



WE'RE HONORED TO INVITE YOU TO THE  
SEVENTH

# Southern Jam

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HELD IN PERSON AT

**PRAMA INSTITUTE | MARSHALL, NC**

**June 6-10, 2023**

Priority Deadline: April 21  
Final Deadline: May 12



# Hey there, Fellow Southerner!

With great excitement, we warmly invite you to the 2023 Southern Jam. This unique gathering will unite 25-30 dynamic and diverse Southern dreamers and changemakers. Together, we will dive into deep listening, sharing, self-discovery, systemic inquiry, and community-building in the gorgeous mountains of Marshall, North Carolina just 20 minutes outside Asheville.

For more than 30 years, YES! has brought together changemakers from around the world. This June, YES! facilitators from across the southeast are offering our seventh Southern Jam, and the first since 2018! We honor and appreciate the efforts, organizing, and collaboration of the first six Southern Jam teams, and are humbled to bring forth this offering to our communities.

We'll come together to share our challenges and breakthroughs; nurture ourselves; support and inspire each other; explore our identities; find intersections for future collaborations; and build more resilient communities and networks. In the midst of a global pandemic and global uprisings for racial justice, there is an ever-deeper calling and need for community and connection, and we are rising to the occasion, remembering that we are the ones we've been waiting for.



*"And who will join this standing up and the ones who stood without sweet company will sing and sing back into the mountains and if necessary even under the sea*



*we are the ones we have been waiting for"*  
-June Jordan

**The Southern Jam will take place from Tuesday, June 6 to Saturday, June 10, 2023.**

**Apply today at [yesworld.org/southernjam23!](https://yesworld.org/southernjam23)**



# What is a Jam?

In music, a jam is a creative, live gathering of musicians who, together, spontaneously create a new sound. Similar to that, YES! Jams are places where diverse leaders and visionaries bring together their passions, openness, and unique perspectives. In spontaneous connection, we weave layers of experience, wisdom, heart, and spirit to create some real magic. The Jam asks that all the players who are present and ready to listen deeply to each other, and together, we create something greater than we as individuals can create alone.

A lot of movement trainings are about strategy, but leave out how to build healthy relationships. Other retreats focus on personal transformation but leave out systemic change. Some trainings work on leadership and power dynamics, but forget our souls.

YES! brings all three together – we give change-makers tools to build open-hearted, healthy communities where people can be real with each other. The Jam is not a conference, seminar or typical meeting – it is something unique. It's dedicated time to think and feel deeply about transformation in our world, in our communities, and in ourselves. There are in-depth conversations and there is a lot of fun, art, and creativity. There is dancing and embodiment, group explorations, and co-creations, as well as solo time and internal reflection.



# The Jam works on 3 levels:

On the **personal level**, the Jam is a place to share and reflect on your life journey and work in the world. It is a time to replenish, recharge and renew, and to gain specific and practical tools for self-care and personal sustainability. It is also an opportunity to grow in self-knowledge, to ask meaningful questions, to unlearn our fears and blocks, and to co-create new possibilities together.

On the **interpersonal level**, we come together to share our backgrounds, our stories and our struggles, to deepen in our understanding of each other and of ourselves. During the Jam, we hope to discover our commonalities and celebrate our differences. The intention is to build trust and friendship, in a meaningful way. This means challenging stereotypes, being present with each other, speaking truth, working through tough places and being open to giving and receiving support. We feel that the more authentic our relationships are, the stronger the foundations we will have for developing new collaborations and synergies within our movements and communities.

On the **systemic level**, the Jams give us time to become clearer about our vision and work in the world. We get a chance to link issues that aren't commonly linked, to notice crucial intersection points, and get a clearer picture of the whole. We come together to learn from each other: about what is working, about what mistakes we have made, about where we need help. We have a chance to share tools and ideas to support one another. In turn, we hope this helps us to generate a body of collective wisdom for change. We also hope it will enable each participant to feel deepened in their capacity to affect meaningful positive change and carry their dreams forward.



# Facilitator + Participant

This organizing team is a new configuration of folks coming together and has a wide variety of involvement in co-organizing and co-facilitating a number of different Jams. We will be fully participating in the Jam, bringing our questions too. We don't have all the answers (or maybe any of them!). What we do offer is a variety of ways for each of us to arrive at our own answers – and new questions. We'll use a number of processes and tools and experiment with different ways of being together, all aimed at strengthening our self-awareness, our ability to communicate and work through conflicts, and our ability to vision and put these pieces together. We see the Jam as a co-learning journey of the collective experiences, questions, powers, and differences of everyone who attends.



My soul will be forever grateful for the sacred space shared during our time here. I've been reminded of how important it is to take care of self in order to care for my community and how I can show up with compassion, presence, and truth in my relationships. I'm ending this time with deep gratitude and a new found strength that will be alive in the future conflicts, struggles, and challenges. Thank you for the grounding. Thank you for seeing me. Thank you for supporting the future that I envision.

**-Denise Shante Brown, 2015 Southern Jam Alumni**

# Why the South?

**The Southeastern United States or the South is a wise and sacred land riddled with pain. This land holds the wisdom of indigenous folks who lived in symbiosis with it. It holds the wisdom brought over by enslaved Africans who built their own culture as a means for survival. This land holds the love of community and steadfast determination towards liberation for all people that Freedom Fighters of the Civil Rights Movement held so deeply. This land holds joyous acceptance towards migrants from all lands to be a part of the beloved community. This land is holding the continuation of this legacy of love and justice that southern changemakers are currently taking on.**

**This land also remembers the harm. It remembers how the indigenous folks were violently forced out. It remembers the physical, mental, and spiritual violence systemically inflicted on enslaved Africans and their descendants. It remembers and knows that the legacy of this harm is being upheld. This land of the South sees that it is being used as a political playground by those upholding the system and legacy of harm. The land sees migrants being treated less than human; the history of Black Americans being erased; body autonomy being stripped from women and queer and trans folks. The land sees its own resources being uprooted and destroyed. The land weeps.**

**With this permeation of wisdom, joy, love, symbiotic community, and the grief from harm, the South is fertile ground to birth the New South with those in conscious relationship with this land.**

# Why a Southern Jam?

The **intention** of this Southern Jam is to invite in these folks in conscious relationship with the South to deepen into themselves and explore what's there. From this exploration we invite folks to connect and build intentional community with each other and investigate together what a New South looks and feels like.

This is a **vital time** for the South as this harmful system violently lashes out with awareness of its impending death. The framework of the Southern Jam allows folks to connect with each other and the land through **our sacred breath** in order to uphold and build on the legacy of the beloved, intentional, and symbiotic community.

*"Our breathing is sacred because the energy that connects us is older than any of the structures we are unlearning and will persist beyond the imagination of this species."*

*-Alexis Pauline Gumbs*



**"Jam, you have changed my life forever! Teaching me how to fight for self-liberation, how to protect my mind with love, and how to shine my light so far. We planted a new seed together that is already growing roots in the rich black soil of the South."**

**-Ayana Clemmons-Smith, 2017 Southern Jam Alumni**

# Who's it for?

**This jam is place-based and focused on people, organizations, and communities that are based in the Southeastern US. If you feel called to attend, keep reading!**

**We seek to bring together as diverse a group of people as possible. This means we are looking for a range in:**

- **leadership (from 'person on the ground' to 'director and founder');**
- **years of experience (from 'just starting out' to 'been at it for a while');**
- **methods and venues of social engagement (entrepreneurs, NGOs, communities, families, neighborhoods, healers, philanthropists, government, etc.);**
- **issue- or work-focus (for example, community media, local economies and globalization, indigenous issues, education, food security, cultural regeneration, cultural exchange, interfaith, health and physical well-being, ecology, spiritual healing and recovering from trauma, arts, sustainable living tools and practices, political participation, socially- and ecologically-conscious building and architecture, upholding and honoring diverse forms of human dignity, etc.);**
- **place of origin and base of work (in terms of country, sub-region, locale, etc. within the south);**
- **race and ethnicity;**
- **religion and spirituality;**
- **sexual orientation and gender identity;**
- **ability;**
- **class;**
- **documentation status**

Being at a cross-roads in my life, I arrived here with a big idea, but not knowing if I had the energy or the means to achieve it. This amazing journey nourished my parched soul and gave me the inspiration and support I need to move forward with courage and confidence. Thank you!

**- Marla Durden, 2014 Southern Jam Alumni**

# Who is organizing the Jam?



**Gert Comfrey** does facilitation and healing labor at the estuary of psychotherapy, community organizing, and spiritual care. They are a therapist in private practice, as well as a Circle facilitator and continuing education trainer. They were raised in Central Pennsylvania (Susquehannock land) and have lived in the South on unceded Cherokee, Shawnee, and Yuchi land in Nashville, TN for nearly 15 years. During that time, Gert has learned from and been shaped by intersectional liberation movements including feminist, abolitionist, queer, disability justice, transformative justice, healing justice, anarchist, and anti-capitalist frameworks. To rest, Gert spends time in their garden, making art, and cuddling their cat Trouble Jane.

**Jacklyn Joy Byrd** is a somatic therapist and traumatologist based in their home community of Decatur, Georgia (Muscogee Creek land). Their research has been presented at local, national, and international conferences. Her commitment to social justice has been honored with fellowships from Global Citizen Year, Dalai Lama Fellows, and the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. Jacky's love for movement work is rooted in radical softness and savoring one-on-one connections. To stretch, they lean into group dynamics with vulnerability. When panic arises, she uses her body and 20 years of dance training to find her center. For comfort, they nap, enjoy binge-watching television, and care for their senior cat, Adele (she loves to sing!).



**Alejandro Guizar Lozano** is an Undocumented Immigrant, union member from Culiacan Sinaloa, Mexico with roots in the Appalachian city of Knoxville TN. Alejandro's community organizing journey started in 2011 when the U.S. Government unsuccessfully sought to deport Alejandro to Mexico. In those early days Alejandro participated in the first Southern Jam, leading to an internship with Elandria Williams at the Highlander Research and Education Center. Ten years of community organizing experience ranges from Senate campaigns in NC, to rural organizing in AL. Now, Alejandro currently resides in Nashville TN and seeks to find the nexus of community organizing, popular education, and providing those communities with the services they need. Alejandro spends their limited free time playing video games, taking formal classes online, working out, paying attention to his family (wife, 3 cats). Cooking and attending AA meetings.



**Patricia (Pat) Parker** is a communication professor and director of the Institute for the Arts and Humanities at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. She is a participatory researcher committed to helping to make the Beloved Community a reality. In 2007, along with her students, and girls and women in a local public housing neighborhood, she established the Ella Baker Women's Center for Leadership and Community Activism. Her 2020 book, *Ella Baker's Catalytic Leadership* grew out of that work and translates Ella Baker's philosophy and praxis into tools such as radical listening (to perceive trauma and, also, resilience), productive structural analyses (to see how oppressive power is currently reinventing itself), and catalyzing leadership (creating participative spaces for people to see their personal routes to collective power). She applies these tools in all her endeavors, including as co-chair of the University Commission on History, Race, and A Way Forward, charged with leading efforts for reckoning, healing, and repair given the legacies of white supremacy and racial violence at the founding of UNC that persist as current inequities and injustices.



**Frank (Byrd) Phoenix** is a Professional Engineer turned philanthropist. In 1999, after 24 years in the environmental business he set up a family foundation with assets from a company his grandfather started in 1917. He has served as President of the foundation ever since, supporting people and organizations working for systemic and cultural change. Today Byrd is an aspiring elder and ritualist, he strives to see the Earth through a new and ancient lens, to see the Earth and all life as sentient, Sacred Beings. And he strives to connect with the Earth and the other than human world using prayer and ritual, by connecting with the ancestors, approaching the other than human world and the ancestors with great humility and respect and a deep, deep longing for a just and more beautiful world.



**Kym Alexander** (she/her/they) is a seeker, writer, and creative. She is a management consultant focusing on results and centering race equity. She is also a native Memphian (Chickasaw and Quapaw lands), a white middle class Southern woman, a mother, a wife, and a daughter, and a list of other things that weave all through the tapestry of her life. She is lucky to have an amazing community of friends who have been instrumental in making her life rich and expansive. Attending the Southern Jam in 2017 was a huge step in a new direction for her, and inspiring significant changes since then. She dreamed of being on the team who helps midwife the experience of the Southern Jam to others in the South and cannot believe this dream is now reality. She hopes with all her being that the transformative healing of the Jam continues to pollinate and grow a New South, where white supremacy is rooted out and replaced with equity, justice, and great joy.



**George Holmes** is a Black, queer, neurodivergent Atlantan. As a young adult, their curious exploration of life has allowed them to engage deeply in their personal healing. Through various opportunities, they've been able to use their personal healing journey as a catalyst for others to explore their own healing.



Through extremely challenging yet healing moments, they have acknowledged and accepted their role as a caretaker which manifests itself in different forms. As a healer and facilitator, they have the opportunity to embody care through mindfulness. As a project coordinator, they are able to express care through organizational support of organizations dedicated to the care of frontline communities. As a way to care for themselves, they enjoy expressing themselves through music production, photography, and software development/generative art design. George's values are aligned with Black Feminist Wisdom. They are committed to justice for marginalized people and exploring ways to dismantle systematic oppression while establishing intentional community rooted in the ancestral wisdom of accountability, generosity, and love!

**Nour Elkhattaby Strauch** is a community organizer and facilitator from Casablanca, Morocco, currently living in Western Massachusetts. Nour has been organizing and facilitating YES! Jams since 2012, including the Middle East Leadership Jam, the Northeast Changemakers Jam, the Men Raised as Men Jam and others. He is now starting a new adventure as Executive Director of YES!, and hopes to continue growing the impact of this organization that works with social changemakers at the meeting point of internal, interpersonal and systemic change to co-create thriving, just and balanced ways of life for all.

Prior to moving to the U.S, Nour worked mostly in the fields of informal education, community development, human rights, peace-building and socio-economic integration of at-risk youth and women from disadvantaged neighborhoods in Casablanca. He is the former president of a youth-led NGO called Neighborhoods Association Idmaj, and was the Deputy Director of Sidi Moumen Cultural Center (since then renamed Boubker Mazoz Community Center). Nour has also worked with many other notable non-profits in Morocco and beyond including LifePath, Seeds of Peace, CorpsAfrica, Casablanca-Chicago Sister Cities, and others. He is a former member of the National Administrative Council of Amnesty International Morocco, and is currently serving on the Board of Directors for the Pioneer Valley Habitat for Humanity.



# Dates, logistics, and contribution

The Jam will be held from the afternoon of Tuesday, June 6, 2023 to the morning of Saturday, June 10, 2023. The location is Prama Institute in the beautiful Smoky Mountains of Appalachia: [prama.org](http://prama.org)

The tuition for the Jam is offered on a sliding scale of \$300-\$1200. We are working hard to make this event accessible to all people, regardless of ability to pay. If you have less access to money, feel free to pay at the low end of the scale, and if you have more access to money or resources and/or you have the financial backing of an organization or institution, we invite you into class solidarity, to consider paying more so that someone else can pay less.

If you pay more than the at-cost amount for tuition, that extra amount is tax-deductible.

**Money should never be a reason not to apply:** partial scholarships are available on a limited and first-come, first-serve basis. We also invite work trades and monthly payment plans. We aim to figure out with each applicant the right combination of tuition, work trade, and scholarship that can work for you. The sooner you apply, the sooner we can mutually create a plan that works and the better your chances are of receiving a partial scholarship if you need one.

**Apply today at [yesworld.org/southernjam23](https://yesworld.org/southernjam23)!**  
**Our priority application deadline is April 21, 2023 and our final application deadline is May 12, 2023. Please feel free to contact us at [southernjam@yesworld.org](mailto:southernjam@yesworld.org) if you have any queries.**