



THE

Stay

PROJECT

STAY Posted

2022

No.1



We continued weaving our multiracial, multigender network of young organizers, artists, and visionaries across the region. At the beginning of 2022, The STAY Project Co-ordinators went on a regional road-trip tour to connect with, learn from, and deepen our relationships with STAY leaders, members, and young people from Birmingham to Pittsburgh, to all the hills and hollers in between. We had the opportunity to briefly witness and learn about the histories, current conditions, and beautiful solutions across our many places—seeing the parallels across our places, the distinct nature of each place, and seeing how, in each of our places, we’re living in the history we’ve inherited.

This year, the STAY Project continued to build on our nearly 15 years of youth organizing and our Appalachian youth liberation movement, led by and for youth living in the Appalachian counties of Kentucky, North Carolina, Virginia, West Virginia, Tennessee, and Alabama.

We assembled the Black Appalachian Young and Rising (BAYR) Dream Team, a committee of young Black leaders from across the region who are committed to build the infrastructure for the BAYR program to grow, deepen, and connect with Black youth across the region. We are excited for the space for Black Appalachian youth leadership to continue growing within STAY and beyond.





This summer, we gathered our folks in West Virginia at our annual STAY Summer Institute, where we focused our time together on building and nurturing our relationships across our many places, learning from and about each other and our homes across the region; celebrating our youth, our joy, the fullness of our dignity, and building our political and cultural analysis and strategy together.

This November, we gathered young Appalachian artists and culture bearers together at our annual Appalachian Love Fest, in Big Stone Gap, Virginia, to practice a joyful and transformed world. We celebrated and loved on each other across all of our experiences, identities, artforms, genres, and lineages, and forms of creative expression. We laughed and danced, and practiced our vision of liberation and wholeness as a salve on the wounds of our communities, our land, our cultures, and our bodies.



We built together alongside our partner organizations and stood in solidarity with social movement forces across Appalachia, the South, and beyond. We joined the Powershift network, a network of youth led climate justice movement organizations across the country. We stood with, supported, and affirmed the critically important work our partner Sexy Sex Ed as they were attacked by reactionary forces and right wing think tanks and media. We joined organizers from across the South at the Southern Movement Assembly to deepen and build our collective analysis of our political moment and strategize toward building the infrastructure that our communities need to thrive.



WHAT ARE WE FACING?

We know that as young people across Appalachia, we're living with the scars of industry, capitalism, extraction, and exploitation written on the land—the organized abandonment across time and place. We're living surrounded by monuments to industry all around us in run down and abandoned plants—coal, steel, textiles, timber, oil, Good Year, Dupont. Monuments to a mythical history—to the church of the empire and the company, the slavocracy and capitalism, to death-making institutions. Confederate and colonial statues, shrines to policing and caging people like the Prison on Wallens Ridge in Big Stone Gap Virginia. Shrines to imperial domination and expansion, to the worship of Alabama power and US steel, the worship of wealth and power. We see mirror images of disinvested Black and poor multiracial communities across the region. Communities that have again and again been smothered through divestment, economic strangulation, criminalization, repression, and the poisoning of our environments.



We see our infrastructure crumbling—roads, bridges, and houses. Public, social, transportation, healthcare, and education infrastructure disintegrating. Flood waters rising in the coalfields of West Virginia and Kentucky, in Pakistan, as there’s no water for folks in Jackson, MS. Heatwaves, unpredictable weather patterns, and climate collapse met with coal executives, pipeliners, and green capitalists. Public housing literally being demolished—leveled. Generations of homes lost and families displaced.

We see Black neighborhoods and rural land being bought and flipped at an exponentially rapid pace. Development popping up everywhere—luxury housing, boutique shops, mansions on the ridges of mountains, second homes—forcing our people out of their homes and communities, and deeper into precarity and the neighborhoods where pollution and policing is most concentrated, like North Birmingham.

We see the infrastructure that the ‘powers who think they are’ propose and fund: extractive economies continuing in new forms—chicken processing plants, Amazon and Walmart, tourism and the service industry, the non-profit industrial complex, and the prison, policing, and detention industrial complex.

Young people and our communities are left with no resources or opportunities, no spaces to gather and feel connection, be joyful, whole, dignified, cared for and care free. Instead we see elite captured state structures and private institutions targeting our bodies with violence being mobilized in its many forms—criminalization, exploitation, disposability, abandonment, policy attacks, and stoking of vigilante violence. Violence directed particularly at young queer and trans people, young Black people, working class, cash poor, and houseless people, people crossing borders, disabled people, and people with addictions.

We see the control and targeting of our access to all kinds of information and knowledge about our bodies and what our bodies deserve—the targeting of our bodily autonomy in anti-trans legislation, abortion bans, union busting, sex work criminalization, and the criminalization and genocidal treatment of migrants at the US nation-state border and peoples across the global South, particularly in historical and present colonial centers like Haiti, Borinquen (so-called Puerto Rico), Palestine, and Cuba.

We see the targeting and suppression of our knowledge about all of our tangled histories of violence and oppression, here in Appalachia and globally. We know that this suppression is a tactic of the ruling class to maintain power and control. We honor our grief for our loved ones and leaders that are no longer here with us. We send our love and support for our folks locked up, for freedom fighters facing governmental and non-governmental forms of opposition, and for all our people just simply trying to survive, simply trying to be.

What are we going to do about it?



We know we're living in communities that have across time and place organized for and practiced care, solidarity, and mutual aid amongst each other; holding the glimmers of abundance. We know our histories of Civil Rights struggle, the mine wars, militant labor organizing, and the Southern Freedom Movement that we are living inside of. And we see in those histories communities that have built relationships, cared for each other, struggled and prayed and sang and organized and worshiped together toward dignity and freedom. And we see young people—our leadership, our vision, our courage, our joy—always at the forefront.

And young people are still out here fighting and building and dreaming!

We're out here unionizing our baristas, supporting striking miners and other workers, organizing free stores, mutual aid, harm reduction, mental, physical, and reproductive health care support, direct actions, banner drops, rallies, press conferences, and other actions, teaching comprehensive sex education, sharing our knowledge, stories, skills, histories, relationships, brilliance, and resources with each other. We're out here obtaining and tending land, growing and sharing food, creating visionary art and music, creating refuge in each other, and reminding each other we're worthy of so much more than the conditions we've been handed.

We're out here cultivating relationships, networks, formations, and cultures rooted in reciprocity, mutual dignity, and collective care. Building a political and cultural analysis together. Building power to challenge power. Making the movement irresistible—centering joy and fun together, honoring our youth and showing up to each other and the world we're tending with our full, expressive, beautiful selves. We're out here dreaming about and envisioning and practicing and organizing toward liberation y'all!

In 2023, we commit to weaving our dreams and visions for our work, together. To our relationships—the ones we have and the ones we want to build and deepen. To our web of connection, belonging, safety, joy, love, care, resource, and spiritual fortitude. To our new world—abundant and free. We commit to the grace and the discipline of building together, to the love we have for one another and for the land, to the love we have for liberation and the making of it.

*We are thankful to our STAY Fam who
subscribed to STAY Posted
We look forward to continuing
quarterly editions of the newsletter
through member submissions*

*Signed by:
STAY Colo's
&
Steering Committee*



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