



KMA SYNTHESIZER REPORT



Dear Reader,

Please find below the outcome of hundreds of hours of work from over a dozen people who were part of the Kentucky Movement Assembly's Synthesizer and Notetaking Team. By directly observing conversations and workshops across the Assembly; by collecting feedback from surveys, flipchart paper, and scribbled thoughts on sticky notes; by sitting deeply with, reflecting upon, and discussing this material, we present to you a snapshot, only partially developed. A snapshot of general themes, of key insights, and of potential paths forward that were explored by those present at the 2023 Kentucky Movement Assembly.

We offer up this snapshot as a catalyst upon which further action may be coordinated and spurred. The images this snapshot contains of the work happening in Kentucky is only partially developed, both due to the natural limitation that it can only reflect the people who were able to be in the space with us, and because it requires active engagement after the Assembly. In order to develop it fully, we invite you and your organization to take it, reflect on it, build upon it, and get with other organizations across the state working around similar (and completely different!) issues to you and start a conversation: *What are the problems we are facing? What are the solutions to these problems? And what are we going to do to get to the solutions?*

We also invite you to explore the process of moving from this report, into developing commitments and explicit and coordinated action steps together through the Synthesis Process of People's Movement Assemblies (which can be found on page 32 of the [People's Movement Assembly Organizing Handbook](#)). This report represents the first steps in that process, the next are up to you and your organizations.

We look forward to developing the rest of the snapshot with you, both in conversation and in the streets. We've got a lot to build, and a lot to fight for, together.

In Solidarity,

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WHERE WE ARE

As Kentucky faces increasingly intricate and deeply intersectional challenges, it is evident that our political economic system is rotten to the core and deeply entrenched in racial and economic biases and corruption. Those most directly affected by these systemic issues, including activists and organizers, find themselves worn out and weary.

To tackle these deep-rooted problems, we must embrace unconventional approaches and a wide range of strategies and tactics that are rooted in cultural and historical contexts. By building relationships across the state, from person to person and community to community, we can refine our tools, tactics, strategies, and shared analysis to serve as the foundation for creative and transformative solutions, all aimed at dismantling oppression at its very core.

"WE ALL HAVE SELF INTEREST...BUT SOMETIMES WE WORK AGAINST IT BECAUSE OF THE NARRATIVES WE'RE FED, INCLUDING NARRATIVES ROOTED IN RACIAL CAPITALISM, WHICH TRIES TO KEEP US FROM CONNECTING THE DOTS OF OPPRESSION (AND DOING SOMETHING ABOUT IT)."

- Jessica

In building relationships across differences, our vulnerability will be our strength as we work to discover our shared interests. Regardless of our backgrounds, no matter our experience, we must strengthen our connections and unite around common ground within the struggle so that we can throw down in the trenches together, fighting alongside and supporting each other.

To ensure we are showing up in right relationship to each other, we must grow our collective social, emotional, and organizing skills, especially when it comes to learning to navigate generative conflict within our movement spaces and organizations. Across these differences we must build organizational and movement cultures of care and rigor centered around our shared values, that proactively develop the leadership of those most directly impacted, that take calculated risks within a clear strategy, and that create spaces of joy and reflection, where intention is an ongoing and engaged process.

"We need to skill ourselves up across the state. Organizing takes so much work, and I'm tired and I only have so much energy."

- Daisy

We must honor the wisdom and guidance of our elders who have walked the path of liberation before us. Additionally, we must nurture and honor the wisdom and

guidance of our youth. We must create spaces where both elders' and youths' voices are actively listened to, their opinions are valued, and where they are included directly in discussions and decision making around strategy and tactics when it comes to shaping our communities and movements. We must archive our elders' oral histories to preserve our cultures and to learn from their experience, and we must empower youth to learn, grow, and lead. Our fight and the prospects for a better future are inherently intergenerational.

"Older folks were starry eyed because they had so many young folks listening and interested in what they were saying...It was so moving, I can't even explain the love that was felt."

- Emmanuel

A fundamental necessity of our shared struggles is learning to truly listen to and empower those directly impacted by various injustices to be leaders in this movement. As the saying goes, "The people closest to the problem are closest to the solution." Directly impacted people have the experience and urgency necessary to develop creative and impactful solutions, but we must ensure they are supported and resourced to sustain their efforts.

Additionally, we must fight the stigma and shame so often associated with being directly impacted. The personal is political and sharing our personal stories is a powerful tool to reveal and remind people of our humanity as directly impacted individuals. Sharing our stories helps more people to find the courage to tell their own stories. Our stories can serve as a wellspring of strength within our collective movements that can begin transforming the dominant language and culture that attempts to dehumanize us at every turn.

"We live in times when we're all talking at each other. Being heard really means something. Listening is a healing act, and we need healers."

- Tim



Our stories serve as one means of cultural organizing, of preserving and passing down our histories and our cultures to the next generation. Blackness, Indigeneity, and the full spectrum of oppressed identities are part of our history, present, and future.

We must preserve, create, and protect our culturally appropriate spaces as we loudly proclaim, “We’ve been here, we’re still here, and our cultural knowledge is sacred!” To share our stories and make our organizing efforts more compelling and inclusive, we must harness the power of art in its various forms, from writing and visual arts to music, comedy, and theater, all of which have the capacity to engage and mobilize communities across Kentucky.

“Our stories remind us that we’re people and not numbers or a dollar sign. The system is incapable of treating us like people, so our movements have to do the work of not treating us like numbers.”

- workshop participant

Our engagement and mobilization of our communities must harness the power of our collective anger at every injustice, it must spur hope and a collective vision, and it must turn us to coordinated and strategic action. Be it on our block, in our city or county, or in Frankfort, if we are to realize our collective power, we must forge innovative and proactive strategies and tactics rather than just reactive ones. Whether the battleground we choose to fight for justice upon exists within the realm of policy makers and legislative work, or it exists in forging new terrains of struggle and lines of solidarity between communities that puts power directly in the hands of the people, we must grow strong bases and networks of support upon which to take action towards collective liberation together. We must build our relationships and our skills across communities, across differences, across intersections, and across geographies.

We must fight for that glorious day where we can all truly say we are free, and that our liberation is, and always will be, bound together.



THE FRONT LINES UPON WHICH WE ARE FIGHTING

HARM REDUCTION, THE WAR ON DRUGS, AND INCARCERATION

The War on Drugs and the 'Law and Order' atmosphere that sustains it is fundamentally racist, white supremacist, and anti-poor with its tendrils causing devastating impacts on communities, families, and substance users across the state. In a country where 'pharmaceutical companies are the biggest drug dealers', we must uphold the rights of people with Substance Use Disorders (SUD); we must combat discrimination, ensure access to legal protection, educate people who use substances about their rights, and shift away from a culture and practice of criminalization of drug use to one of harm reduction that is fundamental to building a safer Kentucky for all. Harm reduction that is centered on compassion, and not judgment, is a critical and necessary stance when it comes to stopping the War on Drugs and building support for substance users.

In this fight we must center and hold people over policy, prioritizing organizing and community building first while educating and empowering those with lived experience to be leaders. We must fight against the stigma substance users face in our communities, amongst policy makers, and amongst medical professionals surrounding drug use and develop proactive strategies at the city, county, and state levels to address racial and geographic overdose disparities.

When it does come to policy work, we must remain wary of and vigilant against 'reforms' that only make the problem worse. The safest communities don't require more police presence or more nuanced criminalization; instead, they need an abundance of resources and as such we must work to decriminalize all drugs, defund the carceral system that the war on drugs sustains, and use that money to fund care and basic needs for our community and those impacted by this war.

We must promote greater interaction between people with lived experience and legislators, ensuring that their voices are heard, their needs recognized, and the stigma leveled against them is reduced. We must commit to creating a more compassionate and informed Kentucky that can prevent overdoses and provide real support to those with substance use issues. We must ensure naloxone and narcan trainings are readily available and accessible, that there are accessible



testing options if people are going to use drugs, and that there are real resources for at-risk youth, parents, and substance users such as trauma-informed therapy and rehabilitation and treatment resources rather than incarceration.

Important to note in the fight against incarceration across Kentucky are the various movements and campaigns present at the Assembly fighting for abolition of the criminal justice system. Whether working to stop a new jail in Louisville, the long-standing fight against the most expensive proposed Federal prison in U.S. history happening in Letcher County, attempting to hold police departments accountable for their actions, or engaging in proactive court watching and support for those facing trials, Kentuckians across the state are building lines of solidarity across all communities directly impacted by incarceration to fight for a new world beyond the criminal injustice system.

CLIMATE DISASTER, ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE, AND MUTUAL AID

Climate disaster, its causes, and its consequences are here right now impacting communities across the state. From the ongoing industrial poisoning of the Black community of Rubbertown in Louisville; to the unprecedented destruction wrought by a tornado striking in the middle of the night in Bowling Green; to the "1,000-year flood" that decimated Letcher County and surrounding communities in Eastern Kentucky, destroying and damaging thousands of homes and killing dozens. Policy change cannot keep pace with the realities and impacts of the climate crisis, nor 'shift forward any radical change', and 'we can't just make capitalism green'. As a result, we must:

1. engage in the fight to give land back to indigenous peoples for them to steward, and
2. begin preparing our communities to take care of each other by building resilient and interconnected mutual aid networks.

Mutual aid organizing will allow us to prepare before disaster strikes, whether it be educating the public about mutual aid as a process, a politic, and a practice, by promoting community preparedness through practical skills building and hyperlocal organizing, by chal-



lenging profiteering from disaster relief, by fighting for clean energy initiatives, and by building a movement of movements outside of the non-profit industrial complex that interweaves our localized efforts into a statewide network of support based on reciprocity and solidarity.

Working together, from displaced Indigenous nations, to rural and urban neighborhoods, our communities can create an empowered, well-prepared, and tightly knit front in the face of the climate crisis; ready to help each other rebuild if and when a crisis comes.

HOUSING AND LAND RIGHTS

Housing insecurity and instability is one of the most common issues faced across Kentucky and impacts everything in a person or family's life, including their mental health, job security, access to resources and safety, and on a macro level it destabilizes entire communities. The challenges are many, including unresponsive landlords, hazardous living conditions, the weaponization of code enforcement and evictions, the misappropriation and misuse of funds designated for low-income housing, and Kentucky's historical inability to even acknowledge (much less rematriate) the indigenous lands upon which it was built. All stem from or are reinforced by a system of racial capitalism where the overwhelmingly white property-owning class gain wealth and power from the genocide and forced removal of indigenous peoples, the incarceration of Black people, as well as the exploitation and oppression of poor and working people.

Landlords, property 'developers,' and house-flipping gentrifiers work in coordination, with implicit and explicit support from city and state officials. Building collective tenant power serves as a key antidote to these forces, where one on one conversations, vulnerability, and authentic relationship building can help renters uncover their own self-interest and understanding as to how the systems of power affecting them operate.

By creating and supporting tenants' rights organizations we can challenge the narrative of shame so often built into housing insecurity and empower tenants to fight collectively for the rights of all renters. In this work we must embrace a diversity of tactics in our organizing, such as educational initiatives, storytelling, advocating for protective policies for renters such as a Renter's Bill of

Rights, training tenants on their rights a renters and how they might educate others. By harnessing people's anger, we can create pathways for collective hope and powerful action so that one day we might have a Kentucky where housing is a guaranteed right and not a means of wealth generation for the already rich and powerful.

VOTING RIGHTS

Voting rights, and the denial of them to a broad range of formerly incarcerated Kentuckians, remain a critical issue facing Kentucky. It is critical to uncover and center our shared interest in this struggle. No matter who we are, no matter our experience, we all have an interest in voting rights restoration because when we win on voting rights, it makes other wins possible.

The denial of voting rights undermines our fight for democracy and the people's agenda to address human needs. While fighting for full voting rights restoration for incarcerated and formerly incarcerated people, it is vital that we fight to enhance access to the polls, facilitate voter registration and voter rights trainings, advocate for policy change, host get out the vote campaigns, challenge language barriers to voting, and actively build the base for voting rights across the state who can engage in the political process through calls to legislators, canvassing efforts, and fighting for a constitutional amendment to restore voting rights to every Kentuckian denied them.

The dominant 'Law and Order atmosphere' in Kentucky at the root of these problems is racialized, white supremacist, and anti-poor. In our challenge we must recognize creative expression and storytelling as a catalyst for change. Personal stories and experiences matter and hold incredible power to show the humanity of people impacted, and as such formerly incarcerated people and their leadership must be centered within a broader front as core to the solutions.



IMPORTANT NOTES

In addition to the above work, participants in the Kentucky Movement Assembly highlighted many unique challenges faced by Kentuckians due to the identities they hold. We will highlight a few here:

MIGRANTS AND REFUGEES

Our organizing work must be attuned to the needs of newly arriving refugees and migrants to our communities, who face unique challenges in their transition to Kentucky. Transportation barriers, employment difficulties, a thin network of support organizations to turn to, and complicated legal hoops that must be navigated are all hard enough on their own, but complicated by language barriers that newcomers face.

If we are to create a Kentucky that welcomes migrants and refugees with open arms, places to start include building relationships and community with our newly arrived neighbors, educating employers about the capabilities of refugees, fighting for funding for on-site interpreters in labor settings to overcome language barriers, working to improve both language accessibility and transportation accessibility to services, and providing assistance in job and educational processes.

Lastly we must figure out ways to support the resourcefulness and amplify the expertise of our new neighbors, whether this is in the entrepreneurial area by supporting new small business development, in city hall and in Frankfort by supporting a platform for migrants and refugees to speak for themselves and fight for policy change addressing their unique challenges, and explicitly valuing the care work that migrant women engage in that is so often undervalued and overlooked.

BLACK KENTUCKIANS

White supremacy and anti-Blackness permeate every institution and intersect with every frontline listed above, and across Kentucky. We would be remiss if we did not, however, include reflections from the Assembly on the unique difficulties faced by both rural Black Kentuckians, and plus-sized Black Kentuckians.

Rural Black Kentuckians face unique challenges when it comes to organizing in overwhelmingly white, and conservative portions of the state where quite often the only Democratic candidates, much less progressive, are

just Republican-light conservatives. There may be only a handful of polling locations in the entire county, such as in Pulaski County where there are only two voting locations, one of which is at the Hal Rogers Fire Station.

It is difficult to mobilize people in small towns that have long-standing political machines set up, where people feel ignored by both major parties, who are getting away with fear mongering poor white people, while completely ignoring Black people who live there. The media does not help, and instead there seems to be an intentional lack of coverage of issues affecting people.

In order to work towards a brighter future for rural Black Kentuckians, we must teach young Black folks how to navigate the unique challenges of living in these parts of the state while putting food on the table; we must work to connect and support rural Black organizers across the state, providing resources and support such as statewide organizing hubs, and coordinated statewide strategy with clear plans; and lastly we must uplift the voices of rural Black Kentuckians.

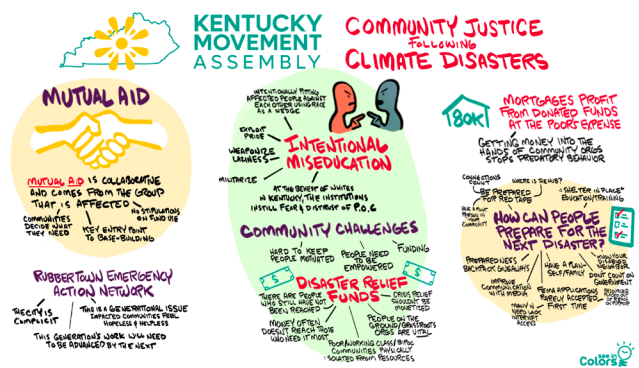
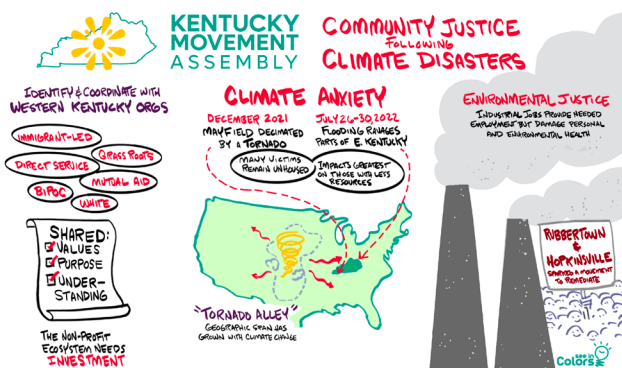
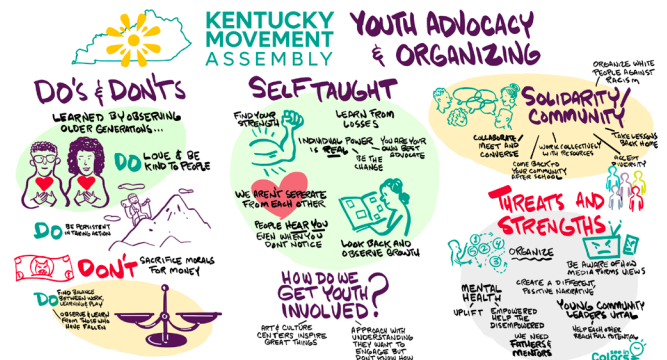
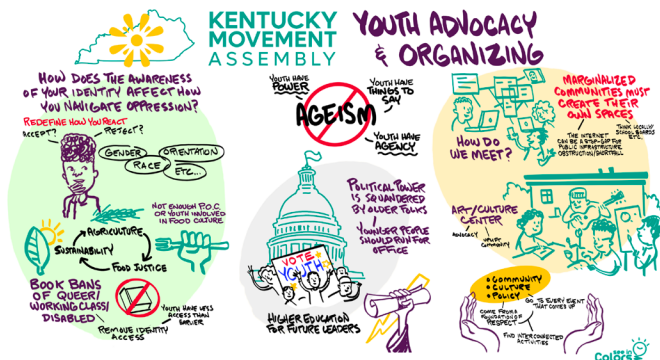
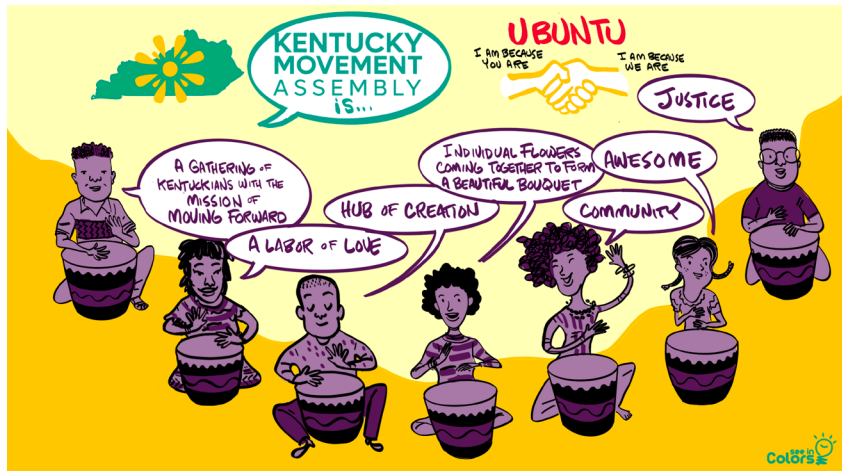
Plus size Black Kentuckians, and in particular Black women, face a myriad of challenges when it comes to navigating health care access that leads to body image issues, mental health issues, financial difficulties, and is detrimental to long-term health outcomes. Medical industry practices, with a longstanding racist history of denying Black women bodily autonomy, are doubly harmful when factoring in unscientific and fatphobic attitudes and policies ingrained in the field.

In fighting for bodily autonomy for all Kentuckians, we must work to abolish the use of the Body Mass Index from both medical practice and insurance which uses it to deny treatment and medicine. We must work towards body empowerment for Black Kentuckians that challenges societal body image norms alongside mindfulness around the language we use when describing people.



GRAPHIC NOTES

Check out these graphic notes highlighting key elements and topics of the KMA!
To view a larger size of the KMA graphic notes visit fjan.org



CONCLUSION

The Kentucky Movement Assembly took inspiration from the work of the Southern Movement Assembly, whose role is to grow a social movement in the U.S. South with the power to practice a people's democracy, build new social economies, and protect and defend our communities.

Hundreds of people gathered in Northern Kentucky to share and get grounded in each other's stories, with the hope that we can build stronger, thriving communities despite the socio-political climate we swim in. We have done our best to summarize common threads and themes from the weekend above.

We invite each organization and group who participated to share this write-up with their membership, staff, and organizational bases to see what resonates, what each base of people might change or add, and to continue this conversation with bases from other member organizations. We also invite you to explore the process of moving from here, to developing commitments and explicit and coordinated action steps together through the Synthesis Process (which can be found on page 32 of the People's Movement Assembly Organizing Handbook). The future is in our hands, and we will be able to build more quickly, resiliently, and joyously if we work hand-in-hand to support directly impacted people in our frontline struggles for justice.

¡Viva el pueblo, y viva la revolución!
(Long live the people, and long live the revolution!)



Thank you to our KMA sponsors!

If you would like to connect with any of the nine sponsoring organizations of the Kentucky Movement Assembly, please visit their websites below:

Forward Justice Action Network
(fjan.org)

Homes For All South
(righttothecity.org)

Kentuckians For The Commonwealth
(kftc.org)

Kentucky Civic Engagement Table
(kycave.org)

Kentucky Poor People's Campaign
(poorpeoplescampaign.org)

Kentucky Tenants
(kytenants.org)

Louisville Showing Up for Racial Justice
(louisvillesurj.org)

Louisville Tenants Union
(louisvilletenantsunion.org)

VOCAL-KY
(vocal-ky.org)

