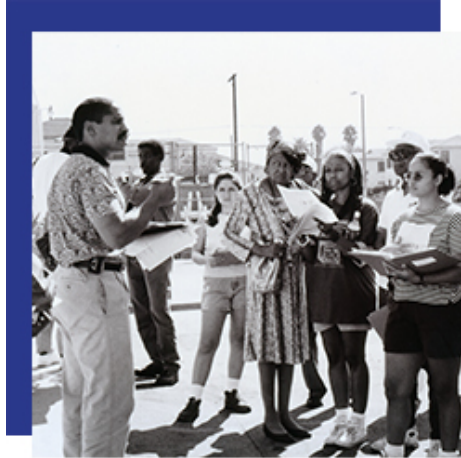


Liberty Hill's Third Decade

1996-2005

World population passes 6 billion. The Euro is released. Barbie is 40. The Dixie Chicks object to Bush. 9/11. The U.S. invades Afghanistan and Iraq.



Community Coalition campaigning against Prop 209, an anti-affirmative action measure in 1996.

As Liberty Hill grew through the still turbulent late '90s and into the new millennium, we continued to concentrate on Southern California grassroots organizing and entered a period of movement building. On one hand, thanks to years of seed-funding fledgling organizations and to a commitment to leadership training that helped empower a new generation of political leaders, Liberty Hill began to see potential for alliances and coalitions to bring groups together on larger, more complex campaigns.

On the other hand, we responded to some urgent issues by creating additional funds, each with its own well-informed Community Funding Board. **In addition to the Fund for a New Los Angeles, two new funds created in this third decade had significant lasting impacts. They were the Environmental Justice Fund, created in 1996, and the Lesbian and Gay Community Fund, brought to Liberty Hill in 2000.**

In 1997, Torie Osborn took over as Executive Director, bringing a strong connection with what was by then known as the movement for LGBT rights during a time when organizers battled homophobia to fight the AIDS epidemic in communities of color and empower youth to recognize bullying and bigotry.



An environmental justice conference in 1998.

Van Tours and Conferences

In the second half of the '90s, we started our still-popular bus and van tours that break through the L.A. widespread geography and traffic obstacles to bring donors and community organizers together. Tours typically take in several stops with on-the-bus narration from community leaders and academic experts, and on-site meetings with organization members and staff. A famous (and widely imitated) "Toxic Tour" provided an eye-opening view of low-income families living beside such pollution-emitting facilities that it wasn't safe for children to play in their own yards. A visit to One Archives shared treasures from the world's largest research library and repository of LGBTQ materials in the world. Tours in the early 2000s included one to an infamous sweatshop in El Monte, now owned by 13 of the 75 Thai migrant

women who'd been enslaved there. The workers' battle for their rights and restitution had been spearheaded by Liberty Hill grantee Asian Pacific American Legal Center of Southern California (APALC),

now Asian Americans Advancing Justice, the nation's largest legal aid and civil rights organization for Asian Pacific Islander Americans.

Liberty Hill hosted the 1998 "Progressive L.A., Past, Present and Future" conference at Occidental College in conjunction with the L.A. County Federation of Labor, L.A. Weekly, The Nation Institute, and Southern California Library for Social Studies and Research. The more than 600 participants were a Who's Who of L.A.'s diverse multi-generational progressive community, including currently newsworthy politicians such as then-State Assembly Speaker Antonio Villaraigosa, along with legendary figures such as Bert Corona, founder of Hermandad Mexicana and Alice McGrath, who worked with the Sleepy Lagoon Defense Committee. The conference's theme of coalition building was an inspiration for the creation of the Progressive Los Angeles Network (PLAN), which began linking specific campaigns especially around environmental issues.



Celia Bernstein (right) on the 1998 Toxic Tour.

Brainstorming and Building Power

In 2001, as it turned 25, Liberty Hill began bringing together representatives of organizations who'd received grants in each year's funding cycle to meet one another and the members of the community funding boards. Together, they brainstormed and discussed solutions for seemingly intractable issues.

L.A.'s community organizations, some now staffed by veterans of many campaigns, grew in sophistication and power. The Bus Riders Union of the Labor/Community Strategy Center scored a major victory with a federal consent decree forcing Metro to replace 1,800 diesel buses and add 550 cleaner natural gas buses. Today, signs on L.A. buses brag, "Nation's Largest Clean-Air Fleet." At a time when some aging schools had no working

drinking fountains, a new generation of youth leaders of Community Coalition's South Central Youth Empowered Through Action program helped secure \$1.53 million of Prop BB money to begin repairing South L.A. schools. In 1997 Liberty Hill helped to launch the Human Services Network in response to the shredding of the federal social safety net, coordinating a collaborative response with labor and religious leaders, supporting the 80-organization Los Angeles Welfare Reform Coalition. The coalition supported a study called "Los Angeles in an Era of Welfare Reform: Implications for Poor People and Community Well-Being," and distributed more than 2,000 copies to legislators, media, government agencies, community organizations and business leaders. A newsletter, "Welfare Reform Brief," was distributed and a forum was organized to present testimony from welfare recipients on the need for jobs, job training and child care to an audience that included 21 state representatives.

Environmental Justice Heats Up

A trio of almost unbelievably dramatic examples of flagrant health-destroying, even deadly, environmental depredations was successfully challenged by grassroots organizations supported by Liberty Hill during this decade. In Del Amo, East L.A. and Bell Gardens, three women led their neighbors to organize and fight back against toxic polluters. After chunks of DDT as big as bowling balls were found in her and her



Members of Homies Unidos, an organization working to end gang violence and reintegrate former gang members into their communities.

neighbors' backyards, Cynthia Babich formed the Del Amo Action Committee, organizing residents of an area that is still a Superfund site between Carson and Torrance. The group forced polluters to relocate 2,000 households, a major victory for a grassroots group. In 1998, a cluster of cancer victims and a miscarriage rate of 46% centered around Suva Elementary and Middle Schools in Bell Gardens alerted families to deadly emissions from two chrome-plating factories adjacent to the school. It took a multiyear campaign by SUVA LA/CAUSA in partnership with Communities for a Better Environment and support from Liberty Hill to clean up the toxins and strengthen emissions standards. Linda Esperanza led a campaign to clean up "La Montaña," a three-story pile of concrete debris from the Northridge earthquake. The arrogant dumping created a grotesque landscape just a few feet behind a row of houses, filling the air with particle-laden dust that sickened the people living nearby. By 1996 the group had succeeded in having the mountain removed and a new high school named for Esperanza was built on the site.



La Montaña shown behind Huntington Park homes.

In 1999, Liberty Hill started the Environmental Justice Institute. In its first year, 60 people took part in a nine-week training program. The institute then expanded to technical, hands-on training, amplifying the collective voice. This had a major influence, for instance, on the transformation of Pacoima Beautiful from a small, well-meaning neighborhood committee to a strong organization. **By 2004, our annual report pointed out that in just ten years the phrase "environmental justice" had become part of California's official language, and the California Environmental Protection Agency had become the first in the nation to formally acknowledge that communities of color are disproportionately exposed to toxics.** In fact, the head of the California EPA and staffers had taken one of Liberty Hill's "Toxic Tours."

Liberty Vote

Liberty Vote! was launched in 2004 not only to register voters for the November election, but to create long-term leadership for energizing new and infrequent voters. Liberty Hill invested \$385,000 in the campaign, which can now be seen as part of an ongoing effort in California to have voter participation keep pace with changing demographics and represent all communities.