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A Report on Jobs and Activism in the
African American Community



Steven C. Pitts

UC Berkeley Center for Labor Research and Education

May, 2004

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TO IMPROVE THE QUALITY OF JOBS
IN THE BLACK COMMUNITY

A Report on Jobs and Activism in the
African American Community

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May 19, 2004

Cover photo: National Union of Hospital and Health Care Employees,
1199 SEIU Archives, Kheel Center, Cornell University

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1. THERE IS A CRISIS OF BAD JOBS IN THE BLACK COMMUNITY

The typical presentation of the problem around work in the Black community is that there is an unemployment crisis. An equally important crisis facing the Black community is the crisis of bad jobs: jobs that pay poorly; jobs with few benefits; jobs that offer no protection from employer harassment; jobs whose only future is a dead-end. During the expansion of the 1990s, the U.S. economy generated a large number of these bad jobs. At the same time, persons of color received a disproportionate number of the bad jobs. Hence, the expansion of the 1990s could be characterized as a “racially polarized job expansion.” By 2000, many of the occupations, where a significant number of African Americans maintained employment, paid wages that made it difficult to sustain a family.

2. THE RESPONSE TO THESE CONDITIONS

Research indicates that a large number of organizations with African American constituencies focus on issues other than work. These groups deal with crucial concerns such as housing, environmental justice, the criminal justice system, drug counseling, and education. Most of the organizations that do have programs addressing issues of work do not attempt to improve the jobs held by Black workers. Instead, the emphasis is on the individualized provision of job readiness counseling, soft skills, and hard skills. There are some examples where organizations take up a transformative approach to bad jobs. While there are a variety of ways to transform jobs, the activities fall under two broad categories: building worker organizations to directly engage employers and enacting public policies to create labor standards in the labor market.

3. REFLECTIONS ON THE LACK OF TRANSFORMATIVE RESPONSES TO THE JOBS CRISIS

Several reasons could explain the nature of these organizational responses. One tendency of the African American freedom movement focuses upon controlling assets within Black neighborhoods. This focus leads to issues of ownership, not to changing the relationship between employee and employer. This also concentrates attention on jobs in a Black neighborhood and does not channel energies to changing the jobs that Black workers hold outside of the neighborhood. Second, the primary approach of the larger society to issues of work focuses upon the problems that individuals have as they engage the labor market and this approach tries to address these “deficiencies.” In contrast, an emphasis on the crisis of bad jobs leads to an examination of the structures of the labor market that generate bad jobs and the need to change these structures. Third, the success of the modern civil right movement led to the incorporation of African Americans into existing government agencies. Often, this incorporation resulted in the bureaucratization of activism and a shift from organizing for power to a passive client-based service provision. Fourth, an overlooked legacy of the anti-Communist hysteria of the 1940s and 1950s was the purge of individuals and organizations in the civil rights movement whose critique of segregation went beyond moral condemnation and contained an understanding of the social and economic structures that led to institutional racism. Without this broader perspective, many arenas of civil rights activism narrowed. In the context of jobs, this narrowing meant a shift from labor market structures to individual workers.

4. MECHANISMS NEEDED TO RESPOND TO THE BAD JOBS CRISIS

Fundamentally, addressing the crisis of bad jobs held by African Americans requires campaigns to directly engage employers that create bad jobs and campaigns to enact public policies that create labor standards for minimal job quality. These campaigns must be led by organizations that have the power to successfully challenge the status quo. Some mechanisms that can be strengthened to build this power include: Black caucuses within unions, labor-community alliances, new union organizing, and community-based worker organizing.

“Negroes are almost entirely a working people. There are pitifully few Negro millionaires, and few Negro employers. Our needs are identical with labor's needs—decent wages, fair working conditions, livable housing, old age security, health and welfare measures, conditions in which families can grow, have education for their children and respect in the community. That is why Negroes support labor's demands and fight laws which curb labor. That is why the labor-hater and labor-baiter is virtually always a twin-headed creature spewing anti-Negro epithets from one mouth and anti-labor propaganda from the other mouth.”

MARTIN LUTHER KING
(AFL-CIO Convention, December 1961)

PART ONE: INTRODUCTION

Martin Luther King, Jr. described the common interests that are shared by two of the United States' greatest movements for social and economic justice: the African American freedom movement and the labor movement. However, when one examines these movements at the dawn of the 21st Century, both are in dire trouble. Today, the African American freedom movement is much weaker than it was at the end of the 1960s. The mass struggles of the modern civil rights movement (1955-1970) that destroyed the institutions of legal segregation were not successful in fully dismantling institutional racism. In a similar fashion, the labor movement has lost power since its heyday. The labor movement represented 32.5% of the workforce in 1953.¹ Since then, the union density has decline to the point where in 2003, unions represent just 9.0% of private sector workers.²

This report represents the culmination of a project that was shaped by a desire to understand how these trends could be reversed. The dominant strategies employed by both movements in the past have less relevancy today, an era of corporate globalization that is qualitatively different than the era of corporate dominance that shaped the world for twenty-five years after World War II. The contemporary times have seen the growth of a job machine that creates some good jobs at the top of the wage spectrum, many bad jobs at the bottom of the wage spectrum, and few jobs in the middle. This hourglass economy has caused and been affected by the transformation of the workforce in the United States due to the immigration of peoples from Latin America, Asia, and Africa. This immigration has radically restructured relationships in labor markets and altered racial dynamics in communities. The African American freedom movement and the labor movement must view these changes as an opportunity to re-evaluate old strategies and develop new energies to meet the challenges placed before them by corporate globalization. New immigrant communities have been leading

¹Leo Troy (1983), *Union Sourcebook Membership, Structure, Finance Directory*, Table 3.63.

²U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, *Employment and Earnings*, January 2004, Table 42, www.bls.gov/cps/cpsaat42.pdf. In the public sector, unions represent 41.5% of employees.

new waves of activism. Immigrant workers have been engaged in many of the leading unionization campaigns in recent years. Immigrant workers have been in the forefront of the creation of worker centers—a community-based form of worker organization.³

In fact, it was the energy provided by immigrant worker centers that generated the immediate impulse for this project. It is an enduring principle that rights and opportunities for marginalized populations are wrested from the elites through collective struggle. However, another enduring principle is that these struggles must be guided by a concrete analysis of the specific times. Therefore, strategies, tactics, and organizational forms that were appropriate during one period might lose their efficacy during other periods. Strategies used to destroy *de jure* segregation might not be useful when institutional racism has adapted to the context of corporate globalization. Strategies used to organize large industrial factories in the 1930s, 1940s, and 1950s might not be useful to organize small firms, many of which are enmeshed in the informal economy. New times require new strategies, tactics, and organizational forms. Immigrant worker centers are an innovative response to the new conditions.

But it appeared that the creative use of community-based strategies to improve labor market outcomes which was gaining currency inside immigrant communities was not prevalent among African American communities.⁴ This observation was troublesome for two reasons. First, it is imperative that the African American freedom movement utilize all viable strategies in order to transform conditions in Black communities. Second, the very visible allocation of resources (by unions and foundations) to immigrant communities could have the effect of exacerbating tensions between African Americans and new immigrants from Latin America and Asia.⁵ The Labor Center made a decision to invest resources into this investigation of jobs and activism within the Black community with the goal of using the research to simulate a dialogue on the need for more worker organizing among African Americans.

The goal of additional organizing among Black workers reflects a key principle guiding this project. Often, the crisis around work in the African American

³The concept of worker centers will be developed more fully in a later section of the report.

⁴See Janice Fine (2004), *Immigrant Worker Centers: Building a New America at the Edge of the Dream*, for documentation of this new movement.

⁵The very visible (but by no means the only) example of these tensions occurred in Los Angeles during the 2001 mayoral election. Traditional Black leadership supported a moderate-to-conservative white candidate over a Latino candidate with stellar progressive credentials.

community is posed as the presence of a high level of unemployment. However, another key dimension to the crisis is the abundance of bad jobs held by African Americans. Bad jobs do not deliver family-sustaining wages. Bad jobs do not carry decent health benefits. Bad jobs offer few protections from the whims of discriminatory and abusive employers. Black workers hold a disproportionate number of these bad jobs. Worker organization can turn bad jobs into good jobs.

The operative hypothesis of the project was that few organizations within the Black community are actively engaged in trying to transform the jobs held by African Americans. While some groups are dealing with job training issues and many more are dealing with a variety of non-work issues (e.g., housing, education, the criminal justice system), it appeared that seldom do community-based organizations take up the challenge of turning the bad jobs that Blacks possess into good jobs.

What follows is a presentation of the findings of this investigation. Part Two documents the labor market conditions facing African Americans. Part Three discusses the responses to these conditions. Part Four looks at the role of race and class in organizing in developing a response to these conditions. Part Five discusses mechanisms to improve the responses to these conditions.

PART TWO: CONDITIONS FOR AFRICAN AMERICANS IN THE LABOR MARKET: THE CRISIS OF BAD JOBS

1. THE CHANGING ECONOMIC CONTEXT

The first twenty-five years after World War II were marked by a rise in family income and a decline in poverty and inequality. Median family income doubled between 1947 and 1973.⁶ The poverty rate for families fell by more than half between 1959 and 1973.⁷ Family income inequality measured by the ratio of income held by the richest 20% of all families compared to the poorest 20% of all families fell from 8.6 in 1947 to 7.5 in 1973.⁸ During this same time, Black family incomes more than doubled. Between 1967 and 1973, poverty rates for Black families fell by one-third⁹ and the ratio of income held by the richest 20% of all Black families compared to the poorest 20% of all Black families fell from 9.5 to 9.1.¹⁰

These measurable gains for working families reflected several factors. The United States emerged from World War II as the dominant economic power in the world. This dominance reflected both the increased productivity of the U.S. economy and this country's ability to grow at the expense of countries throughout the world. At the same time, the militancy of the U.S. labor movement during the first years following World War II forced business to share some of this wealth with

⁶Adjusted to 2001 dollars, median family income was \$20,402 in 1947 and \$41,590 in 1973. Bureau of the Census, "Historical Income Tables" Table F-5, www.census.gov/hhes/income/histinc/f05.html.

⁷The family poverty rate was 18.5% in 1959; by 1973, the rate was 8.8%. Bureau of the Census, "Historical Poverty Tables" Table 13, www.census.gov/hhes/poverty/histpov/hstpov13.html.

⁸Bureau of the Census, "Historical Income Tables-Families" Table F-2, www.census.gov/hhes/income/histinc/f02.html.

⁹Adjusted to 2001 dollars, the median family income for African Americans was \$10,864 in 1947 and \$25,086 in 1973. Bureau of the Census, "Historical Income-Families" Table F-5, *op. cit.*

¹⁰Bureau of the Census, "Historical Income Tables-Families" Table F-2, www.census.gov/hhes/income/histinc/f02.html.

labor. In addition, World War II sparked the second great migration of African Americans from the rural South to the urban areas of the North and West. This movement from agricultural areas to industrial areas brought about an increase in wages for Black migrants. This increase in living standards was further boosted by the massive assault on racial segregation by African Americans.

However, the mid 1970s saw an abrupt halt to these gains. While median income for all families grew by 103.9% during the twenty-six years following World War II, the twenty-eight years between 1973 and 2001 only grew by 23.6%.¹¹ For African American families, median income rose by 130.9% during the quarter century after World War II; from 1973 to 2001, the growth was only 33.9%.¹² This slow down in growth occurred because the technological, economic, and social forces that had supported the previous advances were overwhelmed by trends that set back working class advancement. Intensified international competition led firms to seek ways to lower labor costs and reduce worker power. Basic manufacturing industries abandoned the cities to which many African Americans had migrated; the resulting deindustrialization meant the loss of jobs that provided good wages for Blacks. These jobs paid well because they were either union jobs or jobs with non-union firms who had to pay the union standard. These declining urban areas became very inhospitable for Blacks: economically, the African American working class suffered devastatingly high unemployment; politically, African Americans gained electoral power over institutions that were increasingly either irrelevant or impotent in their region. In addition, as African Americans' employment niche in basic manufacturing crumbled, a second niche—in the public sector—began to erode. Increasingly, governments turned to privatization strategies with the resulting effect of reducing the number of good quality jobs available to Blacks.

2. AFRICAN AMERICAN ECONOMIC SITUATION SINCE 1990

A central feature of the post-industrial U.S. economy is the proliferation of bad jobs. One analysis indicates that between 1992 and 1999, 17% of the net job growth came from jobs ranked in the worst 10% based on job earnings. In

¹¹Bureau of the Census, "Historical Income Tables" Table F-5, www.census.gov/hhes/income/histinc/f05.html.

¹²*ibid.*

contrast, during the 1960s, the worst 10% of jobs contributed less than 2% of net job growth.¹³ In addition, the creation of bad jobs was accompanied by “a racially polarized job expansion”: over $\frac{3}{4}$ of the net expansion in the worst 10% of jobs went to African Americans and Latinos, while whites received $\frac{3}{4}$ of the net expansion of the best 20% of jobs.¹⁴

As a result, employment outcomes for African Americans were significantly worse than those of whites. At the beginning of the 1990s economic expansion, unemployment rates for Blacks were 12.7%; by comparison, whites had an unemployment rate of 5.9%.¹⁵ These disparities still exist when the data is focused on youth or disaggregated by gender.

The official unemployment rate examines the proportion of people who are in the labor force (working or seeking jobs) that are unemployed. Thus, it is a flawed measure because people who have stopped looking for employment are not counted. The number of these persons who are not counted is likely to be high in a community wrecked by institutional racism. A better measure of employment outcomes than the oft-used unemployment rate is the employment-population ratio. This measure looks at the proportion of the population that is employed. Using this measure, racial disparities still exist: in April, 1991, the employment-population ratio for African Americans was 59.9%; in contrast for whites, the ratio was 62.9%.¹⁶

This situation has been made worse by the nature of the economic expansion since 2001. In the twenty-eight months since the official end of the recession (December, 2001 – March, 2004), employment for African Americans over sixteen years of age has expanded by only 1.1%. In contrast, coming out of the recession of the early 1990s, employment for African Americans over sixteen years of age rose by 2.2%. (Both of these figures pale when looking at job growth after the

¹³See Erik Olin Wright and Rachel Dwyer, “The American Jobs Machine,” *Boston Review* 25(6), <http://bostonreview.mit.edu/BR25.6/contents.html>.

¹⁴See *ibid.*

¹⁵These figures are calculated from the labor force statistics derived from the Bureau of Labor Statistics' Current Population Survey, “Household Data—Table A-2. Employment status of the civilian population by race, sex, and age” (www.bls.gov). The figures for whites are regardless of ethnic background and thus non-Latino whites and Latino whites are combined. Because a larger proportion of Latinos are unemployed compared to non-Latino whites, if the white figures could be disaggregated into non-Latino whites and Latino whites, the unemployment rates for non-Latino whites would be lower than the presented data for whites. Thus, the data presented understates the actual racial disparity. The proper comparison should be between African Americans and non-Latino whites, not African Americans and whites.

¹⁶It is important to make note of the fact that these unemployment rates and employment-population ratios understate the crisis of work in the Black community because the surveys are examining the “non-institutional” population. Thus, persons that are incarcerated are not counted in this data.

recessions of the mid 1970s and early 1980s; during these expansions, these numbers were 8.4% and 13.6% respectively.¹⁷

Still, these figures describe the unemployment dimension of the jobs crisis in the Black community. It is also important to understand the crisis of bad jobs in the Black community. A bad job can be described in several ways: low wages; involuntarily working part-time; unstable hours; the lack of health benefits; the absence of dignity and due process in the workplace; poor health and safety conditions; and few opportunities for advancement. The best way to quantify the existence of a bad job is to examine the prevalence of low wage full-time employment. In 1999, 16.5% of all African Americans who worked full-time (at least 50 weeks per year; 35 hours per week, minimum) received incomes below \$15,000.¹⁸ In 2002, 7.3% of all Black families with at least one family member working full-time had incomes below the official poverty line.¹⁹

Another way to document the crisis of bad jobs in the Black community is to examine the occupations that African American workers hold. In 2000, ten occupations contain 25.7% of all Black employment in the United States (see Appendix C). Among the occupations are: nursing and home health care workers; cooks; janitors; maids; cashiers; salespersons; customer service representatives; secretaries; truck drivers; and laborers. The annual salaries in these occupations range from \$29,020 for truck drivers to \$10,335 for cashiers. In the Bay Area, the top ten occupations for African Americans contain 23.8% of all Black employment (see Appendix D). These occupations include laborers; custom service representatives; retail salespersons; secretaries; security guards; truck drivers; nurses and home health care workers; cashiers; janitors; and office clerks. Here, annual salaries range from \$31,925 for truck drivers to \$13,736 for cashiers.²⁰

¹⁷Once again, these figures are calculated from the labor force statistics derived from the Bureau of Labor Statistics' Current Population Survey, "Household Data—Table A-2. Employment status of the civilian population by race, sex, and age" (www.bls.gov). This data comes from the monthly survey of households; this is not the survey of payroll employment (derived from a survey of firms) which indicates a net job loss during the same time period. The household data was used because it can be disaggregated by race while this cannot be done with the payroll data. Regardless of the data source, the comparison over time is consistent: the change in jobs since the recession ended in November, 2001 is less than what occurred during the recoveries of the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s at a similar point in time.

¹⁸Source: U.S. Census Bureau (2000), "Table PINC-05. Work Experience in 1999—People 15 Years Old and Over by Total Money Earnings in 1999, Age, Race, Hispanic Origin and Sex" (<http://148.129.86.150:8080/macro/032000/perinc/toc.htm>).

¹⁹U.S. Census Bureau (2003), "POV06. Families by Number of Working Family Members and Family Structure" (http://ferret.bls.census.gov/macro/032003/pov/new06_000.htm).

²⁰Steven Ruggles and Matthew Sobek et al. (2003), Integrated Public Use Microdata Series: Version 3.0, Minneapolis: Historical Census Projects, University of Minnesota (<http://www.ipums.org>).

PART THREE: RESPONSE TO THESE CONDITIONS

1. INTRODUCTION

Given the bad jobs crisis, the central question that guided this investigation was: how have organizations in the Black community responded to the crisis? It was our belief that the majority of groups in the Black community are focused on issues not directly related to the crisis of bad jobs. In order to test this hypothesis, the project developed a layered investigation. First, a scan of organizations across the country was undertaken in order to establish various arenas of activism. These organizations were asked a short set of questions to ascertain the scope of their activities. Second, some of these groups were interviewed via telephone in order to gain a better grasp of the organization. Third, a similar process was undertaken in the Bay Area. Finally, four organizations were selected for site visits.

The key concern was to determine if the organizations had any programs that dealt with the area of work. Work issues defined broadly reflect the varied experiences in the arena of employment including job access, skill development, labor market outcomes (such as wages, hours, and tenure) and worker rights on the job.²¹ Since the rise of the modern civil rights movement in the mid-1950s, community activism has emphasized issues such as segregation, education, housing, police brutality, and political power. In recent years, there has been an increased focus on other issues including environmental justice, health care, and drugs. With the exception of the component of desegregation battles that moved beyond schools, housing, and public accommodations to fight employment segregation, relatively little activism concentrated on jobs.²²

²¹This emphasis on concerns surrounding jobs and employment is in contrast to concerns that emanate from life experiences in the community such as housing and education.

²²This is not to say that there was a complete absence of activism around issues of jobs. A

2. ACTIVITIES OF RESPONDENTS

In theory, the project would gather data from the universe of organizations from around the nation. Since the reality of this task was daunting, a sample of organizations was gathered from a variety of foundation sources.²³ This approach yielded 92 economic justice organizations that were thought to have a largely Black clientele. After a simple scan of this sample it was determined that 40 of these organizations were involved with a clientele that was at least 50% African American. Seventeen agreed to complete more extensive follow-up interviews. A similar approach was used to examine organizations in the Bay Area; however, in the Bay Area, the programmatic thrust was narrowed to work issues. Using a method that began with references from area AFL-CIO central labor councils and then spread to other sources, 30 were identified as organizations that had programs relating to work; of these 10 were interviewed. Data from these 10 were supplemented with the working knowledge of 10 additional organizations. These interviews provide a snapshot of how organizations responded to the crises of jobs and work in the Black community.

As expected, the organizations around the country and in the Bay Area had a very rich set of programs and activities in non-work areas. The programs focus on following arenas:

Immigration	Environmental justice
Community-based regionalism	Transportation
Housing	Tax policy
Prison industrial complex	Education
Electoral work	Youth organizing
General supportive services	Technical assistance
Leadership development	General neighborhood issues
Economic justice education	Drugs counseling
HIV counseling	Domestic violence counseling
Legal aid	Interfaith

significant trend in activism challenged the exclusionary practices of building trades and the tolerance of racist management practices by unions. In addition, many of the early attempts to unionize and win collective bargaining rights for public sector employees took on characteristics of civil rights activism due to the existence of large Black workforces.

²³The principal source of organization names was the Phoenix Fund for Workers and Communities (www.phoenixfund.org/).

What was particularly interesting was the focus on leadership development. While most of the above categories represented programs by one or two groups, ten organizations engaged in some form of leadership development (see Appendix E).

With respect to programs about work, there was a sharp difference in the programs from the set of organizations in the Bay Area and the programs from the set of organizations in the national sample. The national sample showed a more organizing approach to the job crisis; the Bay Area sample reflected a more servicing approach to the job crisis.²⁴ These differences reflect the differences in selection methodologies. The reliance on progressive foundation networks for the national sample resulted in a set of organizations that engaged the job crisis in ways that sought to empower groups of workers and transform the nature of the jobs. The reliance on local union networks for the Bay Area sample resulted in a set of organizations that took a more traditional approach to the job crisis: engaging workers to enhance their individual chances of success in the labor market.

When organizations were addressing the jobs crises, the variety of activities could be grouped into five areas (see Appendix F):

A. BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT AND JOB CREATION

A few organizations attempted to deal with the jobs crisis by assisting firms relocate in targeted communities. One organization addressed multiple goals by purchasing a housing complex from HUD and rehabilitating the units to preserve the stock of affordable housing. In the process of rehabilitation, the project created 400 jobs. Another organization engaged in business development; however, the approach was based on a worker cooperative model instead of individual entrepreneurship. In this vein, the group began a worker-owned landscaping business.

²⁴Appendix B provides more detail on these two approaches. Briefly, an “organizing” approach entails trying to develop a collective response to a situation with an end result of greater group empowerment; a “servicing” approach relies upon providing an individual some additional resources while maintaining a client-expert relationship with that individual. While these differences were sharp, this characterization does not mean that all groups in each sample reflected these tendencies. Some groups in the national sample did not have any activities around work; others took a service approach. In a similar manner, some groups in the Bay Area sample engaged the job crisis through the perspective of organizing.

B. EDUCATION AROUND WORK ISSUES

The activity of some groups around jobs focused upon broader educational issues. One group tried to expand the use of the Earned Income Tax Credit by engaging in an educational campaign so that low-income workers would be aware of the additional income that could be received after applying for the tax credit. Another group sought to use economics education to highlight the linkages between the conditions of low income in the United States and the larger processes of globalization.

C. JOB TRAINING

Several organizations were engaged in activities to promote job access through job training. Some of these programs tried to develop hard skills (specific abilities to perform certain tasks) through apprenticeships. Of these apprenticeship programs, some were linked to the building trades and, consequently, fed entrants into a job pipeline that ended in a union job. Other programs did not have these union linkages. Other organizations focused on the development of soft skills (certain cultural traits or habits deemed essential for labor market success). Some of these efforts were in formal pre-apprenticeship programs; others attempted to impart these skills through less formal classes sponsored by the organizations. Other activities to promote job access included classes to help in the job search and resume writing.

D. PUBLIC POLICY ADVOCACY

Many groups addressed the issue of jobs by campaigning to transform public policy. Highlighting these efforts were participation in coalitions to pass living wage ordinances. Some groups also fought to raise the level of the minimum wage. Another target of public policy efforts was the public assistance system. Campaigns attempted to change various aspects of the system including putting additional funds into the system, ending a punitive work program, developing a viable transitional jobs program, and allowing education to count toward a recipient's work requirement. Another thrust of campaigns was to develop and enforce a variety of local hire provisions.

E. BUILDING WORKER ORGANIZATIONS

Finally, several groups did engage in worker organizing. These efforts ranged from specific organizing campaigns to strong support of organizing efforts. One group formed a worker center that served contingent workers by acting as a hiring hall and paying workers wages higher than they would receive otherwise. The same organization developed a campaign against Labor Ready, the largest employer of temporary workers in the country. Other organizations strongly supported unionization efforts among homecare workers. Finally, one group recognized the limitations of the NLRB in protecting worker rights and formed a community-based Worker Rights Board the purpose of which is to publicize campaigns for economic justice by holding public hearings on employer abuses.

3. REFLECTIONS ON THESE RESPONSES

These activities need to be highlighted, deepened, and spread throughout the country. However, the best organizing stories were rare. Many more organizations did not directly deal with work issues. While most groups saw the connections between employment issues and their focal issues (e.g., housing, crime, education, etc.), their actual practice placed the different areas of activism in separate silos. Many respondents felt that issues such as jails and housing were more pressing issues. One respondent (a tenant organizer) said that organizing around work issues was the task of unions. Another respondent indicated that worker organizing in the South was very dangerous due to the virulence of racism and, therefore, organizing energies shifted to issues such as environment justice. Another respondent felt that unions thought about work in a “narrow” sense, i.e., the quality of jobs. They said that a more pressing issue facing Blacks was obtaining any job regardless of quality. Others did not have relationships with unions that they desired. Some groups did develop job training programs but these efforts were shaped by the parameters of the government job training institutions which focus on the “deficiencies” of community residents. (One organization explicitly said that their role is to teach clients “how to work.”) As a result, these jobs programs did not have an organizing impulse. Individuals may (or may not) emerge from the pipeline; however, they do not emerge with greater collective power to deal with labor market problems that are social (and not individual).

Any attempt to respond to the crisis of bad jobs held by Black workers must grapple with the reality that relatively little energy is channeled into transforming the

quality of jobs. Several factors could account for this narrow degree of activism. First, the tendency of the African American freedom movement that stressed self-determination led to practical activity that seeks control over community institutions. Thus, in the arena of education, demands pushed for community control of school. In the arena of housing, demands pushed for more home ownership. In the arena of economic development, demands pushed for community ownership of businesses. Also, the emphasis on “the Community,” defined by physical space, led to an emphasis on the need for jobs in the neighborhood (and implicitly, ignoring those jobs held by African Americans outside of the neighborhood). At its very best, these perspectives lead to activism that seeks to transform social relations by increasing the assets held by the community. However, it does not look at the existing employer-employee relationship that most Blacks engage as workers and attempt to transform these bad jobs into good jobs.

Another explanation for the lack of transformative activism around jobs lies in the larger societal approach to work and job quality. The view that a major crisis facing Black workers is the abundance of bad jobs roots the problem in the social structure of the labor market. However, the dominant approach to labor market issues roots any problems in individual relations in the labor market: individual workers who approach the market lack certain skills.²⁵ Thus, public policy solutions attempt to address the weaknesses of workers by improving their soft skills or their hard skills. This attempt to improve the human capital of individual workers accepts as a given the type of jobs that are created by businesses and the power relationship between employer and employee; all that is done is to try to increase the probability that the individual lands in one of the “good” job slots.

A third factor that leads to this narrow approach lies in the fact that as the government was forced to respond to the pressure of the modern civil rights movement, African Americans gained access to some public positions and public resources. However, the use of these positions and resources was constrained by parameters set by the political and economic elites. Thus, some activism was incorporated and bureaucratized into public institutions that separated the

²⁵Complementing this approach, public policy also tries to develop a safety net for workers who earn low wages. Recent research by the University of California-Berkeley Center for Labor Research and Education has shown that these practices simply subsidize the creation of low-wage employment by shifting the burden to provide the income needed to live decently from the firm (through the provision of good wages and benefits) to the government (through the provision of social programs). See Carol Zabin, Arin Dube, and Ken Jacobs (2004), “The Hidden Costs of Low Wage Employment: Taxpayer-Funded Programs for the Working Poor.”

movement's organizing impulse from its servicing imperative. As a result, a great deal of energy was channeled into an array of public agencies.²⁶

Finally, another important explanation of the narrow approach to work issues in the African American community is the legacy of the anti-Communist purges of the late 1940s and early 1950s. During the 1930s and 1940s, a major tendency within the African American freedom movement linked the call to end segregation with a sharp critique of capitalism. In the 1930s, a cohort of radicals at Howard University including Ralph Bunche, Abram Harris, and E. Franklin Frazier pushed the NAACP to examine the plight of Black workers and link with the growing movement toward industrial unionism. W.E.B. DuBois called for a thriving Black economy based upon cooperative, not capitalist, relations. The National Negro Congress was formed in 1935 in an attempt to unite Black organizations around a perspective that opposed racism and economic exploitation. Numerous Black activists—from ex-Garveyites to Communists—placed their energies in the service of organizing Black workers into unions. The invasion of Ethiopia by Italy in 1935 was vigorously opposed by the Black community. What is striking in this opposition was that the basis for this solidarity with an African nation was not just a moral brotherhood based upon race, but an understanding of the common links due to the economic structures that underlay racism in America and colonialism and fascism abroad.²⁷

However, the anti-Communist hysteria rose in the late 1940s in response to the strength of the Soviet Union, anti-colonial struggles in the Third World, and labor militancy in the United States. The hysteria had its impact on civil rights activism in that calls for mass demonstrations in communities, inter-racial unionism in the workplace, and direct action against the white supremacist State were viewed as directed conspiracies from the Soviet Union. Civil rights groups distanced themselves from those activists who joined the call for desegregation with a call to

²⁶This process—whereby a mass social movement, that was challenging the State and demanding a transformation of power relationship, is incorporated into the very State that it was challenging and defusing its democratic impulse and transformative demands—replicates what happened in the labor movement. The great wave of worker organizing in the 1930s and 1940s culminated in the massive strike wave of 1946 and the formation of strong industrial unions. However, the demands for recognition of labor organizing and dignity on the job were channeled into a formalized labor relations process that stifled the mass social movement. See Nelson Lichtenstein, (2003), *The State of the Union*.

²⁷See Jonathan Holloway (2002) *Confronting the Veil* for a description of the Howard University cohort; in *Dusk of Dawn*, DuBois (1940) describes his vision for a Black cooperative commonwealth; see Ruth Needleman (2003) *Black Freedom Fighters in Steel* for a description of the histories of the early Black activists in the United Steelworkers of America; in *Race against Empire* (1997), Penny von Eschen writes of the structural basis for Black anti-colonialism.

fight economic exploitation. Unions purged themselves of leftists who had been the most vigorous supporter of anti-discrimination struggles in the workplace and within the unions. These moves meant that the modern civil rights movement that emerged in the mid 1950s was led by calls for moral justice; any critiques of structural economic inequalities were abandoned. In the arena of jobs, this meant that struggles were limited to issues of job access into previously white employment niches. Any struggles to increase worker power and transform bad jobs were largely abandoned.²⁸

²⁸Some clear exceptions to this were the Black labor caucus movement of the late 1960s and fights for unionization carried on by Black municipal workers (e.g., Memphis sanitation workers in 1968).

PART FOUR: RACE MATTERS ... CLASS MATTERS

In an attempt to push back against various efforts by conservative and liberal forces to deny the reality of structural racism in the post civil rights world, it has become commonplace to declare that “race matters.” It is clear that by most measures of social outcomes, African Americans as a group have a different set of experiences compared to those of non-Hispanic whites as a group. Beyond indices of objective factors, race still has power with respect to cultural images and symbols.

However, race matters differently as it intersects with class, gender, sexuality, age, and ethnicity. The African American elite experience race far differently than the African American working class which is still different from the racial experiences of the non-working poor African Americans. Race affects Black men differently than Black women. There has never been a monolithic Black experience. One of the major thrusts of white supremacy has been its attempt to dehumanize African Americans by denying diversity among African Americans. The yoke of rigid segregation meant that racial status determined the life chances of African Americans far more than other aspects of our identity. One result of the destruction of legal segregation has been the rising importance of class, gender, and ethnicity in the determination of social outcomes of African Americans.

Despite the differences among African Americans, political dialogue from all participants still uses the phrase “the Community.” The meaning of “the Community” varies with the perspectives and interests of those who use the term; for the most part, it refers to the vast majority of African Americans who are working class (wage and non-wage workers). Many of the problems in “the Community” that we battle have a strong class dimension. The crisis of affordable housing reflects the lack of income; the absence of good retail opportunities reflects the lack of spending power; the threat of gentrification reflects the lack of homeownership; the reliance on government services reflects the lack of earning

power in the labor market; the inequalities in the distribution of public resources reflect the lack of political power that flows from race and class positions. Therefore, a prerequisite to solving many of the problems that plague “the Community” is the accumulation of economic and political power by Black workers.

How does one build this power? Building power requires that individuals see the common threads that bind them and form organizations that have a goal to amass real power in different arenas. With respect to economic power, this power is wielded in the labor market through direct engagement with employers. Thus, there are two key questions: first, what is the “glue” that holds individuals together in their collective struggle? and second, does that group—once formed—have power in a particular labor market? Without the “glue,” individuals shall not see their interests being achieved through group struggle and the needed cohesiveness shall never be formed. Without a group having real power in a labor market, the necessary transformation of bad jobs into good jobs will never occur.

Historically, trade unions solved these problems by organizing unions along the lines of occupations and industries. Prior to the rise of mass production in the early 20th Century, many workers identified with their skill; at the same time, production was organized such that these various crafts had real power in relationship to their employer. Thus, craft unions could successfully engage their boss by controlling the supply of labor and improve their working conditions. As capitalism shifted its dominant mode of production to large industrial enterprises, many crafts worked alongside one another. In this context, individualized occupational battles had less power and successful unionism shifted from craft solidarity to industry solidarity. As unions organized firms, their ability to transform jobs depended upon their ability to organize large sections of an industry and eliminate the variation in wages across firms in a single industry.

It is important to recognize that the above models were not the only models of worker organizing during the first half of the 20th Century, just the dominant ones. In addition, because of employment stratification by race and gender, these models were most successful for white males. African Americans, Latinos, Asians, and women were excluded from most of the successful early craft unions. During the rise of industrial unionism, firms often used African Americans as strikebreakers: ghettoized into bad jobs by structural racism, some Blacks heeded the call to cross picket lines for better pay; at the same time, the racism of many white workers and their unions made many African Americans deaf to the call for

worker solidarity.²⁹ As federal labor laws were passed during the 1930s to create some protections for workers, the laws excluded domestic workers and agricultural workers—two industries which employed the bulk of African Americans.

The end of the 20th Century saw the transformation of the large industrial economic model and the influx of a new wave of immigration from Latin America, Asia, and Africa. While these changes have weakened the old basis for collective solidarity and power in the labor market, they have also generated a new surge of worker activism among the new immigrants. The extent to which the new activism has been successful in changing jobs has been dependent upon the resolution of those two key questions mentioned above. Because the United States is sharply stratified by race and ethnicity, the new immigrants are forced into group solidarity in much the same way that Jim Crow laws bound together African Americans.³⁰ Because of existing racial and ethnic stratification in the labor market, new occupational niches developed that were comprised of immigrant workers. In some cases, this concentration of one ethnic group in one occupational niche generated sufficient power to transform jobs through direct engagement with employers (e.g., the Justice for Janitors campaign). In other cases, the concentration generated sufficient power in the popular consciousness so as to influence public policy. In still other cases, the concentration has been insufficiently powerful to transform labor market conditions.

The historic 1968 struggle in Memphis of Black sanitation workers is an example of the synergy between race and labor that resulted in an improvement in job quality. In some metropolitan areas, efforts to organize security guards and homecare workers will largely be movements of African Americans. One key question is: are there occupational concentrations of Black workers such that calls for racial solidarity can result in an organization that has sufficient power to transform bad jobs into good jobs?

One interesting finding from our research is that calls for racial solidarity—"Blackness"—were rarely used as an explicit organizing/mobilizing concept. This was despite the fact that constituencies were clearly African American and the fact that racism was clearly the source of many of the problems

²⁹A heroic story in the success of the industrial union movement concerns the efforts of Black activists to insist that the interests of Black workers were better served in unions despite the racism there, and the efforts of many whites to push unions to fight discrimination.

³⁰In her forthcoming book, *Suburban Sweatshops: The Fight for Immigrant Rights*, Jennifer Gordon writes of immigrants from Central America who were on opposing sides of civil wars but found common ground in the sweatshops on Long Island.

that were being fought. Often, we were told that race was seen as inhibiting and the term “community” appeared to be a way to express notions of solidarity without direct racial appeals. One group—which was organizing a multi-racial constituency—consciously downplayed the issue of race in an attempt to find broader, “consensus” issues. At the same time, this respondent spoke of the difficulties of developing strong ties with African Americans.

The issue of using Blackness as a mobilizing force to transform jobs for African Americans is linked to the issue of the specific content of racial appeals. During the efforts to unionize the Ford Motor Company in the late 1930s and early 1940s, traditional Black leadership in Detroit urged African Americans to reject the United Auto Workers (UAW) and stay loyal to Henry Ford. This attempt to align the interests of the Black workers with their employer against other workers was driven by the ideological vision of segments of the Black elite and the concrete rewards that Ford dispensed. Often, when a minister agreed to allow the UAW to hold an informational meeting in his church, the company threatened to withhold donations and fire parishioners who worked at Ford.³¹ Today, a similar battle is taking place as Wal-Mart attempts to place its stores in urban areas. Taking advantage of the crisis of Black unemployment in inner cities and the absence of retail opportunities, Wal-Mart tries to win over segments of the Black community with promises of jobs and cheap products and strategic donations to African American groups.³²

These stories indicate that race matters but how it matters and who defines the interests of segments of the Black community is contested terrain. With respect to organizing efforts, this means that it is important to develop institutions of Black workers that allow them to define how race affects their lives and how they shall struggle to transform their lives. Without these institutions, spokespersons and elites will be successful in their attempts to define Blackness and Black goals in ways that may not actually serve the interests of the majority of African Americans.³³

³¹See August Meier and Elliott Rudwick (1979), *Black Detroit and the Rise of the UAW*, for a description of these events.

³²One important difference exists between the struggles with Ford and Wal-Mart. In the battle to unionize Ford, activists were urging that workers organize to transform jobs that they currently held. In the struggle against the Wal-Martization of urban retail, activists are asking some communities to battle when they desperately need jobs. A successful fight against the Wal-Mart model of retail has to contain a positive model for the development of good jobs.

³³Another positive lesson from the research was that some of the more vibrant groups had a strong emphasis on leadership development and an internal organizational culture that relied on the participation of its members.

“The Negro problem cannot be solved by a few of us getting to be doctors and lawyers. The best way my race can win justice is by sticking together in progressive labor unions. It would be unpardonable for Negro workers to fail to join the CIO.”

PAUL ROBESON

(Rally in Detroit for United Auto Workers' organizing drive at Ford Motor Company, 1942)

PART FIVE: MECHANISMS FOR RESPONDING TO THE CRISIS

The crisis of bad jobs held by Black workers needs to be addressed. Bad jobs can be transformed into good jobs through worker organizing and directly engaging the employer or by advocating policy changes to enact labor standards that create a floor under the labor market. Either approach requires the existence of vibrant membership-based organizations whose goal is to amass power in order to transform the economic and political arenas. The four mechanisms discussed below can be central elements in building the power necessary to affect these changes.

1. BLACK UNION CAUCUSES

Black caucuses—operating as organized forces within unions—have been in existence since Blacks have been active in unions. There was a large increase in caucuses as part of the upsurge in mass demonstrations during the modern civil rights movement.³⁴ Their mission was threefold: to fight discrimination within the workplace, to fight discrimination within the union, and to fight to improve the conditions of the Black community. While those caucuses had an oppositional edge to their activism because their existence challenged the company and the union, the incorporation of some African Americans into leadership positions—if not actual power—has changed most Black caucuses. Today, most of the caucuses are sanctioned by their international union.³⁵ Their lists of activities include some leadership development programs, youth mentoring programs,

³⁴Among the caucuses that formed during the 1960s were the National Ad Hoc Committee of Black Steelworkers, and United Black Brothers and the various Revolutionary Union Movements (RUMs) that developed in the auto industry.

³⁵The list of unions with sanctioned caucuses include the Service Employees International Union (SEIU), the International Brotherhood of Teamsters (IBT), the Laborers International Union of North America (LIUNA), and the Communication Workers of America (CWA).

and special Black History Month events. Often, the caucuses' dynamism, at best, parallels that of the parent union.

Black caucuses could play a crucial role in addressing the crisis of bad jobs in the African American community by spurring a revitalization of the labor movement and deepening the relationship between labor and the Black community. Many African American workers do not get involved in union matters because they see that the union is passive with respect to issues of racism in the workplace. As Black caucuses become advocates for racial justice in the workplace and organize unions members—of all races—to oppose acts of discrimination, the union will be infused with additional active members and their energies. These new energies would also facilitate addressing concerns of the Black neighborhoods where members reside. Specific steps toward these changes could include caucus-sponsored leadership development programs that get more African American members deeply involved in the union and specific programs that build concrete links with the Black community. As the steps are taken, the power to either directly organize workplaces or to enact better labor standards shall increase.

2. LABOR-COMMUNITY ALLIANCES

The history of relationships between the Black community and the labor movement is very contentious. The chief reason for these tensions is that the labor movement has grown and developed in a racialized environment and, given this context, its growth and development have often reinforced the racial status quo. When unions had the power to control job access or influence assignments to departments within factories, the racism of white members often led to the denial of Black employment or the segregation of Black workers in the worst departments. When unions did not control or influence jobs or job assignments, the surrender of hiring and assignment decisions to the company as part of “management prerogatives” meant that institutional racism outside of the workplace would penetrate the workplace unchallenged. When African Americans were successful in challenging hiring practices, the cherished labor principle of seniority meant that newly employed Blacks—with the least seniority—were condemned to being the last considered for many promotions but the first dismissed during layoffs. This history has resulted in extreme difficulty in forming enduring alliances between labor and the Black community.

However, these coalitions can be very fruitful for labor and the Black community as each side gains allies for their struggles.³⁶ As these alliances are strengthened, they will have the power to lend strong support to workplace organizing and engage in successful campaigns to improve labor market public policy. In addition, since union jobs are—all else being equal—better than non-union jobs, the fight against bad jobs is a fight for union jobs. In many industries (particularly the construction industry) unions have established pipelines through which job hopefuls can enter and, upon completion, gain access to a union job. Attempts to form labor-community alliances would be more productive if two realities were recognized.

First, the labor movement traditionally addresses the concerns of working people as those concerns are expressed on the job: wages and benefits; health and safety conditions; and representation. Due to a lack of resources and the narrow perspective of many unions, the non-work concerns of their members are relegated to the background. This separation of work and community has meant that often when labor engages its members in electoral issues, the suggestions of leaders are ignored.³⁷ To the extent that unions view their members as “whole workers” and address the issues that members face in the community, the ties with community are stronger and the subsequent synergy strengthens unions.³⁸

Second, labor-community alliances are typically relationships between leaders. Because the coalescing organizations often have fundamentally different interests and specific historical trajectories, these efforts are difficult. These difficulties can negatively shape activities even when the leaders of the organizations share political viewpoints. Two other approaches carry a greater probability of success compared to this top-down approach.

³⁶If successful, labor-community coalitions could be active on a range of issues, including labor campaigns for union recognition and union contracts and community campaigns for access to good jobs, criminal justice reform, and transportation equity.

³⁷In the mid-Forties, the leadership of the United Auto Workers (UAW) encouraged its members to support efforts to improve housing opportunities for Blacks in Detroit. These efforts were repeatedly rejected by white members to the point where the UAW ceased to exert major efforts in those local issues that were racially divisive. See Thomas J. Sugrue (1996), *The Origins of the Urban Crisis: Race and Inequality in Postwar Detroit*. In 2003, an estimated 40% of union members supported the recall of Governor Gray Davis despite the opposition of the recall by the leadership of the California labor movement.

³⁸See Jane McAlevey (2002), “Stamford, Connecticut, Case Study: The Whole Worker Movement” in *Teaching for Change: Popular Education and the Labor Movement* edited by Linda Delp, Miranda Outman-Kramer, Susan J. Schurman, and Kent Wong, for an example of how this approach was successfully used.

One of these methods of building alliances calls for a coming together based upon shared organizational interests, and the commonality of interests can only be known after groups work on building solid relationships. For instance, a coalition formed quickly around affordable housing may be short-lived due to short-term differences in interests between housing advocates and building trade unions. However, a coalition built slowly between the same two groups might be feasible if time is taken to build an understanding of the interests that each group possesses and the potential for common ground.³⁹

The other potentially fruitful approach calls for alliances to be built based upon overlapping memberships. This “coalition-from-below” approach posits that it would be easier for a union and a community group to come together if the two groups shared membership bases. With this method, the glue of the alliance is commonality of membership, not the relationship between two leaders. For instance, several members of a union belonging to the same church could approach their pastor requesting support for a union contract campaign. In a similar manner, several members of a union who reside in a neighborhood with severe mass transit needs could approach their union for support in the community struggle for transportation equity. The success of this approach requires that labor and community groups take a holistic view of their members: unions need to understand the community networks of their members; community groups need to understand the nature of work engaged by their members.⁴⁰

3. NEW UNION ORGANIZING

In order to change workplace conditions at one firm, the employer must be directly engaged by the affected workers. The sort of activism that results in a formal collective bargaining agreement between workers and their employers is new union organizing. While the labor movement has lost its traditional

³⁹Such a patient relationship-building process is underway in Los Angeles mediated by the UCLA Center for Labor Research and Education.

⁴⁰Two articles by Bob Bussel examine attempts by the Teamsters Local 688 in St. Louis to develop a trade union-based community activism in the 1950s and 1960s. See: “A Trade Union Oriented War on the Slums: Harold Gibbons, Ernest Calloway, and the St. Louis Teamsters in the 1960s,” *Labor History*, (2003) and “Creating Worker-Citizens: The Community Stewards Program of the St. Louis Teamsters in the 1950s” (working paper, 2003). In her dissertation research, Janice Fine discovered that the term “community unionism” was employed by Jack Conway of the United Auto Workers (UAW) and, later, the AFL-CIO’s Industrial Union Department (IUD) as he described attempts by the UAW to organize community residents. See Janice R. Fine (2003), “Community Unions in Baltimore and Long Island: Beyond the Politics of Particularism,” Appendix A, (unpublished dissertation).

stronghold in manufacturing, recent years have seen an increase in unionization in some sectors, most notably the public sector and some parts of the service sector such as homecare and building services. With respect to new union organizing and African Americans, there are union organizing efforts in sectors that have high concentrations of Black workers. African Americans are disproportionately represented in occupations such as home health care, security guards, and janitors; these are some the areas of increased union activism.

4. COMMUNITY-BASED WORKER ORGANIZING

An outgrowth of the new global economy has been a qualitative change in various institutions and norms that bind workers to firms. Workers are less attached to one firm as job tenure is shorter, internal career ladders disappear, and many functions that were previously done inside the firm have been contracted out. As a consequence, the web of labor and employment laws that was developed to deal with a labor market that was in existence immediately following World War II is ill-suited for 21st Century labor markets. In a similar fashion, many of the strategies and tactics that may have served the labor movement well in the twenty-five years following World War II have less currency today. “New times require new forms” has been a rallying cry for many labor activists seeking to reverse the steady decline in union power.⁴¹

One of the new forms that has developed is community-based worker organizing. In this approach, workers are organized based on common community characteristics such as neighborhood, race/ethnicity, or religion instead of the traditional unifying features such as a common occupation or industry. These new organizational forms have been particularly evident in the rise of the new immigrant worker center movement.⁴² Since 1992, over 130 worker centers have begun serving largely immigrant communities. While there is a great deal of diversity among these worker centers, programs are usually a combination of service provision, policy advocacy, and labor market organizing. It appears as if the movement has been successful in transforming the terms of public debate around issues of immigrant workers. In addition, the worker centers have had some success with respect to some policy issues. However, the worker centers

⁴¹Peter Olney, veteran trade union activist and Associate Director of the University of California Institute for Labor and Employment, has made this point numerous times in articles and speeches over the past several years.

⁴²Janice Fine (2004), *Immigrant Worker Centers: Building a New America at the Edge of the Dream*.

have been less successful in engaging individual employers and developing specific power in a labor market.

These efforts at generating a synergy between labor and community activism are not new. In the 1960s and 1970s, several community groups formed to deal with the exclusion of African Americans from the construction trades.⁴³ Since 1981, Black Workers for Justice (BWFJ) has used this model of community-based worker activism: fighting for worker rights in union and non-union shops and leading many community battles. In the course of their various campaigns, BWFJ has established institutions such as worker centers and annual educational schools. Currently, the organization is spearheading efforts to organize public sector workers throughout contract campaigns, organizing campaigns and state and regional coalitions.

One attraction of the immigrant worker center model is that the immigrant workforce that is its primary constituency exists in the shadow of the formal labor market and this is the strata of the labor force that is growing and is seemingly impenetrable with traditional union organizing strategies. This is similar to the situation of many African American workers who hold low-wage jobs in both the formal and underground economy. For new immigrant workers, their experiences are largely due to citizenship status and language skills; for African American workers, their assignment to the world of low-wage work reflects historical and contemporary institutional racism. While African American workers would not need the citizenship and language classes that many immigrant worker centers provide, other services could be useful, such as those provided to ex-offenders attempting to adjust after a period of incarceration and former welfare recipients adjusting to the harsh terms of welfare reform. The key to the success of any application of the immigrant worker centers model would be a focus on the work experience of these individuals, a shift from individual service delivery to collective organizing, and an ability to either engage employers or effect public policy to transform the quality of jobs that are held. As these actions are taken, the community-based worker organization will be better positioned to respond to the needs of those workers who are situated in arenas not easily suited for union organizing.

⁴³In Boston, the group was United Community Construction Workers. In Seattle, the group was United Construction Workers Association (later Northwest Labor and Employment Law Office).

APPENDIX A

EXAMPLES OF POSSIBLE FOLLOW-UP ACTIONS

UNION BLACK CAUCUSES

1. Offer leadership development programs for caucus members
2. Conduct participatory member surveys to help build caucuses
3. Form a network among area union caucuses that would focus on internal mobilization

LABOR-COMMUNITY ALLIANCES

1. Develop a labor-based community action based upon
 - a. Mapping the union membership into the community
 - b. Participatory member survey to determine
 - i. Social networks
 - ii. Community issues
2. Developing a campaign-based dialogue between local unions and community groups on a topic such as
 - a. Transportation
 - b. Education
 - c. The attack on the public sector

COMMUNITY-BASED WORKER ORGANIZING

1. Develop a legal clinic which would have the goal of gather information of low-wage Black workers through the provision of legal services concerning labor standard violations
2. Develop a campaign-based dialogue with service providers about the employment needs of their clientele. Potential service arenas to examine include:
 - a. Ex-offenders
 - b. Former welfare recipients
 - c. Youth

APPENDIX B

BACKGROUND THEORETICAL NOTES

1. SERVICING VERSUS ORGANIZING

A central characteristic of community-based worker organizing is that whether the issues are service provision, settling workplace disputes, or policy advocacy, the activism focuses upon organizing for power. Thus, “bottom-up” strategies are employed to build participatory membership organizations. This is in contrast to a narrow “servicing” approach where members are passive clients represented by staff and there is a heavy reliance on “top-down” relationships with businesses or policy makers. The notion that a path toward building power organizations can involve providing services requires a re-examination of the rigid dichotomy between servicing and organizing.⁴⁴

An organization's activities involve the life issues of a community. These issues include work-life issues such as concerns around job access, labor standards, and workplace rights and non work-life issues such as housing, education, health, public safety, small business formation, and police brutality. An organization can engage in these issues in a variety of ways. To simplify this analysis, these responses will be collapsed into two methods. A group is engaged in “**organizing**” if it engages in activity designed to increase the economic and political rights and resources of individuals and groups. In contrast, a group is engaged in “**servicing**” if it engages in activity designed to use the existing set of economic and political rights and resources.

In the context of trying to expand the political power of individuals and groups, “organizing” has both an internal and an external dimension. Internally, “organizing” manifests through a focus on membership and leadership development and organization-building (which includes developing a sound financial

⁴⁴A series of articles by Bill Fletcher and Richard Hurd examine these issues in a union context. See “Is Organizing Enough? Race, Gender, and Union Culture,” *New Labor Forum*, (2002), www.qc.edu/newlaborforum/html/6_article2.html; “Overcoming Obstacles to Transformation: Challenges on the Way to a New Unionism,” in Lowell Turner, Harry C. Katz, and Richard W. Hurd (2001), *Rekindling the Movement: Labor’s Quest for Relevance in the 21st Century*; and “Beyond the Organizing Model: the Transformation Process in Local Unions,” in Kate Bronfenbrenner, et al. eds., *Organizing to Win: New Research on Union Strategies*, (1998). Jennifer Gordon presents a nuanced view of the relationship between servicing and organizing in the context of building the Long Island-based Workplace Project in her book *Suburban Sweatshops: The Fight for Immigrant Rights*.

structure and participatory governance processes). Externally, “organizing” focuses upon building relationships with several forces including allies, power brokers, the media, and adversaries. Because of the absence of traditional “voice” mechanisms in the larger political process, mass mobilization is often the primary expression of any political power; however, there is a distinction between “mobilizing” and “organizing.”⁴⁵ Skillful use of external relationships in conjunction with a mobilization of the organization’s base can generate positive short-run results. If, however, the sound internal work is not in place, these gains will evaporate.

In addition, “organizing” and “servicing” can be done in two ways. “Organizing” may be either “top-down” or “bottom-up,” depending upon the primary methodology used to achieve success. A “top-down” approach tries to achieve success by focusing upon key decision makers (i.e., political officials, businesses); a “bottom-up” approach tries to achieve success by organizing grass-roots constituencies. “Servicing” can be provided in two ways: the process is either “expert-driven” (a “top-down” approach) or “client-driven” (a “bottom-up” approach). The “expert-driven” method tends to not create participatory organizations as members rely upon the knowledge, skills, or contacts of the provider.

2. EXPRESSIONS OF POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC VOICE AND THE TRAJECTORIES OF NEW IMMIGRANT AND AFRICAN AMERICAN EXPERIENCES

Immigrant worker centers (and other forms of community-based working-class activism) appear to be addressing important needs in the economic and political spheres of life. Issues such as language, citizenship status, and culture isolate these communities from mainstream institutions that provide mechanisms to participate in societal life. This need for avenues to project a voice in the affairs of the economy and the state is not unique to immigrant groups. What is rare is the development of single institutions that address both arenas. The expectation derived from dominant academic perspectives is that communities in the United States would develop separate institutions to address these “separate” spheres of life.

⁴⁵In a presentation of “The Algebra Project,” legendary civil rights organizer Robert Moses distinguishes between the civil rights movement’s “community mobilization traditions” and the “community organizing traditions.” See Robert Moses et al. (1989), “The Algebra Project: Organizing in the Spirit of Ella,” *Harvard Educational Review* 59 (4), pp. 423-43. Found online at: www.brothermalcolm.net/archivedsites/youth_and_education.htm.

Fine summarizes the literature concerning this separation of institutional responses to address community and workplace concerns.⁴⁶ In trying to understand why the United States working class is less engaged in politics as a class compared to the European working classes, many scholars note that at the formation of unions in Europe, political and economic avenues of expression were closed to workers. Thus, unions began to address struggles in workplaces as well as to address political concerns through identification with working class parties. A different trajectory developed in the United States. Because the franchise was extended to white males at the same time as the development of unions and because urban political machines actively sought to incorporate immigrant men, unions developed a more narrow scope. Labor organizations largely (although not exclusively) addressed workplace concerns while political parties that were not organically connected with unions addressed community concerns.

This history indicates that the institutional response to the need for economic and political voice is linked to a community's access to the traditional paths of incorporation.⁴⁷ The social, economic, and political isolation of recent immigrant groups led to the development of organizations that view these issues in holistic terms. If other groups have access to voice mechanisms, their institutional response would be different. This perspective is the basis for hypotheses concerning why community-based strategies for worker activism that are prevalent among recent immigrant groups are not common within the contemporary African American community.

The Black experience in the United States has led to a social relationship to mainstream institutions that is much different than those of recent immigrants. While *de facto* segregation still characterizes the residential and educational lives of many African Americans, one achievement of the modern civil rights movements has been the development of avenues for political voice. While African Americans are disproportionately represented in many job classifications, decades-long battles with unions have broken down many of the explicit barriers that existed earlier. These factors have shaped the modern response of African Americans to the classic need for political and economic voice.

⁴⁶See Fine, *op. cit.* Chapter 2.

⁴⁷Dorothy Sue Cobble writes of waitress unions affiliated with HERE in the first half of the 20th Century that bridged the gap between community and work issues as women were segregated on the job and denied access to political power at home. See Dorothy Sue Cobble (1991), *Dishing It Out: Waitresses and Their Unions in the Twentieth Century*.

However, if a dissimilarity exists between recent immigrants and contemporary African Americans, there may be a commonality between today's immigrants and Black participants in the Great Migrations of the 1910s and 1920s and the 1940s and 1950s. Just as the movement of recent immigrants is influenced by the push of political violence and economic devastation in their native countries and the pull of greater economic opportunity in the United States, Blacks who left the rural South were pushed by state-sanctioned violence and the collapse of the agricultural economy and pulled to urban areas by the promise of jobs.

A re-reading of this migration history begins to yield a confirmation of the hypothesis that the institutional response to the need for political and economic voice is a function of the current mechanism to express those needs.⁴⁸ In the midst of their essay which establishes that the lineage of non-violent direct action predates the Montgomery Bus Boycott of 1955-56, August Meier and Elliot Rudwick document much of the Black community activism during the Great Depression that focused on the twin concerns of jobs and desegregation.⁴⁹ Robert Korstad and Nelson Lichtenstein tell of a labor-based civil rights activism in Charlotte, North Carolina and Detroit.⁵⁰ Kimberley Phillips writes about the Future Outlook League and its organizing among the Black working-class of Cleveland.⁵¹ Rosemary Feurer writes of the organizing of the largely African American women workforce in the nutpicking industry in St. Louis during the 1930s.⁵² In their seminal study of African American life in Chicago, St. Clair Drake and Horace Cayton mention the efforts of the Negro Labor Relations League to secure more employment for Blacks.⁵³

⁴⁸ Joe William Trotter, Jr. writes about viewing the migration of Blacks from the rural South to urban areas (primarily in the Midwest and Northeast) as a proletarianization process—the making of an African American industrial working class. See *Black Milwaukee: The Making of an Industrial Proletariat: 1915-1945* (1985) and his introduction to his edited volume, *The Great Migration in Historical Perspective: New Dimensions of Race, Class, and Gender* (1991). This approach is in contrast to approaches that viewed migration through the lens of race relations or ghetto formation.

⁴⁹ See their “The Origins of Nonviolent Direct Action in Afro-American Protest: A Note on Historical Discontinuities,” in *Along the Color Line: Explorations in Black Protest*, eds. August Meier and Elliot Rudwick (1976).

⁵⁰ See Robert Korstad and Nelson Lichtenstein (1988), “Opportunities Found and Lost: Labor Radicals and the Early Civil Rights Movement,” in *The Journal of American History*.

⁵¹ See Kimberly Phillips (1999), *Alabama North: African American Migrants, Community and Working-Class Activism in Cleveland, 1915-45*.

⁵² See Rosemary Feurer (1996), “The Nutpickers Union, 1933-34: Crossing the Boundaries between Community and Workplace,” in Staughton Lynd, ed., “We Are All Leaders”: *The Alternative Unionism of the Early 1930s*.

⁵³ See St. Clair Drake and Horace Cayton (1945), *Black Metropolis: A Study of Negro Life in a Northern City*.

APPENDIX C

USA—OCCUPATIONS WITH THE LARGEST NUMBER OF BLACK WORKERS (2000)

Occupation	Average Wage
Nursing, psychiatric, and home health aides	\$18,422
Cooks	\$13,047
Janitors and building cleaners	\$17,546
Maids and housekeeping cleaners	\$13,911
Cashiers	\$10,335
Retail salespersons	\$17,279
Customer service representatives	\$22,258
Secretaries and administrative assistants	\$24,051
Driver/sales workers and truck drivers	\$29,020
Laborers and freight, stock, and material movers	\$18,360
These occupations contain 25.7% of total Black employment in the United States.	

APPENDIX D

BAY AREA—OCCUPATIONS WITH THE LARGEST NUMBER OF BLACK WORKERS (2000)

Occupation	Average Wage
Laborers and freight, stock, and material movers	\$18,775
Customer service representatives	\$27,011
Retail salespersons	\$18,237
Secretaries and administrative assistants	\$25,949
Security guards and gaming surveillance	\$20,461
Driver/sales workers and truck drivers	\$31,925
Nursing, psychiatric, and home health aides	\$23,012
Cashiers	\$13,736
Janitors and building cleaners	\$16,263
General office clerks	\$23,450
These occupations contain 23.78% of total Black employment in the Bay Area	

APPENDIX E

RESPONSE FREQUENCIES FOR NON-WORK ISSUES

Issue	Frequency
Immigration	2
Interfaith coalitions	1
Environmental justice	3
Community-based regionalism	1
Transportation	3
Housing	7
Tax policy	1
Prisons	3
Education	3
Supportive services	1
Leadership development	10
General neighborhood issues	1
Economic justice education	1
Drug abuse	1
HIV	1
Domestic violence	1
Youth organizing	2
Legal aid	1
Electoral action	2
Technical assistance	2

APPENDIX F RESPONSES FOR WORK ISSUES

Activity	Public Policy Advocacy	Job Training	Worker Organizing	Education around Work Issues	Business Development and Job Creation
Campaign against Labor Ready			X		
Economic justice education				X	
EITC educational campaign				X	
Formation of worker centers			X		
Formed cooperative landscaping businesses					X
Living wage campaigns	X				
Local hire ordinances	X				
Fighting low-wage firms with city contracts	X				
Minimum wage campaigns	X				
Organizing day laborers/contingent workers			X		
Pre-apprenticeship/apprenticeship programs		X			
Provided community jobs during the rehabilitation of a housing complex					X
Report on workplace abuses				X	
Simple job search/resume writing		X			
Soft skills development		X			
Support of homecare worker organizing			X		
Welfare reform	X				
Worker rights board in response to ineffectiveness of NLRB			X		



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