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Project South: The Institute for the Elimination of Poverty and Genocide

My time at Project South, in Atlanta, Georgia was truly a gift. I got to Atlanta without really knowing what to expect, and open to anything that would come my way while there. Throughout the internship I took on various significant roles. The greater part of my focus during the summer was on the Septima Clark Community Power Institute (SCCPI or CPI). The CPI is a summer, month-long program for youth ages 14-19 which gives them the opportunity to learn community organizing and leadership skills. Workshop and activity topics included: Globalization, Youth Identity and Experience, Gender and Gender Norms, Mapping our Visions for Change, among many others. Pre-CPI, I was able to take on much of the work and research that needed to be done in preparation for the program, which included planning and prepping workshops, and activities for the month. This was a very valuable experience for me because it included some research on Atlanta history that gave me a great context on the area in which I would be living and working for ten weeks.

During the CPI I played a support role for both the adult staff/allies and the youth leaders. Throughout the inspiring workshops and activities (focused on political education) I was able to support the youth leaders with facilitation. A very special part of the internship for me was that I was asked to co-facilitate a workshop called "Gender 101"- since my focus in college is greatly on Feminist Studies it was amazing to have a chance for the first time to facilitate a workshop on a topic that was directly related to my

studies. This experience was an especially challenging one for me. Although for two years I have been focusing on Feminist studies and studying gender overall, such subjects are always difficult ones (especially for young people). Because this is such a tough topic, throughout the workshop I had some difficulties making clear what the message I wanted to get across. Having gone through this I am now more aware of different ways I can work on my facilitation skills especially when it comes to difficult topics such as gender. I am also aware of how necessary it is to take into full consideration the audience I will be speaking to.

As the young people were divided into two groups, I would share my time between them being an extra helping hand, or sharing my knowledge and very importantly probing them and challenging them further in their thoughtful conversations. Throughout the month I was also available for everything and anything that the adult staff needed support around.

My second important role throughout the Institute was that of documentation. While I shared my time between the groups I was also not so discretely taking pictures of everything that went on. Along with this task, I thought it would be useful to create Powerpoint slideshows of each of the 4 weeks of the CPI, as well as create physical photo collages, and photo CDs to keep for future use. Since the CPI is a new program, and this is its third incarnation, it is crucial for Project South to have such resources in order to showcase what they have accomplished (esp. for grants/donors/ the community to be in the know) and document how things have improved/ what could make the program better each year.

I was very fortunate as an intern at Project South this summer that the second

United States Social Forum (USSF) would be happening, and that we would be very involved in that process. As you may or may not know, the first ever United States Social Forum happened in Atlanta, GA in 2007 and was put on in large part by Project South. I believe that one of the foci of the USSF is that amongst all our social movements we have very similar struggles, but we are not networking enough, and solidarity amongst us all is lacking- the Social Forum ideology is that with this solidarity, networking, and sharing of ideas and strategies that our social movements could be much more successful and effective- hence the USSF is a place for all of that to happen. Since Project South took on the weight of the first Social Forum and knew what it took to run such an event, we played a huge support role to the folks in Detroit. Before the forum I was able to help with some logistical tasks, which made the process for folks in Detroit easier. The young people of this year's CPI were also very blessed- they got the chance to go to the USSF (imagine being able to experience such an event as a high school student!).

The Social Forum was the last week of the CPI and we drove up to Detroit, MI by way of the Southern People's Freedom Caravan. The People's Freedom Caravan was an incredible chance to meet up with folks from all over the U.S. South along the road and meet up at certain locations such as Louisville, KY and Chicago, IL to support communities in their struggles- it was the first time I was able to see the true meaning and importance of solidarity in action. The entire Social Forum experience was one of the highlights of my summer. While there, I was one of the chaperones for our young people and was able to help make sure that their experience there went smoothly. Personally I was most thankful for the fact that twenty of our brilliant young people, some as young as 14, got the chance to live through this life-changing crucial process. The reason why I

appreciated this so much was because attending such events as a young person have played a huge role in shaping what I want to do with my life, and in inspiring me to be a part of effecting positive change in our world. The forum was certainly hectic, and exhausting, but thankfully also incredibly inspiring. The highlight of my week was being able to attend the Health, Healing, and Liberation People's Movement Assembly. It was a truly energizing, inspiring, and renewing experience for me. As I am interested in becoming a social worker, yoga teacher and a doula it was really wonderful to hear how important healers are to social movements. How crucial in fact, and how we (as healers in our communities) need to make these facts known so that activists aren't living on the burn-out model, but are instead taking care of themselves along the way, with the help of a healing community. It was reassuring to hear that what I wanted to do with my life is in fact crucial for our social movements to move forward in a healthy, productive way- and I very much needed that certainty. This was one of the greatest gifts I received from the Social Forum process.

One of the very (seemingly not) exciting parts of my internship was being able to help out with post-USSF and post PMA work. Although much of it was tedious it was enthralling to know that with my work I was partially contributing to the success of the People's Movement Assembly process.

Through my entire internship one of my skills that came most useful were my organizational skills. I was able to add to keeping much of the CPI flowing smoothly with my help/organization. I also believe that my levelheadedness was very crucial. It seems that while working for any organization or in any social movement it is very important to be able to stay calm through the roughest of times. This is also important because as with

anything else in the world, we deal with all kinds of people, and especially in social movements, we need to be able to work with people we do not get along with. For all these reasons my time at Project South went very smoothly. I also had the opportunity to learn much about my self while there and greatly developed my patience- which is also necessary in such environments.

I think that if I had the chance to do my internship over the one thing I would change involves the young people in the CPI. Although I had a great relationship with most of them and was very thankful for the ease with which that happened, I feel that I could have pushed myself further in finding ways to get closer to each and every one of them.

My studies have also focused a lot on race, and therefore the history of the South. Knowing the historical context of an area is very crucial especially if you are going there to participate in any kind of organizing and work towards effecting positive political changes. This meant that I was very aware of what to expect my first time being in the South. In order to create effective social change we need to know where we have been so we can know how to move forward, and this is a philosophy that Project South lives by.

I was also prepared because of my familiarity with a lot of the topics around political education that the young people were receiving and could therefore share my knowledge, anecdotes and facts with them to expand on what they were learning.

Working at Project South was a very helpful stepping stone in relation to my career goals. I was reminded of the fact that although I want to be a social worker, and that is a necessary profession in our world, that it also has its limits as far as how much positive and lasting change can be effected. It is a necessary profession because social

workers attempt to help people that have been negatively affected by factors (structural racism, sexism, and classism) in our society. What Project South provided me was concrete and different avenues by which one can effect positive and lasting change in our communities. And alongside this, how important this specific kind of work (all that Project South does) is.

One example of community work which I directly participated in was spreading political education (to community's youth) but through popular education models. Through meeting and working with many of the youth program's alumni, I saw first hand the positive and intense effect that going through this program had on the young people's way of thinking about the world and therefore their attitude towards wanting to work to change it. Seeing all this was a very powerful testament of the importance, and effectiveness of popular political education.

Having experienced, witnessed and having been a part of all the work that Project South does has reassured me that in my career as a social worker I need to do my best to work outside of the limits imposed by the profession. Whether that means I will actively contribute to community organizing work, or one day decide to help run such an organization as Project South, my time there has meant and demonstrated that it is possible and *necessary* to work outside the limits that I will encounter, and shown me plausible and effective ways by which I can accomplish that.