwest could distill valuable insights from these experiences, especially around organizing in rural settings, sustaining intergenerational and family-based organizing, and organizing around and across the border. While many groups in the Southwest regularly produce publications and other printed materials for their own use, they have had fewer opportunities to document and disseminate their experiences for broader audiences.

THE FUNDING LANDSCAPE

Like their counterparts nationally, most social justice organizations working with youth in the Southwest devote significant energy towards broadening their funding support beyond public grants and private philanthropy: Calpulli Tlapacalli and Kalpulli Izkalli make and sell soaps, shampoos, lotions, and natural medicine. SWOP has sold more than 15,000 copies of its landmark book *500 Years of Chicano Resistance*, and many groups such as SAGE Council and Esperanza Center for Peace and Justice organize successful community dinners, performance events, individual donor initiatives, and other grassroots fundraising appeals that have drawn significant revenues. Nonetheless, the majority of these organizations still typically depend on foundation grants for 60 to 90 percent of their operating expenses.

The Funders' Collaborative on Youth Organizing (FCYO) surveyed a sample of foundations making grants in 2004 to youth social justice work, including youth-led and intergenerational organizing as well as training and intermediary groups. The aggregate data is far from exhaustive. For instance, it does not include all sources of foundation funding for youth organizing; track government funding (which some groups receive); include every youth organizing group in the area; or distinguish between grants made to support adult or youth-specific work within intergenerational organizations.

With these limitations acknowledged, a preliminary review of the data illustrates two tentative patterns.

- 1. Overall funding to the region:** In the last year, groups engaged in youth organizing in the Southwest received about 9.5 percent of the roughly \$15.5 million in grants from the 74 foundations surveyed — less than any region in the country except the Pacific Northwest. By contrast, California groups collectively received 25% of the funding, with 23% to New York groups, 13% to other Northeast groups, 11% to groups in the South, and 9% to the Midwest. Again, survey constraints, combined with differences in population

and the number of organizations in each region limit the cross-regional inferences that can be drawn. Moreover, achieving funding parity between regions by reducing support to areas like California and New York makes little sense; a more farsighted solution would bring new resources to underfunded regions such as the Southwest.

- 2. Reliance on national funding sources:** Of the 74 foundations surveyed, 26 reported making at least one grant to organizations working with youth in the Southwest region. Nineteen are located outside the Southwest, making grants nationally or to multiple regions. Seven funders are based inside the Southwest and have a regional focus, including: New Mexico (1), Colorado (3) and Denver (3). Note that many funders who made grants in support of youth social justice work, such as in Arizona and Texas, were not surveyed. But the pattern, in which over 90 percent of funding received by youth organizing projects comes from outside the region, is suggestive. Finally, excluding one regional funder with a relatively small grantmaking budget, all the Southwest-based funders that provided some youth organizing support devoted less than two percent of their overall grantmaking towards such projects.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Youth organizing in the Southwest, fueled by the strength of its intergenerational organizing models, emphasis on political education and analysis, multi-issue organizing, and attention to cultural production and autonomy, will continue to play a vital role in advancing progressive social change in the region.

Youth activism in this region spans complex issues, geographies, organizing models and constituencies. The leading issues of youth organizing groups in the area — especially around land and water rights, sacred site protection, environmental justice, border rights, public education, and policing and incarceration — are central to the broader politics and future of the Southwest, and the nation as a whole. While the conflicts over these issues are always intense and sometimes violent, their outcome is never preordained or inevitable. These struggles are marked by both crisis and possibility, and youth organizing groups have a singular role to play in shaping their resolution.

As this paper suggests, the Southwest boasts a long and impressive tradition of youth participation and leadership in social justice work. Youth organizing in the Southwest, fueled by the strength of its intergenerational organizing models, emphasis on political education and analysis, multi-issue organizing, and attention to cultural production and autonomy, will continue to play a vital role in advancing progressive social change in the region.

Moreover, the Southwest itself stands at a crossroads of sorts — a region that could emerge either as a new focal point for the revitalization of grassroots activism committed to youth empowerment and social change, or as the hub of conservative activity which seeks to exclude vast numbers of youth from civic and political power. For this reason, the Southwest remains an enormously strategic region in the present moment.

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS:

- **Support regionally-based networking and movement-building.** Youth organizing groups in the Southwest have already taken enormous initiative in conducting trainings, strategy sessions, staff exchanges, and coordinated campaigns across the region, especially between groups in New Mexico and Texas. Organizations such as SNEEJ and Youth Action in particular have made long-standing commitments to this networking and movement-building work, and deserve further support.
- **Expand the pool of available technical assistance.** Other than SNEEJ and YouthAction (both based in Albuquerque) most Southwest youth organizing groups have had to turn to intermediaries and technical assistance providers in California, Washington, D.C., or New York for organizing training and other support. These groups may continue to meet short-term needs, and intermediaries located outside the Southwest should recognize opportunities to bring their expertise to the groups in the region as necessary. But as youth organizing expands in cities like Denver, Austin and San Antonio, locally-based training resources may become more urgent.
- **Consider new approaches to supporting rural and Native organizing.** Youth organizing in rural areas and among Native groups often looks different than the urban-based models familiar to many funders. Some organizations lack the full-time staff, evaluation criteria, long-range strategic plans and other capacities often valued by funders. In addition, an emphasis on intergenerational models that do not provide distinct youth spaces may also lessen their appeal to youth specific funders. But these organizing models have developed in response to local conditions, and funders might consider how to adjust their own criteria and evaluation processes to give them the support they require, such as local re-granting strategies that place fewer administrative burdens on grantees.
- **Advance innovative border-justice and cross-border organizing.** Securing just, humane policies to protect the rights of those who cross and live around the United States/Mexico border stands as one of the most important political challenges in the Southwest and nation as a whole. Young activists

integral to border justice organizations deserve more support. Even smaller project-specific funding for trainings, exchanges or delegations can have sizeable impact.

- **Build relationships for the long-haul.** Understanding and transforming the varying social and political structures and conditions in the Southwest takes time. Funders and others seeking to advance youth social justice work in the region should consider the advantages of developing long-term relationships with groups in the Southwest. More sustained, meaningful solutions can be developed through long-term engagements, rather than standard 12 month grant cycles.

¹ 2004 Kids Count Data Book. Annie E. Casey Foundation, Baltimore, Maryland (based on 2001 data).

² Border Kids Count Pocket Guide: A Snapshot of Children Living on the Southwest Border. Annie E. Casey Foundation, Baltimore, Maryland (based on 2000 data).

³ Reports available from Padres Unidos. In addition, see two reports published by Students 4 Justice “On the Outside Looking In: Racial Tracking at Denver’s East High School” (2001) and “Struggling to Succeed: Broken Promises and Post-Busing Reforms at Denver’s Manual High School” (2002) which had similar findings. Contact information available in resource listing.

⁴ See “Fact Sheets” on People of Color in Prisons and Prison Growth published by the Colorado Criminal Justice Reform Coalition.

⁵ 2004 Kids Count Data Book.

⁶ For comparative data, see “The Condition of African American Children in New Mexico.” (February 2005), New Mexico Voices for Children, Albuquerque, New Mexico.

⁷ See February 15, 2005 “Fact Sheet” produced by Colorado Protectors of Public School. www.copops.org.

⁸ See *Voices from the Earth*, Vol. 5, No. 2 Summer 2004, published by the Southwest Research and Information Center, www.sric.org.

⁹ For a full transcript of the 1970 Gonzalez interview in Havana, Cuba, see “Chicanos: Identity Recovered Corky Gonzalez and Cha Cha Jimenez.” Interview by Karen Wald at www.walterlippmann.com/klw-1970.html.

RESOURCES

For more information about organizations in the Southwest, contact:

ARIZONA

Alianza Indígena Sin Fronteras

Dulce Ruelas
631 South Sixth Avenue
Tucson, AZ 85702-1286
520-770-1373
www.derechoshumanosaz.net

Black Mesa Water Coalition

Wahleah Jones
408 East Route 66, Suite #1
Flagstaff, AZ 86001
928-226-0310
www.blackmesawatercoalition.org

Native Movement

Evon Peter, Chairman
2920 N. Steves Blvd.
Flagstaff AZ 86004
928-213-9760
www.nativemovement.org

Social Justice Education Project

Julio Cammarota, Director
Mexican American Studies and
Research Center/University of
Arizona
César E. Chávez Building,
Room 208
Tucson, AZ 85721-0023
520-621-7551

Tonatierra

P.O. Box 24009
Phoenix, AZ 85074
www.tonatierra.org
602-254-5230

COLORADO

Metro Organizations for People/Voices Heard

Mike Kromrey, Executive Director
1980 Dahlia Street
Denver, CO 80220
303-399-2425
www.mopdenver.org

One Nation Enlightened/ Students 4 Justice

Soyun Park, Executive Director
1536 Wynkoop Street, Suite 322
Denver, CO 80202
303-572-1663

Padres Unidos/ Jovenes Unidos

Pam Martinez
2009 West 33rd Avenue
Denver, CO 80211
303-458-6545

NEW MEXICO

Colonias Development Council

Shelia Black, Development
Director
1050 Monte Vista
Las Cruces, NM 88001
505-647-2744
www.colonias.org

Concerned Citizens of Wagon Mound and Mora County

Sofia Martinez
PO Box 318
Wagon Mound, NM 87752
505-877-5381

Diné CARE

10A Town Plaza, Suite 138
Durango, CO 81301
970-259-0199
www.dinecare.indigenusnative.org

Kalpulli Izkalli c/o Health Clinic

Sylvia Ledesma
1028 Ann Ave. SW
Albuquerque, NM 87105

New Mexico Acequia Association

Paula Garcia, Executive Director
430 West Manhattan, Suite #5
Santa Fe, NM 87501
505-995-9644
www.acequiaweb.org

SAGE Council

Laurie Weahkee, Executive Director
510 3rd Street SW
Albuquerque, NM 87102
505-260-4696
www.sagecouncil.org

**Southwest Environmental and
Economic Justice Network**

Bianca Encianas,
Lead Campaign Organizer
PO Box 7399
Albuquerque, NM 87194
505-242-0416
www.sneej.org

Southwest Organizing Project

Robby Rodriguez, Director
211 10th Street, SW
Albuquerque, NM 87102
505-247-8832
www.swop.net

Young Women United

Adrienne Barboa, Organizer
PO Box 8490
Albuquerque, NM 87198
505-831-8930

YouthAction

Adriana Villar, Southwest
Regional Program Coordinator
PO Box 12372
Albuquerque, NM 87195
505-873-3345
www.youthaction.net

TEXAS

**Border Network
for Human Rights**

Fernando García, Director
2101-A Myrtle Ave.
El Paso, Texas 79901
915-577-0724

Calpulli Tlalpacalli

P.O. BOX 3032
Brownsville, TX 78523
956-748-9159

**People Organized in Defense
of Earth & Her Resources
(PODER)**

Susana Almanza
P.O. Box 6237
Austin, TX 78762-6237
512-472-9921
www.poder-texas.org

Southwest Workers Union

Che Lopez, Co-director
P.O. Box 830706
San Antonio, TX 78283
www.swunion.org

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