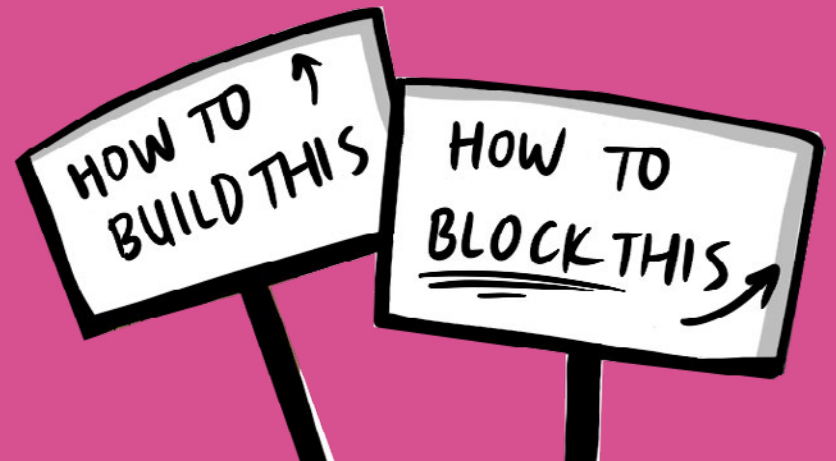


Long-term Power Building

A shared analysis of navigating crises

January 2021



This booklet was created based on a series of conversations, inquiries and virtual meetings during the first two years of the COVID-19 pandemic (2020-2021). The resulting power analysis was a project of the Northstar Network, a group of leaders who were making meaning of the current political moments and syndemic.

The Northstar Network was a home for long-term power-building (personal, organizational, and movement) grounded in analytical rigor and inspired by radical hope for a feminist, multi-racial democracy. Coming together in the midst of climate, democratic, and economic crises, the network provided a critical space for social justice leaders to refresh analysis and rethink strategies. Leaders built cross-movement relationships rooted in shared analysis, values, and a collective vision. The network supported their ability to make meaning of the scale of challenges we faced. We addressed the root of the most pressing challenges and issues, experimented and co-created approaches, and strategized and practiced towards a world where all people and the planet can thrive.

The Northstar Network and the creation of this booklet was facilitated by the Social Transformation Project (www.stproject.org), a movement building organization that sunset in July 2022.

Special thanks to Lisa VeneKlasen, Tarso Luis-Ramos, Tamara Toles O’Laughlin, Lauren Jacobs, Alison Lin, and Jodie Tonita for contributing to content and synthesis, and crafting images with our collaborating artist, Tracy Nyguen. The booklet greatly benefited from editors Lisa VeneKlasen, Annie Holmes, and her design team at Pemba Productions. The Northstar Network Logo was designed by Catherine Madden.

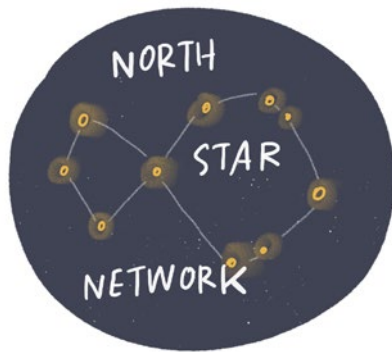
Please freely share this booklet and the information in it with your communities and colleagues with attribution to the Northstar Network. An electronic PDF of this booklet, as well as more information about the network and learnings from it can be found here: <https://changeelemental.org/learning-project/nsn>.



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What?



Northstar Network

Co-created and predominantly led by women of color, the Northstar Network brings together people and organizations working on a range of issues including gender, racial, economic, worker and climate justice across the Global North and South. The network amplifies the critical – yet often unsupported and unrecognized – role of people of color, particularly women of color, and queer and gender non-conforming people play in understanding and transforming power in our movements.

Grounded in analytical rigor and inspired by radical hope, the network is a home for long-term power building – personal, organizational and movement. Coming together in the midst of climate, democracy and economic crises, the network provides a critical space for social justice leaders to:

- refresh analysis and rethink strategies
- build cross-movement relationships rooted in shared analysis, values, and vision
- support our ability to make meaning of today's most pressing challenges
- experiment and co-create innovative approaches, strategies, practice, and narratives
- reach towards a thriving feminist, multiracial democracy

Who?

Some members of Northstar Network



Tamara Toles
O'Laughlin,
formerly
350.org



Amanda
Ballantyne,
AFL-CIO



Miya Yoshitani,
Asia Pacific
Environmental
Network
(APEN)



Wendy Chun-
Hoon,
Family Values
at Work



Eveline Shen,
Forward
Together



Lisa
VeneKlasen,
JASS (Just
Associates)



Shereen Essof,
JASS (Just
Associates)



E. Smiley,
Jobs with
Justice



Jacqui
Patterson,
NAACP



Jennifer
Morales,
Family Values
at Work



Mackenzie
Baris, Jobs with
Justice



Cynthia Lin,
National
Network of
Abortion Funds
(NNAF)



Lauren Jacobs,
Partnership
for Working
Families



Tarso Ramos,
Political
Research
Associates



Jill Reese,
Teamsters 117



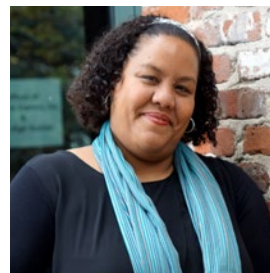
Neha Mahajan,
Transformative
Leadership for
Change



Judith LeBlanc,
Native
Organizers
Alliance



Amber Garcia,
Women's
Voices for the
Earth



Felicia Griffin,
Partnership
for Working
Families



Isabelle
Leighton,
Political
Research
Associates

Why?

A reckoning

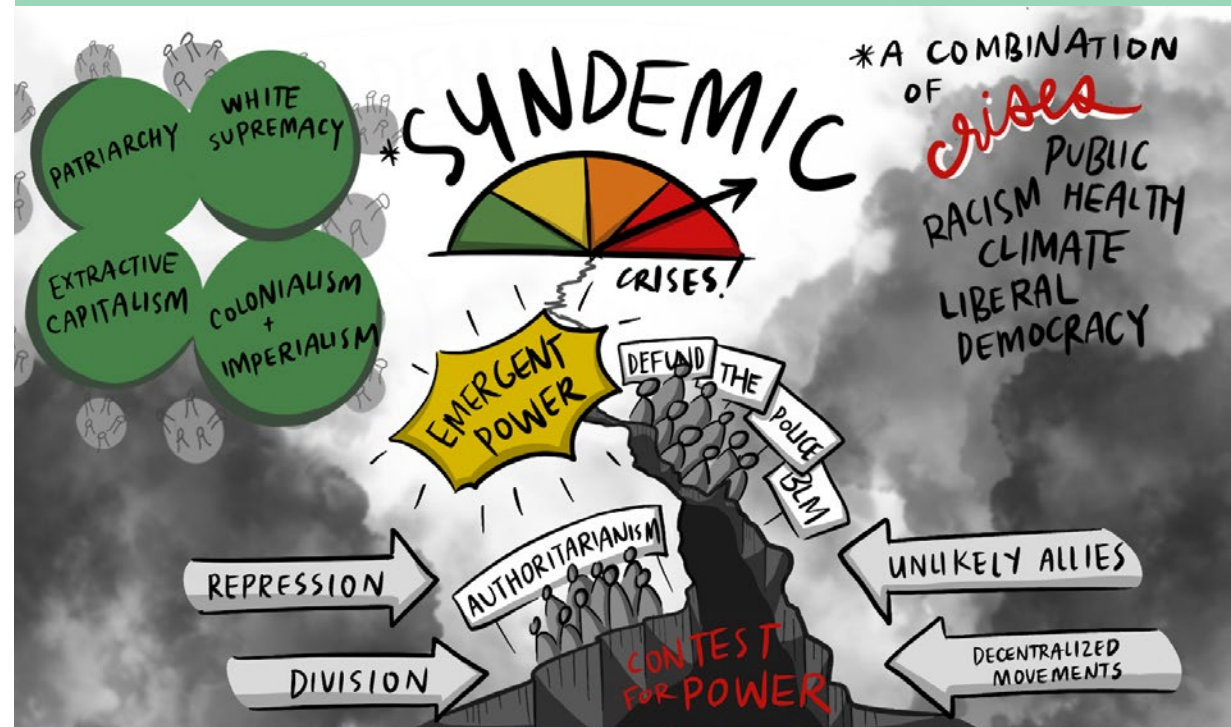
COVID has exposed the brokenness of our systems. We are living in a moment of interconnected global crises – public health, capitalism, liberal democracy, and climate – a syndemic where social, political, and natural systems are collapsing simultaneously.

A call to action

Anxiety, grief, and uncertainty are inflaming the smoldering fires of feminist, multigenerational, multiracial, transnational movements and solutions that:

- draw on our stories and histories
- rethink the new
- reimagine the “we”

Through our shared analysis, we hope to inform urgently needed political and popular education to contribute to a better understanding by our constituencies and movements of the threats, power dynamics, and possibilities we face in building a feminist multiracial democracy.



Capitalism in crisis and consolidation fuelling inequality. Governments serve the unchecked interests of oligarchs and corporate monopolies, creating precarious conditions that fuel authoritarianism but also open up possibilities for transnational solidarity, cooperation, unexpected alliances, and mobilizations that bring together workers, consumers, and small businesses.

Rising authoritarianism, driven in the US and globally by energized patriarchy, religious and racial nationalism, misogyny, gendered control of bodies and sexuality, and the politics of the “strongman.”

This syndemic has unleashed a collective reckoning, a decentralized but interconnected set of upheavals taking shape as “emergent power in resistance.”

In 2020–21, building on earlier collective analysis and visioning, the Northstar Network dialogue focused on the power dynamics of this moment – the interlocking systems of white supremacy, extractive capitalism, patriarchy, and colonialism – and the resistance that is evolving.

Interconnections

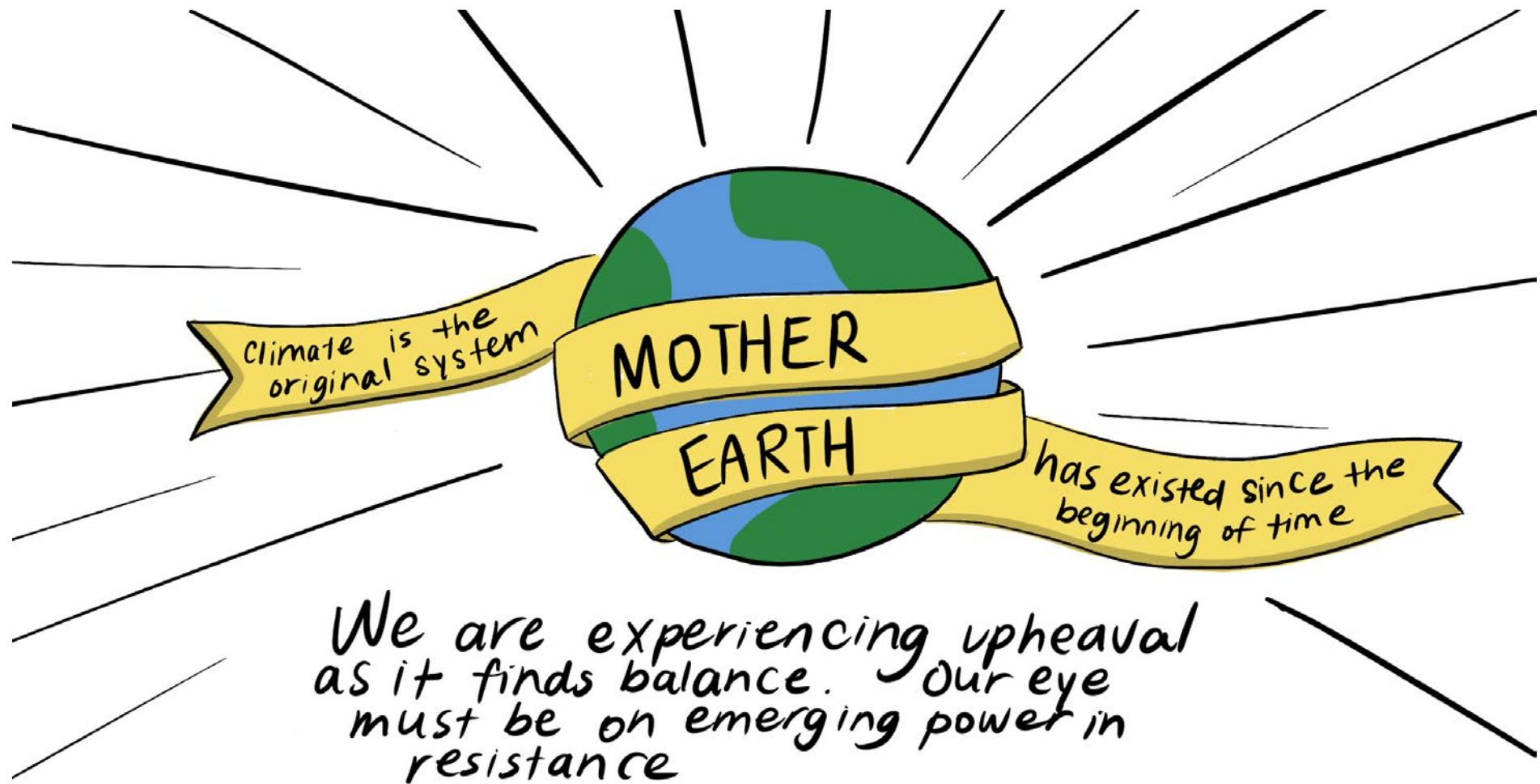
Climate, indigeneity, and the planet

Across the world, lives are upended by wildfires, super storms, droughts, and other disasters reminding us that:

- climate is the “original system,” threatened by the logic of markets and growth
- change is not linear
- rather, each moment is a push–pull signalling a contest of power
- emergent power demands systemic thinking and a long view

This moment of crises and upheaval:

- Affirms our interconnections with each other, the earth, the climate. As we create emergent power, we realize that seemingly distinct past and present struggles are related and propelling us. What we do in this decade, this family, this community, this country impacts the future of all of us.
- Calls for cross-movement, cross-border systemic, intersectional analysis to guide long-term strategy and power-building. Centering relationality – to each other and the natural world – helps us envision not just what we want but also how we resist, organize, and lead into our values.
- Demands we find the “cracks where the light comes in” – the inherent contradictions and convergences of power created by interconnected dynamics of capitalism, patriarchy, white supremacy (colonialism/imperialism). These are places for change, new connections, and building into the future.
- Urges us to draw lessons from our local-to-global histories and struggles for liberation, Global South and social justice feminism, Black and Brown liberation, and indigenous histories, worldviews, and resistance. These lessons guide us to up-end oppression and structural inequalities from the inside out.



Imperatives and inflection points

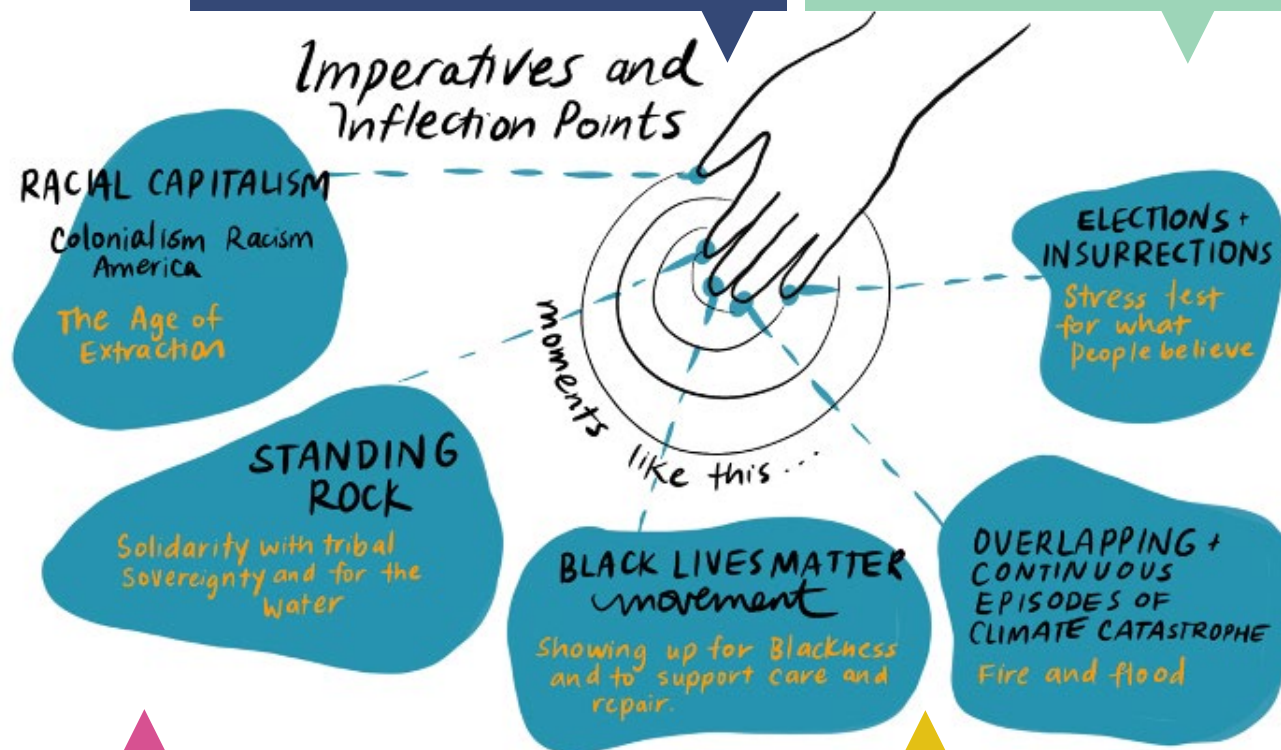
Across the last decade, we see multiple mobilizations of resistance to injustice and abuse of power.

What may appear to be disconnected struggles are interconnected inflection points that link mobilizations of the past to the present. They give shape and momentum to our current struggles to transform power.

Each blue “pool” reflects some of those moments among many, including struggles against austerity, impunity, political repression, and unchecked gendered violence, and attacks on reproductive autonomy and feminists.

Elections are a stress test for the democracy project, challenging the legitimacy and role of the government and our party system. The US remains divided; defeating Trump has not ended Trumpism. White supremacy underlies the role of white women in the 2020 election (55% voted for Trump) and of far-right groups such as QAnon in the insurrection.

The January 2021 insurrection revealed how white (and male) supremacy remains the fundamental challenge to the health of this democracy. The insurrection firmly exploded the global myth of US exceptionalism.



Racial capitalism and neo-colonialism globally drive economic and climate crises (wildfires, floods, droughts) and disproportionately impact poor, Black, and Brown people. Indigenous people lead struggles to protect water, land, territory, and rights (with Standing Rock as one example), while structural and police violence fuel our movements (such as Black Lives Matter).

The power struggles in our politics (toxic masculinity and white power) confirm that it is essential that we all show up for Black, Brown, indigenous, gender justice struggles around the world. Social justice feminism is central to the vision of collective care, solidarity, and repair that we seek in our future.

What are we up against?

Authoritarianism

This is the 3rd march of authoritarianism in history; the 1st was the struggle with fascism (WWII) and the 2nd took the form of coups and dictatorships (1960–85) – often supported by the US – around the world.

Key drivers today include:

- Unregulated, extractive capitalism, and accumulation
- Religious nationalism, theocracy
- Racial nationalism
- Climate change and demographic shifts

Cutting across all of this is the threat of deeply rooted misogyny on display through militarized masculinity and right-wing vigilantism and terror, alongside sustained and rising gendered violence to control LGBTQI and women.



Severe economic inequality and precarity: the transfer of resources upward to a shrinking .01%; created by neoliberal policies such as deregulation, privatization, enabling corporate and political corruption (kleptocracy), and the power of extractive capitalism to buy and dismantle public services, buy indigenous lands, dismantle labor protections.

Rise of religious nationalism and theocracy: theocratic movements provide a mass base to support repression against activists; energized around control of bodies, they push to reverse reproductive and gender justice gains and return to "traditional family" and hetero-gender roles.

Rise of racial and ethnic nationalist movements: reviving white supremacist colonial identities/enmities, demanding a more aggressively racist state to ensure social, political and economic dominance as the true 'nation' against perceived threats of immigrants, racial/religious minorities. Mobilizes a sense of victimization and rivalry for jobs, services, and government patronage. Appeals to racial solidarity across violent divisions of gender and class.

Fires, droughts, floods: caused by climate change, resource grabs and demographic shifts; a sense of displacement manipulated to create fear, polarization, and racist othering.

Inequality maintained through militarization; surveillance and repression are big business.

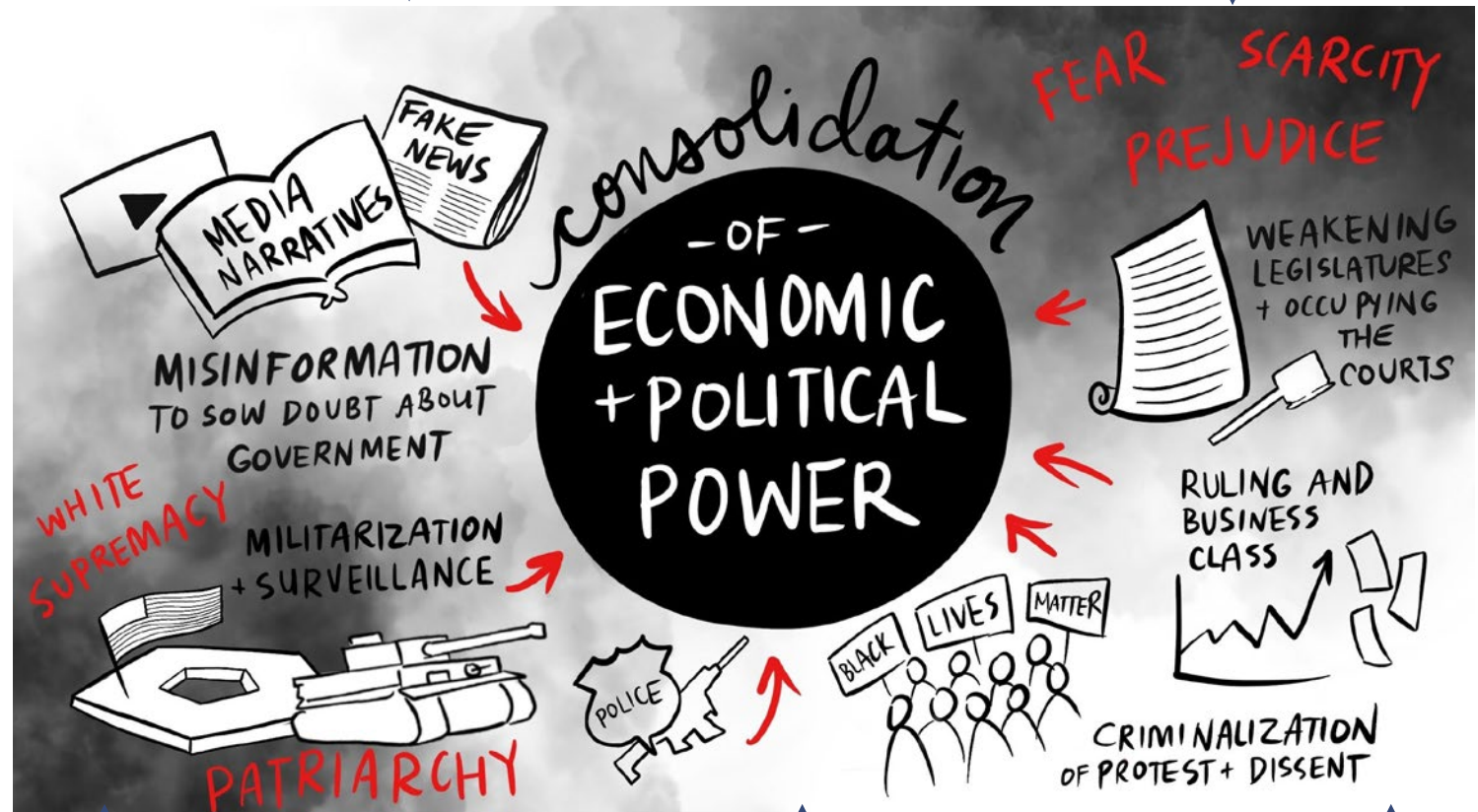
Consolidation

Fake news: disinformation and misinformation to sow doubt and confusion and to divide people; easily amplified by unregulated digital technology

Othering: tapping into deep racism, misogyny, and prejudice to create fear, the sense of loss of status and entitlement, a perception of victimization and scarcity

Economic and political power

Authoritarian forces energize white, male, and religious supremacy to consolidate economic and political power.



State and vigilante violence: criminalizing dissent; militarization and surveillance of domestic policing; at the center of US foreign policy and empire

"Inside job": state structures and courts align and coordinate with right-wing authoritarians, empowering, for example, Christian nationalists, TERFs, white nationalists, oligarchs

Weakened legislatures and stacked courts: "gaming" a flawed governance system to sustain minority rule and abuse of power; facilitate plutocrats and corporations

Clash of worldviews

Who and what matters most?

This moment of crises and reckoning, brewing for decades, reveals a fundamental conflict over who and what matters, who decides, and who is the “we.” This shows up in narratives and images around us.

Black, Brown, indigenous, and women-led movements organizing around people’s needs, cries for justice, demands for care and repair as the seeds of multiracial feminist democracy

Movements and strategies that redefine safety, center collective care and interdependence between people and with the planet. Exemplified by solidarity with striking Amazon workers, wild cat bus strikes by drivers for PPE, nurses unionizing

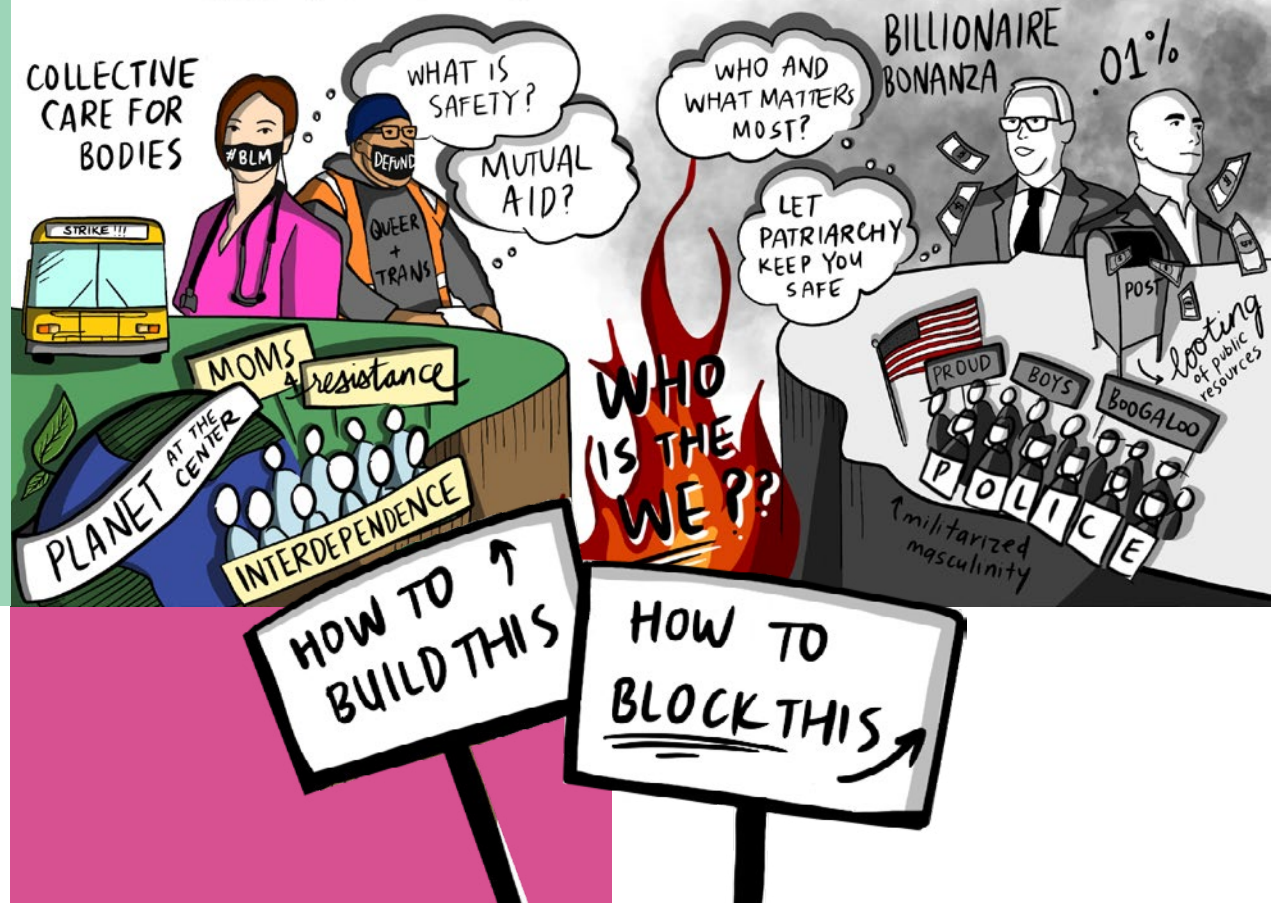
VS

White supremacy and male supremacy in displays of militarized violence (Proud Boys, Oath Keepers, Boogaloo) with white women playing key roles in far-right in alignment with patriarchy

VS

Billionaire bonanza for COVID profiteers (Jeff Bezos, Amazon CEO + Pharma); Wall Street booms despite economic crisis; the 01% see new tax havens amidst renewed calls for austerity; continued looting of public institutions (schools, land, post office); exploitation and endangering of essential labor

Transformative ideas shaped by social justice and Global South feminisms, indigeneity, and queer-led Black and Brown movements block rising authoritarianism and profiteering while building multiracial democracy.



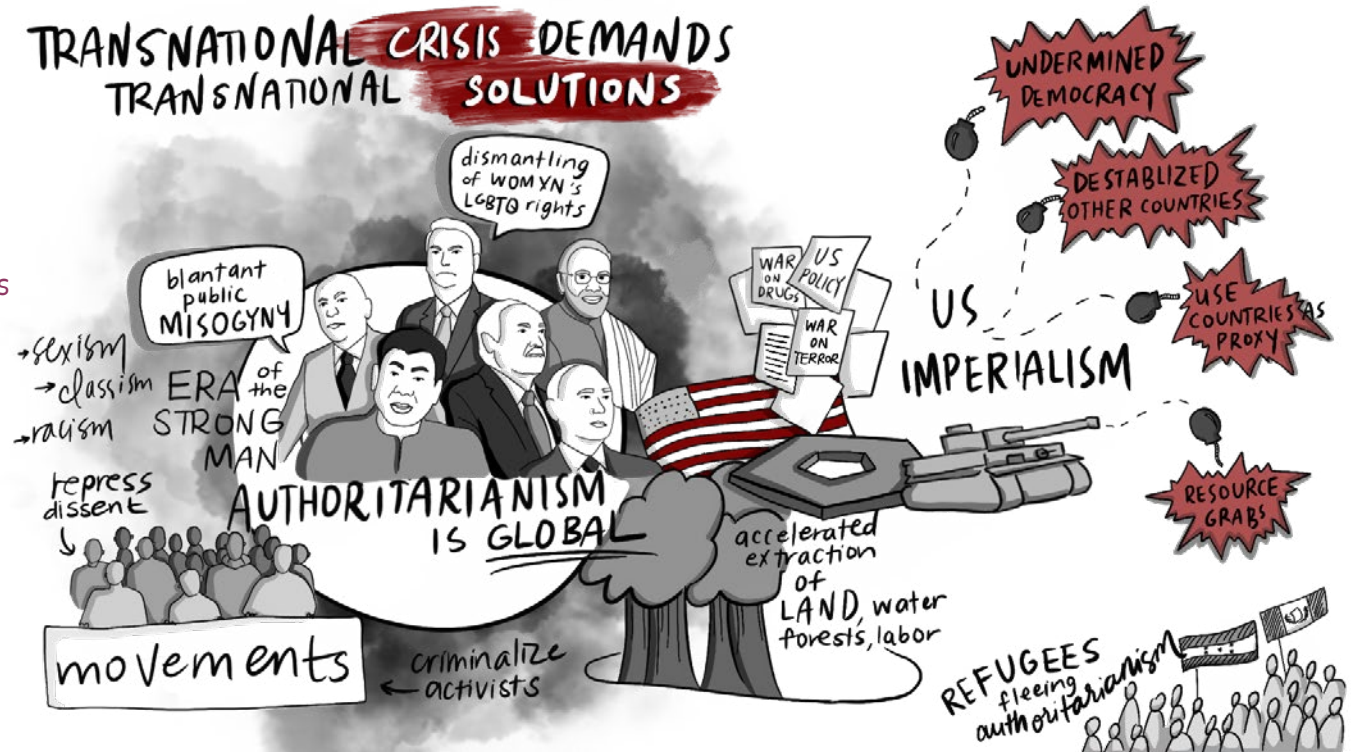
Transnational crisis

The pandemic has revealed desperate material conditions and the regular abuses of power that perpetuate them, sparking cross-border connections and energizing solidarity and a new internationalism.

People everywhere are struggling with loss, death, and dislocation from:

- COVID
- climate disasters
- economic precarity
- political violence
- the failures of governments to interrupt impunity, corporate capture, and extreme inequality

Trump was one among many leading a tide of authoritarianism and right-wing nationalism around the world. "strongmen" have come to power in the Philippines (Dutarte), Brazil (Bolsonaro), India (Modi), Belarus (Lukashenko), Hungary (Orban), and Russia (Putin).



They follow a similar playbook for consolidating political power in cahoots with oligarchs and corporations by:

- rearranging courts and legislatures
- polarizing through misogyny and anti-gender ideology
- a crackdown on dissent and journalists
- accelerating the extraction of natural resources
- dismantling rights

The US is not a bystander swept up in a pattern. US imperialism and colonialism have fueled precarity and police states through Washington Consensus, War on Drugs, War on Terror, militarizing the globe and driving autocratic crackdown and kleptocracy.

How do we step into the moment?

A new internationalism

The deep roots and trends driving this syndemic – multiple crises at once – are international, and so they demand cross-border solutions, connecting local people's struggles and global actions.

US activists and organizations have much to learn from movements elsewhere, organized around decolonization, austerity, land, and violence. Feminists, indigenous people, youth and workers are leading battles against dictators, military governments and the global politics and economics of extraction.



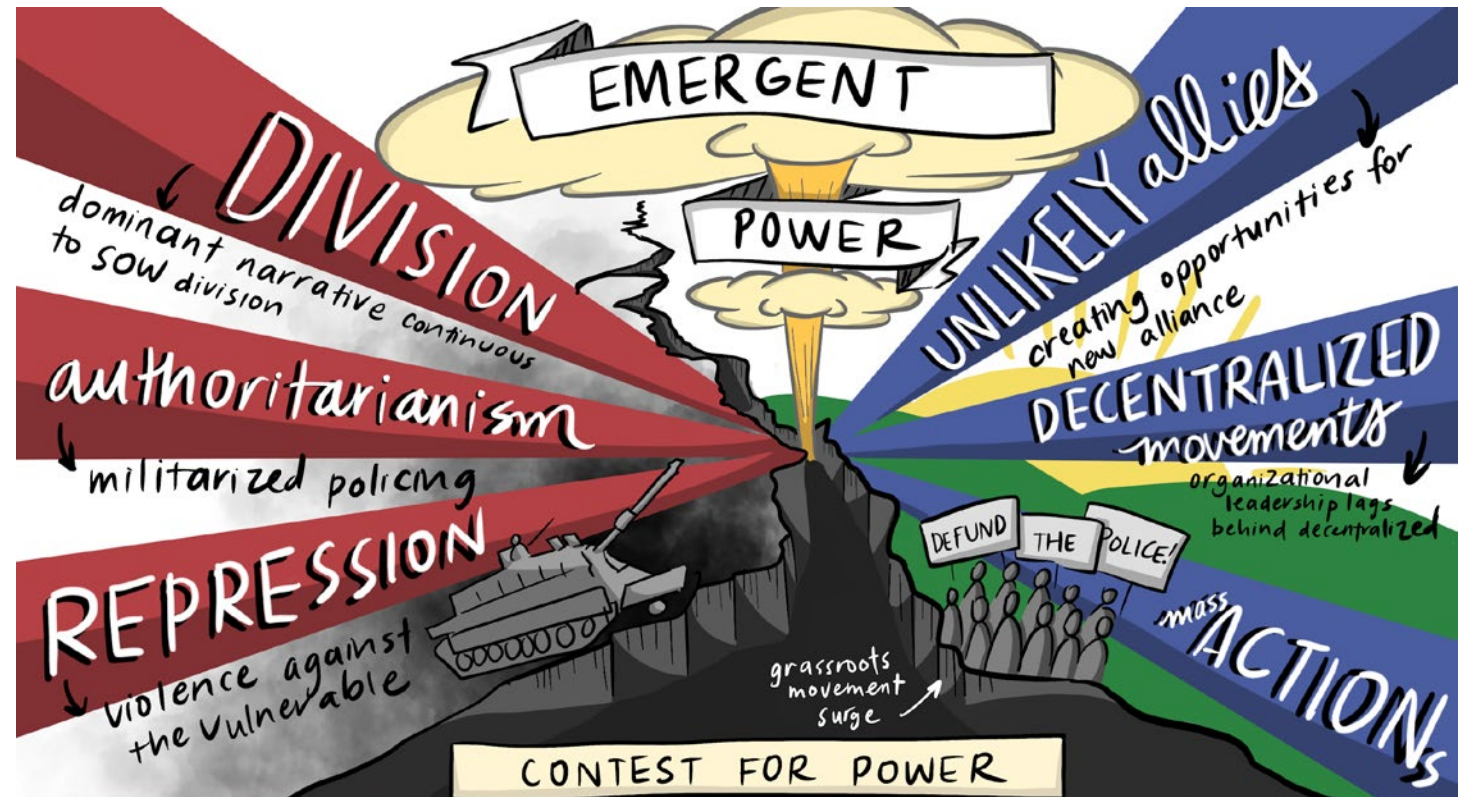
Our vision

Transformative ideas shaped by social justice and Global South feminisms, indigeneity, and queer-led Black and Brown movements block rising authoritarianism and profiteering while building multi-racial democracy.



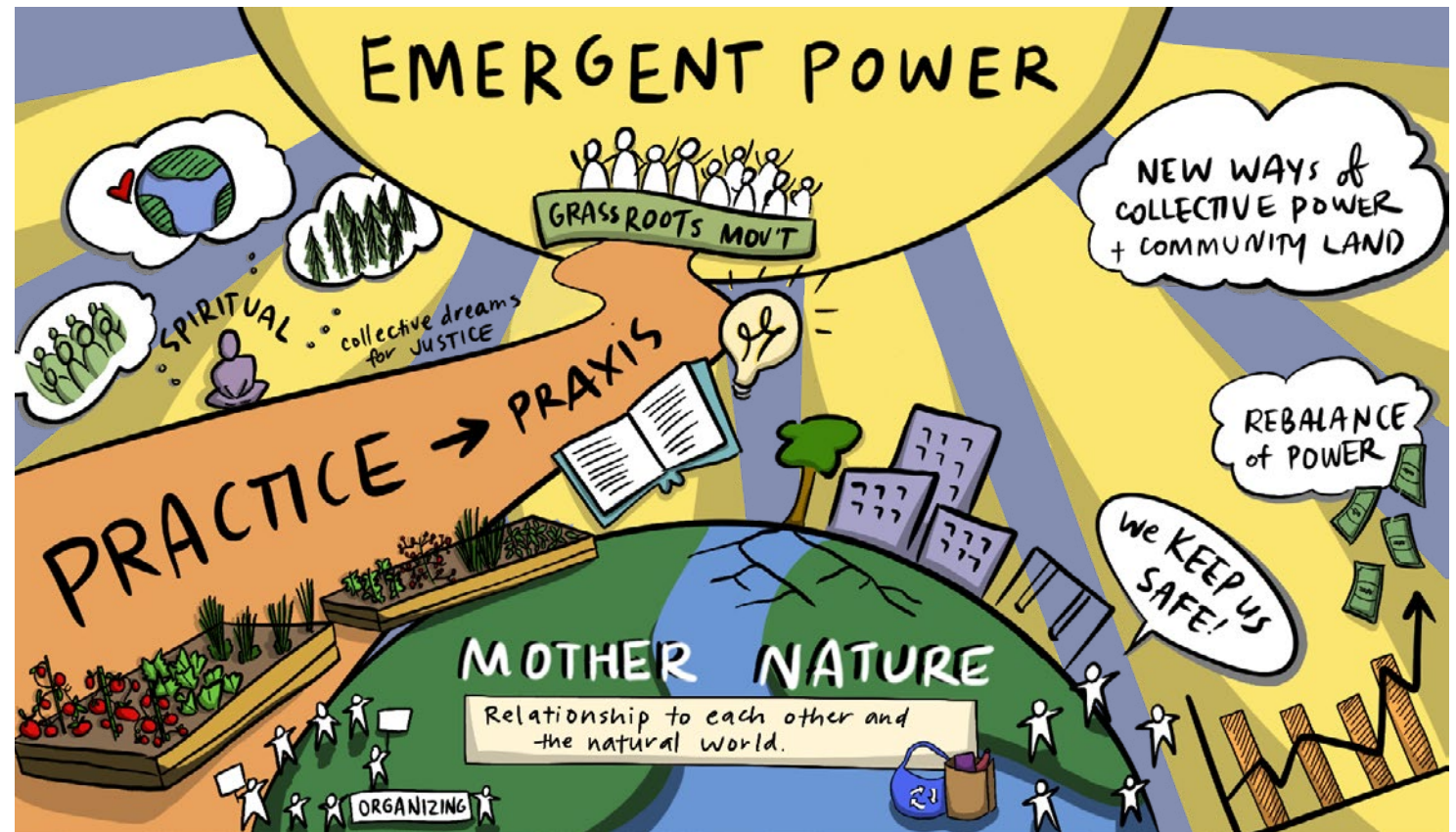
Emergent power

The clash over who “we” are and what matters is birthing new forms of collective, decentralized, cross-movement, cross-border power. We’re coming together and organizing in ways that seek to rebalance relationships with each other and with nature, demanding and practicing solidarity through action to address shared needs, material wants, basic rights and an emergent sense of justice.



Transformative ideas

From mutual aid and basic support for food, housing, PPE, and vaccines to mobilizing to call out abuse or to defend land, water, labor rights and protections, care, justice, and access, an expanded sense of community is being born out of loss, indignation, and longing. A rebalanced relationship to the earth offers a new global grounding for the future we need to build.



Where does Northstar Network go from here?

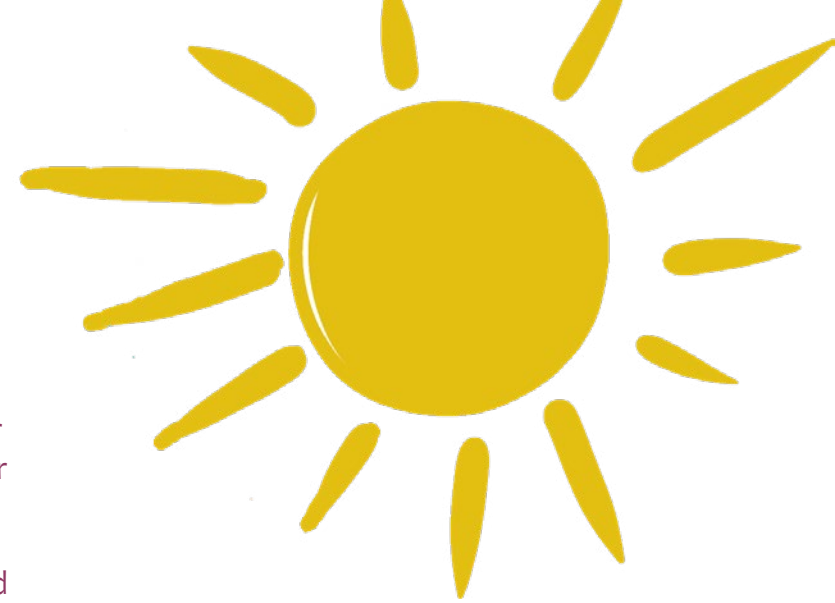
Blocking and building

As we move into 2021–22, we seek to occupy the terrain of multi-racial democratic feminist transformation taking a long-term internationalist view. The moment demands that we balance the political demands and opportunities presented by tactical, short-term policy work, blocking where necessary, while building the how and what that better address the challenges and threats of our times.

We recognize the tendency of the white liberal establishment to pull us backward toward status quo, content for the Black freedom movement to ‘save democracy’ in a crisis but still reluctant to embrace a comprehensive change agenda. We recognize too the opportunities created by unexpected gains and propositions in the policy space.

Concretely, we aim for our work together to contribute toward:

- Sustaining transformational momentum and leadership-building catalyzed by the multi-racial upsurge against systemic racism, keeping step with the massive change opportunities that exist as a result.
- Better understanding the forces we are up against across the world – integrating an internationalist perspective in our work to create a powerful vision, and narrative of the multi-racial feminist democracy we seek to practice and build.
- Set up a runway for the next few years to move the content and practice of systemic cross-sectoral feminist anti-racist power analysis and the new narratives it births through our movements toward the future.
- Seek out strategic opportunities to occupy the political ground where tactical battles have the potential for strengthening our power, narratives and movement infrastructure, making critical connections domestically and globally.



Goals, external and internal

- Deepen our cross-sectoral reflection about the ways that our history, world and our practice contributed to this moment of crisis, identifying the kinds of strategic and organizational shifts that long-term transformational work demands;
 - Invest in visioning about the meaning and practice of emancipatory democracy that forges alignment across different sectors and work in parallel ways in pursuit of culture change/ political change and always engenders hope and actionable interventions;
 - Continuously refresh, sharpen and internationalize our shared analysis
- while supporting its dissemination, application and adaptation both in our individual organizations and across our movements, allies and funders as we find ways to intervene, interrupt and build, and spawn new endeavors based on our collective analysis; this year, we will engage in the development of political education materials and processes, and other projects to this end;
- Build our network infrastructure around culture shift and narrative work, including inviting and learning from others outside the network and experimenting with different ways of working in smaller formations to feed into the larger process.

