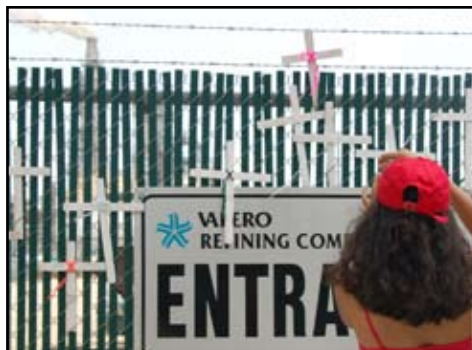




WE CAN CHANGE THE WORLD, WE CAN WE CAN. WE'RE THE...

PEOPLE'S FREEDOM CARAVAN

6 STATES, 80 ORGANIZATIONS ON THE ROAD TOWARD ANOTHER WORLD



MILESTONES OF A MOVEMENT: REFLECTIONS & EXPERIENCES ON THE JOURNEY TO THE U.S. SOCIAL FORUM

JUNE 23, 2007 - JULY 2, 2007
SOUTHWEST WORKERS UNION – SAN ANTONIO, TEXAS



Feature Presentation...

What: The People's Freedom Caravan, "a social forum on wheels"

Who: 80 grassroots community organizations from across the south and southwest of the U.S.

Where: starting in Albuquerque, NM - Carlsbad, NM - San Antonio, TX - Houston, TX - Lake Charles, LA - New Orleans, LA - Slidell, LA - Jackson, MS - Biloxi, MS - Selma, AL - Atlanta, GA.

When: June 22, 2007 to June 27, 2007

Why: to build a movement from the ground up, starting by sharing stories, cultures, histories and realities of struggle in the south and southwest; to unite across racial, cultural, language and geographic barriers

How: dedication to social justice, a vision for a different United States

In remembrance: of our brother James (Jim) Hayes, a lifelong freedom fighter of the People's Institute in New Orleans and the Freedom Riders who were a spark for a social movement in the early 1960s.

The first U.S. social forum was a historical event - One that has already spurred innovative dialogue, new connections and exciting ideas about creating another world.

For Southwest Workers Union and many organization in the southern half of the U.S. the social forum was more about the PROCESS of getting there than merely the participation in the event itself. We used this opportunity as a way to build upon the movement in the region and bring grassroots leaders together - young and old - to share their stories, to hear and see first hand the history and the realities in the southern U.S.

The caravan made dozens of organizations work together. One person or even one group could not have made this happen. It was our collective effort, our collective power that created this amazing event. This has fortified relationships, trust and solidarity between organizations in a way that no conference could have done.

It is about being able to sit down together and have a conversation. It's about being proud to share your food, your language, your music and your story. So many barriers and stereotypes divide us, that these simple acts become revolutionary.



Who got on the bus??

- Infants to grandparents (and even great grandparents)
- veterans of the civil rights and social justice movements
- Lots of YOUTH
- immigrants
- People who had never left their state before
- Folks that produce radio, tv, film and newspapers
- a ska band
- indigenous peoples
- people making change happen

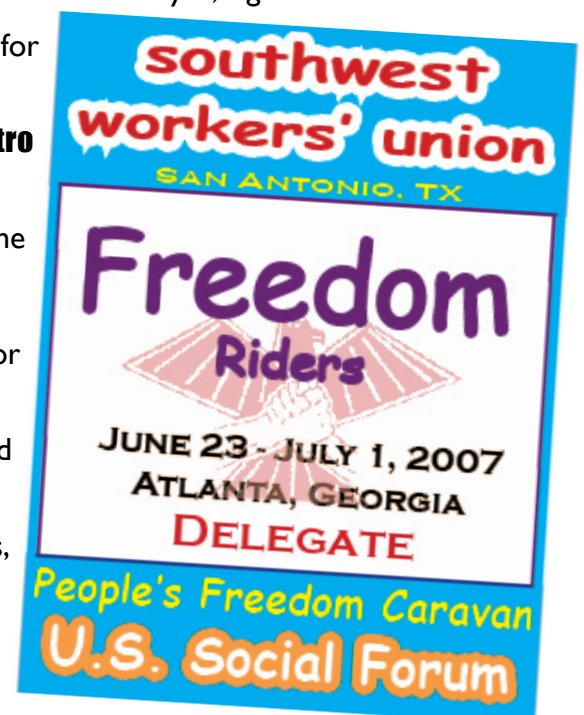
Get on the bus

San Antonio represents...



**Southwest Workers Union rolled with a delegation of 50.
Our awesome crew included:**

- **School Workers** fighting for a Living Wage and just working conditions as public employees that are denied the right to organize or act collectively
- Members of the **Committee for Environmental Justice Action (CEJA)**, dedicated to the cleanup, health and revitalization of their community poisoned by Kelly Air Force Base
- The **Youth Leadership Organization (YLO)** - young folks energized to make a difference and raise their voices within this movement building process. The YLO rolls with the Glasseyes, a groovin' ska band.
- The newest local of SWU, **Migrantes Unidos**, migrants organizing for human rights and dignity for all peoples
- Organizing, educating and training the community, members of **Centro por la Justicia** were on the bus
- A resurgence of the defenders of Chicano rights in the 1960s, the **Brown Berets**, continue the struggle for community power
- **Fuerza Unida** - a group of amazing working women struggling for justice since the closure of the Levi's plant in San Antonio
- Allies, **World Can't Wait** joined with their struggle against war and the Bush regime
- **COMPA**, the Convergence of Movements of Peoples of the Americas, a hemispheric alliance. Chiapas presente!
 - Broadcasting from the other side of the frontera, **Radiohemba**
 - and a documentarian from Hokkaido, Japan with **Marines Go Home**



After weeks and weeks of preparation, conference calls & meetings, anticipation was high as San Antonio anxiously awaited the arrival of the New Mexico delegation. Travelling 100 strong and definitely winning for most stylish buses, the People's Freedom Caravan officially started at 7am on Friday June 22nd from Albuquerque.



the launch...



"Our current pay to play democracy keeps low income families and communities of color down, no matter the issue- Katrina, immigrant rights, youth rights, education, housing, or the prison industry," **says JoAnn Gutierrez Bejar of SWOP.** "The Caravan recognizes that real change will come from the grassroots, and will speak to the issues of those most affected by the changing economy and globalization."

Albuquerque, NM -- The People's Freedom Caravan launched on Friday June 22nd and sent off 100 New Mexicans towards the US Social Forum to build proactive ways to address the problems of poverty, globalization, contamination and racism.

As we enter hurricane season 1000 delegates will travel down the hurricane path from the South and Southwest. They will participate in a multi-city tour that will break historic racial, gender and economic divides in this country.

The New Mexico Delegation consists of residents from Pajarito Mesa fighting for basic services, Immigrants fighting for a just immigration reform, Indigenous people protecting sacred sites, African Americans preserving historical traditions and culture, policy organizations fighting for working families and other allies from around the state.

"The caravan will unite across racial, cultural, geographic and language barriers to advocate for people-based solutions and to create a democracy that works for everyone not just a selected few," says Bineshi Albert, Board President of SouthWest Organizing Project.

"This is a historic event and moment for change; it's our opportunity to take democracy back." Robby Rodriguez, Executive Director of SWOP.



Caravaners get a 'reality' tour of southwest San Antonio, showing the impacts of the toxic military bases. At the community headquarters, folks hear first hand from the leaders struggling against the deadly Kelly Air Force Base.



Clean water, just borders

(making connections in San Antonio)...



From SA Express-News (6.24.07):

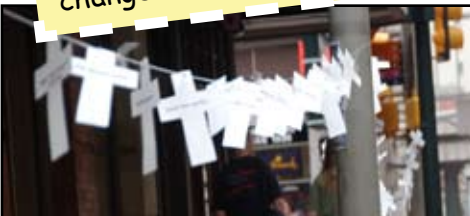
Tourists visiting the Alamo got an eye and ear full Saturday, witnessing a rally of more than 150 immigration advocates demanding equal rights for immigrants, especially children.

Lydia Williams, 41, of Carlsbad, N.M., said she was part of a Southwest Organizing Project group of about 100 who stopped for the protest on their way to a forum in Atlanta.

"We are really trying to make positive changes in the world today," she said.



The march stopped at the office of Senator John Cornyn to call for and humane immigration reform that keeps families united, protects worker rights, supports a living wage and creates a friendly demilitarized border region. We later shared culture, music and history South Texas style.



In the heart of the oil industry

(demanding healthy communities in Houston)...



3 buses strong, we met our 4th in Houston, in the shadows of refineries. Houston is in the center of the dirty oil industry causing cancer, asthma, smog as well as climate change. Welcomed with a bar-b-q, we joined one of the biggest environmental actions in the city's history, even catching the attention of the mayor.



Houston, TX – Hundreds of “freedom riders” made their way to Houston today, visiting East Houston’s Manchester neighborhood to show solidarity with the community living adjacent to a massive petrochemical complex.

“Thanks for being here,” said one mother of Manchester, standing with her children. “We’re trying to clean our air.” PortArthur residents spoke of their recent victory stopping trucks of nerve gas from Indiana from being incinerated near families in Port Arthur, already home to 3 refineries.

The rally concluded with a short march to the fenceline of the refinery where marchers placed 300 white crosses on the fence, representing cancer victims in the community.

“The people in Houston filled me inspiration, says Victoria Rodriguez, who rode the People’s Freedom Caravan from New Mexico. “I don’t know how they live next to those refineries, you can smell it. Truly an environmental injustice.”



“We heard about children having heart surgery, families dealing with high instances of cancer, yet the community is still filled with hope,” added Rodriguez.

“We need to make change happen in the world and stand together with the people in this community in East Houston to make [Valero] clean the air,” says Sandra Garcia, from Southwest Workers’ Union in San Antonio Texas.

“Environmental Justice is a human right just like housing, health care and education,” explained Bryan Parras of the Southern Human Rights Organizing Network.



The caravan continued to Lake Charles, La, home to the highest juvenile incarceration rate in the country. Across the river is Mossville, originally a free black settlement, that is now surrounded by petrochemical industries and power plants that kill. Change is happening now. The caravan helped bring two strong grassroots organizations, FFLIC and MEAN together in solidarity across many issues.



*"We've been waiting a long time" for this type of convergence that overcomes the barriers that divide us, said one Mossville Resident. **"This is about making our voices heard, bringing together our power and constructing a better future for our children based on human rights and justice."** Young voices filled the auditorium as folks shared their experiences, hopes and realities.*

Protecting future generations

(building bridges in southwestern Louisiana)...

**"WE KNOW WHAT A BETTER WORLD WOULD LOOK LIKE. IT HAS AIR AND WATER THAT NOURISHES RATHER THAN POISONS, IT HAS SCHOOLS AND PARKS NOT PRISONS, IT PRIORITIZES SOCIAL PROGRAMS AND HEALTH CARE INSTEAD OF CORPORATE WELFARE. LET'S GO TO ATLANTA AND BUILD THAT BETTER WORLD."
- GRACE BAUER, FFLIC**

The stories focused on recuperating democracy for the working-class and people of color communities in this country.

Residents spoke of victories in shutting down prisons for children, dedicating resources to education and services, and reducing the amount of poisons in the air. A line filled the hall of people waiting to sign a petition for justice for

the Mossville community poisoned by toxic water.

"I felt the suffering of the community here, dealing with health problems from contaminations just like in my neighborhood in San Antonio," explained George Valdez of SWU. "We must unite our struggles to ensure that everyone in this country has a safe, clean environment for their families."



New Orleans moved everyone on the caravan in so many ways. From tears to laughter, from tragedy to dancing, the spirit of the place had a lasting impact on all. Nothing can prepare you for the first hand experience.



The Culture, the Spirit and the People are Alive...

Strength, Resilience, Courage

(reconstructing democracy in New Orleans)...



jazz funerals.

"People in New Orleans don't like to say birth and death they say sunrise and sunset. And on a person's sunset, they celebrate they do not mourn. They have a huge parade to commemorate that person."

-Laurita Abner, SWU

"Let us come together to overcome the barriers set up to keep us divided. As hurricane season is upon us, we must join together for a just rebuilding and reconstruction of our city. The other U.S. possible, it starts here and it starts with us," - Kimberly Richards, People's Institute.



"Hope for displaced hurricane survivors to return to our homes with dignity and justice relies on a mass movement that begins with the People's Freedom Ride to the US Social Forum," - Monique Harden, Advocates for Environmental Human Rights

.Inspiration. "This whole experience left me even more inspired to help communities like the lower 9th ward to fight the system and demand that they be treated fairly. I hope to put all my energy and effort into helping people that our government chooses to ignore." - Debbie Moschak, SWU.

.Solidarity. "We visited a free health clinic that has seen 150,000 people. People have united and not let go of their land, their pride, their roots, their culture. It gives me that strength to continue...and never to ignore what happens to other people." - Monica Garcia, SWU





Problem: The U.S. Government is denying low-income and African-American Residents the right to return to their homes. They are using the fact that no one has picked up the mounds of trash as a reason to shut down entire neighborhoods.

Evidence: Public housing units have been locked up and residents harrassed for being on their property, even in homes NOT damaged by the flood.

Solution: People Power!! Residents are reconstructing their homes, fixing up houses and reclaiming their community.

Mission: Pick up the trash at the CJ Peete Housing so that folks can come home.



Hope... one step at a time

(sweating for justice, helping folks return)





Smiles & handshakes greeted the caravan in the rural community of Slidell. We had doubled in size with the 4 gulf coast buses. On sacred communal grounds, the group wrapped around an ancient oak tree several times to join in unity with the community to offer hope and smiles in the face of hardship.

Feelin at home in Bayou Liberty

(Keeping spirits high in Slidell, la)...

Report from St. Tammany News 7.5.2007 (mostly accurate):

Social reform groups gather for crab boil on Bayou Liberty

Members of Moving Forward Gulf Coast Inc., St. Vincent de Paul Society of St. Genevieve Church and the Creoles Sans Limites welcomed about 200 people from California [SW US] recently with a real Louisiana tradition - a crab boil.

The Californians are traveling in a series of buses called the People's Freedom Caravan and are on their way to the U.S. Social Forum in Atlanta.

The crab boil was held on the grounds of St. Genevieve Church on the banks of Bayou Liberty.

Besides friendship and a good time, the crab boil was a way

for people working for social justice around the country to get together, network and map out plans on how to improve the lives of Americans.

Residents of the area will join the People's Freedom Caravan to attend the forum, which will focus on plans to reform governments and leadership in the country. The U.S. Social Forum is a large gathering of progressive, grassroots organizations and faith-based ministries that network to help improve the quality of lives of Americans.

Moving Forward Gulf Coast Inc. is a non-profit organization based in Louisiana that was founded to help local families rebuild lives and homes on the Gulf Coast after Hurricane Katrina.



Freedom on Our Minds

(Converging struggles in Jackson, ms)...

Jackson is rich with struggle, resistance and songs of a movement. The city where the original freedom riders were jailed, we heard the truth of the inhumanities based on racism, a legacy that is more subtle but still alive today. We learned of the fight just to get recognition of the civil rights leaders and the power of history. For many folks from San Antonio this was their first time in the deep south, or even out of Texas, & their first encounter with the civil rights movement outside of textbooks.



Two legacies of the civil rights movement...

Medgar Evers (statue) and

Hollis Watkins, founder of Southern Echo



The Caravan takes on modern day oppression...



“Walmart is eating the flesh off the bones of the workers, stealing benefits from workers and families... To unionize Walmart, we need a spark. Today, you are that spark.”

- State Representative Jim Evans

Showing the power of unity



“Those working inside this store right now are the ones making the buck, creating the enormous profit for the Walmart Corporation, meanwhile they are only given crumbs to live off of.”

- Latoya Davis, MS Workers Center for Human Rights

Hundreds demands justice & dignity for workers



Over 500 strong and 8 buses deep with thousands involved along the way, Selma allowed us to continue the dialogue, reflect on their whirlwind of experiences and think about the future. At the same time, we remembered how we got here, the sacrifices and violence of the past that stopped at nothing to work towards freedom, towards a new vision and another world. From children to grandparents, moms to organizers we shared with each other.

The Struggle Continues

(Reflecting on our vision in Selma, al)...

“I came on this tour as a mother. I’m leaving committed to social justice,” reflected **Renee Rodriguez of SWU**. Her daughter is part of the youth internship program. “You don’t really get what other people have been through until you actually see it. I have seen the struggles, and I have felt the spark of hope. The community is making change and it is all run by the people.”

“After I saw all that stuff, it made me want to fix houses and do things to help,”
- **daniel garduno,**
ylo secretary, 13.

“I’m very proud of the youth coming on this bus, from the stories they are telling, talking from their heart ... I see hope from all the young people on the bus”
- **viola casares, fuerza unida**

“it may be one thing at a time, but we are all going to get everything accomplished... those who plan to get poor people out, out of their houses so the wealthier can get wealthier, they will come down.”
- **eloy contreras, swu president**

“Everyone was united and everyone was there for a reason. Unfortunately some couldn’t make it and their presence was greatly missed. Our journey to the ussf was part chaos as the caravan was picking up people every which way. We were all having fun chanting and singing and hugs came at you from all direction... Now when I feel tired or sad I think of those people we met along the way and how they greeted us with smiles even through they had been through so much tradegy. I will never forget them and only wish i can tell my story like they did.”
- **Diana Lopez, SWU, 18.**



Our food is part of who we are. it reflects our environment, our history and is the accumulation of many generations of knowledge. With pride, people speak about their food. It is one defining aspect of a culture. For many on the caravan, they had to step outside of their comfort zone to experience a new cuisine.



lima, pinto & red beans

(sharing politics and culture through food)...



As we rolled in Atlanta, the caravan had travelled well over 2,000 miles in 6 days. Getting off the bus to the excited faces of the ussf organizers, a rush of energy revived all of us on the bus. We were met with a brass band and joined over 15 thousand people committed to creating another US marched under the hot sun.

March on Atlanta

(making history at the first US Social Forum)...



the people's freedom caravan was a transformative movement building experience. it did what a conference could never do. the act of sharing and giving, something deeply rooted in all of our cultures, creates so many bridges and solidifies our relationships. Building that trust and common experience sets us on firm ground to realize our visions.



15,000 people converged in Atlanta for 5 days of action, workshops, plenaries, networking and the people's movement assembly. There were over 1,000 workshops, 15 tents, 10 sites and countless dialogues, innovation and vision for social change.



at the forum SWU...

...held down the Peoples Solidarity Tent, did 15 workshops, sold SWU merchandise, exhibited a photo display, served food at our food booth.

...coordinated the Peoples Movements Assembly and the Southwest regional meeting, participated in the Migrant rights plenary, protested ATSDR (Agency for Toxic Substance & Disease Registry) headquarters.

...spoke to local, national, independent and even international media.



As the caravan brought together thousands along its journey, it carried the spite of those unable to get on the bus. The caravan was able to bring those voices, those struggles and those stories to Atlanta. And as we return to our communities, it will bring the experience and knowledge back to our base across the South & Southwest.



united states social forum

(another world is possible, another US is necessary)

we can change the world

(the people's freedom caravanistas)...

21st Century Youth Leadership, (AL)
Action for Community Education Reform, (MS)
Activists With a Purpose, Grenada (MS)
Advocates for Environmental Human Rights,
New Orleans (LA)
American Indian Movement, National
Ashe' Cultural Center, New Orleans (LA)
Bayou Liberty, Slidell (LA)
Bayou Paquet, Slidell (LA)
Brown Berets, San Antonio (TX)
Capital Post-Conviction Project, New Orleans (LA)
Catalyst Project, New Orleans (LA)
Centro de Igualdad y Derechos, New Mexico
Chicano, New Mexico
Children's Defense Fund, New Orleans (LA)
Circle of Love Center, Selma (AL)
Citizens for Education Awareness, Mississippi
Coalition In Defense of the Community, Houston (TX)
Committee for Environmental Justice Action,
San Antonio (TX)
Community In-Power Development Association,
Port Arthur (TX)
COMPA, Americas
Concerned Citizens for a Better Tunica County,
Tunica (MS)
Concerned Citizens of Greenville, Greenville (MS)
Creole Sans Limites, Slidell (LA)
Enlace Comunitario, Albuquerque (NM)
Elwood Community Church, Selma (AL)
Fourth World Movement, New Orleans (LA)
Friends and Families of Louisiana's Incarcerated Children,
Lake Charles (LA)
Fuerza Unida, San Antonio (TX)
Georgia Stand Up, Atlanta (GA)
Grassroots Global Justice, US
Gulf Coast Fund, US
Houston Indy Media Collective, Houston (TX)
INCITE! Women of Color Against Violence,
New Orleans (LA)
Indianola Parent Student Group, Indianola (MS)
Institute of Women & Ethnic Studies, New Orleans (LA)
Just Be Inc, Selma (AL)
Latino Health Outreach Project, New Orleans (LA)
League of United Latin American Citizens, Houston (TX)
Left Turn, New Orleans (LA)
Lower 9th Ward Health Clinic, New Orleans (LA)
Mary Queen of Vietnam Church, New Orleans (LA)
Millions More Movement, Houston (TX)
MLK Dream Team, Carlsbad (NM)
Mossville Environmental Action Now, Mossville (LA)
Moving Forward Gulf Coast, Slidell (LA)
National Alliance of Vietnamese American Service Agencies,
New Orleans, (LA)/national
Neighborhood Partnership Network, New Orleans (LA)
New Mexico Acequia Association/Sembrando Semillas,
New Mexico
New Orleans Women's Health Clinic, New Orleans (LA)
New Orleans Workers' Center, New Orleans (LA)
Nollies Citizens for Quality Education, Mississippi
One Torch, New Orleans (LA)
Parents and Youth United for a Better Webster County,
Webster (MS)
People's Hurricane Relief Fund, New Orleans (LA)
People's Institute for Survival and Beyond, Houston (TX),
New Orleans (LA)
People's Organizing Committee, New Orleans (LA)
PODER, San Francisco (CA)
Project South, Atlanta (GA)
Safe Streets Strong Communities, New Orleans (LA)
SAGE Council, Albuquerque (NM)
Saving Our Selves Coalition, Alabama
Somos Un Pueblo Unido, Santa Fe (NM)
Southern Echo Incorporated, Jackson (MS)
Southern Human Rights Organizing Network,
Houston (TX)
SouthWest Organizing Project, Albuquerque (NM)
Southwest Workers Union, San Antonio (TX)
St. Vincent de Paul Society, Slidell (LA)
Students at the Center, New Orleans (LA)
T.E.J.A.S, Houston (TX)
Texas Death Penalty Abolition Movement, Houston (TX)
Vietnamese-American Young Leaders Association of New
Orleans, New Orleans (LA)
Welfare Rights Organization, New Orleans (LA)
World Can't Wait, San Antonio (TX)
Youth Innovation Movement Solutions, Mississippi
Youth Leadership Organization, San Antonio (TX)
Youth Media Council, Oakland (CA)



.southwest
workers'
union.
san antonio, texas
www.swunion.org