

# Educating with Soul

By Liz Derias

**F**or nearly 11 years, the School of Unity and Liberation (SOUL)—an organizing skills and political education training center in Oakland, California—has conducted workshops for people around the Bay Area and across the nation, with the goal of building power within oppressed communities. For the most part, we are self-taught as educators, facilitators, and curriculum developers. We have learned what we do through years of political study and experimentation, and our mistakes.

The belief that education is an important component of movement building underlies all of SOUL's programs and is reflected in our trainings and workshops. Political education focuses not only on understanding the systemic roots of oppression and developing a conscious action response, but also on providing a context for our (working class, immigrant, queer, and transgender communities and communities of color) experiences with oppression.

## The Methodology of SOUL

SOUL's political education and trainings are based on a methodology that encourages participants to reflect on their own experiences as a way to understand the importance of political education. Our definition of Popular Education is taken from the series "Training for Transformation: A Handbook for Community Workers," produced in Zimbabwe by Anne Hope and Sally Timmell. It is "...a method and a philosophy of education that holds oppressed people at the center of the learning process."

SOUL understands that education and good ideas alone cannot bring about radical change in society. It takes a grassroots movement of community organizing. So, we strive to develop leaders in the movement to fight against the systemic roots of oppression. Akua Jackson, an organizer with the Malcolm X Grassroots Movement, says that SOUL has helped her to "...think of organizing as a science, and to think about organizing in a politically and historically

grounded way. The process has mirrored the type of leadership development and the new political reality we're fighting for."

As facilitators and educators, it is our role to always move people to the next level. The multi-step process for raising consciousness through political education is different for all oppressed people. And consciousness itself is not a static thing, but a continually evolving process that requires developing conscious organizers. SOUL's Educational Alternatives Program attempts to raise consciousness through a series of 16 workshops on understanding systems of oppression and identifying community solutions to combat them. Another approach focuses on developing a framework for analysis, otherwise known as "coming into consciousness." Our 10-week summer internship program brings 12 young organizers from around the world to engage in political education and organizing skills training. This advanced study course is designed to raise the analytical, critical thinking, and assessment skills of participants. In addition, SOUL offers a three-day training for trainers to build and strengthen facilitation skills.

Finally, SOUL offers two programs that attempt to develop the analytical and assessment skills of people trying to become conscious organizers. They are, a five-day intensive training for youth organizers at our National Youth Organizers Training Institute, geared towards new lead organizers and youth leaders transitioning into formal lead organizing positions, and



Sunday School. We hope these programs help people to commit to becoming lifelong movement leaders.

To date, SOUL has trained over 5000 people. We engage in regular evaluations of our work, drawing primarily on participant feedback and by tracking the impact of our work on individuals, organizations, and the movement as a whole.

Says Malachi Larrabee-Garza, SOUL's advanced political education coordinator, "SOUL trains people in frameworks that will help them to develop their analysis and to engage the Left. The whole process, which is very Freirian, is based on input and evaluation from participants, which requires constant refining of the curriculum. It has taught me about the broader process of consciousness raising because it forces you to check in with your base. You tailor your stuff based on what's in people's heads and... on reflection, action, and evaluation—not what's solely on... paper, which is the traditional model... in the United States."

### Educating the Next Generation

SOUL's aim is to develop youth leaders with effective political analysis and organizing skills, and an

organizational capacity to create leaders who impact policy with field-wide knowledge and collaboration.

According to Yu Tong, a SOUL summer school graduate who starts law school at Santa Clara University next fall, "SOUL has made me think about educational access for the poor. I personally have been motivated to access different things... instead of waiting and... not being proactive because of my oppression. I've found different outlets... to do what I want to do and get where I want to go. My time with SOUL has provided certain bridges, and in some ways, outlets to help me organize and realize I can do what I want in life."

Educating the next generation of leaders for our movements is a key element in building social movements. Transformative change takes a long time—many generations long. At SOUL, we are in it for the long haul, providing opportunities for developing consciousness and taking action for 21st century youth. ■

*For more information about SOUL's programs and instruction manuals, contact [soul@schoolofunityandliberation.org](mailto:soul@schoolofunityandliberation.org).*

Photo: Summer School session at SOUL.

Courtesy of SOUL

*Liz Derias is the educational alternatives program coordinator at SOUL. Originally from Egypt by way of Philadelphia, she began educating and organizing at the age of 17 with Sankofa Community Empowerment, Inc.*

# the **Race, Poverty Environment**



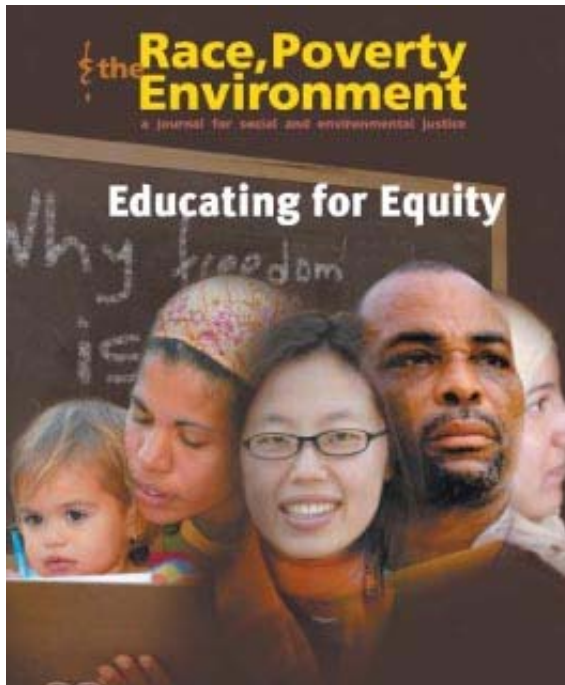
a journal for social and environmental justice

[www.urbanhabitat.org](http://www.urbanhabitat.org)

First published as a joint project of the Urban Habitat Program and the California Rural Legal Assistance Foundation, **RP&E** is now published twice annually by **Urban Habitat** and is dedicated to exploring the intersection of race, class, and environmental and social justice.

Don't miss any of our passionate, in-depth discussions of important social topics!

## Support RP&E: subscribe today!



Use the form below or order online:  
[www.urbanhabitat.org/subscribe](http://www.urbanhabitat.org/subscribe)

- Spring 1990 ▶ Earth Day
- Summer 1990 ▶ Cultural Diversity
- Winter 1991 ▶ Women of Color
- Spring 1991 ▶ Pesticides
- Summer 1991 ▶ Energy
- Winter 1992 ▶ The Summit
- Spring 1992 ▶ Asian/Pacific Islanders
- Summer 1992 ▶ Water
- Fall 1992 ▶ Native Nations in 1992
- Spring 1993 ▶ Urban Problems
- Summer 1993 ▶ Population and Immigration
- Fall 1993 ▶ Latinos and the Environment
- Spring 1994 ▶ Military Base Conversion
- Winter 1995 ▶ Environmental Justice and the Law
- Summer 1995 ▶ Nuclear Technology & Communities of Color
- Fall 1995 ▶ Social Justice and Transportation
- Spring 1996 ▶ Multicultural Environmental Education
- Fall 1996 ▶ The Border
- Winter 2000 ▶ A Place at the Table: Food & Environmental Justice
- Winter 2001 ▶ Reclaiming Land and Community: Brownfields & Environmental Justice
- Summer 2002 ▶ Fixin' to Stay: Anti-Displacement Policy Options & Community Response
- Summer 2003 ▶ Where Do We Go from Here? A Look at the Long Road to Environmental Justice
- Fall 2003 ▶ Governing from the Grassroots: EJ and Electoral Activism
- Summer 2004 ▶ Reclaiming our Resources: Imperialism and Environmental Justice
- Winter 2005 ▶ Burden of Proof: Using Research for Environmental Justice
- Winter 2006 ▶ Moving the Movement: Transportation Justice
- Summer 2006 ▶ Getting Ready for Change: Green Economics and Climate Justice

**Yes!** I want an annual subscription to Race, Poverty & the Environment.  
Sent free of charge to grassroots groups upon request.

\$20 (Individuals)       \$40 (Institutions)

**Yes!** I want to support the advancement of social, economic, and environmental justice in the Bay Area and beyond.

I want to support Urban Habitat with a tax-deductible donation of:

\$25    \$50    \$100    \$500    \$1,000    Other \$ \_\_\_\_\_

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Organization: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

State: \_\_\_\_\_ Zip: \_\_\_\_\_ Email: \_\_\_\_\_

A check is enclosed       Please charge my Visa/MasterCard  
 Visa/MC Number: \_\_\_\_\_ Exp. Date: \_\_\_\_\_

*(Please include the 3-4 digit card verification number found on the back of most credit cards.)*

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_