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# Second Lines, Story Circles, and Freedom Songs: A Call and Response

Ann-Meredith Wootton  
*SIT Graduate Institute*

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**SECOND LINES, STORY CIRCLES,  
AND FREEDOM SONGS:  
A CALL AND RESPONSE**  
Ann-Meredith Wootton  
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**Abstract:**

**Community Is Survival**

In New Orleans, all the grandmothers tell the story about the live oaks. Our roots don't grow deep into the swamp, but they grow wide – weaving, growing, and binding together with all of the surrounding trees, so that when the hurricane winds come, we will not fall. Together we can stand up against the strongest Gulf force winds (and the many faces of the Cradle to Prison Pipeline) – pushing, pulling, and leaning on one another when we need – and survive to see another day.

Live oaks also carry the story tradition of being a safe haven for stranded wanderers out in the storm, who without shelter of their own, can find refuge deep within the branches of the live oaks to survive through the dark night of a hurricane. Together we bind our roots and branches together, like the Seven Sisters, and as we build community deep within one another, we also build a structural safe haven for ourselves out on the edges of the community, lost, pushed from the big house, and otherwise alone through the storm. Community is survival.

Together we can weave our collective memories of resistance across our different communities, sharing our oral histories of freedom fighters and traditions of revolt and self-determination. Through this counter narrative we can recognize and name the patterns in the fabric that binds us together.

For in the same way that oppressors attempt to divide and conquer our movements, they also strategically segregate our stories and histories in a myopic version of truth through their own eyes. The simple act of building community (breaking down imposed boundaries, our border scars of internal colonization) is a powerful act of resistance.

Therefore, throughout this narrative, rather than tell one story deeply from beginning to end, I will instead attempt to retrace the paths that bind us together and the bridges we build to unite our struggles.