

A Working Guide to the Landscape of Arts for Change

A collection of writings depicting the wide range of ways the arts make community, civic, and social change.



Scribe Video Center's Documentary History Project for Youth is an after-school, weekend and summertime production workshop supporting young people explore an aspect of the political, social or cultural history of Philadelphia by creating short video documentaries, audio works or websites.

A Youth Media Agenda for Social Justice

By Diana Coryat

Youth media is a diverse array of practices in which young people collaborate with artists and educators to express themselves creatively, communicate with peers across borders, and participate in community dialogue and problem solving. Social justice–focused youth media facilitates a root-cause analysis of “why things are the way they are,” has a vision of a more just and equitable society, and uses media to contest dominant narratives and to support systemic change.

The process of creating and presenting media can be transformative for youth, educators, communities, and audiences. Pressing issues of our times are addressed, such as the uncertainty faced by undocumented youth, discrimination against transgender youth, and the daily harassment of youth by police. In response to these conditions, young people lead processes of analysis, research, and community dialogue. They articulate their perspectives and join in national, even global dialogues. Moreover, the media they produce contribute to a more pluralistic, democratic media environment. Youth media projects can be found in urban, rural, and suburban neighborhoods; most are deeply rooted in their communities. Youth media is most likely to impact people, communities, and policies when it achieves a mix of several factors: It is well crafted aesthetically, tells a compelling story, has a strong social justice component, is produced to coincide with a specific campaign, and cultivates relationships with partners who can use the media widely.

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INTRODUCTION

Social justice–focused youth media facilitates a root-cause analysis of “why things are the way they are,” has a vision of a more just and equitable society, and uses media to contest dominant narratives and to support systemic change...

In 1991, long before we were all conversant in Facebook, Twitter, You Tube, Google Maps, Web 2.0, or even e-mail, Susan Siegel¹ and I speculated that media could be a great tool for young people to express themselves creatively, communicate with peers across borders, and participate in community dialogue and problem solving. Global Action Project (G.A.P.), initially conceived of as an international “videoletter” project in which youth produce and exchange videos about their lives and struggles, was eventually established as a New York City-based youth media organization. Along the way we discovered that the process of creating and presenting media was far more transformative than we had imagined for the youth, educators, communities, and audiences. We were not alone in thinking that media could be a way to engage young people in culture, politics, and organizing—in the ‘90s, many youth media programs were launched across the United States.² To date, the youth media field is still growing. As for G.A.P., it continues to deepen its practice nearly two decades later.³ Part of its evolution has entailed deep reflection about the role that youth media can play in building a strong movement for social justice.⁴

I think of youth media as a diverse array of practices in which young people (usually in their teens and early twenties) collaborate with artists, educators, and other cultural workers to produce and present media. There is also a youth media field that has grown up around these projects, including film festivals, leadership institutes, conferences, researchers, funders, a growing body of literature, curricula, a professional journal, and other resources.

In this essay, I use G.A.P.’s upcoming 20th anniversary as a vantage point from which to discuss how youth media as a practice and field can engage young people, artists, and communities in progressive social change. This essay does not pretend to capture the vast array of projects, the complexity of the field, or the social and artistic visions that drive the work. It a modest attempt to create a snapshot of youth media at the end of the first decade of the 21st century, with a particular focus on programs that have a social justice framework. In addition to providing training in media tools, social justice–focused youth media facilitates a root-cause analysis of “why things are the way they

are,” has a vision of a more just and equitable society, and uses media to contest dominant narratives and to support systemic change (among other characteristics).⁵ It is a smaller subset of the larger field of youth media. In writing this article, I have drawn on my work as a critical practitioner and on the rich discussions I have engaged in over the years with committed youth and adults in the United States and internationally. This essay is also informed by some of the latest research, reports, evaluations, case studies, websites, and ideas being generated by diverse stakeholders in the field.⁶

In the pages that follow, I reflect on the context within which youth media is practiced and discuss some of its influences and history. I provide an overview of the many forms youth media takes, where it takes place, who drives the work, and how it is distributed. I describe the field that has grown up around youth media and highlight some efforts by justice-focused groups to document and evaluate youth media’s impact. Finally, I address some of the current challenges, trends, and opportunities on the horizon. I end the article with some thoughts about how youth media can truly be an art for change.

My hope is that the information, ideas, and analysis presented here will generate interest from those unfamiliar with youth media (in particular social justice-focused youth media) and constructively build on conversations happening in the field.

YOUTH MEDIA IN CONTEXT

Recently, I attended G.A.P.’s End-of-Year Screening. The large audience, diverse in age, race, class, sexuality, and neighborhood, was energized to see new work. The youth-produced fiction and nonfiction videos we watched that evening delved into some of the most pressing issues of our times: the uncertainty faced by undocumented youth after high school, the discrimination against transgender youth, and the harassment youth confront as they negotiate the daily screening of their backpacks and bodies by police officers stationed at their schools. While I watched the video about policing in the schools, my mind flashed back to an earlier G.A.P. video produced in 1996 in which the youth reacted to then-Mayor Giuliani’s decision to place police inside public schools. I recalled the fictionalized scenes depicting what the youth imagined could happen, and realized how similar they were to the real stories documented 14 years later by another group of youth producers.

The contrast of these two videos about the police presence in New York City public schools brings into stark relief the fact that conditions have worsened for young people, working class communities, and communities of color over the past 20 years. Our landscape is one of widening economic inequality, rising unemployment, heightened attacks on immigrants, continuing war, ecological crisis, and deep cuts to city, state, and

federal social programs that were already insufficient. Media continues to be concentrated in the hands of a few corporations even as new technologies offer ways to circumvent total domination by commercial media.

In response to these conditions, social justice–focused youth media reflects on and analyzes these realities, generating youth-led research and community dialogue as part of the process. It provides opportunities for young people to articulate their perspectives and be part of a national, even global dialogue about creating a more just, equitable, and sustainable world. It also contributes to a more pluralistic, democratic media environment. These difficult times, however, call for strategic alliances between artists and social justice–movement actors. For this reason, many of us believe that youth media is much more effective when it learns from, builds with, and engages in coordinated efforts with community organizers, advocacy groups, and others working to bring awareness about and change unfair policies.



Global Action Project's Media in Action training, 2010

Historical Roots

Youth media has been influenced by diverse social, political, and artistic movements past and present. Social movements, which young people have historically led or participated in, have often used the media available to them to challenge the status quo. In the 1960s and '70s, powerful social movements, such as those for racial and gender justice, coincided with greater access to technology.⁷ Many authors cite the introduction of the Sony Portapak as a pivotal moment when Black, Latino, Asian, Native, other racialized minorities, and nondominant-identified groups (including women, LGBTQ, and people with disabilities) contested their exclusion and misrepresentation in the media by appropriating the tools of production.⁸ This synergy between movements and new media technologies paved the way for community media, public access television, and independent media.

The '80s and '90s were decades in which production equipment became even cheaper and of higher quality. Also, the question of who is able to speak on whose behalf became a more frequent topic of dialogue and debate among filmmakers, programmers, academics, funders, and audiences. In the late '90s, when activists working on a whole spectrum of issues came together in Seattle to challenge the International Monetary Fund during the so-called Battle for Seattle, Indymedia demonstrated how independent media makers, working collectively, could capture social movement protest and affect mainstream media's coverage. Youth media stands squarely on the shoulders of these and other social histories. It continues to be similarly informed, in part, by artists and cultural workers who believe that cultural production, self-representation, and agency go hand in hand and that media is one of the most powerful tools for education, literacy, youth empowerment, and community organizing.

In addition to leading and joining social movements, youth were making media as early as the '60s. In 1961, for example, Dee Dee Halleck founded Children Make Movies at a settlement house in the Lower East Side of New York City.⁹ In the '60s, '70s and '80s, organizations that provided access to media tools were multigenerational and counted youth among their members (notable examples are Third World Newsreel in New York, 1967; Appalshop in Whitesburg, Kentucky, 1969; Downtown Community Television in New York City, 1972; The New Orleans Video Access Center, 1972; and Scribe Video Center in Philadelphia, 1982). A smaller number of organizations with a specific focus on youth-produced media also began to appear (Community TV Network in Chicago, 1974; Youth Communication in New York, 1980; and Educational Video Center in New York, 1984). By the early '90s those numbers grew, especially in metropolitan areas like New York City, the Bay Area, and Chicago.¹⁰ As true then as it is now, youth media programs are uniquely shaped by many factors, including the community where they are located; the kind of media they use; the youth population they work with; and the backgrounds, skills, and values of the organization's leadership.

YOUTH MEDIA TODAY

Youth media programs often recruit specific youth populations that are less visible or that are depicted negatively in the mainstream media, that have less access to digital tools, or that come from under-resourced schools and communities.

One of youth media's defining characteristics is its heterogeneity. Youth media projects can be found in urban, rural, and suburban neighborhoods. Most are deeply rooted in their communities, whether they are in a global city, a rural mining community, on Native lands, or define their community in other ways. The programs work in a wide range of media formats, including video, radio, animation, newspapers, zines, blogs, photography, mixed media, public art, graphic novels, websites, music, street art, and digital storytelling. They take place in schools, arts and cultural organizations, social service organizations, community centers, public housing projects, colleges, churches, public access centers, prisons, libraries, museums, and television and radio stations. A handful of organizations have achieved a level of sustainability that has allowed them to develop curricula, train staff, mentor other organizations, and play a leading role in the field. These groups often have budgets ranging from \$500,000 to more than \$1 million. The majority of youth media programs, however, are cash-strapped, under-resourced, and operate with a bare bones staff and budget. But no matter their size, a hallmark of youth media is the widespread practice of collaborating with diverse social organizations in their region.¹¹

Youth media programs often recruit specific youth populations that are less visible or that are depicted negatively in the mainstream media, that have less access to digital tools, or that come from under-resourced schools and communities. Targeted populations include youth of color, working class youth, immigrant and refugee youth, girls and young women, queer youth, incarcerated youth, youth who are no longer in the school system, and homeless youth. The themes that are dealt with often have a direct correlation to the stories, life experiences, and struggles of the youth and educators in the program. The media products are overwhelmingly documentary in nature, though it is not uncommon to find animated, fictional, experimental, or hybrid forms, and other genres.

At its best, youth media involves rich intergenerational relationships between youth and adults who are mentors and facilitators, but who also see themselves as learners. A youth media educator is charged with roles and responsibilities of great complexity. He or she needs to balance not only the "process and product," but also grapple with interpersonal issues and the effects of institutions and social conditions that young people experience.

Practitioners are attracted to this work for a variety of reasons. Some have backgrounds in media; others are community organizers, artists, and educators from across the disciplines that recognize the potential of media to engage young people. Most are drawn to the work because of their belief in the potential of young people. Even in a single organization, educators often possess different sets of skills, interests, and values. Some focus more on the craft of media making, others focus more on building individual youth competencies, and others focus on social justice education. This has, on the one hand, generated great diversity and, on the other hand, has caused a well-noted lack of cohesion in the field.

There is a documented generational and demographic shift underway in the leadership composition of organizations across the United States¹², though research is needed to understand whether or not this is also taking place in the youth media field. Certainly, there is still much work to do to cultivate and develop a more diverse leadership base.

On an international scale, youth media is widespread, though in general it is framed and funded differently than U.S.-based youth media. It is not always called “youth media,” and, depending on the project’s goals, leadership, and funding sources, might be called “community media,” “citizens’ media,” or “movement media.” In Latin America, for example, there are many informal media collectives made up of young people in their teens to early thirties.¹³ Many of these projects are directly linked to social movements and to important national and international progressive networks. Projects spearheaded and funded by international development groups are often framed as “communication for development,” “communication for social change,” “Participatory Video,” or as “Information and Communication Technologies” (ICTs). Though international groups work in many media, radio is one of the most viable mediums because of its low cost and widespread community use.

FIELD BUILDING

Practitioners began to refer to a youth media field in the late ‘90s. A distinguishing trait of this emerging field is that it is highly interdisciplinary and fragmented. It intersects with other practices and fields and encompasses many kinds of programs with distinct purposes and products. Adding to the disparate nature of the field, youth media groups sometimes identify less with the “youth media field” (perhaps because it is so broad) and more with communities of practitioners working in the same medium or toward the same desired impact. For example, youth radio groups might identify more with the community radio field and attend intergenerational conferences focused on radio. In other instances youth media groups

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working toward policy change on key issues such as immigration, education, or gender equity might align themselves more consciously with the organizers and social movements working toward building collective power than with youth media groups

that are more focused on building skills and competencies of individual youth.

Even though the work is diverse and far-reaching, youth media programs often share many characteristics. These include: providing training in artistic and technological tools for creative self-expression; building caring relationships between adults and youth; encouraging young people to take charge of their own learning; focusing on both process and product, thereby creating impact on multiple levels; encouraging artistic and intellectual inquiry and experimentation; and promoting active participation in schools, neighborhoods, and communities.

One must also step outside of the field to get a broader picture of the work. There are related media fields that overlap with youth media, though each has a distinct approach. They include community media, media justice, citizen journalism, digital storytelling, independent media, media education, participatory video, and public access television. Media is increasingly used as a tool in other fields such as civic engagement, conflict resolution, communication for development, community arts, public health, human rights education, juvenile justice, social justice education, youth development, and youth organizing.

In the 1990s, the new field captured the attention of influential foundations, including the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, The Open Society Institute,¹⁴ The Surdna Foundation, and Time Warner Inc. The National Endowment for the Arts and state and city art councils have also played important roles in supporting the field. According to *Investing in Youth Media*, “Youth media organizations offer a broad impact that belies their often small sizes and even smaller budgets. They bring together youth development and social justice in a way that is both energizing and authentic. They offer new models for educating young people who have lost interest in school, bring youth voices to public attention, and offer opportunities for artistic exploration and career experiences.”¹⁵

In addition to funding youth media programs, foundations have supported intermediary organizations, such as film festivals that highlight youth work (Urban Visionaries in New York, Do it Your Damned Self in Cambridge, Sundance Film Festival in Utah, Tribeca Film Festival in New York), youth participation at media conferences (National Alliance for Media, Arts and Culture, Allied Media Conference), and other promoters of youth media (Listen Up!, Media Rights). A few, most notably The Open Society Institute, vigorously advocated for the field within the foundation community. Together with a small group

of other philanthropists invested in the field, they earmarked funds for curriculum development, practitioner convenings, leadership development, training institutes, and evaluation.¹⁶

The legacies of this investment are tangible. Youth media practitioners now have available at their disposal books, curricula, on-line documentation, and other assistance to bolster their practice. A repository of theory and practice can be found in *The Youth Media Reporter*, a professional journal for the field (initiated by The Open Society Institute and now managed by the Academy for Educational Development under the direction of Ingrid Hu Dahl). Another excellent online source is IssueLab's "Close-up on Youth Media," edited by Mindy Faber.¹⁷ The Youth Media Learning Network, originally developed by Steve Goodman of Educational Video Center and Tony Streit of Educational Development Center, launched in the fall of 2006 with support from The Open Society Institute and the W.K. Kellogg Foundation. It was one of the first efforts on a national scale to promote professional development and capacity building for the youth media field.¹⁸ These early advocates helped to bring attention and legitimacy to the field, which in turn attracted more foundation support. While fundraising remains a major challenge for most youth media projects, philanthropies have played a pivotal role in supporting youth media as well as other noncommercial media.

The youth media field has come a long way since the late '90s, though clearly there is much more to be done. In August 2009 45 educators and other stakeholders attended a National Youth Media Summit in Lake Forest, IL. As part of their work together they discussed six priority issue areas that emerged as a result of a three-year meta-analysis and youth media sector survey conducted by *Youth Media Reporter/AED*. These issues, some of which are briefly covered in this essay, include: leadership development, strategic partnerships, research and evaluation, distribution, curriculum, and professional development and networks. The document is worth reviewing for the excellent suggestions generated, as well as the resources listed. The recommendations clearly point to the need for more coordination and collaboration. To that end, two possible next steps mentioned in the report are to "establish a staffed and living hub for an official association, alliance, or national network that would provide a loose infrastructure and act as a platform for collaboration" and to "lay the groundwork for a Wiki site to store Youth Media resources, including research reports, curricula, and Youth Media organization/program contact information."¹⁹

YOUTH MEDIA DISTRIBUTION

Youth media is often used in community-based settings by youth, organizers, cultural workers, high school teachers, and college professors for educational purposes. Youth video is also seen widely in film festivals, conferences, and on public access television (this was not the case just a decade ago). Web 2.0 has had a substantial impact on the

ability to get youth media out to wide audiences, often via YouTube (some youth videos get thousands of hits) and through the organizations' and allies' websites.

Youth radio groups have been making good use of the Web for years, as audio and podcasting technologies were available earlier than video capabilities. Youth radio is disseminated widely to general audiences when the programs are part of larger public radio and other media networks. For example, while on the website of *The Huffington Post*, I was pleased to see that they had featured a timely opinion piece by a Youth Radio correspondent about the controversy over the planned Islamic Community Center in New York City. *The Huffington Post* also lists Youth Radio among their news sources. Joe Richman's *Radio Diaries* is another example of a program that is widely heard because of its partnership with National Public Radio.

While the impact of a youth media program on individual youth is often documented and evaluated to some extent, the dissemination of the final product is tracked less frequently for a variety of reasons (including a lack of capacity or expertise, turnover of youth and staff invested in the media's distribution, etc.).²⁰ Where has the media been seen or heard? Who has it reached? Has it been used in a specific campaign? What has changed? These are just some of questions that need to be documented beyond the anecdotal if programs and the field as a whole want to make a strong case for creating wider impact. Bay Area Video Coalition (BAVC) for Youth Digital Filmmakers has attempted to do just that by creating "Case Studies for Youth Media Distribution,"²¹ in which they provide a sample of the media, basic data about the project, information on who they partnered with, details about distribution efforts, and results. It is clear from the summaries that, in addition to grassroots screenings and festivals, they have also tried (with varying degrees of success) to get national advocacy organizations to use their videos.

Youth Rights Media, a youth media organization based in New Haven, Connecticut, that is "dedicated to empowering youth to know, protect and advance their rights" stands out for its concerted focus on using video as an



Locked 'N Loaded, a new youth-produced documentary created at Youth Rights Media in New Haven, CT, explores the socio-political factors contributing to gun violence. In the process, youth question whether such governmental policies as the War on Drugs help resolve or escalate the problem.

organizing tool in order to change unjust policies that are damaging to young people (See blog.youthrightsmedia.org/). According to a case study about this group,²² Youth Rights Media was effective in getting the governor of Connecticut to shut down an unsafe residential treatment center that was modeled after a maximum-security prison by producing a video about the terrible conditions, organizing screenings across the state, and garnering press coverage.

Drawing lessons from Youth Rights Media, youth media is most likely to impact people, communities, and policies when it achieves a mix of several factors: It is well crafted aesthetically, tells a compelling story, has a strong social justice component, is produced to coincide with a specific campaign, and cultivates relationships with partners who can use the media widely.

EVALUATING IMPACT

Youth media is most likely to impact people, communities, and policies when it...is well crafted aesthetically, tells a compelling story, has a strong social justice component, is produced to coincide with a specific campaign, and cultivates relationships with partners who can use the media widely.

According to Ingrid Dahl, editor of *Youth Media Reporter*, “Educators in youth media see the direct and long-term impact of their programs on young people, despite how hard it is to measure.”²³ Documenting and evaluating that impact is perhaps one of the most challenging arenas in youth media. For individual organizations, it is usually most viable to focus on short-term changes to individual youth skills, behaviors, attitudes, and knowledge. Several good evaluation models and tools are now available for youth development, youth media, and youth organizing programs.²⁴ Evaluating long-term impact on youth, however, is much more difficult to undertake, usually due to organizational capacity and funding, among other factors.

Diverse studies have been undertaken in the past decade, though most practitioners and researchers agree that many more are needed. Important studies include: The Open Society Institute and Surdna Foundation’s commissioned study on youth media’s impact on audiences and channels of distribution (which includes excellent suggestions for different kinds of research that could be undertaken to assess impact),²⁵ The Stuart Foundation’s case studies of five youth media organizations,²⁶ and The Open Society Institute’s report, “Investing in Youth

Media.”²⁷ In the *Youth Media Reporter* one can read hundreds of short, anecdotal reports as well as larger evaluation studies (such as Tyner 2008).

It is even harder to document and evaluate youth media as a vehicle for social change, or the impact that the youth and their media have on communities, institutions, public perceptions, and policy. Are youth of color seen and treated differently by police officers who have been exposed to youth-produced media? Has a school-based youth media program positively affected the school culture? Has collaboration between a youth media group and youth organizing group strengthened a campaign or affected public policy? How does youth media help participants or audiences think more critically about how issues are framed in mainstream media? To answer these kinds of questions, we need to develop the tools, resources, expertise, and capacity to carry out in-depth studies that evaluate wider impact.

Grantmakers for Film and Electronic Media (GFEM) has produced a well-researched report about media philanthropy.²⁸ One of the report’s recommendations is that the impact of media grantmaking should be measured and that “the [philanthropic] field should undertake new efforts to do so.” The report highlights The Fledgling Fund’s “creative media social impact continuum,” which seeks to capture “dimensions of impact.” In expanding concentric circles, these dimensions include: the quality of film or media, increased public awareness, increased public engagement, strengthening social movements, and social change (sample metrics are suggested for each dimension).²⁹ What is very clear from this and other reports is that no one funder or organization can undertake this work, and communication, collaboration, data sharing, and meta-analyses of evaluations are necessary to make a case for the power of media to affect social change.

G.A.P.’s Media In Action (MIA) initiative, which trains youth and community organizers—both local and from across the country—in media strategy, is in the early stages of documenting how former participants use media to strengthen their campaigns.³⁰ Early assessment has shown that, overall, participants walk away from MIA with a sense of urgency and an understanding about how to use media as a creative strategy for engaging young people in campaign work. (See sidebar for examples.)



Global Action Project received a prestigious 2010 National Arts & Humanities Youth Program Award, accepted by Executive Director Meghan McDermott (left) and G.A.P. alum Rayhan Islam who said, “It tells me that the work we are doing is making an impact and gets me even more excited about my future.”

Global Action Project's Media In Action Gets Results!

Khmer Girls in Action in Long Beach, California, used their media skills to create a Public Service Announcement for a campaign against Proposition 4, which they later went on to win in the 2008 elections. They reached more than 1,000 voters with this media tool (www.kgalb.org/media.html)

Tennessee Immigrant and Refugee Rights Coalition used G.A.P.'s TV Tool to train other youth in preparation for their Annual Convention, a yearly statewide membership event. Youth wanted their workshop to cover both an issue (discrimination against immigrant youth) and a new skill (making media). They used the TV Tool to think through their own project and called the session Youth Unity for Justice: A Media Activism Workshop, which in turn reached another 30 youth from across the state. The workshop was so successful that the TIRRC youth decided they would continue giving this training in local high schools and youth centers.

With the Bronx-based Youth Ministries for Peace and Justice (YMPJ), G.A.P. supported the production of a video designed to sustain their youth-led restorative justice campaign. Program activities included research, group work, media analysis, and technical skill development. The end result is "Breaking The Pipeline," a 14-minute documentary that makes the case for restorative justice by tracing its evolution and impact. It was screened to youth activists at the United States Social Forum (USSF) as a core component of a youth-led workshop on educational justice. The unique partnership between YMPJ and G.A.P. was also the subject of the *Citizen Active* series on Plum TV. Entitled "Next Generation," the episode features innovative models of youth engagement in change (www.plumtv.com/citizenactive).

CHALLENGES, TRENDS, AND OPPORTUNITIES

It is incredible to think that just a few years ago researchers measured young people's media use by counting the number of hours they read books, listened to radio, or watched television. The media landscape is shifting dramatically, and although global media corporations continue to dominate, there are reasons for cautious optimism as we move into an increasingly complex, fluid, networked environment.

In the United States and in many other countries, new media technologies such as Web 2.0, mobile technology, and social networking are impacting the way we communicate. With regard to youth media, while this does not mean that media production or distribution will no longer present challenges, there are more tools at our disposal to craft stories and messages and communicate with allies and other audiences. However, while there are several examples of youth media programs that use Web 2.0, gaming strategies,

and other new media technologies,³¹ it remains to be seen if and to what extent the field is prepared to take advantage of these innovations, given limitations of funding, technical assistance, and staff training.³² A related field of digital media and learning has recently emerged, in part related to the MacArthur Foundation’s investment in this area.³³

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Another trend is that community organizers are increasingly using, creating, or aspiring to create their own media in order to communicate with their constituencies, larger networks, and wider publics. This has opened up more opportunities for youth media organizations to scale their work by collaborating with organizers. Both G. A. P. and People’s Production House offer national institutes for organizers wanting to hone their skills in storytelling, framing, and messaging. Rather than top–down trainings, these workshops are designed to encourage relationship building and cross-fertilization of ideas and strategies.³⁴ In the realm of radio, it is important to mention the groundbreaking work of Prometheus Radio, an organization that builds, supports, and advocates for community radio stations that empower participatory community voices and movements for social change (www.prometheusradio.org).

Convergence is also increasing at the level of social and political organization. One way in which this is occurring is through intergenerational, cross-sector gatherings that bring together youth, organizers, artists, educators, and others working toward common goals. Youth media groups who aspire to work with organizers and social movements have several places to build relationships. Two of the most exciting venues are USSF and the Allied Media Conference (AMC). Led by people of color and young people, they provide youth media makers with venues to show their media, workshop their craft, learn organizing skills, build relationships, and strategize with others.

The USSF,³⁵ whose credo is “Another World is Possible - Another US is Necessary!” has taken place twice—in Atlanta in 2007 and Detroit in 2010. It is a large gathering of social justice activists from across the United States. Like its predecessor (The World Social Forum, which began in 2001 in Porto Alegre, Brazil) the arts, culture, and media are interwoven into all thematic strands of the program. Many youth media groups across the United States have participated in the World and USSF. As an example of a youth media/organizer partnership, KUNM Youth Radio partnered with Southwest Organizing Project to document the People’s Freedom Caravan and the experiences of the young people on the Caravan bound for the 2010 USSF. Viewers can see the four-part series on Southwest Organizing Project’s blog, “swopblogger) or on KUNM’s YouTube channel.³⁶

Media justice organizations—including The Center for Media Justice, smartMeme, the Praxis Project, Progressive Communicators Network, and others—convened a “Peoples’

Movement Assembly” at this year’s USSF in Detroit as part of a movement building participatory research project to define a media policy and media narrative agenda for social movements in the US.³⁷

The AMC is held each summer in Detroit. According to its website, the AMC “unites the worlds of media and communications, technology, education, and social justice. From this unique intersection some of the most exceptional community-organizing models emerge each year.”³⁸ In the 2010 conference workshop themes included: media tools for LGBTQ organizing, using cell phones as a journalism tool, creating street art, and using online community mapping tools to challenge inequality. In the Media Lab participants learned to build mini radio transmitters, produce radio stories, build computers from salvaged parts, and create gender-inclusive video games. In addition, The Palestine Education Project, 7th Generation Indigenous Visionaries, and SNAG Magazine hosted their third annual Skype conversation between youth in Palestine and youth at the AMC.

PARTING REFLECTIONS

To be a part of progressive social change, youth media must connect youth to and work with social justice changemakers. Youth media programs are much more valuable for young people when we ensure that their experience with youth media does not end when they finish a production but continues through their sustained involvement in those same communities and movements. Instead of the school-to-prison pipeline, we need to ask ourselves what kind of pipelines organizations are creating for young people. What core social visions are we presenting as alternatives to the world in which we live? As Roberto Levins Morales tells us, “Our ability to act powerfully is connected to our ability to see powerfully.”³⁹ Ideally, youth media makers are storytellers who join with and inspire others to do just that.

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For more information, visit: www.artsusa.org/animatingdemocracy

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Endnotes

¹ Susan Siegel and I are co-founders and former directors of Global Action Project (G.A.P.). G.A.P. works with young people most affected by injustice to build the knowledge, tools, and relationships needed to create media for community power, cultural expression, and political change (www.global-action.org).

² I cannot provide an exact figure, though Dahl (2009a) estimates there are more than 100 youth media organizations. This figure does not include youth media programs located within larger organizations. See Tyner (2008) and Tyner (2004) for youth media mapping surveys that have been conducted over the past few years. See <http://youthmediasummit.pbworks.com/w/page/Youth-Media-Timeline> for a youth media timeline in-construction.

³ See <http://www.global-action.org> or www.youtube.com/globalactionproject for more information and to see some of the videos.

⁴ For an essay that describes G.A.P.'s process, see McDermott et al. (2007).

⁵ For an excellent discussion of a social justice youth development framework, as well as young peoples' history as organizers and as part of social movements, see Ginwright and James (2002). According to these authors, a social justice youth development framework "examines how urban youth contest, challenge, respond to, and negotiate the use and misuse of power in their lives" and is "strengthened by youth and adult allies working together with a common vision of social justice." (p. 35). Also see Rael (2009) for a discussion of New Mexico-based KUNM Community Radio's social justice youth media framework.

⁶ I want to thank Ingrid Dahl and Meghan McDermott for carefully reading and commenting on various drafts of this article.

⁷ See Downing (2001).

- ⁸ See Boyle (1997) and Halleck (2002).
- ⁹ Halleck, Dee Dee. *Hand-held Visions: The Impossible Possibilities of Community Media*. Fordham University Press: New York. 2002.
- ¹⁰ A youth media timeline is currently in construction at http://www.youthmediareporter.org/YMD_Timeline_FINAL.pdf
- ¹¹ For detailed mappings of youth media, see Dahl (2009) and Tyner (2009).
- ¹² Kunreuther et al. (2009).
- ¹³ See Coryat (2009, 2008) as well as the *Youth Media Reporter's* Global Special Features Section, Vol. 3.
- ¹⁴ Recently renamed The Open Society Foundations.
- ¹⁵ Sutnick Plotch (2006).
- ¹⁶ See *Youth Media Reporter's* Fall 2010 forthcoming issue on Funding/Investing in youth media (with support from The McCormick Foundation). Also, see Vol. I (2007) for an interview with Anna Lefer about Open Society's funding of the field for eight years.
- ¹⁷ http://www.issuelab.org/closeup/Mar_2008
- ¹⁸ <http://ymln.wikispaces.com/About+YMLN>
- ¹⁹ Dahl (2009b)
- ²⁰ Inouye (2004)
- ²¹ See <http://www.bavc.org> for more information on the case studies.
- ²² Sutnick Plotch (2006).
- ²³ Dahl (2009)
- ²⁴ See Inouye et al (2005); London et al (2004)
- ²⁵ Inouye et al., (2004)
- ²⁶ Pontecorvo et al. (2006)
- ²⁷ Sutnick-Plotch (2006)
- ²⁸ Kaufman and Albon (2010)
- ²⁹ Barrett and Leddy (2008).
- ³⁰ See Global Action Project's Media in Action Curriculum at <http://curriculum.global-action.org/>
- ³¹ Some notable examples are Global Kids (www.globalkids.org) and Open Youth Networks (www.openyouthnetworks.org).
- ³² See Brunner et al.
- ³³ The MacArthur Foundation launched its five-year, \$50 million digital media and learning initiative in 2006 to help determine how digital technologies are changing the way young people learn, play, socialize, and participate in civic life. See *The MacArthur Series on Digital Media and Learning*, a series of volumes published by MIT Press in December 2007 that explore core issues facing young people in the digital world. <http://digitalllearning.macfound.org>
- ³⁴ See www.peoplesproductionhouse.org and www.global-action.org.
- ³⁵ See www.ussf2010.org
- ³⁶ See <http://www.swopblogger.org/2010/07/swop-youth-kunm-youth-radio-ussf-vids.html> (last accessed on September 1, 2010).
- ³⁷ See www.pma2010.org
- ³⁸ See <http://alliedmedia.org/> (last accessed on September 1, 2010).
- ³⁹ Levins Morales, Ricardo. Float Like a Butterfly, Sting Like a Bee: A Political Ecology of Change. Friday, July 9, 2010. <http://www.zcommunications.org/float-like-a-butterfly-sting-like-a-bee-by-ricardo-levins-morales>. Last accessed September 1, 2010.