



Photos: See captions in this section.

# Economics of Equity

# Equity: The Superior Growth Model

By Sarah Treuhart, Angela Glover Blackwell,  
and Manuel Pastor

**T**he nation's economic model is broken and the problem is not just the recent downturn, as pressing and important as that may seem. Over several decades now, economic growth has slowed, racial and income inequality has spiked, and the middle class has withered. The United States needs a new strategy to bring about robust growth that is widely shared by all who live here.

The nation is undergoing a major demographic transformation, in which racial and ethnic groups excluded in the past are becoming a larger portion of the population. The new growth model must embrace these new demographics and make the necessary investment for the next generation to reach its full potential.

By 2042, a majority of the population will be people of color, which is the reason for the growing racial gap between America's oldest and youngest—whites make up 80 percent of seniors but only 54 percent of those under 18. Too many elders and decision-makers do not see themselves reflected in the next generation and they are not investing in the same educational systems and community infrastructures that enabled their own success. The racial generation gap not only puts youth of color at risk, it threatens the well-being of all children and the nation as a whole.

## Racial and Economic Inclusion Give Competitive Edge

Reducing inequality, growing the middle class, and turning today's youth into tomorrow's skilled workers and innovators is critical to restoring America's growth and competitiveness. In this time of demographic transition, our leaders must address the wide

racial disparities in educational outcomes, income, health, wealth, and employment that are dragging down the economy and holding back its potential.

## Reducing Inequality Promotes Growth

Increasingly, economists are finding that inequality is not only bad for those at the bottom of the income spectrum, but that it places everyone's economic future at risk. Recent studies suggest that inequality hinders growth and that greater economic inclusion corresponds with more robust economic growth.

## Diversity is an Overlooked Economic Asset

America's transformation into a world nation within its borders can help it connect to—and succeed in—the global economy. Diverse perspectives

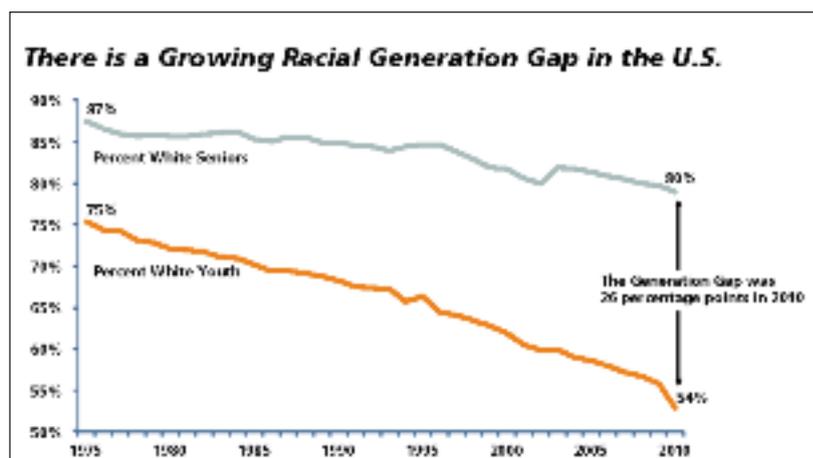


Chart:

PolicyLink/USC Program for Environmental and Regional Equity (PERE) analysis of data from the IPUMS CPS March Supplement and the 2010 Census Summary File 1, published in "America's Tomorrow: Equity is the Superior Growth Model," a PolicyLink Report.

Courtesy of PolicyLink



help solve problems better and can foster the innovation needed to grow the economy. Diverse communities also create new markets: by developing new enterprises and providing a significant consumer base for existing businesses.

### Skilled Workforce is Critical to Securing Future

The jobs of the future will require higher levels of skills and education, but our current educational and vocational systems are not adequately preparing people for those jobs. Forty-five percent of all jobs in 2018 are projected to require at least an associate's degree, but among today's workers only 27 percent of African Americans, 26 percent of U.S.-born Latinos, and 14 percent of Latino immigrants have achieved that level of education. Closing the wide and persistent racial gap in educational attainment is the key to building the strong workforce that will become the backbone of our economy.

### Implementing an Equity-Driven Growth Model

A growth model based on equity would grow new jobs and bolster long-term competitiveness while ensuring that all—especially low-income people and people of color—have the opportunity to help create and benefit from that growth. Below are three promising strategies for linking vulnerable populations to good jobs and career pathways while at the same time, strengthening their local and regional economies in three key areas:

#### 1. Rebuilding Public Infrastructure

High-quality public infrastructure—such as, roads, transit lines, schools, bridges, and sidewalks—is essential to fostering competitive regions. And public investment in infrastructure projects is one of the best ways to create jobs and get dollars flowing within the economy after a downturn. Infrastructure projects that

## The Backlash: Real and Perceived

Rapid demographic change inspires a mix of reactions—from fear and anxiety, to indifference and ambivalence, to hope and optimism. Harsh anti-immigrant laws of the past several years attest to the fear that arises when communities face a rapid influx of newcomers from distant places. The Migration Policy Institute found that the growth rate of the immigrant population was the biggest predictor of whether a locality considered restrictive immigration legislation. But a recent survey conducted by the Applied

Research Center suggests that it could be a small number of vocal pessimists who ignite fiery public debates about racial change. Most of the 2,700 survey respondents did not have strong feelings one way or the other about changing demographics, but the pessimists were the most likely to express their opinions. These survey results point to the need for a much more vocal and active majority.

There are many promising examples of multiracial organizing and coalition building. In Prince William County, Vir-

ginia, white mothers and police officers joined forces with Latino immigrants in 2007 to successfully overturn a regulation that would have required police officers to question people they had “probable cause” to believe were undocumented immigrants. Activists in Portland, Maine—a predominantly white town that has seen an influx of immigrants in the past decade, particularly African refugees—came just a few points away from passing a law to allow non-citizens to vote in local elections in 2010. ■



maximize job opportunities for the people and communities most in need of them and create opportunities for local and minority-owned businesses, promote equity and boost growth at the same time. A case in point is St. Louis, Missouri, where the Department of Transportation (at the urging of Metropolitan Congregations United and the Transportation Equity Network) agreed to devote 30 percent of the work hours on a \$500 million highway project to low-income apprentices and one half percent of the project budget to job training. Other cities and states have adopted similar workforce provisions and advocacy groups are now working to incorporate a construction careers policy in the next federal transportation bill.

## 2. Growing New Businesses and Jobs

Small businesses create two out of every three jobs in this country and are critical to providing economic opportunities for low-income and communities of color. Providing training support and linking entrepreneurs to larger-scale opportunities—in markets, sources of capital, and economic development and growth strategies—can encourage more start-ups and help existing small businesses grow, so that they generate more jobs for those who need them most. For example, since 1993, the Neighborhood Development Center in St. Paul has collaborated with community organizations to help residents start their own businesses. The center—through its seven business incubators—offers a 16-week entrepreneurship course and follows up with start-up and expansion loans, ongoing business support and technical assistance, and low-cost commercial space. Five hundred graduates are currently operating businesses, sustaining 2,200 jobs in the community.

## 3. Preparing Workers for Future Jobs

The nation needs an education and workforce training system that can equip current and future workers with the skills they need to thrive. Ensuring that all workers—including those who face high barriers to employment—can get the advanced training or education needed to access “middle-skill” jobs that pay family-supporting wages and offer career growth is critical. For low-income children who face the greatest risk of not succeeding at school or work, the preparation must begin before they enter kindergarten, and last throughout their careers. The Chambers of Commerce in Santa Ana and Los Angeles have partnered with their local school districts to bridge the growing gap between the education levels of their diverse youth populations and the needs of their employers. Santa Ana created a jointly administered high school that trains students for careers in six growth industries—automotive and transportation, engineering and construction, global business, health care, manufacturing, and new media. Los Angeles offers summer jobs and internships with thousands of employer partners.

### Wanted: The Right Movement

It will take a real social movement to bring about the social, cultural, market, and political shifts needed to create an equitable and inclusive economy. Major shifts in policy and politics are needed at every level—from local job creation to national economic policy. Bringing about those shifts will require sustained advocacy and diverse leadership that spans generations, sectors, and issues. New champions for equity-driven growth—even from the unlikely quarters—must be allowed to emerge. What is clear is that the task of creating jobs and opportunities—

Photo:

Angela Blackwell and Grace Lee Boggs at the Opening Plenary of the Equity Summit 2011, Detroit, Michigan.

Courtesy of PolicyLink



for everyone—requires the nation’s full attention. We need to begin a new national conversation about equity driven growth that is broad and open. Honest debates about how to move ahead are critical because no one group has all the problems and no one leader has all the solutions.

In order for growth and equity to come together, everyone will need to stretch out of their comfort zones. Growth advocates will have to stop viewing equity as something that trickles down from their efforts to attract and grow businesses, and start recognizing that racial and economic inclusion will help

them achieve their primary goals of growth and competitiveness. Equity advocates, who have traditionally focused on how the benefits

of growth are divvied up, will have to concentrate more on generating job growth and choose strategies that work with market forces to reach their equity goals.

As the country grows ever closer to becoming a people-of-color majority nation, we must act quickly to prepare for the new future. Equity is the superior growth model which holds the promise of prosperity—for all. ■

## Young Workers at Risk

Today’s young workers will form the backbone of the next economy but the newest entrants to the world of work have been particularly hard hit by the economic crisis and are at risk of never reaching their potential. Recent college graduates—particularly young blacks and Latinos—are struggling to find their footing in the workplace. Among college graduates under age 25, unemployment rates are 15 percent for African Americans, 14 percent for Latinos, and 9 percent for whites. Many of today’s college graduates are starting further behind than they ought to because they take positions with lower education requirements and lower salaries. This is not just a short-term setback. Entering the workforce during a recession can depress earnings for 10 to 15 years.

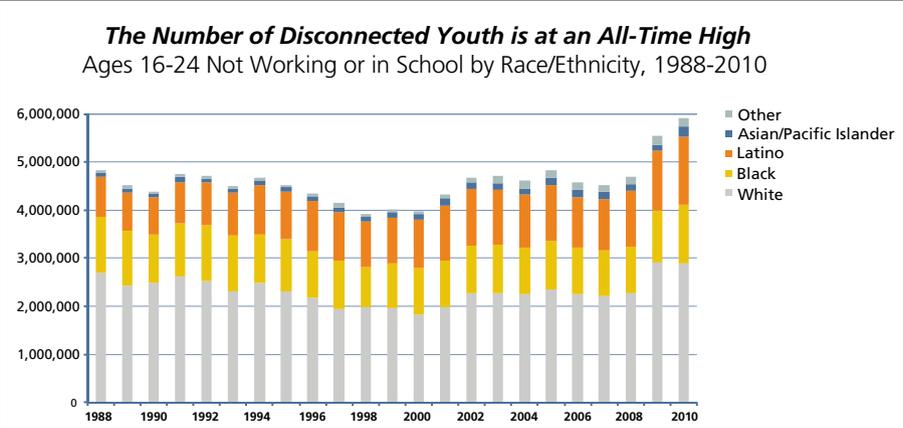
Faring much worse is the growing legion of disconnected youth. Nearly six million young

people aged 16-24 are neither working nor in school. This is both the highest absolute number and the highest share of youth that are disconnected over the entire 24-year period for which, data are available. These disconnected youth are disproportionately youth of color (51 percent), compared to 40 percent of all youth in this age group. But the fact that 49 percent are white highlights the reality that all youth are at risk. Such

high numbers of young people without jobs and options are a source of social instability—for the youth themselves, for their families, and for society. Lacking a successful work experience by the age of 25 increases the risk of lifelong poverty and disconnected youth are also more likely to end up in the criminal justice system, exacerbating an already downward-spiraling situation and imposing a host of societal costs. ■

Photo: Participants at the Opening Plenary of the Equity Summit 2011, Detroit, Michigan.

Courtesy of PolicyLink



Angela Glover Blackwell is the founder and CEO and Sarah Treuhaft is an associate director of PolicyLink. Manuel Pastor is a professor of American Studies and Ethnicity at the University of Southern California. This article is based on a report published by PolicyLink in collaboration with the University of Southern California’s Program for Environmental and Regional Equity. The full report is available at [www.policylink.org/EquityIsSuperiorGrowthModel](http://www.policylink.org/EquityIsSuperiorGrowthModel).

# The African American Jobs Crisis and the New Jim Crow

By Andy Kroll

Like the country it governs, Washington, DC is a city of extremes. The northwest section with its million-dollar homes, palatial embassies, and the lowest jobless rate in the nation is just moments away from Anacostia, a neglected neighborhood in the southeast with one of the highest unemployment rates in the U.S.

On a crisp morning last March, an angry band of protesters—most of them black—marched onto the nearby 11th Street Bridge with signs that read "D.C. JOBS FOR D.C. RESIDENTS" and "JOBS OR ELSE." They were not looking for trouble. They were looking for work. The targets of their outrage were the contractors hired to replace the very bridge under their feet. Estimated at \$300 million, it is one of the largest projects in DC history. The problem? Very few citizens of DC—meaning, very few African Americans—have been hired for the job.

"It's deplorable!" said civil rights attorney Donald Temple. "You can find men from West Virginia to work in DC. You can find men from Maryland to work in DC. And you can find men from Virginia to work in DC. But you can't find men and women from DC to work in DC."

## DC's Economic Divide Reflects Nation's Divide

The 11th Street Bridge arches over the slow-flowing Anacostia River, connecting the poverty-stricken, largely black Anacostia neighborhood with the rest of the District. On foot, the distance is small; in opportunity and wealth, it could not be greater. At one end of the bridge, the economy is booming even amidst a halting recovery and jobs crisis. At the other end, hard times are worse than ever.

The phrase, "east of the river" in DC parlance means "the other side of the tracks." It is the place that friends warn you against visiting late at night or on your own. Home to District Wards 7 and 8—neighborhoods with long, rich histories—Anacostia

used to be known as Uniontown and was one of DC's first suburbs. Frederick Douglass, nicknamed the "Sage of Anacostia," once lived there, as did the poet Ezra Pound and the singer Marvin Gaye. Today, the area's official unemployment rate is nearly 20 percent, while overall unemployment for DC is 9.8 percent, with a mere 3.6 percent for the largely white, affluent northwestern suburbs.

DC's economic divide is America's divide writ large. Nationwide, unemployment among black workers is at 16.2 percent, almost double the 9.1 percent for the rest of the population and twice the 8 percent rate for whites. According to Duke University's public policy expert William Darity, blacks are "the last to be hired in a good economy, and when there's a downturn, the first to be released." That accounts for the current soaring numbers of unemployed blacks, but it does not explain the permanent chasm between black and white employment rates—a problem that spans generations and condemns millions of blacks to a life of "scraping by."

## A 60+ Year Gap That Keeps Growing

The unchanging gap between white and black employment figures goes back at least 60 years but gets remarkably little attention on Capitol Hill or in the media. Since the 1940s, the jobless rate for blacks in America has held steady at twice that for whites but there is little agreement among economists, historians, and sociologists as to why that is so.

In his 1996 book, *When Work Disappears*, sociologist William Julius Wilson depicted the forces of

globalization, a slumping manufacturing sector, and suburban flight as the drivers of growing joblessness and poverty in America's inner cities and among its black residents. He explained the process this way:

as corporations outsourced jobs to China and India, American manufacturing began to fade, shedding jobs often held by black workers. The jobs that remained were moved to sprawling offices and factories in outlying suburbs reachable only by freeway, which made them inaccessible to most black workers who lived in the inner cities and relied on public transportation to get to work.

Time and subsequent research have eaten away the significance of Wilson's work. The hollowing-out of America's cities and the decline of domestic manufacturing no doubt played a part in black unemployment, but chronic black joblessness existed long before the upheaval Wilson describes. Even when employment in the manufacturing sector was at its peak, black workers were twice as likely to be out of work as their white counterparts.

Education is another commonly cited reason for the tenacity of black unemployment. Whites are generally better educated than blacks, the argument goes, therefore more likely to land a job at a time when a college degree matters in hiring. In 2009, President Obama told reporters that education was the key to narrowing the racial gap in the US. "If we close the achievement gap, then a big chunk of economic inequality in this society is diminished," he said.

### Education Improves Wages, Not Employment

Education levels for blacks have been steadily rising in the last 60 years. In 1940, less than 1 percent of black men and 2 percent of black women earned college degrees. In 2000, those figures were 10 percent for black men and 15 percent for black women. Education has certainly helped to narrow wage inequality between employed whites and blacks. But it has not closed the unemployment gap.

Using data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics, Algernon Austin, an economist with the Economic Policy Institute in Washington, DC, found that blacks with the same level of education as whites have consistently lower employment levels. Whether you compare

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high-school dropouts or workers with graduate degrees, whites are more likely to have a job than blacks.

Academics have thrown plenty of other explanations at the problem—declining wages, embracing crime as a way of life, increased competition with immigrants—but none have stuck because in reality, the wage gap has narrowed, crime rates have plummeted, and there is scant evidence to suggest that immigrants are stealing jobs from blacks.

"I don't know if there's anybody out there who can tell you why that ratio stays at two to one," says an exasperated Darity. "It's a statistical regularity that we don't have an explanation for."

### Prisons: Home of the Invisible Unemployed

One theory about the employment gap that deserves special attention points to the high incarceration rate among blacks—especially black men.

In 2009, 7.2 million Americans—or 3.1 percent of all adults—were under the jurisdiction of the U.S. corrections system, including 1.6 million in state or federal prison. Of that population, nearly 40 percent were black, even though blacks make up only 13 percent of the general population. In other words, blacks are six times as likely to be in prison as whites, and three times as likely as Hispanics. In the words of Michelle Alexander, author of *The New Jim Crow*, "There are more African Americans under correctional control today—in prison or jail, on probation or parole—than were enslaved in 1850, a decade before the Civil War began."

When it comes to measuring unemployment, incarceration presents a double whammy for blacks because the Labor Department does not include prison populations in its official statistics, which automatically shrinks the pool of blacks capable of working and lowers the black jobless rate. Although this phenomenon occurs among all races, the figures are particularly striking for blacks, given their overrepresentation among prison populations. In the mid-1990s, academics Bruce Western and Becky Pettit discovered that incarceration lowered the jobless rate for black men overall by 5

Photo:

11th Street Bridge  
Construction

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percent, and for young black men by 8 percent.

Even the vast incarcerated population pales in comparison to the number of ex-offenders in the U.S. old enough to work. In 2008, there were over 12 million of them, according to the Center for Economic and Policy Research (CEPR), which concludes that so many ex-cons present a serious drag on our economy—between \$57 and \$65 billion in output. But such research does not tell us why ex-cons are more likely to be out of work. For that answer, as also an explanation for black unemployment rates overall in the last 60 years, we have to turn to an eye-opening, (and in some circles, controversial) study that began 10 years ago.

### Trying Twice as Hard, Going Half as Far

In 2001, a pair of black men and a pair of white men went looking for work in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. Each was 23 years old, a local college student, bright and articulate. They looked alike and dressed alike, had identical educational backgrounds and remarkably similar past work experience, with one crucial difference: one of each pair had a criminal record. Between June and December, all four men applied for the same entry-level jobs as waiters, delivery truck drivers, cooks, and cashiers found in the Sunday classified pages of the *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel* and a state-run website called "Jobnet."

It sounds like an experiment because it was. Seeing the explosive growth of the criminal justice system—fueled largely by ill-conceived "tough on crime" policies—sociologist Devah Pager decided to look at how prison affected the growing numbers of American ex-

cons; an issue largely ignored by politicians and the judicial system.

As Pager recorded the number of responses each job applicant received it soon became apparent that a criminal history was a major deterrent to employer response—not entirely surprising. But the real telling discovery about racism and employment in America came when Pager began comparing response rates by race of applicant.

The white applicant without a criminal record had a 34 percent callback rate, which fell to 17 percent for the white applicant with a criminal record; whereas the callback rates for the black applicants were 14 percent (no record) and 5 percent (with criminal record), respectively. You read that right: in Pager's experiment, white job applicants with a criminal record got more callbacks than black applicants without a record.

"I expected to find an effect with a criminal record and some with race," Pager says. "I certainly was not expecting that result, and it was quite a surprise."

### Ex-Con Blacks Lose in All Job Markets

Pager ran a larger version of her experiment in New York City in 2004, with teams of young, educated, and identically credentialed men seeking entry-level jobs. As was the case in Milwaukee, team members alternated between playing the ex-con and the applicant without a record. Once again, Pager found that black applicants received fewer callbacks and job offers than whites. The disparity was particularly striking for ex-criminals: a 15 percent drop off rate for blacks compared to 9 percent for whites. "Employers already reluctant to hire blacks

Photo:

William Alston El, a 63-year-old native Washingtonian, and others at the 11th Street Bridge protest on March 22, in Washington, DC.

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thefightback.org

appear particularly wary of blacks with known criminal histories," wrote Pager.

Other research has supported Pager's findings. A field experiment done at the University of Chicago and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology between 2001-04, for example, uncovered a sizeable gap between employer callbacks for job applicants with white-sounding names (Emily and Greg) versus black-sounding names (Lakisha and Jamal). It also found that the benefits of a better resume were 30 percent greater for whites than blacks.

In *The Content of Our Character* (1991), Shelby Steele argued that racial discrimination no longer held back black men and women from the jobs they wanted; the problem was in their heads. Dinesh D'Souza, an Indian immigrant, similarly claimed that racial discrimination had little to do with the plight of black America in his 1995 book, *The End of Racism*.

But the findings of Pager, Harvard's Bruce Western, and other academics working with real data prove that the harmful impacts of racism's deeply embedded patterns of discrimination have barely changed in 60 years and offer a powerful antidote to the growing notion in conservative circles that discrimination is an illusion.

### Periods of Black Joblessness

A look at the history of black unemployment in America since World War II reveals two brief periods—in the 1940s and again in the late 1960s to early 1970s—when the gap between blacks and whites narrowed ever so slightly. (In 1970, for example, unemployment was at 5.8 percent for blacks and 3.3 percent for whites). It is worth examining those periods, if only to understand what was going right for blacks.

According to University of Chicago Professors William Sites and Virginia Parks, those periods were marked by a flurry of civil rights and anti-discrimination activity at the federal level. A series of actions ranging from the creation of the Fair Employment Practice Committee in 1941 to the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 (which mandated the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission), the Voting Rights Act of 1965, and the Equal Employment Opportunity Act of 1972, had "drastic impacts on

employment discrimination," write Sites and Parks. But those gains were soon wiped out, helped along by the thinning of union membership and the dwindling power of organized labor during the Reagan era.

Today, with any social legislation off the table in Washington, the prospect of closing the jobless gap between blacks and whites seems remote. It is a form of discrimination that is especially difficult to deal with, says Pager, as many employers who discriminate don't realize that they are doing so; they are simply going with their "gut feelings." Using watchdogs to crack down on discrimination is also not feasible as federal law requires the person discriminated against to raise the alarm. As William Darity of Duke University points out, it is practically impossible for a job applicant to read the mind of a person he or she does not know. Worse still, the complainant has to prove that the discrimination was intentional, which as Pager's experiments make clear, is no small feat. Under the circumstances, it is no surprise that blacks "grossly underreport their exposure to discrimination and whites grossly overreport it," according to Darity.

To fix a problem, we first have to acknowledge it—something the nation has yet to do, according to Austin. The most effective way to put blacks back to work would be to invest federal money directly into job creation, especially for black workers. "We've spent billions in trying to build jobs overseas [in war zones]," says Austin. "If we invested that money here in our cities, we wouldn't have this racial gap."

But in a Washington gripped by paralysis, where all budget discussions revolve around how much to cut, the employment crisis for blacks threatens to be a permanent one. That's how it seems to blacks in DC, especially those who live east of the river. In April, another group of protesters took to the 11th Street Bridge to demand more DC hires, and the following month, the group DC Jobs or Else ([www.dcjobsorelse.org](http://www.dcjobsorelse.org)) took their complaints to City Hall. But progress is slow. "We're being pushed out economically," said William Alston El, a 63-year-old unemployed resident. "They say it's not racism, but the name of the game is they have the money. You can't live [in] a place if you can't pay the rent." ■

*Andy Kroll is a reporter at the Washington, DC bureau of Mother Jones magazine and an associate editor at TomDispatch.*

*This article is based on one that was first published in TomDispatch.com. Adapted with permission of the author.*

# ‘Jobless Discrimination’ Against African Americans

## Mainstream Media Fail to Cover the Facts

By Nadra Kareem Nittle

With 14 million Americans out of work, the news media are reporting that discrimination against the unemployed is increasing across the country. But their stories often fail to mention the specific hurdles faced by African Americans, whose unemployment rate is more than double that of whites. While *Time* magazine, *The New York Times*, and *The Huffington Post* have all reported on this growing trend, they have not provided critical information on what recourse is available to victims of unemployment discrimination, nor cited the factors that put African Americans at greater risk than whites.

Labor and race relations experts mention the following specific challenges facing African American job seekers: (a) they encounter racial bias while job-hunting; (b) their communities have weaker job networks in place; and (c) credit checks by potential employers often work against them. The media often failed to report on these aspects of the story, which could have been included if reporters had reached out to a more diverse group of sources. The National Employment Law Project (NELP), an advocacy group that has led awareness-raising efforts about discrimination against the jobless, has the data and research to help reporters write more comprehensive stories about discrimination against the unemployed.

### Discrimination, Underreporting, Stereotyping

According to Christine Owens, NELP’s executive director, unemployed African Americans are more likely to be victims of jobless discrimination because their unemployment rate is 16.7 percent—more than twice that of whites. In a story about discrimination against the unemployed, “The Help-Wanted Sign Comes With a Frustrating Asterisk,” the *New York Times* omitted this statistic and made just one reference to unemployed African Americans.

Although the federal government does not specifically prohibit discrimination against the jobless as it does women, racial minority groups, and people with disabilities, such bias may violate civil rights laws if it

has a disparate impact on people of color.

“If an employer advertised an entry level job [that barred unemployed applicants] and in that community the Black unemployment rate was 20 percent and white unemployment rate was 10 percent, 20 percent of Blacks would be excluded from the get-go, and that could violate the civil rights law,” explained Owens.

An article in *Time* magazine entitled “Jobless Discrimination?” noted that companies accused of weeding out unemployed minority job applicants could be found guilty of racial discrimination, but it did not elaborate on the actions unemployed jobseekers of color could pursue if they experienced discrimination. Owens suggests contacting the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC).

Something else that goes largely unreported—the number of unemployed African Americans is likely to be much higher than indicated by the official unemployment rate.

“If you look at [all the] people in the last year who have given up looking for work and the people who are working part time but would rather be working full time, the [national] unemployment rate is actually 16 percent,” says Lauren Appelbaum, research director for the Institute for Research on Labor and Employment at University of California, Los Angeles. “But the official rate reported is 9.1 percent.”

It would indicate that the unemployment rate for African Americans is actually much higher than the



official 16.7 percent, as also their risk of facing jobless discrimination.

Furthermore, the reporting on joblessness does not make it clear that to be counted among the unemployed, one has to be constantly looking for work. So, the figures should indicate that many African Americans are out aggressively looking for jobs. But because the public does not understand how the government arrives at its unemployment figures, they tend to believe the negative stereotypes about African Americans who don't want to work, says Algernon Austin, director of the program on Race, Ethnicity and the Economy at the Economic Policy Institute.

"It's important to [remember] that only people actively looking for work are counted as unemployed," Austin says. "You have to have done particular things in the past four weeks that demonstrate that you're actively looking for work."

### The Unemployment Gap

Austin's research indicates that there is a gap between African American and white employment levels even after taking into account educational achievement. Moreover, foreign-born Blacks face higher rates of unemployment than foreign-born whites, and Black teens face greater unemployment than their white peers.

"High unemployment across the board for Blacks indicates that there's an element of racism to it," says Steven Pitts, a labor policy specialist at the University of California, Berkeley. He says that racism in other sectors—housing, education, and the criminal justice system—compound the difficulties African Americans face in the labor market.

Austin points out, however, that bias is not the only factor undermining African Americans looking for work. Many companies don't even advertise their openings.

"Finding a job to apply for does depend on who you know," he explains. "Do you know someone who knows of a job opening? Blacks are less likely to, and this certainly disadvantages Black workers."

The growing number of companies that check the credit histories of applicants during the hiring process

also makes African Americans more vulnerable. The jobless tend not to have stellar credit ratings because being unemployed makes it difficult to pay bills in a timely fashion. Accordingly, credit checks mostly disadvantage African American applicants as this group of job hunters is most likely to be unemployed.

"People need a good job to reestablish their credit or to put them in a place where they can maintain good credit," Austin says. "If their credit history is used to prevent them from getting a good job, it's a Catch-22."

Although the *New York Times* did mention that credit checks exacerbate discrimination against the unemployed, it failed to mention how it affected African American job-seekers disproportionately.

The media also have not touched on the role of criminal background checks. A *Huffington Post* piece, "Obama: Discrimination Against Jobless 'Makes Absolutely No Sense,'" never mentions unemployment among African Americans. According to Pitts, incarceration keeps a large number of African Americans among the ranks of the jobless.

"The media need to tell the stories behind the numbers, so you can actually get a sense of Black work life, what are people's histories in the labor markets," Pitts says. "Featuring real life experiences begins to humanize the problem." ■

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# San Francisco's Community Jobs Law Swings Into Effect

By Joshua Arce and Utuma Belfrey

**A**pproximately one year ago, Supervisor John Avalos introduced a new local hiring law, supported by the most diverse coalition of community advocates, workers, labor leaders, contractors, and policy makers that San Francisco has ever seen. (See “Wanted: Community Jobs Policy For San Francisco,” *RP&E*, Fall 2010).

The San Francisco Local Hiring Policy for Construction became law on Christmas Day, a timeline remarkably short for legislation of that scale but reflective of the historic levels of unemployment in San Francisco's low-income communities and communities of color. The law requires specified levels of employment of local residents and targeted communities on at least \$10 billion worth of public works construction over the next 10 years. It is unique in its wholesale abandonment of the concept of “good faith efforts” in favor of mandatory local hiring, and its approach in measuring outcomes within all trades, not just overall projects.

The San Francisco law is also unique in that it contains a “reciprocity agreement” provision with neighboring counties, which reflects the regional nature of the construction workforce. The law balances the need to guarantee a share of the local tax-funded public construction jobs for local residents with the goal of supporting the Bay Area economy as a whole, thus ensuring regional employment when no local jobs are available. San Francisco has already signed a reciprocity agreement with San Mateo County, assuring San Mateo residents of participation in work being done at the San Francisco Airport and on other projects.

## The Single Flaw: No PLA or CWA

We believe that local hiring works as a community development tool only when construction jobs are union jobs, based on the wages, benefits, and working condition protections that union employ-

ment brings. The one shortcoming of the San Francisco policy is that it does not include a mandatory provision for implementation through a Project Labor Agreement (PLA) or Community Workforce Agreement (CWA). Advocates spent many months last year building support among community contractors who might have reservations about their capacity to function under such an approach, but while several trades collectively bargained to craft changes to the legislation, the Building Trades Council rejected an amendment proposed by Mayor Gavin Newsom to require PLAs to implement the new policy.

## Within Six Months, Some Obvious Benefits

Six months into implementation of the law we already see signs of success:

- Our partners in labor are recruiting local apprentices to deliver targeted workers on covered public projects.
- Costs associated with the first wave of projects are coming in at or below budget on average.
- There are more opportunities, such as preparation for the America's Cup, for advancing a common community-labor agenda based on the new partnerships.

As we seek to revitalize the economy, San Francisco's local hire approach is part of an evolving nationwide dialog about how to advance the triple bottom line of environment, economy, and social equity, by building communities and a stronger labor movement ■

*Joshua Arce is executive director of Brightline Defense Project.*

*Utuma Belfrey is CEO of Sustainable Futures and a journey-level member of the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers, Local 6.*

# Public Transit and Urban Density Create More Good Jobs

By Greg LeRoy

**T**here are many reasons why public transportation and transit-oriented development should be made priorities for all metropolitan areas. For one, public transportation is the most effective way to reduce tailpipe emissions in this country. For another, the cost of owning an automobile rivals the cost of housing for low-income families. But most importantly, building transit systems creates more jobs than building roads, not to mention the fact that denser development along transit routes seems to create more jobs than the alternative, which is sprawl.

Two long-running community-labor campaigns—in Denver, Colorado and the Twin Cities area of Minnesota—provide excellent organizing models for new public transit, transit oriented development (TOD), and the creation of good jobs.

## Denver Organizes for Transit Funding and Equity

In 2003, Colorado labor leaders met privately with environmentalists to seek common ground. Relations were frayed because three years before, the Building Trades unions had recruited the Colorado AFL-CIO to help defeat a ballot initiative for smart growth. Developers had claimed that smart growth was actually “no growth in sheep’s clothing,” and there was no evidence to the contrary. But Good Jobs First, which facilitated much of the 2003 private meeting, presented fresh research showing that sprawl is actually harmful to all unions and that smart growth, done right, can greatly benefit unionized employers and union members.

The following year, the groups united and won a ballot initiative to raise the sales tax to pay for FasTracks, a large new light rail system for the eight-county Denver metro area. With 122 miles of commuter and light rail and 18 miles of bus rapid transit, it is the largest new system to be built since the Metro in Washington, DC. Its construction, which is still underway, has created thousands of work-years for Building Trades members and its operation is creating hundreds of permanent jobs for Amalgamated Transit Union members.

Soon after FasTracks got underway, FRESC for Good Jobs and Strong Communities, a nonprofit group

created by the Denver Area Labor Federation, launched the Campaign for Responsible Development with a coalition made up of affordable housing, low-income women’s advocacy, small business, and environmental groups. They pushed for and won a Community Benefits Agreement (CBA) for a large mixed-use redevelopment project undertaken by a division of Cherokee Investment Partners at the former Gates Rubber Factory site, a 70-acre brownfield situated at the intersection of three rail lines. The CBA keeps out big-box grocery stores, has the best affordable housing set-asides in Denver, extends prevailing construction wages to private structures, and has a targeted local hire program to give area residents a first crack at qualifying for the new jobs.

FRESC continues to work with community groups around newly built stations and routes yet to be constructed. Cost overruns and the need for additional public investment could mean a 20-year delay for one of the lines through an area with many transit-dependent families. Safety aboard transit and around the stations is also a key issue, as is access for disabled riders.

“With the possibility of a tax increase initiative of .04 percent going on the ballot in 2012, it is more important than ever to make sure that the people who need and will use transit the most are organized and working to ensure equitable outcomes around the train stops,” stresses FRESC organizer Aurita Apodaca. “Access to good paying jobs during construction as well as in and around the transit oriented development are also key.”



### Twin Cities Win New Transit Funding, More Stations

Transit for Livable Communities (TLC) was founded in 1996 by bus riders and rail advocates in the Twin Cities, Minnesota metro area. Targeting suburban stations with the heaviest park-and-ride usage, they built a base of more than 9,000 members and became the region's activist voice. After winning one rail line, TLC moved to broaden its base and seek dedicated funding for a larger system by forming the Transit Partners coalition, which included a large faith-based group (ISAIAH), environmental groups like the Sierra Club, seniors, policy groups, organized labor, and the Alliance for Metropolitan Stability.

In 2006, Minnesota voters dedicated motor vehicle sales tax revenue to roads and transit; the following summer, public attention was riveted on the state's crumbling transportation infrastructure when a section of Interstate 35 over the Mississippi River collapsed, killing 13 people.

In early 2008, the Minnesota legislature enacted a \$5.5 billion transportation bill (with some suburban Republicans joining Democrats to override Governor Tim Pawlenty's veto) projected to significantly increase transit ridership. About one-fifth of the revenues dedicated to expanding the light rail, commuter rail, and bus rapid transit system will be funded by a quarter-cent metro sales tax increase. Since then, organizing has focused on making the build-out equitable.

In mid-2008, shortly after funding was approved for the long-planned Central Corridor light rail line linking downtown St. Paul and Minneapolis, the Stops for Us coalition demanded three additional stations in primarily Hmong and African-American neighborhoods. Residents there faced long walks and reduced bus service if the rail line were to operate as planned. After almost two years of organizing—and with gap construction funding from local foundations—Stops for Us won an official commitment to build three additional stations on the project begun in late 2010.

### Urban Density, Public Transit Create More Good Jobs

Contrary to the claims of some developers, there is now solid evidence that urban density and public transit actually create more work for construction crafts than does sprawl.

A study by Good Jobs First—*The Jobs Are Back in Town*—contains several credible comparisons: single-family homes versus townhomes and condominiums; single-story versus multistory retail; new road rights-of-way versus maintenance/rehabilitation of existing roads (“fix it first”); and metros with growth management policies versus those without. By every measure, smart growth buildings and road contracts proved more labor-intensive, and metro areas with growth management showed higher job growth for construction workers.

Thanks to the 2009 American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, it also became possible to analyze job creation spurred by transit and highway spending. A pair of studies by Smart Growth America and two other groups examining jobs data at [www.recovery.gov](http://www.recovery.gov) found that transit spending created 84 percent (2010) and 31 percent (2011) more jobs per billion dollars than highway projects. (Admittedly, the mix of jobs differs: transit contracts create some manufacturing jobs when they are used to purchase buses or railcars.)

Neither study could address a point that many union leaders understand intuitively: public infrastructure spending, especially for transportation, stimulates private construction, and when that happens, geography matters. If building a new Interstate interchange stimulates the construction of a Walmart and office park on a former cornfield, the construction work is most likely to be non-union. But if the money is spent on cleaning up an urban brownfield and building a mixed-use project on a transit line, chances are greater that the contractor will be union and some of the permanent jobs created will also be unionized.

### Portland Benefits from Urban Density

The Portland metro area is one of America's smart growth meccas. Ringed by a state mandated Urban Growth Boundary since the 1970s, it has the nation's largest multicounty regional government (spanning Clackamas, Multnomah, and Washington counties), and transit, bicycle, and pedestrian commuting rates that far exceed national averages. The area also enjoys a high rate of unionization in the construction industry—creating good jobs with health care and retirement benefits—and faster long-term growth in construction jobs than the rest of the nation.

That Portland has both smart land use and strong construction unions is no coincidence, according to Bob Shiprack, recently retired president of the Oregon Building and Construction Trades Council and longtime state senator. Portland's downtown was depressed and the trades were weak when the Urban Growth Boundary legislation was passed. Once it had survived legal challenges, the Boundary began to spur reinvestment in downtown and later in the Pearl District with its former canneries and warehouses. The Trades successfully organized most of the work, which tended to be labor-intensive because existing structures had to be demolished and replaced or gutted and rebuilt as housing or mixed-use structures. Touring Portland with Shiprack in his pickup truck is a warm experience, as he points out building after building that was built or rebuilt by union members.

As the Portland region's leadership actively promoted density and mixed use, transit ridership grew and Portland Metro moved to augment its bus system with a downtown streetcar system. To meet the demand for streetcars, which had not been manufactured in America for several decades, Oregon Iron Works (a structural steel firm) created a new subsidiary, United Streetcar. The company's workforce is represented by the Ironworkers and the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers. Headed by CEO Chandra Brown, who already boasts of 90 percent domestic content and aspires for 100 percent, United Streetcar was lauded by American Rights at Work and the Apollo Alliance and was featured at the Blue-Green Alliance's 2011 green jobs conference. United Streetcar has also won a contract in Tucson, Arizona and is bidding elsewhere as streetcar circulators make a comeback.



### Transit Union Moves Campaigns for Jobs

Community groups seeking to defend and improve transit gained an aggressive new ally in September 2010, when the Amalgamated Transit Union (ATU) elected Larry Hanley as its international president. The former president of the ATU

local on Staten Island, Hanley is a legend in New York City transit circles for getting union members to directly fund community organizing that won service improvements—and fare cuts—in the mid 1990s. As president of ATU, he inherited a crisis with transit systems across America suffering their worst service cuts, fare hikes, and layoffs in post-war history.

Hanley immediately moved—along with Good Jobs First—to convene two transit rider-organizing “boot camps” in December 2010 and March 2011, bringing together about 100 local ATU presidents and community organizers.

“We have 200,000 members in ATU. There are 15 million people who take transit,” he points out. “Guess who has more power but is least organized?”

Hanley has also created a new Field Mobilization Department and won a big change in the union's political action fund to strongly encourage locals to build new coalitions with riders. Good Jobs First is writing a transit rider organizing manual based on best practices featured at the boot camps.

In addition to all the good jobs already created by transit construction, new job openings are expected soon in many communities as transit workers retire in droves. (Transit operators and mechanics are among the “greyest” employees in the U.S.). In anticipation, labor-management training groups, such as the Transportation Learning Center, are busy creating new hire training programs for transit agencies.

“With massive impending retirements, this green industry urgently needs interested, capable applicants, especially from the urban communities of color that depend on public transportation,” observes Center Director Brian Turner. “New national and local labor-management training partnerships are creating quality training opportunities to build the skills for thousand of new hires in the years ahead.” ■

# Transportation Equity a Key to Winning Full Civil Rights

By Lexer Quamie

**E**quity in transportation means a system that works for everyone and at many different levels. Especially in these times of high unemployment and unprecedented income inequality, transportation policy is one of the most pressing civil and human rights issues facing our nation.

The choices we make with respect to federal transportation policy have an enormous impact on our economy, our health, and our climate. But these decisions about policy and funding are rarely made in consultation with, or with consideration for the low-income people who rely so heavily on public transportation. Spending programs do not benefit all populations equally and the negative impacts of some transportation decisions—historic neighborhoods dissected by freeways, stable communities disrupted, and the transit-dependent isolated from essential services through cutbacks—are broadly felt and have long-lasting effects. The unequal allocation of resources and access to affordable transportation—often along class and racial lines—has been termed by some as “transportation apartheid.”

The struggle to end “transportation apartheid” is rooted in the civil rights movement and resistance to the infamous “separate but equal” doctrine encouraged by *Plessy v. Ferguson*. In 1953, roughly half a century after *Plessy* relegated “coloreds” to the back of the bus, blacks in Baton Rouge, Louisiana staged what historians believe to be the first bus boycott of the civil rights movement. Two years later, Rosa Parks’ arrest for refusing to give up her seat on a Montgomery city bus sparked the bus boycott that ignited the civil rights movement. Now, 50 years later, in spite of other significant social and economic gains, transportation still remains a crucial civil rights priority.

## Reauthorization Bill Presents Key Opportunity

The renewal of the nation’s federal transportation law, now under consideration in Congress, is one of the

best opportunities the country has to align the investment of hundreds of billions of transportation dollars with the goals of improving social equity and public health, protecting the environment, and strengthening local communities through economic advancement.

The transportation sector generates millions of jobs and fuels economic growth by supporting manufacturing, construction, and public transportation activities. For every \$1 billion invested in public transportation, an estimated 36,000 jobs are created; and every \$1 invested generates almost \$4 in economic benefits, according to the American Public Transportation Association’s report, “Public Transportation: Moving America Forward.”

The reauthorization bill has the potential to create hundreds of thousands of jobs in the transportation sector and related projects. It is critically important, therefore, to maximize the job-creation power of every transportation dollar spent by: (a) selecting modes of transportation that generate the most jobs; (b) incentivizing projects that locate jobs in underserved communities; and (c) vigorously enforcing equal opportunity programs and grants that target disadvantaged businesses.

Ironic as the statement may seem, more federal funds must be made available to serve the transportation needs of public transit workers. We must invest in transit options that will enable low-income people to reach a greater variety of job opportunities—including transportation projects in outlying areas.

While transportation construction can provide good-paying jobs, many job sites in growing metropolitan and suburban areas are inaccessible to urban and rural

workers without cars. As a matter of fact, jobs in car-dependent areas are disproportionately inaccessible to people of color: 19 percent of blacks and 13.7 percent of Latinos lack access to cars, compared with only 4.6 percent of whites. Transportation investment decisions of recent years—a combination of severe service cuts and fare hikes—have only made many more jobs inaccessible to low income communities and people communities of color.



### Effects on Individual and Community Health

Transportation policy that fails to consider the needs of low-income and minority communities can have extreme and cascading health consequences on those communities. Whether it is lack of physical access to health services and nutritious fresh food or levels of air pollution caused by traffic, our current transportation policy generates public health problems that disproportionately affect low-income communities and communities of color.

A car-dependent infrastructure is a barrier to health care access and poses several health hazards—ranging from asthma to obesity. Transportation policy needs to shift a portion of the investment away from new highway construction towards expanding public transportation and building bicycle- and pedestrian-friendly roads to promote greater parity in health care access, as well as to decrease health hazards, such as pollution and pedestrian fatalities. Curbing the expansion of metropolitan areas over vast distances will also result in more compact communities where non-automobile transportation options are even more efficient and attractive.

As Congress considers a reauthorization of our nation's surface transportation programs, which will allocate significant federal funds to infrastructure, civil and human rights advocates have an opportunity to advance a public health agenda by participating in the policy-making process.

### The Intersection of Housing and Transportation

When the cost of transportation is factored in, affordable housing choices usually come up less favorable than they appear to be. It is vital that civil rights advocates urge policymakers to prioritize projects that

include strategies to preserve and create affordable housing for all income levels close to public transportation and other community amenities.

In addition to focusing on the creation of livable communities with resources to support local, multi-modal transportation projects, federal transportation investments should provide station area planning grants to help communities maximize the economic potential of existing and future transportation investments; expand and/or preserve affordable housing near public transportation, quality schools, and job centers; and revitalize economically distressed areas.

To produce and preserve truly affordable housing, transportation investments must address the following: affordable alternatives to cars; reduction in transportation costs for communities with lower housing and rental costs; development of affordable housing near jobs and vice versa; desegregation on a regional or metropolitan scale, not just a local scale; and prevention of displacement of low-income people from transit-rich areas.

### Let's Invest Transportation Dollars Wisely

Today, most housing stock is not accessible by public transit nor is it located in pedestrian- or bike-friendly areas close to jobs. When families seek housing with lower rents and mortgages, they have to move to the suburbs, which raises their transportation costs. Currently, working families in the 28 largest metropolitan areas spend about 57 percent of their income on housing and transportation, with roughly 29 percent going to transportation.

Our transportation dollars have limitless potential to help our communities, as long as we make targeted and equitable investments to provide access to opportunity for all. Indeed, transportation is a key component in addressing poverty, unemployment, health, and community development needs. ■

*Lexer Quamie is a Counsel for the Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights.*

Photo:

Free MUNI Youth Pass Campaign and National Day of Action for Public Transit Funding, September 20, 2011.

©2011 Joe Feria-Galicia/Urban Habitat

# Racial Wealth Gaps Rise to Record Highs

By Rakesh Kochhar, Richard Fry and Paul Taylor

The median wealth of white households is 20 times that of African American households and 18 times that of Hispanic households, according to a Pew Research Center analysis of newly available government data from 2009.

These lopsided wealth ratios are the largest since the government began publishing such data a quarter century ago and roughly double what they used to be for the two decades preceding the Great Recession that ended in 2009.

The Pew analysis finds that, in percentage terms, the bursting of the housing market bubble in 2006 and the recession that followed took a far greater toll on the wealth of minorities than of whites. From 2005 to 2009, inflation-adjusted median wealth fell by 66 percent among Hispanic households and 53 percent among African American households, compared with just 16 percent among white households.

As a result of these declines, the real wealth (assets minus debts) of a typical African American household was just \$5,677, of a Hispanic household was \$6,325, and of a white household was \$113,149 in 2009. Moreover, about a third of African American (35 percent) and Hispanic (31 percent) households had zero or negative net worth, compared with just 15 percent of white households. In 2005, the comparable figures were 29 percent for African Americans, 23 percent for Hispanics, and 11 percent for whites.

Plummeting housing values were the principal cause of erosion in household wealth among all groups, with Hispanics being the hardest hit. Between 2005 and 2009, the median level of home equity held by Hispanics declined by half—from \$99,983 to \$49,145—and the rate of home

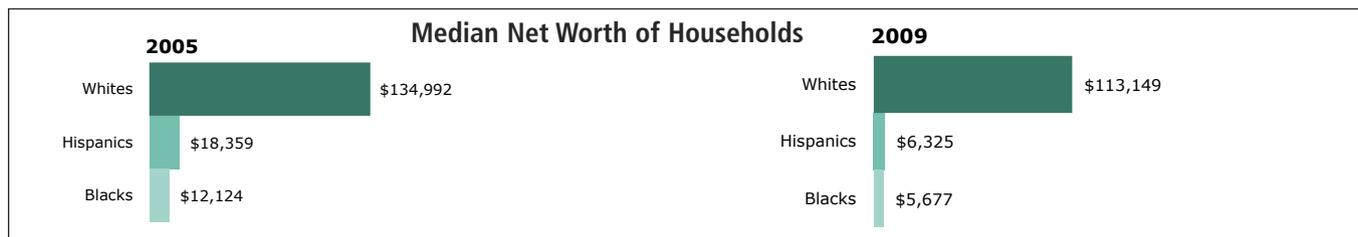
ownership fell from 51 to 47 percent. A geographic analysis reveals the reason for this: Most Hispanics live in California, Florida, Nevada, and Arizona—areas at the vanguard of the housing market bubble of the 1990s and early 2000s, which have since seen the steepest decline in values.

White and African American homeowners also saw the median value of their homes decline during this period, but not as much as Hispanics. Among whites, the decline was from \$115,364 in 2005 to \$95,000 in 2009. Among African Americans, it went from \$76,910 in 2005 to \$59,000 in 2009. There was no change during this period in the homeownership rate for whites (74 percent) and a 1 percent decline for African Americans.

The 2005 to 2009 time frame allows for a before-and-after look at the impact of the Great Recession. However, those dates do not align perfectly with the downturn, which ran from December 2007 to June 2009, according to the National Bureau of Economic Research.

Since the official end of the recession in mid-2009, the housing market has remained in a slump while the stock market has recaptured much of the value it lost from 2007 to 2009. Given that a greater number of whites than African Americans or Hispanics own stocks, mutual funds, 401(k)s, and individual retirement accounts (IRAs), the stock market rebound is likely to have benefited white households far more than minority households. ■

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Graphic: Median net worth of households, 2005 vs. 2009 (in 2009 dollars). ©2009 Pew Research Center

Rakesh Kochhar, Richard Fry, and Paul Taylor are staff members at the Pew Research Center's Social and Demographic Trends. Read the full report, including methodology at [pewsocialtrends.org](http://pewsocialtrends.org).

# Asian Pacific Islanders Made Statistically Invisible

By Diana Pei Wu

When I started to work on this story, I went looking for an article, TV show, or radio program about the effects of the economic downturn on Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders to put into context the voices from grassroots and youth organizations I had collected. I found many resources on working families, children, low-wage workers, and great infographics on gendered and racialized differences in experiences—about African Americans and Latinos!

There was one story on NPR from 2010, which mentions that APIs are out of work the longest among U.S. minorities. It weaves in the story of an unemployed API college graduate who went on vacation and chose not to work, with a quote from Kent Wong of the UCLA Labor Research and Education Center, talking about the difficulties of the economic crisis for working-class immigrants in ethnic enclaves.<sup>1</sup> It is a strange juxtaposition—almost a flip-pant comment on the distress felt by working families—and the subtext seems to be that even unemployed Asian Americans are college-educated and can go on vacation.

There is one report based on 2009 national data that shows the median household income of Asian American families with children to be nearly \$18,000 more than that of white families and more than twice that of African American and Latino families. It seems to say that Asian American household income levels have not changed significantly since 2007, while white, African American, and Latino family incomes have dropped at least 5 percent.<sup>2</sup>

Other than that, there is mostly silence on the plight of the Asian American.

## No Record of Our Downward Mobility

Where is the data that reflects the downward mobility of my parents who almost made it to the middle class about a decade ago? Or about my siblings—who have a college education or advanced degree but work service sector low-wage jobs? And what about the people they have displaced? The high school students, recent immigrants, seniors on fixed incomes, and others who used to work those low-wage service sector jobs? What is their plight? What has happened to the people like my uncle and aunt who used to work in the garment industry or the fortune cookie factories of New York when they first immigrated in the late 1980s?

Although mainstream and progressive media are largely silent or miss the mark when it comes to Asian Americans, the academic literature presents much historical data and analysis, and makes a clear case for group-specific data collection. There are

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Photo:

Southeast Asian Community Alliance (SEACA) youth meeting.

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**“These are the people that came to this foreign land to seek a life of hope. Armed with the will to persevere, they created wealth and laid the foundation for this city, but still live in the shadows of this society. They are continually exploited, often forgotten because they are immigrants or have difficulty with English, with their cries of frustration often falling on deaf ears, never getting media coverage.”**

—*The Workers Committee of the Chinese Progressive Association*<sup>3</sup>

attempts to historicize and contextualize the wealth gap and examine the effects of this depression on different Asian groups. One study explains the apparent wealth gap between Asian Americans and blacks and Latinos as being a result—at least partially—of “bifurcated immigration policies that favor the entry of highly skilled economic immigrants and their families and relatively less-educated refugees and their relatives.”<sup>4</sup> It has created two very different populations that are clumped together within the statistical-problematic census category of “Asian American.”

Since 2006, *AAPI NEXUS*, an academic journal published by the UCLA Asian American Studies Center, has repeatedly raised the issue of heterogene-

ity within the AAPI or AANHPI categories, and the importance of developing the ability to collect group-specific data.<sup>5</sup>

Two articles by Eric Tang on Southeast Asian communities in *Social Text* (2000) and *American Quarterly* (2010), offer theoretically and sociologically rich and nuanced cultural and historical analyses that critique the “culture of poverty” thesis and the idea within dominant culture and academic thought that Southeast Asians are exempt from this “culture of poverty.” Tang asserts that this “exemption” theory is yet another consequence of what Asian American movement activists, organizers, and scholars call the model minority myth.

## Doing It Ourselves:<sup>6</sup> Youth and Excluded Workers Surviving the Economic Downturn

“The silence of having others name you” —*Tu-Uyen Nguyen*

On a recent Sunday in sunny southern California, I was at a cement warehouse building adjacent to the Los Angeles River, with about a dozen youth from the nearby neighborhoods of Lincoln Heights and Chinatown. They are members of the Southeast Asian Community Alliance (SEACA) and we are at Metabolic Studios, getting ready to take off on a CicLAvia ride on bikes lent to us by the studio.

Watching the youth take off and weave around each other playfully, you would not know that they recently won a huge public victory in getting their local City Councilmember to agree to push for affordable housing in a luxury project slated for the Cornfields Arroyo Seco Plan (CASP) area. You also would not know that many of their families make less than \$1000 a month—even with two parents sometimes working 16-hour days—or that fewer than a third of the students at their schools graduate from high school.

For these students, as for most of the youth in the organizations I interviewed, their small weekly or bi-weekly stipends are an important contribution to the family’s monthly income. It is one of the reasons they can continue to participate in a youth program: their families see it as a job.

In August and September 2011, I spoke with staff from six community-based organizations that work with low-income East and Southeast Asian communities, especially youth.<sup>7</sup> Youth organizations in particular have seen their funding drop precipitously in the last two years.

Over and over again, across the country, the people I talked to expressed the sentiment that assumptions about Asian communities have led to language-specific support being cut, on top of the massive social services cuts. For communities that were struggling long before

the economic meltdown, the cuts have shredded away the systems that families had pieced together to barely make ends meet, a careful and fragile balance of resources. For some, the cuts have also meant that the hard-won ability to dream of a college education for at least one family member is now lost.

At the same time, some community organizations have been conducting participatory research of their own with the following goals in mind: (1) raise the collective consciousness of the community or at least of organizational members, (2) provide baseline information on communities that are otherwise statistically invisible to policymakers and decision-makers, and (3) generate data to use in advocating for reforms and funding. The stories elicited through these processes are deeply compelling and testify to the resilience of these communities and the organizations working within them. ■

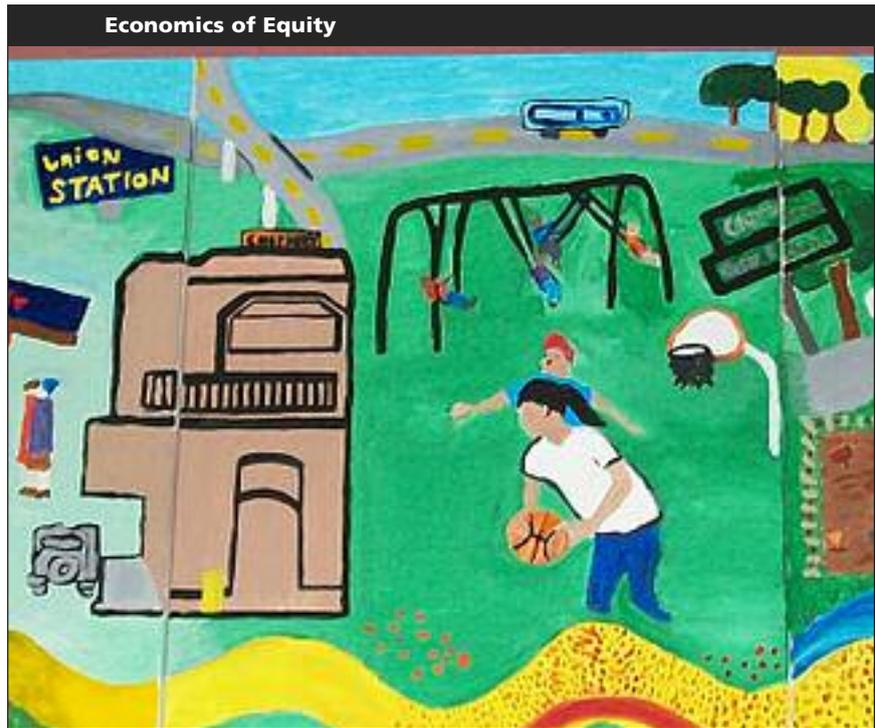
But there is little to nothing that offers information or analysis about the API communities for the last two years—in their own voices, from the point of view of community members.

Whatever the reasons for the silence in the mainstream and progressive media on the issues of Asian Americans and the economic downturn, the lack of thoughtful data and discussion makes it possible for places like Providence, RI to fire all three of their Southeast Asian language-specific social service providers while retaining 20 staff for the Spanish-speaking population. Although this has caused untold hardship for one of the largest enclaves of Khmer-speaking people in the United States, it is not uncommon for agencies to simply not provide in-language services for East and Southeast Asian communities.

On October 10, 2011, Governor Jerry Brown signed a bill (AB 1088), which requires any Califor-

nia state agency, board, or commission that currently collects demographic data to include an Asian American and Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander subgroup. It also directs the Department of Industrial Relations and the Department of Fair Employment and Housing to collect data by these subgroups and post it on the web by July 1, 2012.<sup>8</sup>

This is a major step forward in our ability to provide our sisters and brothers in the poorest communities the support they need to “flip the script” on the opportunity gap. ■



## Los Angeles Chinatown: Gateway to Gentrification

By Sissy Trinh

Chinatown is northeast of downtown LA and like so many Chinatowns across the country, it is the immigrant gateway community for new Chinese and Southeast Asian immigrants. But in the 1950s, along with parts of the predominantly Latino Eastside area, Chinatown became a victim of highway construction—gutted and divided—not unlike African American communities in the rest of the United States.

Now, most of its inhabitants are low-income recent immigrants and refugees with limited education. They

may not speak English well enough and so, are ghettoized into the restaurant and garment industries. The restaurant industry is dangerous and unscrupulous and wage theft is widespread. Garment work is seasonal—with 16-hour workdays or no work at all. Income in both industries is highly sporadic.

Many Southeast Asian immigrants have experienced severe wartime traumas but with little or no culturally appropriate social services available, most community workers are unable to gauge the depth of their traumas. In the past three years, most govern-



ment and philanthropic support has gone towards banks for dealing with foreclosures but there has been no increased funding for affordable housing, which leaves out the majority of the people that make up SEACA. For these families, things have gotten much worse.

Students are under pressure to

Photo:

(Top) SEACA students painted a three-panel mural to depict old Chinatown, present Chinatown, and their hope and vision for the future of Chinatown.

©2011 SEACA

(Bottom) Los Angeles Chinatown

Courtesy of Jon Sullivan.



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7. Southeast Asian Community Alliance (Los Angeles, CA); Asian Communities for Reproductive Justice, Asian & Pacific Islander Youth Promoting Advocacy and Leadership (Oakland, CA); Chinese Progressive Association (San Francisco, CA); Vietnamese American Young Leaders Association of New Orleans (New Orleans, LA); Providence Youth Student Movement (Providence, RI).
8. [http://leginfo.ca.gov/pub/11-12/bill/asm/ab\\_1051-1100/ab\\_1088\\_bill\\_20110916\\_enrolled.html](http://leginfo.ca.gov/pub/11-12/bill/asm/ab_1051-1100/ab_1088_bill_20110916_enrolled.html).

bring in money because they speak English and are expected to get "better" jobs. But with a 12 percent unemployment rate in Los Angeles, college grads are competing with high school students for "traditional" student jobs. Students who relied on summer school to supplement their education are unable to graduate in a timely manner because of budget cuts; nor are they able to get into community college because the competition is greater.

Forty years ago, Chinatown areas were the ghettos and slums. Now, they have become prime real estate as sub-

urbanites tired of commuting try to move back into the city center. The neighborhoods are still affordable, have a great public transportation infrastructure put in place for the low-income residents, and are usually located within a 10-minute drive from downtown. Not surprisingly, the city has started rezoning and is spending money to attract new tenants and owners. It is building parks and revitalizing the river for these folks, trying to bring in high-end restaurants and shops. It paid a developer \$52 million to build a parking lot!

There is now increased policing of

the neighborhood and harassment of the people by private security forces hired by the Business Improvement Districts (BIDs). It used to be the chamber of commerce that harassed our youth, but the chamber is mostly made up of mom and pop shops owned by Chinese immigrants, and they are being pushed out by the BID, which is controlled by outside landowners and developers. So, now we are allies with the chamber in this redevelopment fight. ■

*Sissy Trinh is executive director of the Southeast Asian Community Alliance.*

Photo:

SEACA members rally on May Day 2011.

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*Diana Pei Wu is a professor in the Liberal Studies program at Antioch University, Los Angeles, where she coordinates the undergraduate concentration in Urban Communities and Environment.*

# Challenging the Wealth Gap with New Majority Organizing

By María Poblet

San Francisco is a global city, famous for its progressive values. Some consider it a “bubble,” a wonderland beyond the reach of corporate and right wing forces. But the dirty secret behind the city’s progressive image is an economy that creates and exacerbates racial disparity, propels gentrification, and displaces whole communities.

While gentrification has pushed rents higher, wages and job opportunities for the working class have not kept up. A huge proportion of families in our community are unemployed, under-employed, or so poorly paid that they can barely make the rent each month. Their survival is replete with stories of bravery (waging a two-year letter-writing war with a relentless landlord), ingenuity (creating a bunk-bed out of wood scraps to fit a second child or ill parent into a studio apartment), and desperation (following an energy-drink-fueled routine of night shift on top of day shift on top of an on-call job). They are stories of struggling African American and Latino families heard at Causa Justa :: Just Cause in the Mission District.

At the other end of Mission Street, the towering financial district is home to the headquarters of multinational corporations, and not far from there are the pristine neighborhoods where the owners and managers of these corporations live. According to *Forbes* magazine, San Francisco has the highest number of billionaires per capita. Our state also boasts the largest number of billionaires in the country. Almost half of them are in the San Francisco Bay Area.

## Higher Taxes for Rich, Not Tighter Belts for Poor

The gap between the billionaires and the people working three jobs to survive has everything to do with race. It’s a gap that has reached new proportions nationally.

Last July, the Pew Research Center reported that the median wealth of white households is 20 times that of black households and 18 times that of Latino households. From 2005 to 2009, wealth fell by 66 percent among Latino households and 53 percent among black house-



holds, compared with just 16 percent among white households. Most of the wealth was lost in the housing market as people who defaulted on predatory loans or lost their entry-level jobs ended up losing their homes. Meanwhile, the real estate speculators who caused the housing market crisis and profited from it have managed to avoid taxation and regulation.

All too often, elected officials in our city and our state echo the baseless Regan-era idea that wealth will “trickle down” and that tax breaks for the rich will benefit working class people. But come budget time, there is simply not enough money for essential services for low-income communities of color. Politicians offer patronizing advice to the poorest in our communities about “tightening our belts!” But what we really need is to tax the wealthy and change local and state laws that are getting in the way of solving the revenue problem. In California, that means taking on Proposition 13 and reshaping our tax and fiscal policy so that it benefits the people of California and not just the corporations.

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Photo:

Filipino community-based organizers rally for social justice in downtown San Francisco.

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Brandon  
Bunolna

### Statewide Initiative for Tighter Tax Laws

California Calls is a statewide coalition with a bold strategy to take on the issue of just taxation.

“Our long term goal is to permanently close the budget gap by raising revenue and restoring California’s faith in the importance of government,” explains Esperanza Tervalon-Daumont, a member of the executive committee. “We believe a fundamental step is to address the unintended consequences of Prop 13, which has allowed big corporations to escape paying their fair share in taxes. Long term, we want to reform commercial property tax and establish a majority vote on taxes. We see 2012 as a stepping stone [in] this long term battle... through our organizing we’ll build relationships and inspire new voters and through our campaigns we’ll fight defensive battles and back revenue generating policies.”

The same may be said in regards to San Francisco. If the city does not generate revenue by taxing wealth and the wealthy, we will never have enough money to fund the crucial programs that serve our communities. “If we don’t tax the rich, we pit our communities and community-based organizations against each other in a fight for what little trickles down,” points out Myriam Zamora, longtime San Francisco resident and tenant rights counselor at Causa Justa :: Just Cause.

Why choose between meal delivery for seniors and tenant rights education? Why not think bigger and advocate for bold progressive taxation that can help us meet all of the needs in our communities? Financiers, tech developers, and green capitalists compete with each other to control land and resources in the city, knowing that San Francisco serves as their gateway to the rest of the world. Why not hold them to the progressive standards that our city is known for? Why not require them to reinvest in our communities and be responsible neighbors?

These are precisely the sort of questions being raised within the working class and low-income neighborhoods in our city and being carried all the way to city hall by a new alliance—San Francisco Rising.

### Rising to the Occasion

San Francisco Rising brings together nine community-based organizations with deep roots in the Mission, Excelsior, Chinatown, Bayview/Hunter’s Point, and Visitation Valley districts. Alliance members include: Chinese Progressive Association, Coleman Advocates for Children and Youth, Filipino Community Center, Mujeres Unidas y Activas, People Organized to Win Employment Rights

(POWER), People Organized to Demand Environmental and Economic Rights (PODER), South of Market Community Action Network (SOMCAN), and the SF Day Labor Program.

The alliance has been co-founded on a shared vision of building a coherent and politicized electorate that can shift the balance of power in our city as a whole. Tired of watching downtown call the shots, we have come together to make the voices of our communities heard and to step up to the challenge of helping to build a broader progressive majority in our city.

At Causa Justa :: Just Cause we witnessed the impact of this type of collaborative work in Oakland when we co-founded Oakland Rising with the East Bay Alliance for a Sustainable Economy, the Ella Baker Center for Human Rights, the Asian Pacific Environmental Network, and Mujeres Unidas y Activas.

### San Francisco Rising’s Impressive First Steps

Barely a year in existence, San Francisco Rising has already had an impact. In 2010, we shared membership lists from our respective organizations and used them to knock on doors and make phone calls in Spanish, English, Tagalog, and Cantonese. As a result, we contributed to the passing of a new tax on the transfer of properties worth \$5 million and above; dramatically improved voter turnout in communities of color; and built a solid foundation for more collaborative work in the future.

On an internal level, San Francisco Rising membership assemblies are known for building community among members of different organizations, linking the different neighborhoods and the campaigns that each organization is running, creating dialogue that is multilingual and multigenerational, and building a sense of power. And that is just the beginning.

We are currently building mutual support between Oakland Rising and San Francisco Rising and considering how best to contribute our collective strength towards crucial statewide fights. We are developing a platform that articulates our vision of a more just San Francisco and collaborating with larger progressive forces that also want to generate revenue by taxing wealth to build a more equitable city.

We know that the only way San Francisco will live up to its progressive image is if we come together to form the progressive majority that will make it so. And that’s exactly what we plan to do. ■

*María Poblet is the executive director of Causa Justa :: Just Cause.*

# The Fight for Good Jobs and Clean Air at the Port of Oakland

By Rui Bing Zheng and Andrew Dadko

**D**uring the current Great Recession, we have witnessed the U.S. government's multibillion dollar bailouts of private industry, a flood of foreclosures, and the worst unemployment in our generation.

In Oakland, where the unemployment rate was high before the recession (8 percent in 2005), the national fiscal crisis has exacerbated the situation. Families continue to struggle with the lack of accessible good jobs (17 percent unemployed), flat-lined incomes, and disparities in earnings (African Americans earn 60 cents on the dollar and Latinos about 47 cents compared to their white counterparts). Two out of five East Bay residents living in poverty are actually working full- or part-time. Years of urban disinvestment, poverty, and unemployment have locked Oakland residents in a "perpetual recession." Now is our opportunity to break this cycle.

It is no longer enough to simply contribute to an economic recovery; we must address the root causes of economic injustice, such as a lack of family-sustaining jobs and barriers to employment that leave marginalized communities behind, in good times and in bad.

## **EBASE Works to Rebuild Oakland's Middle Class**

The East Bay Alliance for a Sustainable Economy (EBASE) was founded in 1999 when a groundbreaking collaboration between labor, community, and faith groups won the Oakland Living Wage Ordinance, which boosted wages for city service workers. Since then, EBASE has won seven living wage policies for 2,000 workers, created better workplace conditions for 17,000 others, and connected 1,000 local residents to family-sustaining jobs.

Now EBASE has an unprecedented opportunity to advance grassroots, local solutions for rebuilding Oakland's once thriving middle class with the Revive Oakland and Coalition for Clean and Safe Ports campaigns. Both campaigns will impact one of the most

significant economic drivers in Northern California—the Port of Oakland. The Port handles 99 percent of the containerized traffic (valued at over \$55 billion) in and out of Northern California and supports 450,000 jobs.

The transportation and logistics industry cluster in Northern California employs 282,000 workers. As a sector, it accounts for 6 percent of the regional employment and is projected to grow. Oakland Port is the regional center of the goods movement industry—the part of the economy that transports goods from their place of origin (primarily overseas) to their final retail destination (U.S. stores). EBASE's goal is to ensure that the Port and the growing goods movement industry are accountable to the community.

## **Investing in Local Jobs Through Revive Oakland**

The Oakland Army Base is a 333-acre site in West Oakland jointly owned by the Port and the City of Oakland. After years of negotiations and failed proposals for the site, the City and the Port are finally moving forward to close the deal on a redevelopment project with Prologis (an international multibillion dollar corporation) and local developer CCG by early 2012.

The \$800 million redevelopment plan—subsidized by tens of millions of public dollars—will transform the site into a state-of-the-art international trade and logistics center servicing the Port, making it one of the largest development and job creation projects in over 50 years. It presents a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to bring an estimated 6,000 jobs to Oakland over the next two decades. To make the opportunity a reality, EBASE has convened Revive Oakland, a community-

labor-faith coalition of 30 organizations working to secure a community jobs agreement for the project. The enforceable agreement would create family-supporting jobs, such as inventory clerks, package handlers, and forklift operators; provide access to these jobs for low-income communities of color through local hiring and jobs training; and remove discrimination barriers by “banning the box” that asks about criminal records during the application process.

As our government leaders balance budgets by cutting critical services and demand that public workers share the burden, we must ensure that projects, such as the Oakland Army Base redevelopment—where approximately 40 cents of every dollar spent will come from taxpayers—give a return on their investment by prioritizing community needs.

### **Port Trucking Companies Cheat Local Communities**

The growing goods movement industry at the Port of Oakland should actually be a catalyst for good jobs and a sustainable environment. In reality, low-income communities of color and poverty-stricken truck drivers often end up paying the price for the movement of goods to and from the Port.

Communities near the Port frequently are plagued by asthma and cancer associated with exposure to diesel pollution. One out of five children in West Oakland (the neighborhood closest to the Port) suffers from asthma, and the life expectancy of West Oakland residents is 10 years less than that of residents of the Oakland Hills. As the workhorses of the goods movement industry, truck drivers pay a tremendous price in terms of their health and welfare. Most are paid under \$29,000 annually for a 60-hour plus workweek. Seventy-six percent make less than the city’s living wage requirement and 29 percent earn below the California minimum wage. Of the Port’s estimated 2,000 truck drivers, 93 percent are immigrants.

The crux of the problem lies in the widespread—82 percent, according to a recent study by the National Employment Law Project—illegal practice of classifying port truck drivers as “independent contractors” rather than as employees by port trucking companies. This places the burden of truck purchase, maintenance, insurance, tolls, and taxes on the truck driver. Companies are able to evade taxes and their share of Social

Security payments, while denying workers minimum wage, unemployment insurance, workers compensation, disability insurance, health and safety law protections, and the right to organize for fair wages and benefits. Under the current system, the cost of truck replacement and upgrades has fallen primarily on taxpayers and truck drivers.

The Oakland Coalition for Clean and Safe Ports (CCSP), which EBASE co-convenes with 80 organizations, brings together port drivers with environmental, community, labor, faith, and public health allies to reduce air pollution and improve job quality at the Port of Oakland. Ultimately, CCSP aims to secure a comprehensive policy that would shift the financial burden of goods movement and clean trucks onto trucking companies, shippers, and cargo owners.

### **Public Funds Should Benefit the Community**

At a State Assembly hearing on Labor and Employment, long-time port truck driver Manuel Rivas delivered powerful testimony on the price of clean trucking and who really pays for it. Rivas used to haul for Bridge Terminal Transport (BTT) before losing his job on account of his truck failing the new emission standards. BTT, which is owned by Maersk and made \$5 billion in profits last year, refused to pay for a retrofit. Prior to working for BTT, Rivas worked for Shippers Transport Express whose parent company, SSA Marine, is co-owned by Goldman Sachs, which made \$2.3 billion in 2008 and was a major recipient of government bailouts. These companies can bear the costs of greening the port trucking fleet and should be made to do it.

This perpetual recession must not continue in Oakland’s communities. Now is the time to hold companies as well as elected and appointed officials accountable. Shipping companies should not be allowed to profit on the backs of poor immigrant drivers. Public funds invested in projects, such as the redevelopment of the Oakland Army Base, should benefit our communities that have been locked out of the economy by creating good jobs for their residents. The current economic crisis has reignited the work EBASE does to organize and advocate for progressive policies that improve the lives of working people. We now intend to take it to a new level by impacting entire industries. ■

*Andrew Dadko is the program director and Rui Bing Zheng is the grants coordinator at EBASE.*

# Oakland Gang Injunctions: Gentrification or Public Safety?

By Eric K. Arnold

**W**hen economic interests and the criminal justice system intersect, the impacts are often detrimental to people of color. The justification for structural racism is usually couched in buzzwords like “public safety” or “tough on crime,” because the true beneficiaries of such policies are developers, politicians, and special interest groups. Gang injunctions are a perfect example.

A growing trend in law enforcement since the 1980s, these civil court proceedings circumvent the due process afforded by criminal cases, in particular, the right to an attorney and therefore, are rarely defended. Sold to the public as a quick fix for crime in urban areas, the impacts of gang injunctions extend far beyond the incarceration of a few low-level street dealers.

In Oakland, California, where 64.5 percent of the roughly 400,000 residents are non-white, efforts to enact injunctions against street gangs have been underway since the mid 1990s. Initially dismissed as unconstitutional, their legality was upheld in 1997 by the California State Supreme Court. Then in Febru-

ary 2009, amidst a declining economy, the Oakland Police Department (OPD) and then-City Attorney John Russo announced a joint proposal to revisit injunctions, noting that “gangs are involved in criminal activity ranging from large scale graffiti, narcotics dealing, firearm possession, intimidation, and violent crimes, such as assault, robbery, and homicide.” The initial cost estimate was approximately \$400,000.

## Injunctions Target Most Desired Real Estate

When Russo filed for an injunction against 19 alleged members of the “North Side Oakland” (NSO) gang in a predominantly African American area bordering Berkeley and Emeryville, he did not mention that the injunction zone was conveniently situated next to the gentrified Temescal district, called a “yupster magnet... poised to become the next Rockridge,” by the *Wall Street Journal*.

The NSO injunction was granted by a Superior Court judge in June 2010 over the objections of the ACLU. Four months later, the City Attorney’s office proposed a second injunction, naming 40 alleged members of the Norteños gang in a 450-block area of the traditionally Latino district of Fruitvale. What was unclear, however, was how the injunctions would further the OPD’s strategy of “hotspot enforcement,” which targets areas with the highest and most frequent occurrences of violent crime. Because OPD data shows that the city’s worst hotspots are located outside the injunction zones. In 2008, 72 percent of Oakland’s homicides occurred in West Oakland’s Dis-



Photo:

A young activist at the “Stop the Injunctions” rally in March 2011.

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trict 3 and East Oakland’s Districts 6 and 7—all of them outside the area covered by the two injunctions.

While the NSO injunction met with little resistance—owing to a climate of fear and historical tensions between African Americans and Oakland police, neighborhood activists say—the Fruitvale injunction was firmly opposed by a broad coalition of civil rights, labor, and social justice activists, youth groups, teachers, and police accountability advocates. The gang injunction debate became one of Oakland’s hottest issues of 2011. Initially, public support for the injunctions seemed high; tough-on-crime proponents joined with neighborhood crime prevention councils and business leaders in favor of the OPD/City Attorney stance. But as court hearings dragged on and more information emerged, opposition grew and the media narrative shifted, which in turn affected the battle for the hearts and minds of Oakland residents.

### Costly Injunctions to Fuel Political Ambitions

By February 2011, the cost of pursuing the two injunctions had grown to \$760,000, raising questions about effective use of city resources at a time of drastic budget cuts. More doubts were cast when a top criminologist, Dr. Barry Krisberg, told KQED’s Forum that gang injunctions “have almost no chance of reducing crime in Oakland.”

Russo’s political ambitions—he has been mentioned as a possible candidate for State Senator or Attorney General—were rumored to be the driving force behind the injunction effort undertaken

without initial authorization from the City Council. Although, the injunctions did have three prominent backers on the City Council: Larry Reid, Ignacio De La Fuente, and Pat Kernighan.

At Oakland’s frequently contentious Public Safety Committee hearings, OPD Assistant Chief Howard Jordan stated that gang injunctions were part of a police “vision” for Oakland. But youth organizer Sagnitche Salazar outlined a different vision: “Our communities need solutions that work. Our communities need accountability. If you want to avoid violence, give our people jobs.”

“If you really want jobs, you’ve got to create a better impression,” scolded Duncan Essex, a new resident of Fruitvale, referencing Oakland’s image in the corporate world. The Oakland Chamber of Commerce’s Public Policy Director at the time, Scott Peterson, added: “Trying to keep businesses in Oakland is a major problem because of public safety.” Councilmember Kernighan linked Clorox Corporation’s decision to move 500 jobs to Pleasanton to concerns about crime in Oakland.

### A Strategy Pursued Against All Odds

The businesses most closely affected by the Norteños injunction, the Fruitvale Merchants Association, refused to take sides—an indication, perhaps, that the criminal activities of street gangs were not a pressing concern. They did, however, complain about the OPD’s failure to follow-up on reports of petty theft. And the decision to set up sobriety checkpoints—which they considered a form of harass-

Photo:

“Stop the Injunctions” rally in Downtown Oakland.

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ment—at a Cinco De Mayo celebration, rather than increase foot patrols, as requested by the merchants.

Harassment by the OPD was a frequently voiced concern of injunction opponents. Javier Quintero was subjected to a humiliating courtroom arrest for a technical parole violation—accepting a ride from another defendant to meet with his attorney—even though he was wearing a GPS monitor which made his whereabouts known to parole agents at all times. Michael Muscadine complained about not being able to visit his family, which lives (and has for generations) in Oakland. Critics of the injunctions say the strategy of targeting people like Muscadine and Quintero—who have juvenile records but few recent police contacts and are gainfully employed—is a smokescreen for criminalizing minority and immigrant communities at the expense of civil liberties.

As Krisberg remarked on KALW News, “Could



you imagine if there was a gang injunction... in an all-white area in San Francisco or Oakland? It wouldn't last a week. Part of it is targeting powerless people, people who don't have resources, and that's the only reason it has any currency, in my mind.”

Even so, in May 2011 the injunctions were authorized by the Oakland City Council and later upheld by a judge. But questions about their efficacy linger. Mayor Jean Quan told reporters that her preference would have been prevention and intervention programs. And according to the OPD's own statistics, violent crime actually rose in the NSO area after the injunction was granted.

### To Understand Injunctions, Go Behind the Veil

If the premise about gang injunctions reducing violent crime does not hold water, you have to wonder if there is another agenda at play. According to George Galvis of Communities United for Restorative Youth Justice (CURYJ), “Gang injunctions are very effective tools for areas ripe for gentrification.”

Galvis points to North Oakland's emergence as a developing biotech corridor and the “spillover effect” of young urbanites priced out of the San Francisco housing market populating Fruitvale. Gang injunctions are “something that developers wanted” to change the demographics of those neighborhoods, he says. If so, it would not be the first such case.

In an expert declaration submitted to the Superior

Photo:

(Top) A GPS monitor worn by one of the defendants.

(Bottom) George Galvis of Communities United for Restorative Youth Justice (CURYJ).

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Court, Krisberg warns of “displacement of poor and working black and Latino families from their home communities,” and a development strategy identified as “privileged adjacency,” or “a pattern of using gang injunctions to benefit nearby affluent areas.” He refers to a study done in Oxnard, CA, but it has parallels to Oakland, where the chosen gang injunction zones are in close proximity to neighborhoods where property values are high.

According to Trulia ([www.trulia.com](http://www.trulia.com)), a residential real estate listing service, the average listing price for homes in North Oakland’s Gaskill district was \$225,881 last September (compared to \$483,281 in Temescal). Similarly, the flatland areas within the Fruitvale injunction zone represent some of the best real estate values in the city with median price along International Boulevard at about \$162,000.

Under state law, a “nuisance” condition must be disclosed to prospective buyers. “The unassailable logic is that if buyers are told that a property is in a GI [zone], some buyers will insist on a ‘damaged’ property discount or refuse the sale,” says former Oakland City Councilmember Wilson Riles, Jr. “This will lower the value of those properties in the GI area.”

Property values in the Bushrod neighborhood have already fallen 12 percent since the injunction was enacted, according to Zillow.com. A new study by RealtyTrac.com projects a \$12.2 billion loss in

Oakland home values by 2012 because of foreclosures; Fruitvale being among the neighborhoods most affected. Any further drop in property values resulting from gang injunctions could accelerate the major shift in population demographics Oakland is currently undergoing.

### Blacks Being Pushed Out of Desirable Neighborhoods

Census data shows that in the last decade, Oakland’s black population has declined by 25 percent. A 2010 study by Urban Strategies identified North Oakland as an area that lost the most African Americans.

Even before gang injunctions and the foreclosure crisis, gentrification was already underway in Fruitvale. A recent *East Bay Express* article (“Fruitvale New Hangout for Hipsters?”) mentions its growing popularity as a day-trip destination for UC Berkeley students in search of cheap eats at the numerous taco trucks that cater to immigrant laborers. Longtime residents fear that the region will turn into an East Bay version of San Francisco’s hipsterish Mission district—which, incidentally, experiences frequent gang violence despite existing injunctions.

Still, Fruitvale’s transformation has not been entirely smooth. In 2006, the *Express* reported that Fruitvale Station, a proposed model for a mixed-use transit village (and a pet project of City Councilmember De La Fuente), was an epic failure. Devel-

Photo:  
Accused Norteño David Pelayo leaves the courtroom.

©2011 Eric K. Arnold

opment cost a whopping \$100 million but poor planning resulted in a retail center that did not bring in the promised hoards of post-commute shoppers, did not provide enough affordable housing, and for the most part, duplicated existing stores that hawked the same goods for lower prices in the neighborhoods. “We were promised an affluent, upscale customer base. Instead, we have immigrants who are looking for bargains,” one business owner was quoted as saying.

Joe Haraburda, president of the Oakland Chamber of Commerce, says he supports “the concept” of injunctions, calling them “a reasonable approach to protecting the citizens of Oakland.” When informed that violent crime rates in North Oakland had risen since the injunction, he called it “an interesting situation” and added, “we really need to give it time to work.”

Interestingly, Haraburda contradicts both Councilwoman Kernighan and his own former staffer Peterson in stating that perception of crime in Oakland is not a major factor for businesses looking to locate or relocate. “I don’t think you can tie Clorox’s relocation... entirely to a crime situation,”

he says, and adds, “I’ve never heard anyone say directly, ‘I’m not coming to Oakland because of crime.’” According to attorney Mike Siegel, however, a big Atlanta-based corporation recently decided not to open an Oakland office, allegedly because of the city’s liberal “hug-a-thug” policies.

For CURYJ members, it all comes down to prioritizing community development over corporate development. “Tough-on-crime saber-rattling reinforces structural racism,” says Critical Resistance’s Isaac Ontiveros.

On the other hand, “When you create viable employment and education opportunities, you see a drop in crime,” says Galvis and adds that several effective youth programs, including Youth Together, Leadership Excellence, and the East Side Cultural Center, all suffered cuts in funding, even as the amount spent on injunctions ballooned to an estimated 1 million dollars (as of May 2011).

Instead of a “top-down” approach, which reinforces the popular perception of crime in Oakland but fails to address its root causes, let’s invest in our communities, says Siegel. ■



Photo:

Latina youth demonstrating against gang injunctions in downtown Oakland.

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*Eric K. Arnold is a freelance writer and photographer. He has been documenting hip-hop and youth movements since 1994.*