

Sistas Makin' Moves

Collective Leadership for Personal Transformation and Social Justice

Sista II Sista

Sista II Sista Collective Poem

Of Woman Born and lives we live
Afro-Latina groove together as unique sisters
Women raised sometimes to depend on and comfort men
We take command over our bodies and our souls
How hard we struggle with the pain we went through
I have come and I have gone;
What women have come through in the past and present
and what we will go through in the future.

Hermanas somos, pedazos de la tierra
giving of ourselves sometimes unwillingly
Hot air cold feet;
we allow ourselves to be mistreated no more.
We understand the irony of power,
that those who are vulnerable,
in fact are a source of strength,
Because the meek shall inherit the earth

I am Black, I am Latina, I am the hip-hop, merengue,
reggae, salsa, calypso, bachata rich woman who gave you life.
I am the dark chocolate, caramel butter pecan, complexion
filled with *sazon* and spices
of my ancestors that gave me life,
my history, my hope, my dreams of becoming a woman.

But this is only the beginning of my struggle,
This is only a mystery to be unfolded, to expand and soar
like butterflies going from destination to destination,
telling the Queens of our past and present
to bring our journey home to the future
through the words of wisdom that our mothers have taught us.

Editorial note: In keeping with their organizational model and practice, Sista to Sista wrote this piece, as well as their poem, collectively, which means they labored and labored over several drafts and all of Sista to Sista's membership reached consensus on the entire piece and jointly created the title.

Us, Mothers, daughters, sisters, aunts, girlfriends,
and grandmothers—the source to which we will return.
We are the alpha and omega, the beginning and the end.

Introduction

We at Sista II Sista wrote this article to share our experiences and learnings with those young women of color who are struggling to find meaning and purpose; for those of you who are doing work with young people; those who are doing work around violence (state or interpersonal); those of you who are trying to develop new ways of organizing, building community, and developing organization; and, lastly, for those of you who think that change is not happening. Since 1996 we have been building a grassroots organization called Sista II Sista. This is who we are.

Who We Are

Sista II Sista (SIIS) is a Brooklyn-wide, community-based organization located in Bushwick. We are a collective of working-class, young and adult, Black and Latina women building together to model a society based on liberation and love. Our organization is dedicated to working with young women to develop personal, spiritual and collective power. We are committed to fighting injustice and creating alternatives to the systems we live in by making social, cultural, and political change.

Our goal is to promote the holistic development of young women of color, ages 13 to 19, and to inspire them to take strong leadership roles in their local communities. We nurture the personal development of young women which incorporates physical, emotional, spiritual, and intellectual growth, linked to community-based, political action. Sista II Sista remains grounded in its principle of self-determination with respect to young women's personal, spiritual, and political empowerment processes. Self-determination promotes the idea that all groups are able to identify and work toward solving their own problems and creating their own liberation.

How We Came to Be

In 1996, a group of working-class young women in our early twenties began looking at how we had been marginalized growing up. We felt that existing institutions did not speak to our life experiences. The schools and youth centers we had been a part of did not address our experiences as young women of color. As a group facing a braid of oppression (racism, classism, sexism, ageism, etc.), we deal with multiple challenges. In a low-income community organization, the experiences of youth from the community are not central; in a youth-focused organization, the experiences of young women are not central; in a women's organization, the experiences of poor and working-class women of color are not central. We found that there was no place to nurture the voices of young women of color to participate fully and to build collective power to transform the society we are a part of. From this space, the vision for Sista II Sista was developed.

We started meeting to plan a summer Freedom School for young Black and

Latina teen women. In a matter of months, we developed a vision for a holistic personal and political space where we could support young women's leadership through workshops and activities that focused on building physical, intellectual, creative, spiritual, and emotional power. Even though our advisors felt we should first raise money, we decided to jump right into launching a summer program with no money and no infrastructure. The first Freedom School was eight weeks long and had twenty-five young women participants and fifteen young adult women volunteers to coordinate and facilitate. We obtained free space at a Beacon Center in a public school in Bedford-Stuyvesant and got donated food and supplies. A Beacon Center in New York City is a public school that is open during summer and after school for community groups to use the classrooms for free. We were excited to share our skills in workshops on sexism in hip-hop, holistic community organizing, the feelings and politics of hair, revolutionary women of color in history, martial arts, b-girlin, and the creation of photo autobiographies.

At the first graduation of our Freedom School for Young Women of Color there were drummers, dancers, photoautobiographical displays, and lots of love. In her closing comments, one volunteer stated, "Young women do not suffer from low self-esteem. It's about the struggle to defend (ourselves from) it, to live and move in it every day." Finally, the collective poem that young women wrote declared in its last line, "Not ONE more strangled, stabbed, shot sista anywhere. Together, forever, sista-hood." That was the very successful summer of 1996.

From there, the growing pains began. We were constantly outreaching to young women of color that shared our vision, vibe, and politics to join our crew. We kept meeting and talking about how to develop Sista II Sista as a year-long program, not just a summer Freedom School. We decided that we wanted to be a young women of color organization, not just a program. We began putting these ideas into practice and ran into one of our biggest challenges: creating an organizational structure that was in line with our vision of the society we wanted to create.

How We Became a Collective

We started to build with each other personally—the volunteers and the young women participants. We started to build strong ties of love and friendship and we started to really feel connected to each other. We saw ourselves grow politically and personally in each other's lives, experiences, and ideas, and the power of Sista II Sista began to emerge. (We could keep telling the story, year by year, but y'all would probably get bored.) To make a long story short, we researched the infrastructures of other organizations. Then we spent lots of time developing our own structure based on the information we gathered, and our own imaginations. So we never had an executive director or a secretary. From the beginning, we decided that these titles had no place in an organization like ours because we wanted everyone to feel valuable. We wanted to recognize everyone's labor, as equals.

After long dinners, meetings, visioning sessions, and hangouts at people's houses, we decided that Sista II Sista would be a collective. Visually, we saw this as a flower, and the petals were the different areas of work: organizational development, Freedom School program, outreach and organizing, financials, and fund-

raising. (Recently, we added a membership petal.) And, back then, the center of the flower was the collective—a leadership body of ten to fifteen people made up of members who made the time commitment. Now, our center includes the Sista Squad (young women leadership body); the collective (young and adult women who meet monthly); the advisory board and our general membership. These bodies decide on the direction and vision of the organization together twice a year at retreats. The Sista Squad and the collective make the day-to-day decisions that need to be made outside of those retreats.

Ten years later, our collective structure reflects the ideals of a society that approaches all its members as equals—instead of following a model of one or two directors, our organization's leadership and decision-making model is nonhierarchical and one of inclusion. In spite of the challenges, we are working to create sustainable leadership centered on a diverse group of women sharing power and creating a vision together. Prior to 2000, the organization functioned through volunteer efforts. All the work of the collective has remained volunteer-based and all members are asked to volunteer with SIIS for at least three to six months before joining the collective. Though some collective members are now staff members, they also participate in the collective as volunteers.

Major decisions are made by a consensus-based decision-making process. This is based on the principle that the voices of minority or dissenting opinions are as important as the majority, and the most powerful ideas come from putting many perspectives and experiences together. Not every member of SIIS is not involved in every single decision; different teams are empowered to make decisions. Though this model is time consuming and difficult, this process has proven to be richer and more rewarding than any other work experience we've been a part of.

Our collective style has yielded better ways to structure our work because when something isn't working and the issue gets raised, we all pay attention. For example, until 2002, we had a Freedom and an Action Squad: the Freedom Squad developed, coordinated, and facilitated the holistic leadership development work of the Freedom School, and the Action Squad members coordinated the community organizing work of SIIS. But at the 2002 fall retreat, members expressed concern that the division of work between Freedom and Action Squad members had, at times, created a false division between "personal" (Freedom Squad) and "political" (Action Squad) work. This division was clearly contrary to our mission, and we recognized that it created a dynamic which privileged the work of the Action Squad over the Freedom Squad. So, shortly after the retreat, we created mixed "work teams" which incorporate Freedom and Action Squad members. Squad members, collective members, and general membership have divided themselves into interdisciplinary work teams focused on different issues and areas of work, including programming, organizing, video, and grassroots fundraising.

Our model ensures growth and continued relevance of the organization by incorporating graduates of the Freedom School into all levels of the organization (Sista Squad, collective, board). The Sista Squad is a concrete vehicle for young women's leadership and ownership of the organization. All of SIIS's organizing issues are chosen by young women members based on their real-life experiences, and they are also responsible for developing and implementing organizing strategies.

Furthermore, Sista II Sista's Freedom School programs are developed and facilitated with the leadership of the Sista Squad, who build relationships with new incoming members and create evaluation systems for programs. The role of the Sista Squad in SIIS is critical because it is a tangible mechanism for young women to have on-going decision-making power over the direction of the organization. It also serves as a place for young women to develop as strong leaders who are invested in SIIS, which will ensure the sustainability of the organization and will continue to bring forth change in their day-to-day lives and surrounding communities.

What We Believe in and What Guides Us

Sista II Sista promotes the principles of self-determination, interconnected personal and social transformation, and collective action against injustice. We believe that the perspectives of young women of color are critical to the survival and flourishing of our communities, so our approach focuses on young women's innate power as organizers for social change.

Unfortunately, many programs geared toward youth utilize a service approach that frames young people in terms of their deficiencies, and very few organizations address the experiences of young women of color in particular. Taking the principle of self-determination as a starting point, Sista II Sista has created an organization where young women of color take the leadership in transforming themselves and their communities. Though it is true that more services are needed for young women, if we are truly committed to the creation of a society based on social justice, we must encourage young women to actively struggle for the creation of this vision. It is important to have spaces where young women can be more than recipients, or "victims in need of services," and can fulfill their potential as leaders and creators of a more just community and society.

While we clearly believe that there is tremendous potential in sisterhood, we also believe that it is not an automatic thing—it must be built, and is part of a process of struggle. Our membership is African American, Afro Caribbean, and Latina young women at various stages in their lives, which provides a rich forum for personal and political development. Rooting ourselves within our membership's diverse experiences, cultures, and realities, we express our visions for a more just society through cultural mediums such as dance, media, music, and poetry. We recognize these areas as places where culture is created and promoted, and use these mediums to foster critical thinking and challenge dominant culture, which often degrades our very existence.

Lastly, as mentioned above, although we do not promote individual leaders, we recognize the uniqueness of every individual involved. We practice this in all aspects of the organization, not just the collective and squad. We have no "founders," our staff is nonhierarchical, division of labor is not traditional, and the pay scale is flat—everyone is paid the same wage, regardless of age, formal education, or how long they've been a member. Our experiences continue to show us that real and long-lasting change comes through collective leadership and struggle.

What We Do

In the past seven years SIIS has established a strong membership base through our holistic leadership development program, the Freedom School for Young Women of Color. For the first three years we didn't take on organizing projects and campaigns, instead we focused on building our base, developing collective leadership and consciousness, and supporting the organizing work of our allies. Once we had established a strong base of members through the Freedom School, we began to develop our organizing work.

The Freedom School operates as a year-round program with three cycles: fall, spring, and summer. Through their participation in the Freedom School, young women are engaged in a variety of activities designed to spark their development as critical thinkers, physically strong women, creative performers, and as community organizers. The five main components of our Freedom School are: political education, physical health and power, nourishing our bodies, video, and community action projects. Political education links the personal experiences of young women to larger issues of oppression and resistance. Using principles and techniques of popular education, workshop topics include women in hip-hop, confronting sexual harassment, the braid of oppression, sex and relationships, and many more. Physical health and power allows young women to explore their physical power through classes such as break-dancing, self-defense, boxing, and Afro-Brazilian and Afro-Dominican dance. Nourishing our bodies provides an opportunity for participants to share healthy recipes and meals.

The video component trains young women of color as media makers, puts the word out on the street about an issue, and supports our community organizing in a creative way. Video production has shown us how different forms of media can help us get our message across to larger audiences; SIIS's message is reaching more people in the neighborhood, citywide and nationally through regular screenings and discussions. Since adding the video component in 2001, we have purchased equipment, expanded our video work, and developed an organizing plan using video as a political education and organizing tool. Finally, our Community Action Projects are chosen by SIIS members and led by Squad members in conjunction with the Outreach and Organizing petal. Through discussions with the Freedom School participants, Squad members facilitate the identification of issues that the young women feel should be addressed. Once an issue is identified, Squad members outline an organizing strategy and take leadership in involving other Sista II Sista members in the campaign.

Organizing against Violence Targeting Young Women of Color

Sparked by the murder of two teen women of color in Bushwick by a police officer and an auxiliary policeman, in the summer of 2000, young women identified violence against young women of color in Bushwick as our main area of organizing work. We realized that the majority of our membership had faced some level of violence in their lives, but, by launching a community survey of four hundred young women in Bushwick, we were able to confirm what a serious issue this was.

We started our work in 2001 with Street Theater, skits about sexual harass-

ment. SIIS members performed skits on the streets of Bushwick with the objective of raising consciousness about the issue. We also held a community forum in October 2001 with INCITE to strategize about community solutions to the issue of violence in our communities. These solutions would be later incorporated into Sista's Liberated Ground.

In 2002, we launched Action Summer to do ongoing organizing around these issues. As part of Action Summer, we did a video documenting police harassment of young women in Bushwick called "You Have the Right To Break the Silence." The video project was really successful in putting into action the research (surveys and statistics) and documenting the on-the-street perspectives of young women, community activists, and local police officers on this issue. We also held an end-of-summer Action Day in front of the 83rd Precinct in Bushwick to strongly address the issue of accountability. Over 250 community members attended the event and close to two hundred petitions were signed demanding an end to police violence and harassment of young women in Bushwick. The action included testimonies, breakdancers, poetry, and a screening of our video.

This cultural event/action sent a loud message that harassment of young women by the police would not be tolerated by a unified community. The action served as an opportunity to put into practice our model of organizing, and it succeeded in publicly embarrassing the local precinct in front of many local residents and the press, putting the police on notice that they were being watched. But it also sparked serious harassment and surveillance of SIIS. The day after, there was a mini-precinct mobile unit of the New York Police Department (NYPD) parked outside of the SIIS space. They were messing with the phone wires on the pole outside and the mini-precinct stayed parked there for two weeks, 24/7, with a cop inside at all times. It definitely planted some fear in us. But in the era of the "war on terror," we were aware that this was not only a random retaliation from this particular precinct. Through our coalition work we knew that our allies were going through similarly heightened surveillance and harassment.

We initially met with fellow organizers to document our experience and to strategize a response. In terms of our work, we realized that our conversations and actions were being watched more closely. We did additional "Know Your Rights" trainings for all members, and everyone carried our pro-bono activist lawyer's card with them at all times. Though most of our members stayed focused and committed, parents of families who were undocumented became less active and encouraged their daughters to stop participating. We had a lot of deep conversations with mothers, and understood that everything was now more complicated. We couldn't really do much about the harassment but document it and proceed with greater caution to ensure all our safety. Irrespective of these methods of intimidation, our work continued on.

At SIIS we feel that true social transformation is holistic, that change comes from inspiration, emotional and cultural expression, and a strong political message. The video, Action Day, trainings, self-defense workshops, and day-to-day organizing work, such as door-knocking and flyer-ing, strengthened community support for our organizing work. SIIS went from getting bottles thrown at our doors by young men who didn't understand the need for a women's space to gathering hundreds of

neighborhood supporters—who were multigenerational, and not just female—at street actions against the police and military. This took many years of street outreach and conversations. As our work around violence has grown, we've divided it into three areas: challenging the police around issues of sexual harassment and violence against young women of color in Bushwick; building an alternative to the police for women to turn to in cases of interpersonal violence; and creating solidarity with women facing violence in the Third World.

We have learned from our experiences that, along with taking a strong public stance against police abuse of young women, we must also find practical ways of implementing creative solutions to this issue. In 2002, our efforts coincided with citywide press coverage of the NYPD backlog of domestic violence cases against women: more than one hundred thousand reported cases had not been followed up on—this gross inaction further endangered women's lives. This information supported our critique of the police as an inherently oppressive institution, and as an impractical and ineffective agency to end violence against women. But to truly build collective power, we need to do more than strongly critique an institution or system—we must also begin to envision and create what we want to replace it with! We needed a concrete option for sistas to count on when dealing with the constant gendered violence on the streets, at school, at work, and at home. Sista II Sista's overall vision for our organizing campaign is to work on institutional change, as well as social and cultural change, while creating alternatives at the same time. Sista's Liberated Ground (SLG) is our local alternative to the police.

SLG has been the most challenging social change work that SIIS has ever engaged in. We began strategizing within SIIS, held local meetings and built on strategies from our October 2001 community forum. In February 2003, we hosted a two-day gathering sponsored by Incite! The meeting brought together thirty-five young and adult women of color from around the country who are working on models of community accountability for violence against women. At this gathering, SIIS members presented SLG and drew from other concrete models, and many presented interesting reflections and observations. With the knowledge gained from that meeting, squad members improved the project model and presented it to the whole SIIS membership for a consensus approval in May of 2004.

Since then, we've declared our territorial zone: Sista's Liberated Ground, a space where violence against sistas is not tolerated, and where women turn to each other instead of the police to address the violence in their lives. SLG includes extensive outreach with flyers, posters, T-shirts, stickers, and murals to mark the territory. There is also an action line, a phone number that women can call to get involved in SLG. The squad members are also developing a series of workshops for young women from the community on sexism, conflict resolution, collective self-defense, and other topics to raise consciousness and build relationships with other women in the neighborhood. Our new video, *No More Violence Against Our Sistas!*, will be used for political education within the community. SLG is also organizing Sista Circles, collectives of support and intervention for cases of gender violence with groups of sistas that are friends, neighbors, and coworkers. We will first practice these Sista Circles in the Freedom School with our members to see what creating collective support and real

accountability looks like.

The inauguration of SLG took place on June 28, 2004, at our block party. Amid performers and music, community members signed on to and shouted the Sista's Liberated Ground Pledge:⁷

I believe that in the struggle for justice, women's personal safety is an important community issue.

Violence against women hurts families, children and the whole community.

As a member of this community, I commit myself to ending violence against women!

I stand in support of Sista's Liberated Ground, a territory where violence against women is not tolerated.

I commit myself to working with the community to collectively confront cases of violence against women without the police and to work together so that violence against women stops happening.

I will dedicate myself to creating relationships based on respect, love and mutual support and to struggling for justice and liberation on a personal and community level.

This innovative organizing project created by the young women of SIIS is beyond anything any of our staff or volunteer collective has concrete experience with, and we've been surprised by the challenges and rewards. Through meeting other national groups, we've also learned that there aren't established on-the-ground models to help us figure out how to put these ideas into practice. We've also looked at and learned from many current models in revolutionary movements and community struggles in the Third World. We looked at the occupation safety systems and the gender teams of the Landless Workers' Movement (MST) in Brazil, the autonomous territories of the Zapatistas, and many less-known community accountability action groups of poor women that live in places where the police wouldn't come even if called. These creative intervention models were built upon strong community connections and relationships.

And in the United States, in a lot of places like Bushwick, community has been undermined—that's what keeps us all alienated. So doing this type of work inside the empire is extra hard. We know this work will take years and a lot of sista power to fully implement, but we are excited and challenged by this project.

Another area of social change work that SIIS members have taken on is solidarity with other women in the Third World. We began with a solidarity campaign with young women in Juárez, Mexico. Squad members saw the parallels between how violence affects poor young women in Bushwick and in Juárez. The work included an action at the Mexican Embassy with hundreds of petitions presented to the head consul on the same day that actions were happening all over Mexico, in late November 2002.

From there, attention turned to the impending war and the solidarity team began organizing with citywide coalitions against the war. In Third World Within

(a citywide people of color social justice network), SIIS squad members were the only youth (under 21) at organizing and work meetings. But our participation brought energy, ideas, and creativity to the larger group. We successfully helped organize actions on February 15, 2003, the day after the bombing began, and on May 19, Malcolm X's birthday.

Along with the citywide work, the solidarity team also did local neighborhood antiwar organizing by doing outreach and education on the issue, holding a candlelight vigil the night the bombing began, and by doing ongoing antimilitary recruitment outreach which culminated in an action called Recruitment for Justice. On June 17, outside the local ROTC recruitment center in Bushwick, antiwar stickers, posters, and CDs were given for free to those who would register with SIIS (by joining our mailing list) instead of the armed services.

How We Fund Our Work

SIIS functioned during its first three years without any foundation funding. We had an all-volunteer collective that helped coordinate and facilitate our Freedom School, and we maintained our programming through in-kind donations from volunteers and local community businesses, t-shirt sales, and cultural fundraising events. In the past three years, our foundation funding has increased significantly. We expanded our grassroots fundraising with individual donor drives, speaking engagements, and workshops, events, and collectively-made products.

In the fall of 2002, spurred by the realization that we were increasingly working harder and harder to become ever-dependent on foundation grants, we prioritized non-foundation, grassroots fundraising strategies by creating two working groups dedicated to raising money. One group promotes and markets SIIS products, which include T-shirts, sweatshirts, massage oils, bath salts, and other SIIS-created and creative products. This group also began promoting the Sista Solidarity Products, crafts, such as earrings, blouses, and hand bags, made by women's cooperatives in the Third World; these sales provide funding to the cooperatives as well as SIIS.

The other fundraising work team is the Big Mouth Project, made up of a small group of collective and squad members who have developed a national SIIS speaker's bureau. The team created a base of thirteen workshops and talks based on SIIS's curriculum and model of organizing, and began outreaching to public schools, community groups, colleges and universities, and foundations to set up paid speaking engagements for SIIS. The Big Mouth Project team schedules and coordinates the engagements, but all SIIS members are expected to facilitate the workshops and give talks. The prices are on a sliding scale depending on the type of organization. This project has turned out to be one of our most successful grassroots fundraising initiatives, because it raises money, supports the development of SIIS members' leadership abilities, and spreads our mission and vision nationally.

A Few Words on Our Vision from Our Members

What would Brooklyn look like if it was against the community law to tear and claw at a woman's bra

or to break her jaw?

Would Brooklyn be a better place for the human race
if there were no more bruises
on a woman's face?

—*Rafia, 13 years old*

Today I walked down the street and I felt relaxed but strange. I had on a halter top with shorts and some sneakers. And let me tell you, I was looking REAL good. Had my hair flowing with a huge Kool-aid smile plastered on my face. But I still felt strange. I strutted my stuff. Hips swaying to the rhythm of my own music while my breasts bounced to a different tune. I felt so good and relaxed I didn't even notice that for the past half an hour, while I walked through the crowded street filled with men, no one called out at me. For once I didn't hear, "Yo shorty with the big ass," or "Yo ma, can I holla at you?" or even "damn, shorty!" For the first time, I walked down the street and noticed how beautiful the sky looks on a sunny day, how green the grass truly is, and I even noticed the many colors of a tree's leaves. It's bad that it took me so long to notice these things because for years I walked around with a screwed-up face just daring someone to look or say something so I could curse them out. But today I smiled. Free to be me and not having to apologize for being a woman. So you know what I'm going to do as I walk? I'm gonna thank everyone in my community for making this possible. Although it took years, my sistas can finally smile. We are free.

—*Keisha, 18 years old*

As I walk I find
As I walk I see
As I walk yo recojo los pedazos
Que me han tratado de quitar
Caminando me comunico con mis
Angeles, con mis antepasados
Regreso al lugar onde vivi
Una existencia completa
Caminando recupero la fe, vuelvo
A creer en la posibilidad
De un mundo más humano
Un mundo que valorize la vida
Y no la destrucción
Caminando I find mi camino de
Paz, justicia y verdad.

—*Loira, 24 years old*

At the End of the Day

Since we wrote this, we have made some tough decisions at Sista II Sista. One of our major decisions was not doing foundation fundraising anymore. What happened? 9/11 happened. Foundations started moving in more conservative direc-

tions, reflecting the larger climate in the US. Sista II Sista had also ridden a wave of being the "flavor of the month" among the foundations and that time was coming to an end. The progressive funders didn't understand our new organizing work, SLG. If we weren't "targeting institutions" like the police anymore, then they thought we weren't doing "real organizing." Simultaneously we started feeling more and more constrained by the amount of grant writing, administration, site visits, and reports. We were drained by the rejections, the waiting, and the constant explanations of our work to people who just didn't get it. It got tiring fitting our work into quantitative outcomes. Morale was low and SIIS went from being a labor of love to a job.

So we made the leap of faith. We are transitioning back to being an all-volunteer collective. Things move slower now. We've lost a few people in the transition. Our lives are crazy. On the other hand, young women have stepped up and their leadership is more prominent than ever in SIIS. It's empowering to know that people are open to finding alternative ways to building and working in this movement.

Conclusion

We have written many things about ourselves and our work in this piece, but without a doubt there are many more things to be said about Sista II Sista. Over the years, we have learned many lessons and faced many challenges. Some of the lessons stand out more than others.

Among the brightest is our collective understanding that justice is not a product that you arrive at. It's not an "end." Justice is something we have to continually imagine, envision, construct, and practice. It is something that you have to incorporate into your daily life and interactions with those around you in your home, work, organization, spiritual/religious space, and in all the other aspects of a human being's existence. Because of this, Sista II Sista will be constantly reshaping and reorganizing itself to respond to our responsibility to model an organization based on the principles of liberation, self-determination, and love.

The other lesson in the shine-so-bright category is that it is not enough to criticize systems that we find to be oppressive. It is a lot easier to say what's wrong with something than it is to sit with a group of people and imagine what would be better for everyone. It's easier, but it doesn't get us any closer to achieving justice for our communities. We can't tell those who are in power that what they are doing is wrong and then let them decide what would be better for us. We have to create that collectively for ourselves. That is the challenge that lies ahead of us.