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**CRITICAL ISSUES FORUM**  
**Mobilizing Community Power  
to Address Structural Racism**  
Volume 4 • September 2012



# Mobilizing Community Power to Address Structural Racism

## PRE Critical Issues Forum Volume 4

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Full volume and individual articles are available for free download on [www.racialequity.org](http://www.racialequity.org).



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# Foreword

By Nat Chioke Williams, Ph.D.

Over the past decade, the number of program officers, foundations and resources focused on social justice philanthropy<sup>1</sup> has grown. As the social justice philanthropic field has expanded, it has tried to figure out how to effectively help secure a society that is just and fair. Some of us focus on building the social justice infrastructure, others on particular issues or constituencies, and still others on strategies like organizing or civic engagement. However, there is an overarching belief that we need to dramatically increase the scope and scale of social justice policy campaigns and victories if we are to achieve that just and fair society. The aftermath of some imperfect, but nonetheless big, progressive wins in recent years, and the ensuing backlash, has caused some of us to ask more fundamental questions. Are we really getting to the root causes of social injustice by focusing primarily on policy and/or electoral change? How do we better engage the hearts and minds of the public in the quest for real and lasting change?

Policy wins that improve concrete material conditions and access to opportunity for marginalized people are critical and necessary – but they are not enough. Policy wins may open doors to greater access and opportunity for marginalized communities, but if the campaigns that led to these wins are not framed to engage an explicit public discourse on the socio-cultural beliefs that normalize and justify the disparate impact on these communities, then we are not addressing the underlying architecture that generate these disparities.

Let's consider the social, economic and political disparities resulting from structural racism. Structural racism is reflected in the interlocking, replicating and self-reinforcing web of institutional policies and practices that help construct and maintain disproportionate negative outcomes for people of color. The underpinnings of structural racism involve deeply ingrained cultural beliefs about the relative value of people based on race, which have been codified into

institutional practices and policies. Policies can be changed; but if the underlying value proposition about the relative worth of people of color is not exposed, challenged and eradicated, then our wins will be impermanent and frustrating, and our prospects for achieving true justice and equity will be limited.

A solution to this situation is to create policy campaigns that engage the hearts and minds of the public. This is where integrating a structural racism analysis and an anti-racism strategy in community organizing, advocacy and civic engagement campaigns is important.

*Policy wins that improve concrete material conditions and access to opportunity for marginalized people are critical and necessary – but they are not enough.*

Many of my social justice funder colleagues recognize the importance of integrating a racial justice frame into policy campaigns. However, even with this understanding it is sometimes challenging to hold true to both the principle and practice of leading with race in policy campaigns for social justice practitioners and funders alike. Some social justice practitioners choose not to use a structural racism frame because, they argue, an examination of racism would be divisive for their racially diverse constituents, damaging the bonds of trust necessary to work together to create change. Other practitioners figure that policymakers don't want to deal with issues of race and that leading with it could damage their chances to win specific policy changes. The policies that these groups win often help improve the material conditions of people of color; however, structural racism cannot be dismantled through discrete policy change alone and needs to be coupled with work to transform cultural norms about race in order to create lasting and deep social change for communities of color.

Similarly, some foundation program officers may find it strategic to garner support from their boards for efforts to reduce poverty, improve public schools, or increase access to healthcare or affordable housing without examining the role that structural racism plays in creating these conditions. These program officers may reason that leading with a racial justice analysis would make their trustees uncomfortable and jeopardize support for their social justice grants. Some foundations make grants that *happen* to help mitigate some of the effects of structural racism; but without such institutional commitment to addressing the causes of structural racism, there will be circumstantial, but unsustainable, results.

*Structural racism cannot be dismantled through discrete policy change alone and needs to be coupled with work to transform cultural norms about race in order to create lasting and deep social change for communities of color.*

Another challenge is the overreliance on policy wins as the primary indicator of success and positive change. A focus on policy wins is valid because of the urgent need to improve conditions for marginalized communities and because it's a demonstrable measure of impact. However, our attention to policy change overshadows other key changes in the public discourse that are critical to dismantling structural racism (e.g., changes in the public openness to discuss race, introduction of new language, the formation of new alliances).

Conducting racial justice campaigns is hard, complicated, but ultimately critical work. In addition to providing multiyear, general operating support to racial justice groups, social justice philanthropy can support racial justice groups in many other ways. First and foremost, social justice funders can provide support to build the capacity of social justice organizations to effectively conduct racial justice campaigns. Also, targeted support for racial justice messaging and framing is critical, both in terms of engaging the public in constructive dialogues on race (which lessens the impact of wedge issue attempts) and to fend off efforts to delegitimize the use of a structural racism frame.

Support to analyze and develop targeted policy recommendations that can effectively reduce racial disparities is another needed area of strategic investment. Additionally, support should be given to foster cross-racial alliance and community building. Beyond grantmaking dollars, social justice funders can provide more time to see results from racial justice campaigns in order to ease the pressure to continually produce new policy victories. Finally, as individual program officers in foundations, we can advocate for the importance of racial justice with our peers in philanthropy and seek to leverage more support for the work.

The Philanthropic Initiative for Racial Equity has engaged a variety of key activists to shed a critical light on the intersections and intricacies of structural racism, community organizing and civic participation, and help bring more of us into the conversation. Those of us in philanthropy, and our community partners, need to consider a holistic approach to addressing structural inequities that engages policies and practices, but also values, norms and beliefs, in the public domain. This will allow us to get to the root causes, and together do the hard, messy and complex work necessary for true social transformation.

**Nat Choike Williams** is the executive director of the Hill-Snowdon Foundation, a national family foundation that supports community organizing in order to create a more just and fair society. Williams founded and helped lead several social justice philanthropic affinity groups, including the Southern Organizing Working Group, the Funders Collaborative on Youth Organizing, and the Social Justice Infrastructure Funders Group. <http://hillsnowdon.org>



<sup>1</sup> "Social Justice Philanthropy Seeing a Resurgence, Foundation Center Study Finds." Foundation Center. The Foundation Center, 15 July 2009. Web. 29 Aug. 2012. <http://foundationcenter.org/media/news/20090715.html>

# Mobilizing for Racial Justice: A Current Snapshot

by Lori Villarosa

Projections of demographic shifts in the United States are clear: it is a matter of years before the majority of the population is composed of people of color. Yet cautionary comments remind us that “demographics are not destiny.” We have only to look around the world today to see that deep structural and racial inequalities can co-exist with varied population demographics. It will take intentionality, creativity, strategic thinking and resources to build a deep, sustainable and informed movement adequate to achieving a more egalitarian, multiracial democracy.

The history of social change indicates that such a movement will be made up of many strands – political, cultural and analytical – but at its heart, the source of its power, there will have to be strong grassroots organizations of people of color, leading the fight against structural inequality. One of the great challenges facing us today is in helping shape the conditions in which such a movement can flourish, or to put it simply: how to put the “mass” in mass movement. That challenge is the focus of this issue of the Critical Issues Forum.

Widespread changes have occurred that can impact and be impacted by community organizing – from the flourishing of social media to the contradictions today in voter participation and exclusion. While the changes may be well-known and understood within their own spheres, as in so much of the nonprofit and funding worlds, even when there is clear reason for overlap, we often find ourselves in separate conversations. Those conversations need to come together in order to craft strategies that integrate the many necessary strands with grassroots movements, so that both a racial justice lens and a focus on structural change can galvanize our social justice movements.

In grassroots community organizing, there are new developments worthy of study. New alliances and growing numbers of leaders of color with national influence have emerged, along with stronger multiracial coalitions and the increased participation of immigrant

groups. Several traditional organizing networks that were previously ideologically wed to race-neutral approaches are now open to change. In a recent interview, veteran community organizing funder and current executive director of Interfaith Funders Network Kathryn Partridge noted that while many organizing networks in the past operated with a “colorblind” lens, today there are increasingly explicit efforts to integrate a structural racism analysis into their work.

In the civic participation world, there is greater attention to the value of integrated voter engagement and the growing body of work that is connecting community organizing, voter engagement, public education and policy year-round, not simply parachuting in with “Get Out the Vote” efforts every two or four years. In the realm of labor, organizations such as SEIU and AFL-CIO have recently created positions to specifically build and strengthen political capacity in communities of color beyond short-term efforts that were typically more characteristic of their engagement in the past.

Nationally, the conversation on race has also changed rapidly, becoming more complex and engaging broader audiences in many arenas. There is a spreading awareness and understanding of structural racism and racialization within parts of the nonprofit and philanthropic sectors, and more ability in recent years for community change agents to understand differences between individual, intentional discrimination and the cumulative effects of inequities long built into systems regardless of current intent.

Other positive changes include more policy think/action tanks being led by people of color, who are using a structural racism analysis and recognizing the mutual value of partnering with communities to strengthen policy framing.

Finally, of particular importance to the Philanthropic Initiative for Racial Equity (PRE), is the increasing number of foundations beginning to recognize the value



in supporting racial justice work and helping to support needed infrastructure in ways that are having a broader impact.

The campaign to disrupt the conservative lobbying group the American Legislative Exchange Council (ALEC) is one recent example where the ability to recognize the racial implications of policy and to directly engage communities of color had significant impact. Common Cause and other campaign finance reform advocates have long challenged ALEC through litigation and advocacy, effectively raising awareness within some progressive circles.<sup>1</sup> But in the wake of the killing of unarmed 17-year-old African-American Trayvon Martin, Color of Change, Center for Media and Democracy, and other national organizations made a more direct link showing the connections between ALEC and the “Stand Your Ground” gun rights law that appeared to allow the teen’s killer to initially go free.<sup>2</sup> Importantly, their efforts further elevated the clearly racialized impacts of that and ALEC’s other draft legislation, which included anti-immigrant policies and voter identification laws that would have disparate impacts on communities of color, seniors, youth and low-income communities. While a number of progressive organizations have long been trying to shine a spotlight on the moneyed political ties of this heavily corporate-funded entity, the mobilizing power of an online campaign targeting communities of color and their allies effectively pressured at least 30 corporations<sup>3</sup> to end their support to ALEC.

And yet in spite of some of these promising changes, new practices and lessons being learned, struggles remain because the work is incredibly challenging and complex, because financial resources are still too limited, and, of course, because of the nature of structural transformation itself. Because institutions are too often conservative and resistant to change, most interventions are likely to be absorbed with little significant movement. This ability to resist transformation is even more extreme in cases dealing with race. Backlash can be severe, as evident by four years of vitriolic attacks against President Obama, and by the sharp public divides in racial perceptions concerning not only the killing of Trayvon Martin, but virtually every other high-profile “racial issue.”

Changing demographics, evolving organizing sectors, and emerging lessons have provided us at PRE an opportunity to engage a range of players involved in community

organizing, civic engagement and in the analysis of and fight against structural racism. In an effort to bring more of the conversation into the same space, we convened organizers and activists, issued a call for papers, and engaged a number of leading thinkers, including funders and intermediaries, in various reviews or interviews. We wanted to know what they see as their greatest challenges and opportunities. And importantly for the focus of PRE’s work, where and how foundation resources can more effectively support evolving work and respond to the new challenges.

Deepak Bhargava of the Center for Community Change notes that the nation is in “a liminal period – a confusing, contradictory and highly unstable period of transition in which many futures are now possible – and aspects of those very different futures are manifest in our present. The confluence of the economic crisis, demographic change and the radicalization of the right have created a highly volatile situation ... [but] neither the hope for an inclusive, just world nor the prospect of a brutally unequal and racialized one are fantastical – they are both here, right now.”<sup>4</sup>

Bhargava’s optimism for this potential and his caution regarding deepening inequality both signal the critical importance of movement organizing work, especially work that clearly considers the question of structural racism and racialization.

There are clearly a number of outcomes that both organizers and philanthropists would like to see; and while there are many promising efforts and experiments, it would be false to claim that we know unequivocally how to achieve all of these outcomes in light of many continuing challenges. We have thus framed a series of questions that grantmakers should consider as they work with the field to illuminate lessons and consolidate innovations at the intersection of community organizing practice and structural racism analysis.

### **Questions funders seeking to mobilize communities toward racial justice should ask themselves:**

- 1) **How can activists, funders and others work together to define outcomes that strengthen a community’s ability to tackle longer-term structural issues?** Many grassroots groups and policy organizations have been trained to work on short-term, transactional issues that can have immediate impact on their members’ lives.

Yet, many problems require fundamental change that is harder to win. As Rinku Sen<sup>5</sup>, John A. Powell<sup>6</sup>, Manuel Pastor<sup>7</sup> and others have argued, we need to help align transactional work with transformational struggles that can lead to significant advances in racial justice.

- 2) **How can we best make investments for the deep, transformational relationships required for communities to build power together in a sustainable way?** There is an increasing recognition that culture, history and some of the personal engagement that might have previously seemed too “squishy” to organizers and funders alike are all critical to movement building.<sup>8</sup> Such relationships need to engage groups, but in ways that utilize popular education tactics and other tools that centrally involve individuals in telling their stories and in building relationships with others.
- 3) **As we are strengthening support for multiracial alliances, how do we ensure resources for organizing within each community?** Alliances can only be as strong as its individual members. We can’t skip over the specific interventions required to build power in all communities. For example, given their unique role in this nation’s racial history and their importance to the larger multiracial movement, the field must (and, in fact, has begun to) address the dearth of African American-led community organizing.
- 4) **How are we supporting efforts to engage White constituencies with a structural racism analysis?** White people are critical to the fight for racial justice, for their own sakes, but also as strategic allies. But their involvement cannot displace the efforts of people of color. The field needs to develop new models for multiracial engagement that includes White people, so they are neither imposing their biases on communities of color, nor unable to contribute the best of their own ideas and leadership.
- 5) **How do we effectively combine direct services with community mobilization?** Groups that provide services can engage constituents in defining the problem, advocating for change, and mobilizing others. Bridges and advances are being made through efforts such as National Council of La Raza’s Latino Empowerment and Advocacy Program (LEAP), which works primarily with service providers to engage unregistered and newly registered voters in strategic electoral efforts.<sup>9</sup>

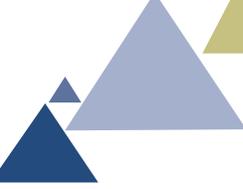
- 6) **How can we support the communications strategies of grassroots organizations that reframe debates, refocus attention on race, and promote a vision of structural change?** In the age of the 24-hour news cycle and dramatic new media tools, opportunities to reframe debates and influence action are more numerous than ever, as evidenced by the Color of Change campaign described earlier.
- 7) **What are we learning from the emergence of several local and statewide efforts that are creating ongoing electoral infrastructures to build for grassroots power and influence policy beyond the levels of their individual base-building work?** Investments should be made in both the innovations and documentation of these strategic alliances led by organizations of color with a track record of integrating smart racial justice analysis into their campaigns. Examples include Oakland Rising<sup>10</sup>, a local coalition launched in 2006 by several executive directors of color from social justice organizations in Oakland, Calif., or more recent state level efforts such as California Calls, Virginia New Majority or Florida New Majority, each with 501(c)(3) and 501(c)(4) arms.

Vast changes in society have generated both momentum and urgency, especially at the intersection of race and organizing. Sharing the successes and challenges experienced by a variety of community organizations not only opens a dialogue, but also provides a floor plan for new strategies. Community organizing clearly doesn’t have to start and stop at small-scale neighborhood issues like stop signs and speed bumps. It has the capacity to take on the biggest questions confronting society. Innovative funders, like innovative organizers, can help the field and the “new majority” grow in such a way as to unleash all its potential for influencing debates and building a truly just society.

**Lori Villarosa** is the executive director of Philanthropic Initiative for Racial Equity (PRE), which is intended to increase the amount and effectiveness of resources aimed at combating institutional and structural racism in communities through capacity building, education, and convening of grantmakers and grantseekers. For further information about PRE, including links to many related resources and organizations, please visit our website, [www.racialequity.org](http://www.racialequity.org).



footnotes continued on page 44



# Five Lessons From the Past and Present of Racial Justice Organizing

by Julie Quiroz

Years of fighting racism have taught us many lessons, perhaps the greatest of which is the recognition that we have to be clear about the type of racism we intend to confront. If we take a narrow view of racism as a set of stereotypes or personal beliefs, then educational efforts aimed at individuals have some impact. But taking on *structural* racism requires entirely different approaches. As scholar Eduardo Bonilla-Silva asserts, “Social systems and their supports must be ‘shaken’ if fundamental transformations are to take place.”<sup>1</sup> In order to shake such systems and structures, we would do well to keep in mind some important lessons – past and present – from the work of racial justice organizing:

- ▲ **Leading with vision and principles, not just disparities.** An example of this comes from the 1980s, when African American communities began organizing to stop the nearby siting of toxic waste dumps, sparking research showing a pattern of what became known as “environmental racism.” In fact, the very term suggested a redefinition of racism as a structural problem and helped define the kind of organizing that, inspired by longstanding work in Native American and other communities of color, led to a powerful set of environmental justice principles that went far beyond comparative disparities, putting forth a bold vision of structural change that challenges racism and seeks transformation of the economic and political structures in which it is embedded.<sup>2</sup>
- ▲ **Making connections across systems.** For example, when the anti-immigrant bill SB 1070 was gaining strength in Arizona, progressives were united in their opposition to its racial profiling provisions. Many organizations focused on the victimization of Latinos and argued that such a law would harm Arizona’s business interests. By contrast, national networks and alliances of grassroots-organizing groups approached the law from a more structural perspective. They also called the law racist, but went further by connecting the dots between the Arizona law and their long-standing campaigns against federal immigration enforcement policies like Secure Communities. “The fact is that any ICE/police access or collaboration leads to racial profiling and mistreatment of our community,” explains Carlos Garcia of Puente, a local immigrant organizing group. “Federal enforcement policies are going to make us *all* Arizona.”<sup>3</sup> In other words, the organizing goal was not to merely eliminate the obvious “Juan Crow” racism in SB 1070 in order to get back to the status quo; the goal was to eliminate racism as part of challenging the status quo.<sup>4</sup>
- ▲ **Guiding principled movement communications.** Consider the Vermont Workers’ Center (VWC) grassroots membership, which led to Vermont becoming the first and only state in the country to pass universal health care. VWC won by building a massive grassroots base that publicly framed health care as a human right – and proactively prepared members for the racialized wedge that was certain to come in the form of exclusions for undocumented immigrants. When both Democratic and Republican politicians lined up to support the exclusions, VWC members and immigrant groups fought back harder, issuing a bold and consistent public statement: “When we say health care is a human right, we mean for everybody who lives and works in Vermont regardless of legal status. We will not tolerate racial profiling and accept the unjust immigration and foreign policies of the federal government.”<sup>5</sup>
- ▲ **Re-imagining change through arts and culture.** As the Movement Strategy Center report “Out of the Spiritual Closet” observed in 2010,

“Movement leaders and organizers within the secular progressive movement are turning to transformative and spiritual practices to help them radically reimagine social change. Collectively, they are generating a transformative approach to movement building that speaks to the needs and challenges of our time.”<sup>6</sup> Powerful networks and alliances ranging from the Domestic Workers Alliance to Florida New Majority have all made transformative practice a core component of their organizing. Similarly, networks like the National Day Labor Organizing Network have made arts and culture a major focus of their work; NDLO’s website features posters, poetry and videos that support resistance to dominant ideas and vision for a transformed future<sup>7</sup>. An emerging national effort called Art Is Change has just developed a capacity-building program that offers cultural strategy development for organizations, alliances and foundations.

▲ **Embodying change, not just demanding it.** At key moments in our movements’ history, racial justice organizing has gone from demanding change to embodying change in the creation of alternative structures. One classic example is the movement for community control of schools in New York City in the late 1960s. Fed up with a school system that was failing and even damaging their children, Black and Puerto Rican parents organized, refusing to wait for the promised reforms of *Brown v. Board of Education* and choosing to believe that they and their community knew what education should look like. Partnering with progressive teachers of color, parents literally took schools over, changing the curriculum to challenge “students to think critically about race relations.”<sup>8</sup> It remains a moment that challenged purely legal strategies and demanded an anti-racist commitment of a public institution, all while expanding the political imagination of parents and children of color.

Organizing does not always see or challenge structural racism. But it has and it can, making possible the massive shifts this challenge requires.

**Julie Quiroz** is a senior fellow at the Movement Strategy Center, where she is dedicated to discovering, generating and telling powerful stories of social change. Quiroz recently served as senior program consultant to the Akonadi Foundation, and is a co-founder and co-principal of Mosaic Consulting. She is a member of the PRE Advisory Board. [www.movementstrategy.org](http://www.movementstrategy.org)



- <sup>1</sup> Bonilla-Silva, Eduardo. “Rethinking Racism: Toward a Structural Interpretation.” *American Sociological Review* 62.3 (June 1997): 465-480. Print. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2657316>
- <sup>2</sup> University of Oregon professor and former organizer Daniel HoSang discusses this in his unpublished 2012 essay “Racial Justice as a Universal Framework for Freedom.”
- <sup>3</sup> Phone interview, March 2012.
- <sup>4</sup> A detailed case study of the Arizona communications effort will appear in the Center for Media Justice report “Building Meaning, Building Movements: Network Driven Communications Strategies for Community Organizing,” Sept. 2012.
- <sup>5</sup> A detailed case study of the Vermont communications effort will appear in the Center for Media Justice report “Building Meaning, Building Movements: Network Driven Communications Strategies for Community Organizing,” Sept. 2012.
- <sup>6</sup> Zimmerman, Kristen, Neelam Pathikonda, Brenda Salgado, and Taj James. “Out of the Spiritual Closet: Organizers Transforming the Practice of Social Justice.” Oakland, Calif.: Movement Strategy Center, 2010. Print. <http://www.racialequitytools.org/resourcefiles/zimmerman1.pdf>
- <sup>7</sup> National Day Labor Organizing Network <http://ndlon.org/en/arts-culture/posters>
- <sup>8</sup> Salomon, Larry R. *Roots of Justice: Stories of Organizing in Communities of Color*. San Francisco: Chardon Press, 1998. Print.



# **Building Community Leadership and Power to Advance Racial Justice**

*by Terry Keleher*

In a society highly organized around racial inequality, we need to strengthen and support social change models that hold the most promise for transformative results. Grassroots models – community organizing, civic engagement and social justice movement building – are well suited for advancing racial justice because they emphasize empowering the disadvantaged, uniting different communities, challenging prevailing patterns of power, and striving for systemic change. To rise to their potential, these approaches must adopt new equity frameworks and practices that more directly, systematically and strategically challenge structural racism.

The Occupy movement illustrates both the challenges and opportunities related to addressing racial equity. Occupy successfully popularized our society’s deep divisions due to economic inequities and political exclusion. Often missing from the Occupy narrative and strategy, though, is a clear challenge to structural racism. While some Occupy activists and allies have found effective ways to be mindful of race, many still struggle with how, or even why, race must be addressed.

We’re missing opportunities to unite the 99 percent and more fundamentally challenge structural inequality. We need racial inclusion and unity to build sufficient power to win equitable change. And we need equitable processes to foster inclusion and unity. Indeed, equity is a moral and strategic imperative. Thus, it must become both an aspirational and operational framework. For years, the prevailing organizing model was to identify common interests and avoid divisions.

*We need racial inclusion and unity to build sufficient power to win equitable change. And we need equitable processes to foster inclusion and unity.*

Ideology and “identity politics” were shunned. Substantive critiques of White supremacy, patriarchy and capitalism were avoided. Action was preferred over analysis. Pragmatism prevailed over principled purity. Majoritarian politics – appealing to the majority and “moveable middle,” instead of “minority” and marginalized communities – were embraced for perceived winnability.

While some successful models fusing community organizing and racial justice have operated for years, we are still a ways from seeing wide-scale integration. But now there is more openness and less active resistance. The conversation has shifted from “Why do this?” to “How do we do it?”

Full integration of a racial equity framework into grassroots social change models touches every facet of these approaches, as Table 1 highlights.

Funders and technical assistance providers supporting racial justice organizing can encourage equity-focused practices. I will elaborate with some examples, then suggest criteria for assessing the integration of a racial justice framework for grantmaking and capacity-building purposes.

## **Vision and Values**

Racial equity is the opposite of structural racism. Thus, we need a clear vision of racial equity – fairness in opportunities and outcomes across race. It is important to distinguish racial *equity* from *diversity*. Diversity is an essential tool to get to equity, but it is not the end goal. A clear and shared vision of racial justice helps keep efforts proactively focused.

The Maine People’s Resource Center – a sister organization to Maine People’s Alliance, a 30-year-old grassroots community action organization – began using racial equity as a leading lens in developing its statewide

**TABLE 1: ORGANIZING WITHOUT VS. ORGANIZING WITH A RACIAL EQUITY FRAMEWORK**

ORGANIZING FACET	ORGANIZING WITHOUT A RACIAL EQUITY FRAMEWORK	ORGANIZING WITH A RACIAL EQUITY FRAMEWORK
<b>Visions and Values</b>	May address diversity (variety), but silent on racial equity (fairness).	Prioritizes racial equity as a core value and vision.
<b>Problem Analysis</b>	Uses a “power analysis” to identify targets, allies and opponents.	Uses a “systems/structural racism analysis” to inform a power analysis.
<b>Issue Framing</b>	Issues framed around class. Race frames seen as divisive.	Racism, racial equity and racial impacts are addressed <i>explicitly</i> , not <i>exclusively</i> .
<b>Solutions Development</b>	Focus on “universal” solutions to “lift all boats”; prioritizing short-term winnability.	Solutions highlight “targeted universalism.” May pursue long-term “wins,” but with short-term gains (e.g., ideological, infrastructural, cultural change).
<b>Leadership Development</b>	May strive for diverse organizers and leadership, but not necessarily those with competency in equity.	Leadership of color and multiracial leadership are systematically developed. Equity competency is developed across organization.
<b>Alliance Building</b>	Values relationship-building, but emphasizes short-term tactical allies and/or single-issue coalitions.	Develops multiracial and multi-issue alliances, long-term strategic partners, and movement-building connections.
<b>Internal Education</b>	Avoids “identity politics” and anything internally divisive; emphasizes commonalities.	Engages in “difficult conversations” about race and identities to build trust and unity; uses differences as an asset.
<b>External Communications</b>	Media messages may echo dominant frames if palatable to the majority.	Messages interrupt dominant/racist frames, and highlight equity, unifying connections and marginalized voices.
<b>Culture and Practices</b>	Implicit bias is unexamined in practices, politics and culture.	Equity tools and practices are used to counteract implicit bias.



policy agenda.<sup>1</sup> In 2011, they released the Maine Racial Justice Policy Guide, highlighting “fair treatment, equal opportunity and successful achievement across all communities.” Similarly, in 2010, the Chicago-based United Congress of Community and Religious Organizations, a multi-ethnic human rights alliance, released the Grassroots Human Rights Policy Guide for Racial Equity.<sup>2</sup> These and other groups are using a racial equity framework to make policymakers aware of the racial impacts of issues such as voter enfranchisement and funding human services.

### **Structural Racism Analysis**

Community organizers begin campaigns with a “power analysis” to identify decision makers to target, as well as allies and opponents. A “structural racism analysis” is distinct and complimentary. Good questions for a systems analysis include “What institutions are interacting and contributing to the inequities? Which policies or practices are unfair? What are the impacts on different racial groups, and who benefits and who is hurt most? What historical developments have contributed to the inequities? What cultural norms or dominant ideas reinforce the inequities?” This analysis provides context and, most importantly, surfaces the causes of inequities, not just the *effects*. It shifts the focus from *symptoms* to *systems* of inequity.

Blocks Together, a Chicago neighborhood organization, applied a structural racism analysis to its campaign for a new branch library. Suspecting their neighborhood was being underserved due to its racial composition, they discovered and documented the inequities. The Chicago Tribune highlighted the group’s findings, reporting that the closest library “serves students from 27 schools in a predominantly African American neighborhood. By contrast, some libraries in other parts of the city serve families from as few as seven area schools.”<sup>3</sup> Now the community group had a new issue frame: the Chicago Public Library was distributing its services inequitably. The group still had to mount a strong organizing campaign for several years, but their racial analysis was critical to the opening of a new branch library in 2011.<sup>4</sup>

### **Equitable Solutions**

Countless racial disparity reports and the “politics of grievance” have their limits. It is not enough to critique structural racism; community groups must propose equitable and viable solutions. These can have wide-ranging benefits but should specifically and sufficiently address the needs of those most disenfranchised, especially people of color. Combining a “universal” and “equity” frame (“targeted universalism”<sup>5</sup>) is a formula for success.

Advocating for universal preschool is a worthy proposal, but adding mechanisms that prioritize services to low-income children of color to address long-standing disparities makes the proposal equitable.

The Vermont Workers’ Center helped pass legislation making it the first state to enact a universal health care system. Director James Haslam described the effort:

A last-minute amendment for excluding undocumented workers from the health care system was introduced in the full Senate and passed with a large bipartisan majority. Fortunately, through our past anti-racism and organizing trainings, and our emphasis on the human rights principle of universality, our campaign leaders were crystal clear on this issue: When we say universal, we mean everyone!<sup>6</sup>

*Advocating for universal preschool is a worthy proposal, but adding mechanisms that prioritize services to low-income children of color to address long-standing disparities makes the proposal equitable.*

### **Racial Justice Leadership**

Racial justice leadership emphasizes the empowerment of people of color. *Empowerment*, which goes beyond *engagement*, involves leadership and decision-making power. Systems for developing strong leadership of color and multiracial leadership are needed (unless a group strategically seeks to be monoracial). A pluralistic model of leadership, where different perspectives are uniquely and fully represented, is the preferred practice to avoid tokenism and assimilation.

Racial justice leadership addresses the *composition* as well as the *competencies* of an organization's leadership and membership. *Cultural* competency is important, but perhaps even more critical is “*equity* competency” – the ability to model and promote equitable, inclusive and unifying practices. Examples include having self-awareness of privilege and oppression; being respectful of differences; being humble, open-minded and accountable; and having a willingness to share power and make equity an ongoing priority. Racial justice leadership involves infusing equity-mindedness across all facets of the organization.<sup>7</sup> People of all races – including White people – can be effective racial justice leaders if they develop and conscientiously practice equity competencies.

*Racial justice leadership involves infusing equity-mindedness across all facets of the organization. People of all races – including White people – can be effective racial justice leaders if they develop and conscientiously practice equity competencies.*

For example, Alliance for a Just Society, a national coalition of state-based community organizations, has a Justice Leadership Academy, a year-long program for community organizers and leaders. The program is designed to “expand the training and organizing capacity of the Alliance’s affiliate organizations and educate grassroots members across a wide geography about economic justice issues with an emphasis on the role that race plays in creating and worsening inequities.”<sup>8</sup> Through deep and systematic training, the Alliance’s affiliates are leading state and national campaigns addressing race issues in health care, immigrant rights and economic justice.

### **Strategic Alliances**

Structural change will require a broad-based racial justice movement, just as it has in the past. Organizations that are multi-issue and multiracial have the ability to make strategic connections across different issues and constituencies, which can provide the basis for broad-based and long-term power building necessary to produce substantive change.

The Excluded Workers Congress connects workers who by law or practice have been excluded from the right to organize in the U.S. The network creatively and strategically unites farm workers, domestic workers, day laborers and guest workers, taxi drivers and restaurant workers, workfare workers, and formerly incarcerated workers.<sup>9</sup> These alliances exemplify the multiracial and racial justice infrastructure that needs continued development.

### **Internal Education**

To address racism, community organizations need to embrace an “engagement” rather than “avoidance” model. Engagement begins with creating the relational and analytical space for conversations about race and identity. Organizers and leaders can learn how to make these conversations constructive and strategic. Because racism is such a dominant part of many social issues and institutions, racial equity needs to be prominently and continually addressed when building organizational culture and organizing campaigns.

When people most directly affected by the problems share stories of their lived experiences, they can explore connections and patterns. Structuring learning opportunities into the life of actual issue campaigns creates a powerful iterative process between learning and action. It is where the direct-action, organizing model popularized by Saul Alinsky meets the popular education model for social transformation popularized by Paulo Freire. Add in some analysis about how race interacts with gender, class and other dynamics, and people can begin to discover even more connections and options for strategic alliances and action.

For example, Dream Activist, the undocumented students’ action and resource network, has linked thoughtful analysis with shared narratives of racism, heterosexism and anti-immigrant policies into a bold strategy of “coming out” as “undocumented and unafraid.”<sup>10</sup> The Dreamers have advanced the federal DREAM Act to give immigrants more access to college and successfully pressured President Obama to sign an executive order relaxing deportations of young immigrants.

## Strategic Communications

With the dominant discourse on key social issues so racially loaded and coded, strategic use of media and technology to advance alternative messages and frames is now vital to racial justice efforts. Conventional organizing models have relied on the power of organized people and action to try to match the power of organized money. Grassroots organizations need to ramp up another kind of power: the power of ideas. Notions of justice, inclusion, unity and dignity – key racial justice values – are widely shared and deeply felt. These ideas are some of our most powerful assets when projected in ways that reach people’s hearts.

ColorofChange.org and Presente.org have built effective virtual forums for grassroots organizing. By mobilizing hundreds of thousands of activists to confront racism, they’ve successfully challenged the corporate advertisers sponsoring the racist commentaries of Lou Dobbs<sup>11</sup> and Pat Buchanan.<sup>12</sup> They are also creating new cultural standards for acceptable race discourse. These groups understand that cultural change – including the shifting of popular messages and messengers – must often precede policy change.

## Organizational Culture and Practices

A new horizon for advancing racial justice is in addressing implicit bias by instituting consciousness-raising mechanisms such as Racial Equity Impact

Assessments<sup>13</sup> and equity-driven planning that can help decision makers prevent unintended consequences. Implicit bias can be counteracted with “explicit equity” measures that prime the consciousness of decision makers at key “choice points.” Tools for priming equity-mindedness can be used by institutions, community groups and philanthropic organizations.

The Education Equity Organizing Collaborative in Minneapolis succeeded in getting their school board to utilize an equity impact assessment in their district planning, resulting in saving a school serving the Somali immigrant community from closure.<sup>14</sup> Citizen Action of New York, a grassroots multi-issue organization, used a race lens to critique the 2009-10 executive budget proposal and to advocate for equitable public revenues.<sup>15</sup> These groups are moving the focus from institutionalized racism to “institutionalizing racial equity.”

Funders, technical assistance providers, and partners of community organizing and civic engagement efforts can also centralize a racial equity framework in their own practices and decision making. For example, Table 2 lists considerations grantmakers can use for assessing the racial equity practices of current or prospective grantees.

The field of community organizing is adopting new tools, terms and tactics for challenging structural racism and infusing racial equity into civic action. While many

**TABLE 2: CRITERIA FOR ASSESSING RACIAL EQUITY PRACTICES**

1. Is there an articulated commitment to racial justice, equity, inclusion and unity?
2. Is a systems analysis used to identify patterns, impacts and causes of racial inequities?
3. Are issues framed with an explicit focus on racial equity?
4. Are concrete equitable solutions proposed, with viable strategies for achieving them?
5. Are people of color fully engaged and empowered in all facets of the organization?
6. Are equity competency and equity leadership developed and infused organization-wide?
7. Are there ongoing practices to unify people across racial and cultural lines?
8. Are there ongoing educational opportunities to strategically talk about race issues?
9. Are there effective efforts to expand public understanding of racism and racial justice?
10. Are explicit equity practices routinely prioritized and operationalized?

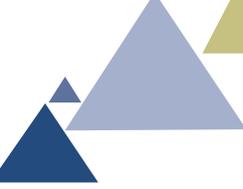
of these equity tools and strategies need to be further developed, disseminated and evaluated, they hold the promise for helping to support and sustain a growing grassroots movement for racial justice. Community organizers and leaders can become the visionaries and architects of a new social order, building strength and structural integrity from the infused values of racial equity, inclusion and unity.

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- <sup>12</sup> "Update: Pat Buchanan Out at MSNBC." *ColorofChange.org*. Color of Change, 16 February 2012. Web. 29 Aug. 2012. <<http://www.colorofchange.org/blog/2012/feb/16/bye-bye-pat-buchanan-officially-parts-ways-msnbc/>>
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# Strengthening Black Organizing Across the United States

by DeAngelo Bester and Valery Jean\*

The majority of people born this year in the United States were children of color. Some progressives believe that this ongoing demographic transformation will disrupt the structural racism that persists in our nation. Evidence suggests that this view is mistaken. We need only look to the minority-majority state of California to see that racialized structures persist and democratic processes remain unreformed. Others in the progressive movement suggest that setting aside the issue of race and focusing on distributive justice can lead to racial and economic equity. This view is also mistaken. Consider how durable racialized structures, such as school and housing segregation, limit the ability of people of color to graduate, enter the workforce, and remain outside a disparately impactful penal system.

Anti-Black racism has been and continues to be the glue that gives life to much of the resilience of structural racism. In addition to older forms, anti-Black racism has taken on the shape of symbolic colorblind racism that allows the fears and anxieties of Whites to be activated without ever using the “r” word. This new expression of racism is used not only to injure Blacks and other people of color, but also to destroy the consensus created by the New Deal and to undermine support for the middle class. By focusing on anti-Black racism, we are also asserting that in the imagination and production of structures, policies and programs, Blackness is foundational. Recognizing this can improve our understanding of American culture, structures and Whiteness, as well as our nation’s slow shift away from liberalism and public space.

Too many liberal and progressive groups are trying to develop justice without understanding racism and the anti-Black racism at its core. We believe this is a serious mistake. Race must be a central component of progressive work, both to disrupt structural racism and to achieve overall progressive change. We have seen this throughout our history, particularly in the civil rights movement of the 1960s. Our goal in this article is to

suggest that strengthening grassroots Black organizing will ensure that race is central to the progressive movement, increasing a more precise analytic discourse and sharpening strategies aimed at achieving racial and economic justice.

It is important to clarify what we are not saying here. We are not asserting that Black organizing is the only means by which to transform our nation’s racialized structures; other non-White and interracial/ethnic organizing efforts are equally necessary. Nor are we privileging the Black experience above others. Instead, we are describing how racism and injustice work in America. While there are various forms of injustice, we claim that race is the central one. We also claim that our nation’s use of Blackness to distinguish between those in the “in-group” and those in the “out-group” is fundamental to our general understanding of structural racism. With our ever-increasing diversity, it is more appropriate to categorize our main racial divide today as White and non-White, while also attending to the distinction between Black and non-Black. Recognizing this sharpens our critical analysis of race and how it intersects with class. Supporting Black organizers is one powerful means by which to achieve racial and economic justice at the point of their intersection.

## **What We Mean by Black Organizing**

We define “Black organizing” as the recruitment, consciousness-raising, skill-building and leadership development of Black people, conducted by Black people, in order to collectively challenge anti-Black

*Our nation’s use of Blackness to distinguish between those in the “in-group” and those in the “out-group” is fundamental to our general understanding of structural racism.*

racism and fight for civil, political, economic, gender, social and cultural rights. Critical to this mission is securing Black people in leadership positions within Black organizing groups. A number of these groups throughout the country have majority Black members or even boards, but their executive directors are non-Black. Max Rameau of Take Back the Land and Movement Catalyst notes that when organizations lack leaders with an understanding of Blackness they have an extremely difficult time engaging in Black organizing.<sup>1</sup> While organizations without Black leaders do good work, we believe that having a Black executive director with a deep grasp of anti-Black racism can greatly increase the effectiveness of their organizing efforts. But even an understanding of Blackness and Whiteness may not be sufficient. We believe to help disrupt the stereotype and bias that Blackness plays in our society it is imperative that Blacks represent again for both Blacks and non-Blacks.

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### **The Current State of Black Organizing**

Unfortunately, a number of realities are seriously weakening Black organizing. First, Black communities and their leaders are fragmented. This lack of unity has made it more difficult to organize. Following the civil rights movement, some Blacks became economically mobile due in large part to union and public sector jobs, but many others remained cut off from opportunities. As a result of this growing class divergence it has become difficult, if not impossible, to organize around a unified vision for social justice. Before the gains of the civil rights movement, segregation meant that middle-class Blacks belonged to the same institutions and organizations that made demands on a system that shut everyone out. Since that is no longer the case, the urgent imperative for grassroots Black organizing today is building power among the people and producing more effective outcomes in the communities left behind.

Black organizing is also weakened by the lack of institutions willing or capable of engaging it. Traditional

civil rights organizations like the Urban League, and to a lesser extent, the NAACP, do not prioritize grassroots Black organizing and are often cut off from a grassroots Black political base. Instead, those venerable institutions limit their engagement to top-down advocacy and litigation activism; but organizing, or even supporting grassroots formations, is not at all part of their work and to expect otherwise is to wait in vain for leadership or expertise that will not emerge.

On the flip side, many national organizations and networks committed to grassroots organizing have lacked both a comprehensive analysis on structural racism and the role that anti-Black racism plays in holding the system together. Groups like the PICO National Network, National People's Action, Gamaliel Foundation and others play a critical role and are evolving their racial justice analyses, but have been more rooted in a populist, economic justice analysis.

Other Black-led organizations operating in Black communities focus on direct services or economic development. Although all of these approaches remain vital and actually connect organizations to those most affected by structural racism, they do not usually engage those constituencies toward action. Though important exceptions to this overall reality exist, most service-oriented organizations in the Black community do not prioritize developing leadership or base building in order to make demands on targets. With grassroots involvement, a movement can be developed beyond single campaigns, increasing the ability of all strategies to bring about structural and systemic change. Applying both top-down and bottom-up strategies can create “communities of opportunity” and lead to campaigns for good jobs, affordable housing and relevant, quality schools.

Unfortunately, Black organizing also suffers from a lack of resources. In his report “The Black Door of Social Change,”<sup>2</sup> Dushaw Hockett summarized over 100 interviews with Black organizers and directors across the country finding that many of their organizations were small and underfunded. These “mom-and-pop shops” usually have deep roots within the Black community and work on issues critical to its survival, but they possess very limited operating capacity with little to no paid staff to facilitate the daily work necessary to advance long-term social change. This lack of capacity



also prevents many of these organizations from being part of larger alliances and coalitions, which are often on the frontlines of efforts to win living wage jobs, affordable housing, expanded health care, environmental justice and police accountability. The presence of strong, grassroots Black-led organizations in such formations would increase the ability of the larger progressive movement to push big issues and bring home actual change to engaged constituencies.

### **Dismantling Structural Racism Through Strengthening Black Organizing**

In their book “The Miner’s Canary,” Lani Guinier and Gerald Torres use the metaphor of “the canary in the coal mine” to illustrate the role communities of color play in our society. Harms experienced by communities of color serve as a warning sign of problems within the larger environment. The Black community has been our country’s perfect canary. For example, years before the subprime lending crisis started getting mainstream media attention, Black communities across the country were being devastated by its effects. Strengthening grassroots Black organizing can draw critical attention to the realities facing the Black community that also harm other communities. As in movements past, organizing highlights many critical issues in the Black community and allows other communities to view those issues for what they are: warning signs of what’s to come in the broader economy and society. The caution of the miner’s canary is also a reminder that by neglecting opportunities to expand Black organizing capacity, we fail to develop the larger movement for racial justice.

At its very core, Black organizing is about challenging racism and racialization, which by necessity requires challenging Whiteness and its values and privileges expressed in our cultures and institutions. Black organizing is uniquely able to take what appear to be isolated events about individual people – the Jena 6, the Scott Sisters, Troy Davis and Trayvon Martin – and through organizing around those events, build a base of supporters broader than the Black community to fight for larger systemic change. “Black organizing directly confronts racism, especially anti-Black racism,” according to labor policy specialist Steven Pitts of the Berkeley Labor Center. “This allows organizations to recruit Black folks from widely different income levels because of the unifying factor of race and shared

oppression.”<sup>3</sup> This characteristic of Black organizing is vital to dismantling structural racism.

On many issues, the Black community expresses more progressive politics than other American communities. For example, Blacks overwhelmingly support policies that would redistribute wealth and help bring about a more equitable and just society. A 2011 National Journal found that 84 percent of Blacks support the idea of a surtax on people making more than \$1 million a year, as compared to just 77 percent of non-Whites (including Hispanics) and 68 percent of the overall population.<sup>4</sup> As the struggles from the civil rights movement fade from our collective memory, our country can greatly benefit from Black organizing that will contribute to a new racial justice movement through consistently strong progressive politics.

### **Solutions and Recommendations**

While progressive organizing groups representing any community could use help in building capacity, we would argue this is especially true for Black organizations, in light of their particular role and the challenges noted above. Below are some recommendations that foundations and other funders could consider in their role to strengthen Black organizing:

**Create a significant donor collaborative fund** to improve the infrastructure and capacity of Black organizing, including the recruitment and training of Black leaders and executive directors. The fund should focus on Black organizations with varying degrees of capacity, and on broad-based support as opposed to any one particular issue or geographic setting. Thomasina Williams, a former program officer at the Ford Foundation, estimated that a fund up to \$50 million would be needed in order to have real impact.<sup>5</sup>

**Strengthen relationships and networks.** Funding can support exchanges, convenings and leadership training among both the staff and base of Black organizations, and also assist in helping these organizations and organizers develop alliances with other organizers of color.

**Open doors.** Funders can empower Black organizers by linking them to influential contacts, particularly when limited access to existing nonprofit sector infrastructure is a barrier for many startup efforts.

### **Become an ally and a partner, as well as a funder.**

In addition to critical financial support, funders can publicly stand behind Black organizers on controversial issues and leverage their social and political power to increase organizers' effectiveness.

**Invest in internal political education and training around structural racism and implicit bias.** In addition to understanding racialized structures, progressive funders can take note of implicit biases – their own and others – that can compromise an understanding of the Black experience and what is needed to ameliorate it.

Our nation is at a crossroads. But through dedicated organizing, leadership and alliance building – which bring racial equity into the heart of movement work – we can see the potential for building a future where racial injustices are greatly curtailed. This future sees a new majority of communities of color where differences are acknowledged and appreciated. Unfortunately, we also can see a future in which marginalization of communities affected by structural racism is intensified – where self-determination is denied for large numbers of Black and Brown people because of massive unemployment, lack of access to capital, mass incarceration, immigration policies that foster and exploit large undocumented populations, and the restriction of voting rights.

To advance our collective goal of ending structural racism, there must be serious alignment and coordination between organizations in the field of racial justice like never before. This means that each community must have space to develop its own leadership and its own analysis, so that diverse leaders can come together as peers to struggle with a larger racial and economic equity agenda.

We hope these reflections and recommendations open up dialogue that begins with a candid assessment about the present state of Black organizing, and from there builds upon the need for a stronger, Black-led and race-conscious field of organizing and action with its transformative potential to move the country toward more progressive values and energize a comprehensive agenda for racial justice.

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**Valery Jean** has been working with Families United for Racial & Economic Equality (FUREE) in Brooklyn, NY, since 2006, and transitioned into the executive director's position in 2010. She has worked on community organizing and policy advocacy in racial, gender and economic justice, as well as strategic planning and funding development for organizations led by people of color, for nearly 16 years. [furee.org](http://furee.org)



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\* Thanks to **john a. powell**, director of Haas Diversity Research Center at the University of California, for his contributions to this article.

<sup>1</sup> Interview with DeAngelo Bester, August 2011.

<sup>2</sup> Hockett, Dushaw. "Black Door of Social Change." *Black America Organizing Project*. Black America Organizing Project, n.d. Web. 29 Aug. 2012. <<http://blackorganizing.org/resources/the-black-door-of-social-change/3/>>

<sup>3</sup> Interview with DeAngelo Bester, March 2012.

<sup>4</sup> Cooper, Matthew. "Occupy D.C. 2 Most Back Protests, Surtax." *National Journal Daily*. National Journal, 19 Oct. 2011. Web. 29 Aug. 2012. <<http://www.nationaljournal.com/daily/occupy-d-c-most-back-protests-surtax-20111018>>

<sup>5</sup> Phone interview with DeAngelo Bester, October 2011.



# ***Will Immigrants of Color Be Racial Justice Voters in November and Beyond?***

*by Mari Ryono, Angelica Salas, and Aparna Shah*

In November 2010, the power of the emerging immigrant electorate became evident. Latinos in particular were credited with “saving the West” for Democrats<sup>1</sup> by helping defeat anti-immigrant candidates and delivering victories to California Democrats such as Governor Jerry Brown and Attorney General Kamala Harris. In 2011, immigrant rights activists and voters helped defeat Arizona State Senator Russell Pearce, the architect of the notorious anti-immigrant SB 1070.<sup>2</sup> “The Latino vote is now seen as a game changer in this country,” said Arturo Carmona, executive director of Presente.org. “Yet there is much work ahead to realize the promise. Collaborating with other communities of color to achieve power equity, justice and a more equitable economy is not only our responsibility as Latinos but required for our collective progress.”<sup>3</sup>

The 2010 U.S. Census underscores the growth of Latino, Asian and other immigrant populations in the United States. Currently, Asians represent nearly 6 percent of the total U.S. population, while Latinos remain the nation’s largest “minority” group at nearly 17 percent. According to Census Bureau projections, by the year 2050, the population of Asians in the U.S. is expected to triple to over 33 million. Latinos are expected to increase their numbers to over 100 million or, roughly speaking, 1 out of every 4 Americans.<sup>4</sup> There are more than eight million immigrants with permanent legal residence who are eligible to become citizens in the United States.<sup>5</sup>

There is much to be done, however, to ensure that immigrants become consistent voters. The Voter Participation Center references recent census data in noting that the Rising American Electorate (RAE) – unmarried women, youth and people of color – accounted for 95 percent of the U.S. population growth between 2008 and 2010; yet 71 million of this demographic group did not vote in 2010.<sup>6</sup> This article adds another critical question to this discussion: What will it take to ensure that immigrants of color not only vote, but become racial justice voters?

Immigrants of color – including Latino, Asian, African and Arab immigrant communities – are certainly ripe to be racial justice voters. They have experienced firsthand the pain and injustice wrought by structural racism – the institutional oppression of people of color as opposed to individual racist acts. From the denial of equal opportunity and a path to citizenship, to racial profiling and discrimination, to the lack of in-language and culturally-relevant materials, and to explicit intimidation and suppression of their vote, immigrants of color understand structural racism because they experience its impacts every day.

The fact that low-income immigrant and U.S.-born communities of color often live in close proximity and in similar conditions demonstrates the fact that immigrants have been impacted by unequal structures in the U.S. Still, African Americans and U.S.-born Latinos may not perceive immigrants as allies, particularly as immigration has consistently and systematically been used as a “wedge issue” to divide Americans. Competition for resources like jobs, housing and education is high. Overestimating solidarity among immigrant and U.S.-born communities of color results in dangerously underestimating the work necessary to build authentic and deep solidarity across difference.

Of course, there is also great diversity within immigrant groups themselves. Take, for example, the “Asian Pacific Islander” category, which includes over 45 distinct ethnicities and over 100 language dialects. According to a recent Pew report summarized by Colorlines.com, “More than a third of all Hmong, Cambodian and Laotian Americans over the age of 25 don’t have a high school degree ... While some Asians may report incomes at or higher than Whites, Cambodian and Laotian Americans report poverty rates as high as, and higher than, the poverty rate of African Americans, according to the 2010 Census. The more complex and far less exciting explanation for Asian Americans’ relatively high rates of education has more to do with immigration

policy, which has driven selectivity about who gets to come to the U.S. and who doesn't."7 Similarly, Nunu Kidane of Priority Africa Network said, "African immigrant voters are often incorrectly categorized or assumed to be part of African Americans; more often, they are entirely left out of discussions on immigrant voters."8

Strategies to bring together diverse immigrant groups and people of color as allies and racial justice voters require deep political education within and across communities. Many organizations like Mobilize the Immigrant Vote (MIV),<sup>9</sup> Black Alliance for Just Immigration (BAJI), and others are doing just that. "The MIV multi-issue platform is a cornerstone of the work," shares Vanessa Aramayo, director of California Partnership (CAP), a statewide coalition organizing for policies that fight poverty and build power among low-income communities. "The needs of low-income communities of color define the core values for MIV. Together, we work on a wide range of issues and engage immigrant communities to better understand the direct impacts these issues have on their lives and the lives of other low-income people of color." Adds Kidane, "Priority Africa Network strengthens the capacity of our partner organizations to do culturally-based community analysis and civic engagement while also building alliances among immigrants, African immigrants and African Americans."

Promising research shows that immigrants support a racial justice and progressive agenda when organizers lead with values and culturally-based concepts in communities' primary languages. In 2011, MIV chose tax and fiscal reform as a priority racial and social justice issue. The MIV Take Back the American Dream Campaign demonstrated high rates of support across race for progressive tax and fiscal reform. Ninety-two percent of immigrant voters of color surveyed supported progressive tax and fiscal policy when phone callers spoke first about shared values of opportunity, fairness and responsibility to the common good.<sup>10</sup>

Leaders with the Coalition for Humane Immigrant Rights of Los Angeles (CHIRLA) identified responsibility to the "common good" ("el bien común") as the value that tested the strongest with Spanish-speaking voters. In the historically conservative Vietnamese community in San Jose, 72 percent of voters

*Ninety-two percent of immigrant voters of color surveyed supported progressive tax and fiscal policy when phone callers spoke first about shared values of opportunity, fairness and responsibility to the common good.*

supported progressive tax and fiscal policy. "We had to choose culturally-appropriate language," said Patricia Diaz, the executive director of the Services Immigrant Rights and Education Network (SIREN). "For example, we didn't use the word 'rich' because many in our community think of themselves as soon-to-be-rich even when they are the working poor. Instead, we had to talk about increasing the tax rate on 'millionaires.' This is an example of how knowing your community and how to bridge concepts makes all the difference." Alex Tom with the Chinese Progressive Association commented on how they bridged cultures and translated the concept of the American dream to Chinese Americans in San Francisco during the MIV campaign. "We found that the language of the 'Gold Mountain,' a common name for San Francisco and the United States among Chinese, really tapped into the hopes and dreams in our community and created a strong bridge for the need for progressive tax and fiscal reform."

Community organizers and the funders who support them can play a critical role in ensuring that the highest quality data and technology is used for reaching out to immigrant voters of color. This is a key to ensure that civic engagement initiatives advance racial justice. For-profit data and technology companies are designed to meet the needs of traditional political campaigns that largely target older, White, affluent, U.S.-born voters. These companies have honed their systems in impressive ways, but are not yet providing sufficiently tailored services that organizations targeting low-income immigrants of color need, such as distinguishing between Pilipino and Latino voters, or training limited-English or computer-proficient community leaders how to manage their voter data.

Significantly, the immigrant vote will only be a racial justice vote if the movements and organizations that represent them have strong and deep alliances with the African American community. Voting rights is



a particularly effective vehicle for building greater solidarity among immigrants and African American communities because of the historic significance of the struggle for voting rights within the African American community and the current systematic exclusion of African Americans from the democratic process. “Black Americans understand both the violent history and modern-day manifestation of voter suppression in this country,” says Dorsey Nunn, executive director of Legal Services for Prisoners with Children. “Americans may celebrate Martin Luther King Jr. Day, but there is no large-scale effort to register incarcerated citizens to vote. Black, Brown and Asian communities are seen as a threat to the current power structure. It is no coincidence that California saw both Proposition 187 (denying services to immigrants) and Proposition 184 (‘three strikes and you’re out’) in 1994. Black Americans know what it means to be excluded from the American Dream. We have that in common with the immigrant experience.”

This work does not happen overnight, but through deep political education and working together side by side. For MIV, this has meant incorporating the history of the struggle for African American voting rights as essential context for the current struggle for immigrant voting rights; engaging immigrants and U.S.-born African American communities in deep conversations on issues such as the housing crisis and criminal justice; identifying opportunities for joint engagement such as MIV partners joining the “We Are The 99%” social justice delegation of the Los Angeles Martin Luther King Jr. parade<sup>11</sup>; and building intentional long-term relationships with other statewide and national organizations that represent U.S.-born communities.

*The immigrant vote will only be a racial justice vote if the movements and organizations that represent them have strong and deep alliances with the African American community.*

The need for explicit alliance building is even more necessary given the changing demographics in this country, the problematic zero-sum view of power, and systematic conservative strategies to divide communities of color across race, ethnicity and immigration status. How does it feel to African Americans to read the

headlines about the exploding Latino and Asian populations in this context? What is the impact on African American political power if a local district historically represented by African Americans is redrawn with a new majority Latino population? These are questions with which immigrant communities and philanthropic investors must seriously grapple.

The good news is that many are doing so. In 2011, a historic convening of immigrant rights groups was held in Montgomery, Ala., to protest the passing of anti-immigrant HB 56.<sup>12</sup> “Our youth leaders participated in a convening of Asian Pacific Islander youth in Montgomery,” said Dae Joong Yoon of the Korean Resource Center and the National Korean American Service and Education Consortium (NAKASEC). “Our young people had the opportunity to walk in the paths of African American civil rights leaders and learn about the history of fighting against racism and voter suppression in this country. It was a transformative experience.”

“Since the Alabama actions in fall of 2011, a coalition of African American leadership from the civil rights movement and leaders in the immigrant rights movement have been in discussion about how to better support each other,” said Xiomara Corpeño of CHIRLA. “Immigrant leaders with the Fair Immigration Reform Movement (FIRM) joined the Alabama NAACP for a one-week march to commemorate the historic Selma to Montgomery March of 1965. African American and immigrant leaders have supported each other in engaging with U.S. Attorney General Eric Holder on issues of racial profiling and voting rights. In Alabama, this closeness has fostered an organic mutual understanding of our linked destiny to fight for rights; and on a national level, it has meant a higher-level conversation about how to work intersectionally as well as coordinate actions where united fronts are vital.”

Mobilize the Immigrant Vote outlines the following as best practices to leverage immigrant voting and civic engagement as vehicles to advance racial justice: 1) community-based strategies that address the complexities and contradictions of diverse experiences; 2) values-based messaging that is in-language, in-culture and based on original research targeting immigrant communities of color; 3) year-round education and building of readiness to engage communities on tough

issues; and 4) relationship-building among immigrant communities and with U.S.-born communities to set the stage for struggling together and building unity. Electoral organizing has been both a historic battleground for racial justice and an arena dominated by White men and institutions that deny the existence of structural racism. Will immigrant communities of color be racial justice voters? With our collective commitment, analysis and action – including bold leadership in the philanthropic sector – we will.

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**Aparna Shah** is executive director of Mobilize the Immigrant Vote. She previously worked for the self-determination and reproductive justice of women, people of color and queer communities, and spent several years working to transform San Francisco public schools into vibrant youth and community centers. [www.mivcalifornia.org](http://www.mivcalifornia.org)

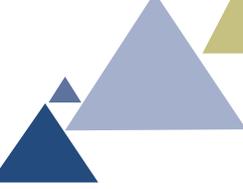


full text of the law is available at <http://www.azleg.gov/legtext/49leg/2r/bills/sb1070s.pdf>

- <sup>3</sup> Email communication with Aparna Shah, July 2012.
- <sup>4</sup> Armas, Genaro C. "America's Face is Changing." *CBS News*. CBS News, 11 Feb. 2009. Web. 29 Aug. 2012. <[http://www.cbsnews.com/2100-201\\_162-607022.html](http://www.cbsnews.com/2100-201_162-607022.html)>
- <sup>5</sup> Czekalinski, Stephanie. "Immigrant Groups Encourage Green-Card Holders to Naturalize, Vote." *The Next America*. National Journal, 01 May 2012. Web. 29 Aug. 2012. <<http://www.nationaljournal.com/thenextamerica/politics/immigrant-groups-encourage-green-card-holders-to-naturalize-vote-20120424>>
- <sup>6</sup> "The Rising American Electorate." *The Voter Participation Center*. The Voter Participation Center, n.d. Web. 29 Aug. 2012. <<http://www.voterparticipation.org/the-rising-american-electorate/>>
- <sup>7</sup> Hing, Julianne. "Asian Americans Respond to Pew: We're Not Your Model Minority." *Colorlines.com*. Applied Research Center, 21 June 2012. Web.
- <sup>8</sup> Unless otherwise cited, quotes throughout article are from email communications between speaker and Mari Ryono, May/June 2012
- <sup>9</sup> MIV is a coalition of organizations anchored by the California Partnership (CAP); the Chinese Progressive Association (CPA); the Coalition of Humane Immigrant Rights of Los Angeles (CHIRLA); the Korean Resource Center (KRC); and the Services, Immigrant Rights and Education Network (SIREN). MIV invests in year-round, multi-issue education that makes connections with unique issues and the daily lives of diverse communities.
- <sup>10</sup> "Taking Back the American Dream in Low-income Immigrant Communities of Color." Oakland, Calif.: Mobilize the Immigrant Vote, 2012. Print. <https://www.dropbox.com/s/h6y17j4ynns99p9/miv-2011-fall-report.pdf>
- <sup>11</sup> In 2012, the Community Coalition convened a multiracial "Occupy King's Dream" delegation of grassroots social justice organizations for the Los Angeles Martin Luther King Jr. parade. [www.cocosouthla.org](http://www.cocosouthla.org)
- <sup>12</sup> HB 56 is the "Hammon-Beason Alabama Taxpayer and Citizen Protection Act" signed into law in Alabama in June 2011. The full text of the law is available at [http://blog.al.com/ht/2011/07/read\\_the\\_full\\_text\\_of\\_alabamas.html](http://blog.al.com/ht/2011/07/read_the_full_text_of_alabamas.html).

<sup>1</sup> Hing, Julianne. "Latino Voters Save the West for Democrats." *Colorlines.com*. Applied Research Center, 03 Nov. 2010. Web. 29 Aug. 2012. <[http://colorlines.com/archives/2010/11/latinos\\_save\\_the\\_west\\_for\\_democrats.html](http://colorlines.com/archives/2010/11/latinos_save_the_west_for_democrats.html)>

<sup>2</sup> SB 1070 is the "Support Our Law Enforcement and Safe Neighborhoods Act" signed into law by Arizona Governor Jan Brewer on 23 April 2010. It became one of the most anti-immigrant laws in recent U.S. history and became a rallying point for both pro-immigrant and anti-immigrant activists. The



# Building Bridges to Empower a True Majority: The South by Southwest Experiment

by Leroy Johnson, Genaro López-Rendón, Mónica Córdova, and Louis Head

The far right is putting up a tsunami of resistance in its attempt to reverse gains made by people of color over the past 50 years. We must fortify and anchor now so that we may move forward after the tide has washed over us. We are presenting this case study as an example of one way that grassroots organizations are maintaining and advancing a position reflective of those gains, while making an important contribution to movement building in the face of the challenge.

Racial justice is a fundamental part of any path to social justice in the United States, and it will only be attained to the degree that structural racism and accompanying social inequality are addressed. People of color will become a collective new majority of the U.S. population by 2040. This demographic shift provides a basis to transform the country, provided that we can become capable of the kind of *struggle* that is necessary for transformation. In order to overcome historic structures of domination and control, organized communities of color and low-wealth communities must become architects of policy and build a *true majority* capable of building and exercising power to bring about real change. This will require not only a clear and strategic analysis of structural racism, but also new forms of collaboration that can build accountable leadership and organizations.

The forms of domination that emerged in the 20th century took different shapes in both the South and Southwest, but bore similar results for people of color. Segregation and racially exclusionary practices, according to historian Eric Foner, developed “as a complex system

of White domination, in which each component – disenfranchisement, unequal economic status and inferior education – reinforced the others.”<sup>1</sup>

Notwithstanding the success of movements to end the legacies of slavery and colonization – legal segregation and the most overt, hostile forms of racial exclusion – structural inequalities remain. Indices related to education, unemployment and underemployment, segregation, political disenfranchisement, and land loss are remarkably similar for African Americans and Latinos – and worse for Native Americans – in the two regions. Furthermore, many argue that the conditions in the South and Southwest provide the foundation for lowered economic standards that are now being applied throughout the country.<sup>2</sup>

The histories of the American South and Southwest underscore the development and growth of both *de jure* racial segregation and structural racism. The two regions have long histories of struggle against distinct versions of racial oppression. Still, the comparisons between those fights and current conditions create an opening for creative and strategic shared work among grassroots organizations in communities of color. One interesting new collaborative development can be found in the work being done by the South by Southwest Experiment (SxSWE).

## **The South by Southwest Experiment**

In 2005, grassroots community organizations responded to the devastation wrought by Hurricane Katrina by sending organizers and members to affected areas in the South via the Gulf Coast Justice and Solidarity Tour, led by Southwest Workers Union (SWU) of San Antonio, Texas. This collaborative project allowed participants to demonstrate unconditional solidarity with affected African American and indigenous communities of the Gulf Coast, and prompted SWU leaders and those of two other participants, Southern Echo of Mississippi and the Southwest Organizing Project (SWOP) of New Mexico, to reconvene. Over several days in Mississippi in 2006, they

*This demographic shift provides a basis to transform the country, provided that we can become capable of the kind of struggle that is necessary for transformation.*

shared their organizational histories, which include specific campaigns that have long named and challenged structural racism.

For example, SWOP made a name for itself in New Mexico and throughout the Southwest during the 1980s by developing a practice of environmental justice organizing. It continues to work on environmental and public health concerns, and focuses much of its attention on food justice and youth rights. SWU grew among a base of low-wage public school workers in San Antonio, Austin and the Rio Grande Valley of Texas, and has won countless victories for better wages and working conditions in that “right to work” state. Like SWOP, it engages in environmental and food justice efforts, and more recently began to organize domestic workers in South Texas.

Southern Echo was founded by veterans of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee in Mississippi and has made its mark working on public education funding in the Mississippi Delta. Southern Echo works to end the “school-to-prison pipeline” by developing progressive policies related to school discipline, and by increasing the grassroots participation in census and redistricting work throughout the state.

The gathering in 2006 of SWOP, SWU and Echo leaders lifted up the visions of each organization as part of a broader movement for racial justice. The differences in the conditions in New Mexico, Texas and Mississippi were obvious, but the recognition of the similarities of those conditions helped organizers understand the possibility of collaboration among their organizations. In order to build a solid foundation, they avoided identifying a set of issues on which to work and instead proposed an intentional process of interaction so their members could be full protagonists in defining the relationship. They called their partnership the South by Southwest Experiment, in recognition of the cross-regional character of the process and because of the fact that they would be testing a new methodology of work.

During 2007-08, a series of listening and learning sessions hosted in Mississippi, New Mexico and South Texas brought together 20 leaders and members from each organization. Participants exchanged personal and organizational stories, engaged in deep cultural sharing – the glue of relationship building – and began to develop a living curriculum by constructing a collective historical timeline of moments of importance to people of color.

Strong bonds between the organizations and their members, young and older, began to take shape.

### ***Joining in Collaborative Work: The Struggle to Maintain and Strengthen Voting Power***

The partners reconvened the following year to begin developing a program of work, agreeing to share best practices, with each organization contributing based on its strengths. Key issue areas were defined: promotion of accountable governance, organizing to ensure complete census counts, enabling communities to engage in redistricting efforts, developing a grassroots living curriculum, and strengthening youth leadership and sharing of intergenerational practice characteristic of each organization.

Over the years, members or allies of each partner organization have become involved in electoral politics, winning county commission, school board, city council and state legislative seats in the different states. The concept of accountable governance includes civic engagement, but raises broader questions regarding the transformation of how power is exercised. A key component is community participation in decennial census counts and the delineation of electoral districts based on the resulting data. With population numbers trending inexorably towards a “new majority,” conservative forces have counted on redistricting efforts to diminish the impact of the Black and Latino vote, and to grow or maintain largely White Republican majorities in state houses, as well as in the House of Representatives.

In the decade to come, many House districts will see continued upward movement in the numbers of voters of color, giving racial justice organizations all the more reason to pay close attention to attempts to blunt that emerging majority. At stake is the distribution of billions of dollars in government funds for public services and infrastructure, as well as the ability of a community to be represented in a manner that best reflects its interests. Without voting power, district and statewide races will continue to result in more policies that support structural racism, which is why both the fight for fairly apportioned districts as well as efforts to prevent systematic voter disenfranchisement are important racial justice strategies.

Since its founding, Southern Echo has made the U.S. Census and redistricting process central to its work.

Echo-led coalitions have provided training and legal assistance to organizations working on both the census and reapportionment of congressional, state legislative and county commission districts. Their successes at the state level have dramatically raised both Black voter turnout and Black representation in the Mississippi legislature, along with numerous school boards and county commissions, thus providing a useful model for this work on a larger scale.

Prior to the South by Southwest Experiment, SWU and SWOP had not engaged in either census or redistricting work. So Echo conducted trainings for them on the census and redistricting – and their relationship to fair representation and voting rights – as well as changes in the laws and rules regarding minority vote dilution and communities of interest under the Voting Rights Act. SWU and SWOP staff and members completed courses of study in geographical information systems development and the creation of electoral district maps. SWOP and SWU then involved their members and allies in first-time, large-scale “Complete Count” census campaigns during 2010, and conducted efforts last year that enabled affected communities to engage in municipal, county and school redistricting efforts. The process also helped Echo expand its reach in Mississippi and broaden its definition of “communities of interest” where applicable to be inclusive of both African Americans and Latinos. Echo credits this partnership with helping to expand its perspectives.

### **Sharing Our Experiences with Allies**

The South by Southwest Experiment is presently conducting a series of three national-in-scope convenings entitled “Building Bridges to Empower a True Majority” in order to share its methodology, further its understanding and practice of accountable governance, explore the potential for broader collaborations with entities outside of the partnership, and to assess conditions and priorities following the 2012 U.S. election cycle. The first two convenings, held in November 2011 and July 2012, have involved large numbers of members from each partner organization, as well as representatives of dozens of community and worker organizations from throughout the country, national policy and advocacy organizations, and public officials with strong ties to the grassroots. Important sectors of philanthropy have also participated by providing needed financial support, but just as importantly, have been engaging fully in the process, including sharing their perspectives on funding work to address structural racism.

Reflecting on grassroots organizing and capacity building, SWOP Co-founder Jeanne Gauna once said that “there is genius in the ‘hood.” However, she knew that we can never fully develop this genius unless there is a transformation of the nature of our relationships with national organizations and foundations. The collective capacity of grassroots agents of change in the American South and Southwest must be greatly increased through new regional and national partnerships and collaborations. Such relationships should be bottom-up, allowing grassroots partners to define their work based on their own interpretations of their histories, present day conditions and cultural realities. Efforts that overcome regional, historic, cultural and racial barriers to build unity among people of color and low-wealth communities are a part of this process.

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**Genaro López-Rendón** is director of the Southwest Workers Union in San Antonio, a co-founder of SxSWE, and sits on the SxSWE Steering Committee.  
[www.swunion.org](http://www.swunion.org)



**Mónica Córdova** came to the staff of the Southwest Organizing Project as the youth organizer in 2005, and represents SWOP on many national spaces including the South by Southwest Experiment. [www.swop.net](http://www.swop.net)



**Louis Head** is facilitator of the South by Southwest Experiment and was previously a longtime SWOP staff member. [www.sxswexp.org](http://www.sxswexp.org)



<sup>1</sup> Foner, Eric, and Joshua Brown. *Forever Free: The Story of Emancipation and Reconstruction*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2005. Print.

<sup>2</sup> Solís, Rubén. “The South and Southwest Labor-Worker Question.” San Antonio, Texas: Universidad Sin Fronteras, 2011. Print.

# S x SWE Youth Organizers Speak Out

The South by Southwest Experiment (SxSWE) is strengthened by its youth leadership, which includes Lizdebeth Carrasco (SWOP), Monica Ramos (SWU) and Kameisha Smith (Southern Echo). Both Liz and Mónica have been organizing since their sophomore year in high school. Kameisha began organizing way back in the fifth grade. The three young women talked recently with Lori Villarosa about their experience with SxSWE.

**Lori Villarosa:** *What were some of your initial reactions or observations when connecting with the peer organizations that are part of the South by Southwest Experiment?*

**Kameisha:** I asked myself, “What are we going to have in common?” But once the discussion started, I realized we shared the same history. We’re fighting for the same things. It was an eye opener to me because, before South by Southwest, I never interacted with people of races other than Caucasians.



**Mónica:** My first experience was back in 2009. It was my first time leaving San Antonio, and in Jackson (Miss.) there were only African Americans. I was not used to that, but it was great because they took us all in like family.

**Liz:** We did the People’s Freedom Caravan to the U.S. Social Forum in Detroit in 2010, and those of us from New Mexico and Texas met up with the people from Mississippi and received them by chanting. This celebration of being together created a feeling of solidarity between us.

**LV:** *Was there a particular “a-ha!” moment for you, something that made a difference in how you thought about this work?*

**Kameisha:** For me, it was during the People’s Freedom Caravan in 2010. One night we stopped in Louisville to spend the night and the hotel staff was, I’d say, racist. The New Mexico and San Antonio groups checked in first and had no problems. But then the hotel made the Mississippi youth sign forms saying that we would not cause any trouble. The service was just hostile. The next morning we all joined in a protest in the lobby and it was so amazing because I had never protested before. We worked together. I found that it didn’t matter if we were Black or Brown. We stuck together. That’s when I learned how connected we are.



**Liz:** One of the principles that South by Southwest goes by is trying to create bridges between communities of color. I had always heard that, but I never really understood it. Engaging in that protest was really exciting because I realized that we were doing it in solidarity with other peoples’ struggles, not just our own.

**Mónica:** That was the first time in my own experience where everyone was all together. We stood united as a family to show the hotel service the way they received our comrades was wrong and we were not going to take it. That incident made us stronger and strengthened our bonds.

**LV:** *What have you found most valuable about your experience with South by Southwest?*

**Liz:** Learning how to share best practices. SWOP has good communications and facilitation skills. The people in Texas mobilize well and know how to put on a protest. In Mississippi they have good skills around the census and areas of work like that. It is just a really good balance, so we learn a lot from each other. And we have actually been listened to and not just tokenized for being young.

**Mónica:** The whole reason for the South by Southwest Experiment is not because we organize in the same way, but because we are all different and we all bring something to the table. That’s how you learn new things. We learn about each other, which is how you keep a connection going. You’re not just focused on the organizing; you’re working on the relationship too.



**Kameisha:** There are times we work extremely hard and get things done; but we take time to reflect on our work, our accomplishments and our history, not just as SxSWE but as a people. I think what I have learned more than anything else from this experience is that it’s really important for us to be in a space where we are not just local, but we are doing something regional – something huge.

**Lizdebeth Carrasco** is a youth organizer at the Southwest Organizing Project, a youth intern with SxSWE, and sits on the SxSWE Steering Committee.

**Mónica Ramos** is a youth organizer at the Southwest Workers Union in San Antonio, a youth intern with SxSWE, and sits on the SxSWE Steering Committee.

**Kameisha Smith** is a youth organizer at the Nollie Jenkins Family Center in Lexington, Miss.; a youth intern with SxSWE; and sits on the SxSWE Steering Committee.



## ***Strengthening the Movement: Voices from the Field***

PRE Executive Director Lori Villarosa conducted a series of joint interviews pairing leading research and policy analysts/advocates with community organizers in May 2012 to discuss what they each see as the key issues within the realm of structural racism and community organizing. Following are excerpts of the interviews held with Deepak Bhargava of Center for Community Change and Dr. John A. Powell of the Haas Diversity Research Center at the University of California; Maya Wiley of Center for Social Inclusion and Ai-Jen Poo of National Domestic Workers Alliance; and Marqueece Harris-Dawson of Community Coalition and Manuel Pastor of the Program for Environmental and Regional Equity (PERE) and the Center for the Study of Immigrant Integration (CSII) of the University of Southern California. These conversations provided an opportunity to discuss where approaches aligned, and possibly surfaced some nuances reflecting their unique vantage points within the movement ecosystem.

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### ***Talking About Structural Racialization and Community Organizing with Deepak Bhargava and John Powell***

***Let's start by talking about how a structural understanding of racism leads to a new vision of community organizing.***

**Deepak Bhargava:** There is a history in community organizing that tries to assert that it is free of values and ideology. But there is no such thing. Organizing does, in fact, manifest values about how the world should be. The infusion of a structural racism analysis into the field of community organizing is still a work in progress. What I see changing is more careful attention to who is in the leadership of organizations, who is doing the actual organizing, and what issues organizations pursue and how they pursue them. A good example, and where John's work has been instrumental, is the Ohio Organizing Collaborative. They have a big jobs campaign that has both a set of revenue and job creation demands for state policy, but also very specific and targeted goals to address collateral sanctions on people who were in the criminal justice system and aren't able to find employment.



**Dr. John Powell:** We're a country that's radically individualistic and pretty ahistoric; issues are framed as if everything is really about personal responsibility, so structures have largely been invisible in our society. Add to that the issue of race and it becomes exponentially more challenging to introduce either an analysis or explicit discussion about structures and race. You're really skating uphill. But there is significant movement that is happening, although the challenge extends beyond community organizing. Because structures tend to be change-resistant, they are harder to actually move than an individual campaign might suggest. And often times there are many more interests to keep a structure in place. You need more power and more coalitions. A lot of traditional ways of organizing are not as broad or effective as they need to be.



**Would you say community organizing is central to sustainable and transformational change? What does a structural racism analysis reveal about the centrality of community organizing?**

**jp:** Well, I would start at a slightly different place. Because structures are complex and resistant to change, you need a lot of capacity. Community organizing is a part of a larger field of organizing and it is probably not sufficient in its current form. You need a substantial, organized effort and to be able to engage at a pretty sophisticated, long-term level. I am worried that we are losing organizing capacity. Fifty years ago, unions represented 35 percent of the labor force; now in the private labor force, they're at 9 percent. The capacity to engage from that sector is diminished; and I'm not sure if community organizing has really thought through how to step into the breach in a way that builds enough power, especially when structures have become more important than they were 50 years ago.

**Deepak, let's build on that. In addition to what John has just raised, I want to talk even more broadly about some of the constituencies that need to be organized and who should be doing the organizing, particularly when we are trying to impact structural racism.**

**DB:** I share John's anxiety about the state of organizing in the country. We start in a situation where the strains of radical individualism work against us. We don't have the same traditions of solidarity as in other countries. There's been erosion in a number of critical institutions, unions in particular. We are at a pivotal point in the country's history, and we don't really have the scale of organization that is required. And there are at least two requirements; the first is organization within African American and Latino communities. That's a major precondition, in my opinion, especially for broad-based coalitions required to get major changes done. The last 15 years has seen an enormous amount of talent and energy in the immigrant

*Because structures tend to be change-resistant, they are harder to actually move than an individual campaign might suggest. And often times there are many more interests to keep a structure in place. You need more power and more coalitions. A lot of traditional ways of organizing are not as broad or effective as they need to be.*

rights movement, but I have a particular concern about whether there is enough attention being paid or enough resources devoted to leadership and organization in the African American community. The second thing is building a broad base of organizations in which race is not submerged by universal agendas. The embracing of specific and general has been maybe the single greatest challenge that the left has faced in constructing mass movements. This has proven very challenging on the multiracial left for decades, maybe forever.

**How do you build a broad-based coalition without submerging race? And related to mobilizing broader coalitions, what criteria do you use for developing campaigns, considering your different positions within the movement?**

**DB:** We start with a commitment to alleviate human suffering, and the impact that particular policies have on our well-being. Beyond that are these questions: Is the campaign going to ameliorate problems that will continue to be generated from the structures that are left intact? Is there energy in the community for taking this on? Does this particular campaign have organizing and movement potential? Does the campaign attract new people to the organization and to the movement? Does achieving these changes position us differently with respect to being able to move other changes? Because as John has articulated very powerfully, systems are complex and interlocked, so it's unlikely that any one particular campaign by itself will fundamentally change life conditions. However, one thing that I have been thinking about lately is consciousness. Of course the goal of a campaign is in part to win policy changes, but the goal of our campaigns should include changing how people understand the underlying dynamics of what's going on. I think about the right's campaign on something like the "death tax"; the payoff from a policy point of view may not be immediate, but it infiltrates consciousness in a way that sets the tone of the debate for a long time. That's challenging for community organizing, but it's a frontier that many of us are trying to explore.

**jp:** Part of the challenge, as Deepak suggested, is changing the goals. We have to have relationships at different levels so it's not just transactional. Think about unions in the '40s and '50s; they were not just where people would go on strike together. They actually had picnics, went bowling, and literally lived in each other's neighborhoods. Because there really was community, there was something there that could sustain them through the very tough fights they had with corporations who were better resourced and could call



in the government. We don't have that. For the most part, our efforts are transactional, exhausting and most people don't really like them. Once the fight is over, people leave and we have to start rebuilding all over again. As a result, we don't get critical mass. Part of the goal, part of the metrics, is figuring out how to build a movement that can sustain people at multiple levels. People aren't going to be engaged in something that depletes them. What we're doing has to be informed by long-term goals about what kind of society we are trying to build; so when Deepak says we need to focus on consciousness, I completely agree. We also see a deeper understanding of how racialized structures and cultures inform much of what is and what is thought of as possible in this country. So race is often present even when not named. Race is more than just about skin tone. America's obsession with freedom, our radical separate individualism, states' rights, our weak welfare system, the Electoral College, and the way we think about class and many other American institutions are all substantially informed by race. We cannot have a serious social justice movement without seriously engaging race.

***Where do you each see the connection in applying a structural racism analysis and utilizing a communication strategy, and do you think you have to be explicit about race in the work?***

**jp:** The analysis and the communication are not the same. I don't think you have to lead with race, but it has to inform our analysis and be explicit in our communication. The question to me is not "Do we talk about race?" but "How?" How do we talk about it in a sophisticated way? How do we talk about it in a way that makes it hard to avoid? And how do we do it without driving people away? From a structural perspective, it's a different conversation. It's thinking of how we're located in structures, how these structures produce different life outcomes, and how they are profoundly racialized. In talking about race, we also need to think about our aspirations. How do we build our structures to reflect a truly inclusive and diverse society? This is a conversation that is fundamentally different from the one we normally have.

**DB:** I see a lot of progress and more intentionality in community organizing to lift up race. I am not sure if it is always done skillfully because it is complex for all the reasons John said. Sometimes it plays out through a false binary set up between race and class: what should we be leading with? But, there is no class in America

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without race. The history of the country is such that they have to be spoken of together. One thing that we are learning – and John's been very important in framing this – is that it is possible both to assert that everybody in this organization is getting harmed by a set of policies, and at the same time to note disproportionate harm or differences in circumstances for certain groups within the constituency. There is no contradiction in that. In other words, one can build the kind of unity that's required in a community organization to go and fight for change on the basis of both shared grievance and also difference. I have seen people move and change when other leaders and organizers have had the courage to lift up the different ways people have experienced health care or housing, or whatever the issue may be. When there are wedges brought to bear, it never works to run and hide. When there is rampant Islamophobia, for example, or bias against African Americans or immigrants, you have to confront it. Those wedges are deployed strategically and intentionally, and the response has to be equally strategic and intentional.

***Many of our readers will be funders who are already allies in some ways, perhaps supporting social and/or racial justice. I'd really love to lift up some of the things that they could be doing more or less of – or differently.***

**DB:** We need to rethink outcomes. We measure turnout at events or policy victories. Those are important, but there are other dimensions of change that have to do with, for example, developing consciousness, which isn't amenable to a short campaign. I am not saying we shouldn't do them. I love 1- or 2-year campaigns. But knowing that the gigantic policy reform may be a 10-year project, it's important that funders, together with grantees, help reconceptualize how we build outcomes. The second thing is inviting some risk taking. There's a tendency in philanthropy to gravitate towards the campaigns that

have previously delivered results, as opposed to looking for new approaches to organizing, coalition-building or campaigning that might be suitable to the large challenges we face. So, more appetite for risk taking and tolerance for failure are pretty important.

**jp:** Again, I agree with Deepak. You want to encourage people to take chances, to do things that are bold and that are different from the traditional things that are funded. I am not saying that is all we should do, but it certainly should be a part of what we do. To be candid, I feel like a lot of our efforts actually have come from foundations in the sense that they're picking the issues, essentially structuring the field, without the field always having the proper input. Sometimes they get it right, sometimes they get it wrong, but it's like they're deciding for – and not with – the field. That speaks to their style and power, and it also speaks to the field's vulnerability and weakness. I think it's very problematic. Something different might be, for example, creating different pots of money. I am not saying we should mimic the business world, but people talk about patient capital as opposed to debt capital. We need patient capital. Now there are some important and noted exceptions – but they're exceptions. I guess if foundations were going to be partners in this effort, I would want them to basically say, "OK, we're going to take 25-30 percent of the resources and work on really long-term problems in networks with each other."

*This is an interesting point, Deepak, because some of us have been trying to help folks be activist leaders within philanthropy; but are there also concerns if funders interpret this activism as being more about setting the agenda?*

**DB:** I agree with John – we do need to reinvent the financial base for social justice work, so that we have more patient capital and a greater ability to take risks. But there are appropriate forms of funder activism. For example, the core of funders that support community organizing and support work against structural racism is ridiculously small. I think it is increasingly how they see their job description to recruit new funders to support this work. I think there's no better perch from which to recruit than from a philanthropic perch. And we can help by strategizing together about what we need to do in order to tell the story in a compelling way, to develop people to tell the story, to promote them. That kind of a recruitment focus would be very valuable for allies in philanthropy.

**jp:** Let me add one other thing: part of the responsibility lies with us in the field. We shouldn't leave it to the foundations to figure this out themselves. We should be saying, "Here are 10 groups who are substantial players in the field. We have some differences, but we all agree we need to think about transformative change, big change, and we're not structured right to do it." The next step would be to participate in a planning process for a year or two to think about this in a serious way.

*I want to make sure I end on a hopeful note, as you each raised important ideas about moving things in the right direction. What are one or two things that make you hopeful as we move forward in this work?*

**DB:** I have a great deal of hope for the field broadly defined as community organizing. It is potentially a deeply transformative force in American life. My optimism lies in the fact that what has changed in the last 10-15 years is the bringing to bear of an analysis, which includes structural racism and also an analysis of how principled coalitions are building for power at all levels. I wouldn't say it is true everywhere, but there are fewer arguments about the centrality of a racial justice analysis than there were years ago. There are now more discussions about the "how" and that to me is remarkable progress. It makes me hopeful that we will actually be able to change some of these systems in a lasting and meaningful way.

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**jp:** Well, I see encouraging signs for what we're doing and what actually is being reflected in the larger society. For example, structural racism or racialization is not a term or idea that is unheard of anymore. Ten years ago that wasn't the case. We are not going to go back to the 1950s. We can't build an electric fence on the border, and we can't reassert the dominance of men in the workplace. An alternative vision demands that we go forward in a very complex, interconnected world where Blacks and Latinos aren't your enemies, immigrants and gays aren't your enemies, and China is not your enemy. So part of our job as progressives who care about race and about justice is to push our friends, whether they are in the foundations or



in the White House. We have to do it in a strategic and respectful way – by helping and pushing. We’re starting to see some of that. We are creating a table with unions, community organizers, stakeholders, communications specialists and researchers. We are seeing some new alignment with LGBT and civil rights. We will also expand to issues around gender, disability, immigration and others. We are seeing some elites and Occupy raise questions of corporate misalignment and inequality. There will be more opportunities ahead, as well as more danger, so what we do or don’t do, what we build or don’t build, will matter a lot in the coming years and decades.

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**Deepak Bhargava** is executive director of the Center for Community Change, which empowers low-income people and communities of color to change the policies and institutions that affect their lives. He provides intellectual leadership on issues including poverty, racial justice, immigration reform, community organizing, economic justice and the progressive movement’s future. Prior to his appointment as executive director of the Center in 2002, Bhargava served as the Center’s director of public policy. He also directed the National Campaign for Jobs and Income Support, a coalition of grassroots groups established in 2000 to give low-income people a voice in the reauthorization of the federal welfare law and other areas critical to poor people. [www.communitychange.org](http://www.communitychange.org)

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## **Maya Wiley and Ai-jen Poo on Strategy and Caring, Criteria For Working Toward Racial Justice**

**How would you describe your organization and its role in racial and social justice movements?**

**Maya Wiley:** At the Center for Social Inclusion, we support policy strategies that will transform barriers to opportunity for real and meaningful inclusion of communities of color. We have to transform the structural arrangements that have been formed to exclude communities of color historically and continue to be reproduced today. We research, test, train and convene through partnerships to identify and catalyze transformative ideas.



**Ai-jen Poo:** We organize domestic workers around the country. Domestic workers are mostly immigrant women of color and many are undocumented. We work to build the power of the workforce and raise the level of respect for the work itself, as we work to help build a broader movement for social change. We really see ourselves

as playing a connecting role across movements for justice. For example, we do a lot of work to help labor think about what it means to have a 21st century labor movement that is truly inclusive and supportive of organizing and collective bargaining among historically excluded workers. We do a lot of work in the women’s movement to bring an immigrant rights or racial justice lens, and we challenge all the movements we’re part of to bring a gender lens to their work.



**MW:** I’d like to add that from a strategy perspective, what Ai-jen and her partners are doing with their Caring Across Generations campaign<sup>1</sup> is extremely important because it elevates a discussion that we have to have in this country about changing demographics and what it means to create a society that works for everyone. The largely White population that is 65 and older is going to be cared for by women of color who are at some of the lowest rungs of the

economic ladder, but who also need to support their own families in the process. So there is a huge opportunity for multiracial, multigenerational organizing and [for] lifting up a very different conversation in this country about what makes up a functional society that meets our needs.

***Well, speaking of strategy, how do you determine which campaigns your organizations are going to work on, and what are some of the key factors that go into how you select and ultimately frame campaigns?***

**AP:** We choose campaigns that help us build the power of the workforce, either through helping build protections for the workforce or that build organizing capacity, because there are really compelling demands that will get workers involved. The other criteria are campaigns that will help us connect to and build other issue areas in other sectors of the social justice movement. When we looked at all of that, we tried to craft a campaign that would both help us build the power of our sector and create a passage to citizenship for our members. Hopefully, in the process, we do all these things in such a way that gets at some of the questions and broader issues that are needed in the movement and in the economy as a whole.

**MW:** We consider ourselves a policy strategy organization that, I hope, supports the movement; but we're not the primary campaign organizer. We play more of a strategic partnership and support role. But in considering campaigns, it has to be something we think has the potential to be transformative at the intersection of structural racial exclusion and poverty. And it has to be something that we think has meaning for communities of color. They should be interested and engaged, and it should fit with the priorities they have. Another criterion is that there is some potential to replicate, and that it can support local strategic innovation that can connect to national strategy. One example is the California Calls Alliance, which is a multiracial alliance organizing on multiple issues while using a structural lens. They have a fiscal policy campaign they have been developing; and there has been an opportunity for us to take our expertise in effectively talking about race to support a communication strategy in their campaign, and help build their capacity and strategic engagement.

***Ai-jen, I'd love to hear more about your thinking on building cross-racial alliances in the context of campaign work.***

**AP:** I just think about how important that it is for race to be central in thinking about our strategies and our

organizing. For example, Phoenix is a city with the most White people over the age of 65 and the most young people of color under the age of 18 – it's the most racially and generationally polarized city in the country. It became clear that a place like Phoenix is really foreshadowing the demographic changes for the whole country. If we don't figure out [how] to articulate an agenda that actually operates in the interest of diversity, and unites us across race and generation, then we could potentially become a nation where policies like SB 1070 are not just in Arizona but everywhere. So really talking and thinking about race, and leaning into it with a realism about what is to come, is essential to how we're trying to think about our campaigns. Domestic work is a really diverse, multinational, multiracial workforce; so there are African American women in Atlanta and elsewhere, there are undocumented immigrants of all nationalities, and there are refugees – all within our alliance. Some of our meetings have to be conducted in up to seven different languages.

There aren't a lot of models. The multiracial society we live in today is continuing to evolve. It's important to keep learning and innovating policy solutions and the communication strategies that will really articulate that vision for what a healthy democracy for the 21st century looks like.

***Maya, how have you seen an explicit race analysis factor into the campaign strategies of other folks, and what are some of the challenges in terms of communications?***

**MW:** I think the best organizers are struggling with these same questions for the same reasons, even if they are working on different issues and campaigns. One example is the South by Southwest Experiment, which is a group of southeast, Black community organizing groups working with Latino/Chicano organizing groups from New Mexico and Texas, and [they are] looking for ways to link those communities in a larger strategic process. They share storytelling, about how people got here and their experiences, and then use that to connect to organizing possibilities – actually thinking about power and how to get people more engaged out of what can be deeply marginalized communities of color. As they are engaging across their different constituencies, most of them are trying to speak to race directly, though they are still doing the internal relationship and strategy building, and are not at the point where they are developing their formal communication strategies. But race is very much a part of the analysis for strategic development.

***You're sharing about a lot of cutting edge multiracial organizing, dealing with race directly. I know you both also work with more traditional organizing networks and unions. Do you feel that this is the direction that most of the field is going? And if not, what are the challenges to advancing a more direct racial justice lens?***

**AP:** I really feel like we are in this moment of opportunity. The more traditional organizing world is changing. There have been changes in leadership, and in organizing strategies and frameworks. A lot of leadership is trying to be more aligned and coordinated with other social justice leaders. I think we are all seeing the scope and scale of crisis in this country, and the fight that we're in – and that none of us can do it alone. Ultimately, the questions that we have to answer are much larger than one sector or one community.

We're also in this really interesting post-Occupy moment. At a meeting recently, Francis Fox Piven said that she thought that we are at the beginning of the next great social protest movement in this country that will fundamentally reshape democracy, and it will be around inequality. She sees it as a maybe 10-15 year arc of a movement that provides a different kind of context for the organizing than what we've been building incrementally over the last few decades. If we can continue to keep race and gender central as we build that movement, we will truly make some leaps forward. I feel optimistic.

**MW:** I think it is important to recognize possibility and not inevitability, because cynicism is one of the tensions that can arise. If we are cynical, it's easy to say we can't do that because it's not possible. These questions are large and daunting; and there's not a clear road map, and answering them requires a lot of strategic time, relationships and capacity that we don't always have. Sometimes what that produces is a cynicism that actually shuts down potential.

The way we develop strategy is thinking and doing together – and not waiting until we have all the answers – because part of strategic development is the iterative process of trying and failing, and learning from those failures.

I am a student of the civil rights movement, and the daughter of organizing strategists who worked at the intersections of race, gender and poverty. What I have taken from that history, and the experiences I watched my parents go through, was that nothing strategic and transformative ever happened without some tension. And tension just means we ask or argue about, for example, whether or not it's important to address issues by including

a race analysis or not. We act like we are in a kind of gilded age where we can pretend that only class matters in how we address issues, even when they have a real racial impact. There has to be a tension with how we think and talk, or we run the risk of actually missing how race operates today. And this has to happen with different generations of folks, including from people who have a different experience with race. All this means we still need to have more of a strategic conversation about the role race plays, and how to produce the results that we want for all communities, including White communities.

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***Are there other next-stage questions that you're thinking about in terms of the intersections of community organizing and policy? What kind of research tools and other supports do you think are needed to help address them?***

**MW:** We take for granted that there really needs to be a strategic process that supports the kind of collaboration around some of the strategies we need to create. And obviously we need a lot more work and tools around communicating race, particularly in a way that both builds our alliances, as well as moves a larger public discourse. And then within particular types of opportunity, there's a need for a lot more tool development. For example, we at CSI have identified strategic opportunities in the green economy beyond green jobs and opportunities in infrastructure building, but also in the bricks-and-mortar sense with things like transit and broadband. There's a huge need for additional tools in how we engage in those opportunity areas that aren't traditionally seen as racial justice areas.

**AP:** I want to link onto Maya's point about communication tools, and the way to talk about strategies and race effectively in the work that we're doing and in our alliance building. For example, we want to be able to effectively talk about the jobs crisis in relationship to both the persistent underemployment of African Americans and the exploitation of immigrant workers. We want to be able to connect the dots between what's happening now

to everyone, and what's happening specifically, and what has long happened to communities of color in a way that strengthens the movement as a whole.

**Are there particular things that you would like funders to think about when they're looking to support this work?**

**MW:** I can think of three things for funder allies. It is really important to build infrastructure in communities of color to grow the engagement of communities of color – especially in areas where demographics are changing rapidly and the need for capacity building is growing the most. Then I would say, in particular, youth of color engagement, which is greatly under-resourced, because that's where the changing demographics for communities of color are happening the most rapidly in the country. If you think of youth of color, it's a huge demographic that is really being fundamentally excluded in some pretty significant ways, and there are very few funders really paying attention to that. The other thing that I would say is it is important to fund some of this tool development around strategy and around different communication strategies. One of the things we are hearing from communities of color is that we are not paying enough attention to how to talk across race among each other in different communities of color. That's pretty significant again because one of the opportunity moments that we have as we move into this next 15-year arc that Ai-jen mentioned, is actually doing multiracial alliance building.

**AP:** It's also important to support White groups who are figuring out how to organize White communities and craft an agenda with a vision for racial equity. I think about a group like Kentuckians for the Commonwealth. One of their main campaigns is on voting rights for felons. Kentucky is a state that is like 97 percent White and their base is majority White, but they've taken that on as one of their main campaigns. It is really a model for how to move these communities, particularly White working-class communities who are really suffering in this economy, toward a vision for a healthy multiracial democracy and future in this country. These experiments across race, generation, class and gender are beginning to model the type of national policy we need, a policy agenda that really knits our interests together.

**MW:** One of the mistakes funders often make is that they convene us on their agenda, which means we're constantly putting ourselves into a conversation that we don't necessarily think is the right priority, even if it is a perfectly understandable conversation. I would hope foundations

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could have a convening, but not necessarily [be] attached to a specific set of grant outcomes. Instead, it would be important to have more of an open collaborative-building process and strategic engagement process. Sometimes it is important to have those conversations without those funders in the room.

**AP:** There are actually a number of convenings, but they don't always get us to the discussion that we need to be having. We need to be sure we're setting the right stage so our collective conversations are adding impact – where we are really going to learn from each other and build something together.

**Ai-jen Poo** is the director of the National Domestic Workers Alliance. In 2000, she helped found Domestic Workers United, which she led until 2010. She has been organizing low-income women workers for over 15 years. Her work has paved the way for historic wins for domestic workers rights on both state and international levels. In 2012, Poo was named as one of Time's 100 most influential people in the world and was included among Newsweek's 150 Fearless Women.  
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**Maya Wiley** is the founder and president of the Center for Social Inclusion, a national policy strategy organization, which works to transform structural racial inequity and exclusion into structural fairness and inclusion. A civil rights attorney and policy advocate since 1989, Wiley has worked for the ACLU, the NAACP Legal Defense Fund, and the Open Society Institute. She has contributed to "Growing Smarter: Achieving Livable Communities, Environmental Justice and Regional Equity." She is a member of the PRE Advisory Board.  
[www.centerforsocialinclusion.org](http://www.centerforsocialinclusion.org)

<sup>1</sup> Caring Across Generations (CAG) is a national movement to unite care workers, seniors, members of the disability community, and allies in order to create jobs, win affordable care services, and transform the care industry. CAG is co-directed by Ai-jen Poo and Sarita Gupta, Executive Director of Jobs with Justice.  
<http://www.caringacrossgenerations.org/>

# Multiracial Coalitions and Transformation with Manuel Pastor and Marqueece Harris-Dawson

**Manuel, in your recent publication (L.A. Rising: The 1992 Civil Unrest, the Arc of Social Justice Organizing, and the Lessons for Today's Movement Building) you share important assessments of the "movement ecosystem" that has developed over the past 20 years. Where do you each see your organization's role in the movement at this stage? What is the particular niche you play?**

**Manuel Pastor:** At PERE (USC's Program for Environmental and Regional Equity), we're very clear that we work with and for community-based organizations, trying to produce very rigorous research and unearth the arguments that our opponents make. We see ourselves as being a very data-intended shop. What we do is provide research ammunition to people who actually make policy, and that is these community-based organizations that are really organizing to garner the power to change things. Interestingly, that devotion to data accuracy has helped the Center for the Study of Immigrant Integration become kind of a neutral space to bring more mainstream organizations like the Chamber of Commerce and business groups to the immigrant rights cause.



actually networks around race as well. The Community Coalition tries to intentionally situate ourselves to bring a particular voice to those discussions. One way is having a Black/Brown coalition. Oddly enough, there isn't as much of that in big cities as you might think.

We also try to make sure that we continually raise issues related to both substance abuse and the war on drugs that impact our community. And we always try to press the point around innovation, both exposing and being transparent about things that we've tried and failed, and just giving ourselves the space and the permission to try to be innovative around our work.

**MP:** The Community Coalition has been able to develop a pretty deep bench. A lot of that has to do with careful attention to leadership development, and that's really a very important part of institution building and alliance building. It also helps because there's so much intentionality around leadership development, which also helps with building Black/Brown relationships because people are being conscious about who they are and what they're hoping to achieve.

Similarly, a distinctive mark for the CSII is that it also spends time trying to understand the relationship between African Americans and immigrants, and views the centrality of the African American struggle for racial justice as being completely intertwined with the issues of immigrant rights.

**MHD:** Leadership development is a place where organizations can be completely conscious about race and gender in a way that is hard to do with other issues. Again, it's hard work but it can be done, and it helps you build the kind of organization over generations that can continue to stay on the forefront of the struggle for racial justice.

**How would you describe the relationship between using an explicit racial justice analysis and transformative organizing? And are there any kinds of campaigns where it is less beneficial to be explicit about race?**

**MHD:** We're in the beginning part of a big campaign



**Marqueece Harris-Dawson:** The Community Coalition plays pretty specific roles in the broader social justice movement. We are consciously building a Black/Brown coalition here in Los Angeles, which is kind of the epicenter in the United States for that kind of work.

Our organization is conscious about trying to build a popular front and pursuing the most advanced social justice or radical line that we can, while remaining in the broader political conversation and not finding ourselves on the outskirts of it.

**What are some of the ways that you engage with your counterparts in terms of community organizing nationally?**

**MHD:** There are networks on issue areas; there are networks around civic or voter engagement. There are

to break pieces of the prison pipeline, which features a discussion about Black and Latino boys in schools, and push outs and suspension rates. To me, it represents a sea change because there is really good data, but this is also a specific racial profiling issue with which to build a broad consensus. That's an example that we're right in the front of, and [it] will push the racial justice line in an aggressive way that we probably haven't done in awhile. In leadership development work, consciousness building around race and racial justice is really central to what we do. [But] in many of our campaigns, we don't have the luxury of racializing them as much as we'd like to. Our rule is that we push it as far as we can. But obviously we don't want to sacrifice victories and improvements in our people's situations because we carried a more radical race line than we had to.

***Have you ever been able to win a campaign by de-racializing, even though you might lose something important in the process?***

**MHD:** The Community Coalition had a big successful campaign around making college prep courses available to every student in the city, where students of color make up approximately 85 percent of the school district in LA. The point was to educate poor Black and Brown kids, and not to shortchange them. But we didn't frame the campaign that way, so there's a sense in which one of the things you lose is the evaluation of the success or failure of the victory because you don't necessarily get the racial justice angle. To me, we lose that kind of edge when, because of the political environment, we de-racialize things.

**MP:** The campaign around men and boys of color has allowed me to consistently raise the differences between African American and Latino young men, as well as the second-generation of immigrants, and the specific challenges they face. I think, frankly, it's young Black men who face the toughest of the challenges in terms of overincarceration, overpolicing, tracking in the schools, and so on. Second-generation Latinos are closer to the African American experience, while immigrants face a different set of challenges. And it's that sort of nuancing, that it is actually really important to have an effective intervention strategy; because if you build unity without talking about difference, then you're not going to really be able to keep the unity moving forward.

I firmly believe the line from our book "Uncommon Common Ground": "You need to get race upfront to get race behind." I find that if you put it at the front of a conversation, at the front of your analysis, you often wind up working on issues that are fairly universal, like reforming the ways in which we deal with tardiness at schools or protecting folks that are in hazardous environmental conditions. Making sure you've got it up front helps you understand how the policies will play out too.

*There's a sense in which one of the things you lose is the evaluation of the success or failure of the victory because you don't necessarily get the racial justice angle ... We lose that kind of edge when, because of the political environment, we de-racialize things.*

***Have you seen traction on strengthening a race lens within the immigrant rights movement and among its allies?***

**MP:** One strand has to do with recognizing that the most anti-immigrant initiatives are being launched in places that have a long legacy of racism, places like Alabama, Mississippi, Georgia, South Carolina. You're seeing a really interesting set of shifts from what I would call transactional alliances to transformational alliances. For example, I think it is very clear that African Americans in Mississippi are recognizing that a strong alliance with Latinos and with progressive Whites might be enough to actually shift politics in that state in the next 5-10 years. Immigrants are beginning to understand their experience of being seen as "others" has been the history of racism in the United States; and African Americans [are] looking at what's going on for immigrants as being a kind of being part of an unfinished civil rights struggle.

***The focus in a lot of our social justice philanthropy has been trying to get folks to understand the importance of funding community organizing, which we all think is critical. But when we talk about systems and structure, we can undermine the importance of the interplay between direct services, such as substance abuse or violence prevention, and efforts to build community power. Marqueece, can you talk about some of the interesting things the Community Coalition has done to bridge organizing and direct services?***



**MHD:** The first constituency for Community Coalition was actually social service providers. Those were the first member activists of our organization and [they] remain the longest-standing members. One of the things I feel like we've learned is the importance of staying connected to people who both are receiving and providing services, because that keeps you grounded in a relationship with your base in ways almost nothing else does. Services are delivered in a politicized way, making that fertile ground for new activists. It is interesting that in the past 15 years or so, progressives in the U.S. have had this line about dividing services and organizing. We think the bridge between services and organizing is very important, and we try to push and help a lot of our friends see that they can find ways to do that, in order to preserve their organizing work.

**MP:** One of the reasons for the dichotomy between services and organizing is because people realized you couldn't service your way out of poverty, and so they leaned totally back on the organizing piece of it. It's important to integrate the two pieces. Service delivery is about actually showing that there are some things that you can do in the short run that make people's lives better. There's an element of the service component that's about soulfulness and people recovering their lives, which fits very well into this new direction in L.A. called "transformative organizing."

*The two of you and your work together represent some of the more effective intersections between community organizing, and policy analysis and research to work for racial justice. What are some of the issues you think are most important about these relationships? And what are the next set of questions we should be focusing on regarding research and organizing intersections?*

**MP:** One of the things that typically happens in the academic world is that faculty have all these theories, and they use the world to test the theories, rather than going out and understanding that there are some people actually building these social movements who are themselves pretty theoretically self-conscious. I think that suggests the need for a new humility on the part of researchers.

I also think a lot more needs to be done on what is the nature of transformative organizing. We've tried to take a stab at that with this new document called "Transactions, Transformations, Translations," which looks at how to measure movement building, both by the kinds of

transactions that take place or the number of people you bring to a meeting, but also by the sort of transformative organizing, leadership development, and alliance-building that takes place.

*What are some of these things you'd like funders to think about in relationship to their approach, and support for work to mobilize communities and address racial justice?*

**MHD:** One thing is to really try to invest in innovation. The other thing is to make a long-term investment so that people have time to push and prod, and explore the contours of the political world that we live in, and equally explore what their organizations are capable of.

**MP:** First, more funding around leadership development. The second thing is alliance building, which is different than leadership development because it is about learning how to be a good ally, how to sometimes put the movement ahead of your own organization, how to work together in the face of wedge issues meant to divide us. Another really key place is in the development of African American organizing leadership, meaning specific efforts that help to make sure that leadership is being built, and relevant in terms of alliance building with other groups.

The economy is key, and thinking about our economic strategy has been often confined to think tanks. So a better connection between think tanks and grassroots organizations that would actually move an agenda is really important.

Also, don't be so fascinated by the next new thing so funding tends to be kind of faddish, right? Some of our better organizations know how to package so it sounds like the next new thing. But I think understanding that this is fundamentally about having some research that undergirds

*One more thing from our own experience is the need for "ready-response" money, which provides the ability to respond to our allies in organizations when an issue comes up, and not a year later when funders have given the go-ahead when the issue is no longer ripe.*

the argument, developing a story that make sense and resonates with people, and doing the kind of leadership development and community organizing alliance building that actually moves people, power and politics. And sticking with it is important.

Finally, one more thing from our own experience is the need for “ready-response” money, which provides the ability to respond to our allies in organizations when an issue comes up, and not a year later when funders have given the go-ahead when the issue is no longer ripe.

***Some of the things that funders often do wrong begin with well-intended goals that can perhaps go awry because of different power dynamics, or a need to focus on their own metrics, etc. What are some things they should be cautious about as they support this work?***

**MHD:** The only thing that I would add as a caution is paying attention to organizational development, of which leadership development is a big, big part. We’re now at the point where a lot of organizations are entering particular changes in their lifecycle. A lot of it is leadership turnover at the top, with the baby boomers who started the organization moving on to other work. A lot of our organizations can really struggle if we don’t pay attention.

**MP:** Philanthropy needs to co-create its philanthropic agendas and the ways in which it measures success by bringing some of the best leaders and organizers in to help them think through what agendas should be, how success should be measured, etc. People are eager for it, and I think it can lead to more effective giving.

***What currently gives you encouragement that you haven’t already touched upon?***

**MHD:** We have some really big fights ahead. The 2012 election will be a big fight. And then on the world stage, a big fight is clearly shaping up around public investment. We’re excited and encouraged that these fights are mostly offensive fights for us – ones that provide space for lots of creativity and actions, and lots of hitting the streets.

**MP:** What gives me hope is watching this multigenerational affair moving forward from the baby-boomer generation that helped found a lot of these organizations. The boomers and then Marqueece’s generation were pretty intersectional and brought together

a lot of different movements. But when you see the Dream Act kids borrowing from gay and lesbian groups to “come out” as undocumented kids, and when you see the way in which young people are overwhelmingly in favor of marriage equality, and the way in which they can really reenergize these things – it sounds trite, but the younger generation gives me hope. Issues are not going away and it’s not post-racial. But this new generation is ready to fight in new and creative ways. Ways that are going to involve art and music; ways that are going to stretch across communities. And ways that are going to put marriage equality, immigrant rights, Black political and economic advancement, and the concerns of rural White working people all in the same bucket, in a much more comfortable and convenient way than we’ve ever thought before.

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# Communications and Community Organizing: Better Together

By Makani Themba

History teaches us that change is often made when an organized segment of those most affected, leading in solidarity with allies, disrupts the ability of those in power to conduct business as usual. From civil disobedience and sit-ins of the last century to #Occupy today, “fringe” strategies (approaches that are led by a disruptive minority) force changes in the status quo – even against the will of the mainstream.

Of course, having mainstream support is a good thing. The idea that we could get millions of people to surrender their privilege and fear in exchange for a world that worked for many more of us without any resistance would be beautiful. However, it’s not the usual way change occurs.

Yet, a tremendous amount of resources are poured into traditional communications approaches that promise to persuade demographic segments (that are not even a strategic priority for most organizing networks) to embrace some aspect of a justice agenda. And their messaging often promotes “lowest common denominator” values that eschew racial justice and are often not supportive or even consistent with change goals. These initiatives get away with this disconnect because they are resourced in ways that do not create any accountability to the networks they are supposed to be supporting. In fact, they operate from an “expert” paradigm where communications is a prescription handed out by a technician, not a participatory process that builds message and strategy from the collective wisdom of change agents and others living with these issues daily.

These big-ticket “strategic” communications initiatives tend to reinforce current power relations by emphasizing Whites who vote consistently as a primary audience. They also, unwittingly, undermine efforts to expand participation and voice in traditionally marginalized communities by diverting resources from organizing goals, and encouraging messaging that is alienating and even damaging to key constituencies. Two examples of current

framing trends are frames that over-represent Whites as actors in stories to advance policies and frames that misuse unconscious bias research.

**The “it could happen to you” frame that dominates current “progressive” communication is damaging to long-term public understanding of the racial impact of public policies.** In an effort to reach large numbers of middle-class White voters, many communications efforts feature stories about Whites who have “played by the rules” and still got hurt by the economic downturn. This frame aims to instill a shared sense of vulnerability in order to get Whites to take action, so the stories have to conjure deep empathy by ensuring that the “poster children” of these efforts closely resemble the audience. As a result, White, “traditional” (heterosexual, two-parent) families are increasingly portrayed as the deserving poor. Think of the White families in financial crisis featured in Michael Moore’s important films “Roger and Me” and “Capitalism: A Love Story,” or the families most often featured in media campaigns to build support for social security, health care reform, or the “Bethany” campaign to build support for the Child Health Insurance Program (CHIP). Although it is true that Whites do suffer in the mortgage crisis and the health crisis and, in fact, from most social problems, this frame does not help people understand why people of color are disproportionately affected by these issues. Further, it can subvert the structural nature of problems as it reinforces the notion that economic shifts happen to “anyone” because they reinforce deeply held notions that these conditions are unpredictable like the weather. The policy response, if any, to this “meteorological” frame is mostly limited to strengthening the safety net “just in case.” At some point, however, we will have to bite the bullet and do the long-term, methodical work of building public understanding of how racism and economic markets really work. Only then will we be able to paint a picture of how life would be under our “new and improved” alternatives.

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**We need a nuanced approach to incorporating the important research around “unconscious bias” that helps people see these conditions as socio-political context, while not reinforcing notions of racism as fixed, biological and intractable.**

Unconscious bias refers to subconscious prejudices of which we are often unaware. In a political context where our opponents have sought to deny the very existence of racism, the promulgation of research to demonstrate that racism and bias exists among most of us is important, especially given efforts by the right (and even some “progressives”) to declare that America is post-racial. However, there are some unintended consequences. Unconscious bias can focus attention on individual choices and “preferences,” and may not always help people see the relationship between these choices or preferences and institutional practice or policy – our targets for change. It can even exacerbate the way many people already confuse racism with ethnic pride and the fight for self-determination by oppressed groups. It can also obscure systemic roots of socialization (i.e., Where do these “preferences” come from?) if the frame is not properly contextualized.

**Our primary job is to build power among those affected and expand our base of support – not convince the opposition.**

A majority is not built by focusing on the opposition. Rather, majorities are formed when we expand our base of supporters, starting at the core and working progressively outward. A communications strategy should be sure to speak in terms that reflect the thoughts and dreams of our constituencies, echoing their awareness and analysis of social issues.

In 2010, billboards targeting Black women’s right to choose had begun to appear in urban media markets. The ads likened choice to “genocide” and attempted to reframe choice as an attack against Black families and communities. Building on framing that came straight from their base, SisterSong chose to put Black women front and center in

a campaign that allowed them to speak for themselves. *Trust Black Women* started with a core audience comprised of the group most affected, and built support outward with progressive women and male allies. The campaign prioritized its base of active support and leveraged the media as an organizing vehicle to engage Black women to speak directly to the underlying racism and paternalism of the opposition that essentially framed Black women as not to be trusted with choice. They prominently featured images of Black women looking directly at their audience while modeling advocacy and strength. By prominently featuring the very community under fire as powerful, the campaign helped build voice and momentum in ways that challenged both stereotypes and structural racism.

Communications is not a panacea. Its capacities are best used in concert with many other tactics: organizing, policy development, media reform and other essential activities. We need to continue monitoring media coverage of the issues and never hesitate to write or call outlets when coverage is missing key voices, shows bias, or is poorly researched. We have to develop and nurture a racial justice infrastructure for media which utilizes data, spokespeople, studies and visual imagery, that document the problems and their root causes, along with other resources that illustrate the landscape of our stories.

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### **What Funders Can Do**

People sometimes remark on how effectively and quickly the right is able to move public opinion about breaking news. They say that progressives need “rapid response” capability. But, in truth, *there is no such thing as rapid response*. The right does scenario planning, preparing for eventualities that may or may not arise, and some of those scenarios come to pass. No one can accurately predict the course of events or mobilize millions in an instant. But, if



the racial justice movement has the needed resources, we can be ready; we can develop the tools, capacities, materials and networks for whatever arises.

This should be an essential and critical priority for funders, because enhanced communications capacity can benefit so many different communities and causes. In considering communications investments, these are some important needs to be addressed:

1. **Strengthen networks among the fragmented field of racial justice workers.** We need to build relationships between and promote dialogue among racial justice funders, intermediaries, grassroots groups, communications specialists, scholars, media and other cultural workers. Strategic communications could serve as one form of connective tissue. There's no better way to build trust and connection than by working together. Developing capacities and planning future scenarios would advance our work while strengthening these necessary relationships. There have been some great collaborations over time, such as the partnership that emerged around "Driving While Black," which featured the Leadership Conference on Civil Rights, the Ford Foundation, McKinney Public Relations and many others who brought together organizers, researchers and media mavens to knit together data, experience and framing savvy into an effective community-led campaign. A more recent collaboration among organizing networks – smartMeme, Lions-Write Communications, Solidago Foundation and others – took on Bank of America this spring at their shareholder meeting in North Carolina. The result was collaborative message development and coordinated work on the ground that generated good framing and good coverage. We can build on these and other successful campaigns to develop more long-term partnerships that help institutionalize collaborations between and among racial justice workers (organizers, communicators, researchers, the many who cut across categories, etc.), and hold the work over the long haul.
2. **Encourage new thinking on race and racism, and support development of new racial justice tools and messages based on current conditions.** We know what the old frames are and why they don't work. Now we need the time and space to develop more compelling counter-narratives to the problematic "post-racial" frame. We will perform at our best not

when we're working under crisis conditions, but when we have the time and resources to innovate.

3. **Support the development and execution of comprehensive strategies that go beyond media messages.** The most promising approaches (some of which are documented in The Praxis Project's guide "*Fair Game: Racial Justice Communications in the Obama Era*") are multidimensional efforts that encompass new and alternative media, as well as broad-based public education tools like study circles, better curriculum for educational settings, and public forums. One recent example of work to advance The Dream Act drew on social media, old-fashioned marches, a sojourn by undocumented youth across the country, and national music tours that even engaged the likes of Lady Gaga.
4. **Foster initiatives that link policy change, organizing and communications to transform the institutions that create meaning in the first place.** Imagine if we set a goal that every child graduating high school in 2030 and beyond would have 12 years of anti-oppression education, leaving school ready to take their place as compassionate actors in a representative democracy. It would change how we message and how we move our agenda if we truly recognized (as the right often does) that schools are also a strategic communications venue.
5. **Support research that could and should inform this work.** We need to document and learn from evaluative strategies of groups on the ground as part of a supportive learning community to improve our effectiveness in the current landscape. We need to generate more case studies and archival efforts of successful communications plans, media banks and original research that help us test and replicate theories – or valuable learning opportunities will be lost.
6. **Provide support to and spotlight the work of groups working at the intersection of racial justice and other issues.** There is a growing sector of organizers building out their issue-based work using racial justice as a foundation for their framing (e.g., immigration rights, environmental justice, education, criminal justice). Multi-issue, cross-cutting initiatives like Caring Across Generations, for example, are critical to aggregating the power and influence of communities of color, and surface best practices in racial justice

framing that can help transform strategic communications practice at scale.

7. **Support groups to seize new opportunities as they arise.** Sometimes even small grants with quick turnaround times can make a significant difference. One model emerged in the aftermath of the 2009 killing of Oscar Grant in Oakland (Calif.). The Akonadi Foundation created the Oscar Grant Peace and Racial Justice Fund, which offered immediate mini-grants of \$500 to groups “engaged in community-led action in Oakland in response to the killing.”

Having communications experts dictate what should be said from on high has never worked. The practice is based on the myth that this is how the right does it, and the problem with progressives is that we don’t have enough message-discipline to adopt the advice in lockstep. The truth is that even conservative masters like Frank Luntz have always based their work on deep listening. The messages are good not because everyone on their side says them; they are good because they are crafted using what is heard from the base and shaped by their deep knowledge of their constituents and cultural frames. There aren’t enough of these competencies in most of what passes for change communications today, and this must change.

Robert F. Kennedy said, “Each time a person stands up for an ideal, or acts to improve the lot of others ... he sends forth a tiny ripple of hope, and crossing each other from a million different centers of energy and daring, those ripples build a current that can sweep down the mightiest walls of oppression and resistance.”<sup>1</sup>

Together, we can tell the stories that inspire the ripples and help us each feel like we are indeed in the current for justice. This work, which some of us are calling “justice communications,” is being forged by a group of forward-thinking communications strategists, organizing networks, and others developing an alternative model that rejects top-down technocratic approaches for collaborative, participatory message and strategy development designed to support not only communications goals but overall change as well.

Advancing racial justice means transforming the structures and systems that help create the world in which we live, which is why *framing* for racial justice – corollary to justice of every kind – requires an attention to systems and

structures (not just behavior and belief). We are reforming structures so that they address the real problems that our communities face as a result of racism. We are rebuilding and reshaping how these structures are managed and governed so that they are democratic, representative and culturally competent to meet community needs. And we are training, retooling and telling stories that help us surface new, shared visions of what is fair and what is possible, so that we end up with real justice for all.

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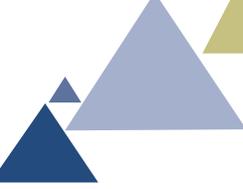
[www.thepraxisproject.org](http://www.thepraxisproject.org)



For more on justice communications and collaborative learning, visit <http://centerformediajustice.org/2011/12/07/echo-justice-initiative-business-as-usual-in-progressive-communications-is-not-good-enough>

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<sup>1</sup> Kennedy, Robert F. “Day of Affirmation Address.” University of Capetown, South Africa. 6 June 1966. Quoted from The Robert F Kennedy Memorial.



# Transformative Organizing: Putting Culture at the Center

by Denise Perry

When I was the director of an organization that worked with Black and Latino youth in Miami, I noticed that music helped create a form of communication that fostered both a strong cultural and organizational identity. The youth members used it to entertain and to raise money with talent shows, but they were moved to a deeper interest in their organizing work when the hip-hop duo Rebel Diaz came to talk with them about the power and meaning inherent in their music.

Our organization always used live music to help connect us with the community and to project our values through a culture-rich identity. One staff member described what we were doing as “edutainment,” the opportunity to deliver a message in music that feeds both the mind and soul. The music opened up pathways to introducing these young people to other forms of culture; some they understood as their own and others that helped them to better know themselves. Our organization exposed the youth to *capoeira* as a way to provide education about their roots, its use as a form of resistance, and as exercise to improve their health. Capoeira didn’t become a personal cultural practice for everyone, but it served to increase the consciousness and imagination of the youth, many of whom engage with it as inspiration in their ongoing campaign to stop the suspension and arrest of other young people in the community.

Getting foundation support for our cultural work was often difficult. More often than not, foundations wanted to see measurable results, a transactional product that we could point to. Despite this demand, our organization and many others like us have not abandoned the values that come with genuine attention to cultural practice. Our communities are shaped by structural racism and other oppressive elements that function to shut down our youth and keep them from the full expression of their potential. But our communities are also resilient places and culture remains a force by which our youth can learn to stand tall, and in so doing, inspire a collective identity and spirit to organize. In order for organizing to develop and thrive among developing young activists, we must support a

cultural practice that validates who they are and what they are capable of doing.

And so it is crucial to recognize and build on community strengths like the important role played by family, cultural events, sports, and places such as schools, parks and Black churches. These communal expressions are affirmations of cultural norms that shape and define our relationships, provide comfort, familiarity and even resistance.

But why consider culture in the context of our already complicated organizing efforts? Because in order for our work to be *transformative*, it must do more than just speak to people’s material needs. The central proposition of transformative organizing is that personal and societal transformations are inextricably linked – that it is impossible to achieve one without the other. Culture is a powerful force that is shaped by and shapes both the individual and society; and culture can aid in organizing the transformation of both.

To transform is to create an alternative, to change something into a different shape, into something new and hopefully much better. At a macro level, organizers struggle to transform a world that has been shaped by dominant groups. For many people of color, living in that dominant culture means adapting to something that marginalizes one’s cultural existence; and a people who don’t know themselves will seldom find what sustains the long struggle necessary to win.

For years, many seasoned organizers and leaders have wondered why there has been so little progress in developing Black leaders of organizations. To this day, most community organizations are White-led, often leaving African American staff and community members feeling disconnected and inadequate. While these organizations may succeed in achieving short-term transactional goals, they usually don’t build the kind of culture and leadership needed to genuinely challenge structural racism over the long haul.

Inherent in this analysis is a struggle for cultural authenticity in the organizing process. Without negating their contributions in organizations made up of people of color, White leaders and allies do not have the authentic connections to the culture of the communities in which they work. And often for communities of color, the impact of such leadership hierarchy can be seen in feelings of insufficiency within White-led organizations. This is often the case, of course, even though White leaders are as committed to the desired outcomes of combating structural racism as anyone. We have to be able to build functional, competent organizations that invest in and support leadership from the community – organizations that, in short, operate in the cultural context of our communities.

*Once people are clear about who they are, they understand that a shared cultural value system roots them to a position from which to build.*

We do know that shared culture connects a group of people through what many would define as their roots or identity. Malcolm X stressed that the real return to our roots does not mean physical return, but a “return culturally, psychologically and spiritually.” Such a recovery of culture, Malcolm explained, would deepen the kinds of values that aid in revolutionary struggle. Once people are clear about who they are, they understand that a shared cultural value system roots them to a position from which to build. This view of culture provided sustenance and resilience for individuals in the Black Liberation, Chicano, Women’s Rights and many other movements. Two generations later, organizers of color are still looking to culture to build solidarity and power.

And there are positive signs. An especially enriching part of my current work is with the Black Organizing for Leadership and Dignity (BOLD) project, a national effort to create a leadership development pipeline that will increase the skill level and number of Black organizers and directors working for social change in the U.S.<sup>1</sup> Our aspiration for BOLD is to build a long-term project that can play a concrete and catalytic role in supporting the development of these leaders and organizations within the Black community, creating a shared, trusted cultural space to work together to address the challenges facing working-class Black communities and the broader social justice movement.

The process of organizing with culture starts with identifying how people and communities respond to the pressures they face, how they unfold the pieces necessary to confront the dominant culture around them, and how they build the structures and interrelationships that provide communities of color with the resiliency to overcome. In my current work with BOLD, we ask people what gives them strength and resiliency; and what we hear are quick responses about things like singing, music, even a special meal. We encourage people to tap into these as a grounding force when they feel they are being pushed off course.

How could foundations navigate their role in this paradigm? For starters, by not dismissing the importance of how cultural values can help shape an organization’s priorities – values that don’t view the number of dues-paying members as more important than the kinds of relationships that are being developed, or more important than the consciousness-building work being done through collective study and political education. And, of course, there are other, specific ways foundations can help:

1. Recognize that cultural development within an organization builds culturally-competent, political and skill development that increases capacity and campaign effectiveness.
2. Trust the knowledge and experience of grantee organizations. Foundations should not and cannot define which cultural practices are used or the value of their use within an organization or campaign. Foundations rarely do this explicitly; however, by designing initiatives or criteria that does not recognize or understand culture, foundations often place limits on support that could otherwise be used to help an organization flourish.
3. Support the development and hiring of local leaders who bring cultural knowledge, practice and desire to see change happen. This includes investment in the development of every position: organizers, administrators, directors, cultural workers, communication specialists and healers. Finally, this includes the investment in organizational transitions that can be a long process.
4. Provide multiyear resources and time frames that allow organizations to develop strategies and tactics that are culturally specific to their community, constituents and targets. One-year funding is an impediment for organizations as what actually gets done in this timeframe is neither transformative nor sustainable.

*The history of resistance demonstrates clearly that in order for a people to be free, they must be self-conscious, self-determining, and rooted in their own culture and creativity.*

Slavery was predicated on stripping people of who they were at every level: human beings were denied their language, food, spiritual practices, homes and land, and any expressions of celebration and knowledge of their history. What the oppressor understood was that the defining feature of a nation or a people was its culture. The history of resistance demonstrates clearly that in order for a people to be free, they must be self-conscious, self-determining, and rooted in their own culture and creativity. Their liberation depends on waging cultural revolution, thus producing a radical transformation of both self and society. This is a lesson taught to us by those young people who by using their music and dance, including capoeira, deepened their commitment to transformational change.

Some of them now serve on the board or work as full-time organizers in that former organization of mine. All of them continue to touch the lives of others for good.



**Denise Perry** works for the Black Organizing for Leadership & Dignity (BOLD) project. She has been organizing for nearly 30 years, initially as a union organizer working for regional and national unions. The majority of her organizing and organizer-training work has been in the southern states where she was a co-founder of Power U Center in the historically Black Overtown section of Miami, Fla. [www.ctwo.org/index.php?s=118](http://www.ctwo.org/index.php?s=118)

<sup>1</sup>BOLD is a national training program developed through a collaboration between the Center for Third World Organizing and Social Justice Leadership. The program is designed to help rebuild Black (African American, Caribbean, African, Afro-Latino) social justice infrastructure in order to organize Black communities more effectively and re-center Black leadership in the U.S. social justice movement.

Mobilizing for Racial Justice continued from page 5

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# Funders Discuss Approaches to Organizing Against Structural Racism

by Ronald White

Because structural racism is mostly hidden, philanthropic support for community organizing efforts that explicitly names and fights the problem has been rare. There are some important exceptions, however, as revealed by the following conversation with several key funders. Among the voices in this article are leaders of foundations operating within a spectrum of work contributing to racial justice and community engagement. Here, they discuss challenges they continue to face, offer lessons recently learned, and share wisdom taught by some of their grantees.

Leaders in countless community organizing projects have de-emphasized the extent to which race factors into their organizing strategies for fear that being explicit may alienate funders. “Many used to have to twist themselves to not mention race in their work, especially to funders,” said Kafi Blumenfield, executive director at the Liberty Hill Foundation in Los Angeles. “But we’ve been building [toward integrating and promoting a structural race analysis]. We’re diversifying our board not just by color, but with people bringing a racial lens in their analysis. I would say all of our staff and board now share this analysis.” Victor Quintana, of the Unitarian Universalist Veatch Program at Shelter Rock, is among several key program officers calling for fellow grantmakers to support community organizing as it attempts to “carve out a program that goes beyond transactional change to one that impacts root causes [and fights for] transformational change.”

The question remains as to what extent funders who support community organizing view structural racism as a root cause. Nat Chioke Williams, executive director of the Hill-Snowdon Foundation, argues that community organizing strategies and structural race analysis are “indelibly connected.” But, he added, “The real question is how conscious and conscientious are we [as funders] about it? It probably is easier on a pragmatic basis to get [foundation] board[s] to be supportive of the social justice and organizing work we do with the understanding that we are doing this work in part to deal with the racial disparities and social injustice; but I think such a pragmatic approach ultimately leads to a type of avoidance.”

Debating how explicit to be about structural racism in community organizing is a contrast to philanthropic communities that are relatively disconnected from the issue or weak in their understanding of how structural racism operates in American society. “We know the underlining reasons for the disparities facing those communities are due to structural racism,” Williams continued. “But we don’t necessarily have an explicit language around it, and we aren’t as explicit about holding our grassroots partners or our grantees to account for how their campaigns involve a structural racism analysis.” Lori Bezahler, president of the Edward W. Hazen Foundation, agrees. “Unless structural bias is made explicit,” she argues, grantmaking meant to address racial justice “can end up with a perverse effect in public policy and ultimately ... a negative impact.”

*Unless structural bias is made explicit, grantmaking meant to address racial justice can end up with a perverse effect in public policy and ultimately ... a negative impact.*

The challenge of how explicit to be about a structural racism lens is made even more difficult in regions of the country with reputations for being far less cordial to a racial justice agenda. Tamiaka White, program officer at the Southern Partners Fund, contends that, “We don’t have enough foundations or funders – particularly in the South – that understand the importance of having this type of framework.” White explained the foundations’ reluctance to their relationship with donors: “It’s my personal take that some foundations are, for some reason, steering away from that analysis. Sometimes I wonder if it’s because they are driven by their ability to secure and maintain relationships with large donors who may not fundamentally believe in systematic change or being a true change maker.”

However, as Gayle Williams, executive director of the Mary Reynolds Babcock Foundation, suggests, foundations can



no longer sidestep the issue. “What’s staring us all in the face is the increasing inequities in wealth,” she said. “This is getting some attention but the question is how to use this growing attention and alarm in a productive way to do a structural analysis of racial disparities. This is not about ‘playing the race card’ and is not exclusive [as, for example, lower-income Whites will be pitted against lower-income people of color]. For funders, the question is ‘How do we develop a structural analysis of racial disparities across all categories of low-wealth people?’”

According to Blumenfeld, the challenge may be “less a matter of getting grantees to acknowledge and incorporate a structural racism lens in their organizing than to explain what they mean by structural racism and how they are operationalizing it. Ultimately, we do tend to focus on outcomes, even though this is always challenging in organizing, since tracking outcomes for racial justice can be just as elusive. We have an assessment tool that measures their approach to racial justice but we don’t require it. But if their analysis is strong, it may result in a larger grant.”

At the Akonadi Foundation, most grantseekers are aware that the foundation began with an explicit and deliberate focus on addressing racism when launched in 2000. Quinn Delaney, who founded Akonadi, noted, “We tend to pre-select organizations oriented toward a racial analysis.” But Delaney added that this focus does not mean grantees no longer require additional support to strengthen their ability to operationalize it. “Over the years we’ve also offered capacity-building grants to help organizers integrate structural race analyses into their campaigns.”

Bezahler shared the challenges for grantees of integrating a structural racism analysis: “It is about how organizing groups want to talk about race externally, how they frame campaigns. We aren’t saying there is only one way to get at the change we are looking for. We want to see a racial justice analysis in organizing that is movement-based, Alinsky-based and congregation-based. This is

*The challenge may be “less a matter of getting grantees to acknowledge and incorporate a structural racism lens in their organizing than to explain what they mean by structural racism and how they are operationalizing it.”*

important for all of them. So a more Alinsky-based style of organizing may not use a methodology that is explicit about race, but they are very important organizations and I think many of them do really great work. I don’t want to dismiss them and say they aren’t working on racial justice because I think they often are.”

More than ever before, community organizing efforts are focused on underlying causes, and on increasing strengths of important networks and alliances for greater impacts. According to Bill Vandenberg, director of the Democracy Fund of the Open Society Foundation, many of these groups “are led by really great local organizers, and are nearly all led by people of color, often from immigrant backgrounds and often by women of color. There are some examples, like the National Day Laborer Organizing Network and the National Domestic Workers Alliance, that have taken off and are really impressive.” However, he added that some issues of capacity and the lack of immediate policy wins could create challenges for continued support of some other organizations who are at earlier stages of development. “There are others that have a really great analysis, but the work hasn’t always happened,” Vandenberg said. “So I felt like we’ve taken some steps to invest in new and emerging efforts, and at the same time I feel that sometimes that has weakened my hand internally when [wins] haven’t materialized. I think some funders are pulling back when perhaps we should invest more.”

There was also considerable discussion among these key funders about the role that Whites play in the organizing work against structural racism. “We funders have to figure out how to extend the proverbial battleground,” said Vandenberg. “Part of a structural racism analysis is also about how White people can be both a barrier and possibly an opportunity. This, at least, has to be talked about.” Esther Nieves, program officer at the Kellogg Foundation, agreed. “We need to have cross-community allies, and that includes White communities and leaders, and people in power positions,” Nieves said. “We need to be able to have these conversations in a transparent and intentional way. We can’t move conditions in neighborhoods and communities unless we are able to cross the street and talk with those who may not have had conversations with us in the past.”

Bezahler shared the example of ISAI AH, a new grantee in Minnesota that organizes congregations, many of which are predominantly White. “As an organization they are doing explicit work on racial equity and education. It’s

very important to us [as funders] to think about how White people engage in that [work], and for me personally as a White person leading this foundation, I am very happy to have found an organization like this really trying to figure it out, because I do think that ultimately the work has to be multiracial to be effective and sustainable.”

Nat Chioke Williams talked about funding the Alliance for Justice Society (formerly the Northwest Federation of Community Organizations). Although the Alliance organizes in predominantly White-populated states like Idaho, Montana, Washington and Oregon, “they spoke of injecting into the Affordable Care Act more support for rural clinics and doctors, because it is in rural areas where there is extreme lack of access and where people of color are much more numerous. So part of what they did was have a campaign that talked about racial disparities by saying, ‘We have to create a solution that addresses that disparity specifically.’ I remember this group because that was one of the times when I asked, ‘How does your stuff look differently?’ and they were able to give a response.”

Ultimately, however, even though foundations will not be able to engage in racial justice organizing without encountering White-led organizations in communities of color, the necessary grantmaking strategy is to make certain that the right questions lead to situations where there is greater leadership and direction from people of color. “We ask about the internal organizational diversity and leadership,” said Cristóbal Alex of the Ford Foundation. “Some organizations need the funder to ask them this question in order for them to have the power to navigate the internal political process and make the necessary changes.”

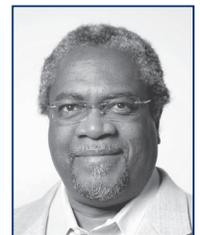
Tamiaka White observed that organizing has had to change over the years to adjust to new challenges, new conditions, and advancement in techniques learned from on-the-ground experience and experimentation: “The models of organizing that got us through the civil rights movement may not necessarily work in the same way in our current day.” At Hazen, Bezahler noted, “We don’t want to ask [grantees] to change their whole approach to organizing; and so for us the challenge is to figure out how your approach to organizing and your methodology can move a racial justice agenda that names race and talks about it in ways that are productive and get at underlying root causes.”

In summary, it should be noted that even foundations committed to a structural racism footing in their community organizing grantmaking are learning as they

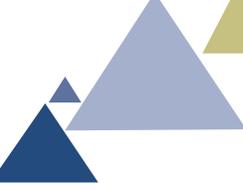
go. From the sampling of funders interviewed for this article, there are key lessons to be learned and shared:

- 1) Foundations with a commitment to social justice and concern for communities of color can be explicit about engaging directly with a racial justice lens.
- 2) Funders can effectively help their community organizing grantees address structural racism by supporting their efforts to deepen capacity, recognizing that even if the will is there, the complexity of the work may take added technical assistance and financial resources to test new approaches.
- 3) A structural race analysis works to impact grantmakers’ own practice and can lead to supporting leadership development efforts in community organizing grantees.
- 4) An analysis of structural racism critically shows how and why Whites, especially those who are low-income, can and should be allies in racial justice work.
- 5) Community organizers and funders must work together to define which measures are meaningful toward transformation, particularly when indicators that are defined purely by a policy win (regardless of potential for lasting change) can be a barrier to reaching long-term outcomes yet may be predictor of future support.
- 6) Even those foundations with a social justice or perhaps racial justice commitment may need a more formal set of internal questions and policies to ensure they are matching their values in their actual grantmaking.

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# **Intersection of Community Organizing and Racial Justice Funding: Limited Data and Limited Dollars**

by Rick Cohen

Among the thousands of possible subjects in the Foundation Center’s online database of some 2.4 million grants from over 100,000 private foundation, corporate and public charity grantmakers, the terms “community organizing” and “civic engagement” do not appear as subjects or topics around which grants are organized and counted. In light of the litany of foundation-supported and published reports attesting to the importance of community organizing in social change strategies,<sup>1</sup> the absence of “community organizing” and “civic engagement” as official categories used by the Foundation Center is striking.

Foundations appear to increasingly recognize the importance of community organizing and mobilization as a core strategy for achieving social change goals, but actual support for building on-the-ground organizing capacities and networks has not risen to anything approaching commensurate levels. The lack of support specifically slated to racial justice organizing is even more dramatic. This, of course, gives rise to questions about a possible gap between the stated commitments of foundations to community organizing and where they actually invest their funding.

An examination of the Foundation Center’s online database between 2009-12 (but mostly reflecting 2009-10) revealed 287 grants for a total of \$26.1 million to U.S. nonprofits with the use of “community organizing” as searchable keywords used in the texts of the recorded descriptions of the grants. Many foundations that engage in community organizing grantmaking might be nonplussed to see themselves omitted from this list, but that is due to how the purpose of their grants is described – not only in the descriptions generated by the Foundation Center, but also in the descriptions they generate and supply in their own materials. (See Chart A for the largest funders of community organizing during this period. See Chart B for a list of the largest grant recipients.)

Overall, the research and trends suggest that foundations by and large recognize the importance of community organizing but still seem wary about matching their grantmaking support for explicit organizing efforts. Compared to overall

grantmaking, community organizing receives a pittance of foundation grants, although some organizing entities may receive other grants not explicitly linked to organizing (with overhead payments that can help sustain organizing efforts, or as general support grants that can be used flexibly for organizing and other program activities).

## **Support for Racial Justice Organizing?**

Some of the foundations in the identifiable, community organizing world overlap with foundations that describe some of their other grants as addressing issues of “racial equity” or “racial justice.” (See Chart C for grants between 2009-12.) Focusing on foundations with large amounts of grantmaking in these fields is not meant to diminish the crucial roles played by smaller grantmakers that are mainstays in funding community organizing and racial justice. Nonetheless, six-figure grant totals for racial justice or community organizing activities do not represent significantly large amounts of support. And because the number of supporting funders and foundations championing the inclusion of a structural racism lens in organizing work is relatively small, the challenge of attracting the vast majority of larger funders into this realm remains difficult.

But there are many more foundations than the large grantmakers, and their overall patterns reveal much about where the foundation sector *writ large* stands as opposed to grantmakers with more connected racial justice orientations. These include smaller foundations (e.g., the Akonadi Foundation, the Solidago Foundation, the Liberty Hill Foundation, the Veatch Program, the Jessie Smith Noyes Foundation) that devote much larger proportions of their grantmaking to civil/human rights advocacy than these million-dollar grantmakers.

Over \$3 million of these grants came from community foundations, which are re-grantmaking institutions themselves. Typically their grants went to smaller, community-based organizations. If there is an agenda for connecting foundations to a structural racism analysis,

some practical effort should be devoted to community foundations since they may be the grantmakers most likely to be supporting grassroots racial justice efforts.

Furthermore, studies of “social justice grantmaking” find the issue of race or racism submerged, making the social action or social justice subject-matter categories of limited use in an analysis of foundations’ racial justice grantmaking. While it is certainly true that some foundation staff use the language of civic engagement and civic participation to avoid potential wariness around the more politicized “organizing” term, the effect is to skew the actual picture of support (and, of course, to mask the value of organizing itself). Does the analysis change if the focus is shifted from community organizing to the broader category of civic engagement? Oddly enough, “civic engagement” also does not rank as a categorical grant subject in the Foundation Center online database. Therefore, we adopted two broad, but definitely narrower, subjects of grantmaking used by the Foundation Center: advocacy for civil and human rights, and voter education.

With national elections approaching, the nation’s most significant barometer of foundation support for civic engagement might be foundation grantmaking addressing voting rights, voter education and registration. Given that recent state policies aimed at suppressing voter registration and voter turnout<sup>2</sup> have already resulted in perhaps a 5-7 percent decline of Latino and African American registered voters between the 2008 and 2010 elections,<sup>3</sup> foundation support for voting rights is almost by definition a statement in support of racial justice. At the very least, it can be viewed as a potential “vote” in favor of racial justice if the grantmaker considered voting rights through a structural racism lens. (See Charts D and E for table of voter education grantmakers and recipients.)

The list of grants shows voter education support increasing for organizations working with Latinos and Asian Americans, in particular. These efforts include local organizations such as the Denver-based Latina Initiative and the San Francisco-based Chinese American Voters Education Committee. Importantly, grantmakers that do not report their grants on their 990s or supply grant lists to the Foundation Center, and grantmakers such as the Democracy Alliance that give to 501(c)(4) social welfare organizations, are not reflected on this list. Nonetheless, while grantmaking for voter education and voter registration targeted to racial and ethnic groups may be on the rise, it is surpassed by more general voter education rights’ work, and programs

*While ... some foundation staff use the language of civic engagement and civic participation to avoid potential wariness around the more politicized “organizing” term, the effect is to skew the actual picture of support ...*

targeted to groups such as women and young people without reference to their racial or ethnic identities.

The overlapping dimensions of community organizing, civic engagement, civil rights, and voter education programs and grantmaking are intuitively obvious. The challenge for advocates of racial and ethnic justice is to deploy a structural racism lens so that the targeting of grantmaking and program development occurs in a way to help remediate the persistent racial injustices in public governance.

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<sup>1</sup> Examples include the Nellie Mae Educational Foundation’s “The Strengths & Challenges of Community Organizing as an Education Reform Strategy,” 2011; the French American Charitable Trust’s “Giving More, Making Change: A Journey in Progressive Grant Making,” 2011; the California Endowment’s “Making Change: How Social Movements Work and How to Support Them,” 2009; the Ford Foundation’s GrantCraft report “Funding Community Organizing: Social Change Through Civic Participation,” 2009; and the Annie E. Casey Foundation’s “Sustaining Neighborhood Change: The Power of Resident Leadership, Social Networks, and Community Mobilization,” 2008, just to name a few.

<sup>2</sup> Keyes, Scott, Ian Millhiser, Tobin Van Osten, and Abraham White. “Voter Suppression 101: How Conservatives Are Conspiring to Disenfranchise Millions of Americans.” AmericanProgress.org. Center for American Progress, April 2012. Web. 29 Aug. 2012. <[http://www.americanprogress.org/wp-content/uploads/issues/2012/04/pdf/voter\\_suppression.pdf](http://www.americanprogress.org/wp-content/uploads/issues/2012/04/pdf/voter_suppression.pdf)>

<sup>3</sup> Thompson, Krissah. “Voter registration down among Hispanics, blacks.” WashingtonPost.com. The Washington Post Company, 04 May 2012. Web. 29 Aug. 2012. <[http://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/voter-registration-down-among-hispanics-blacks/2012/05/04/gIQAQqEY1T\\_print.html](http://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/voter-registration-down-among-hispanics-blacks/2012/05/04/gIQAQqEY1T_print.html)>

# Intersection of Community Organizing and Racial Justice Funding

## Chart A

### Top Foundation Grantmakers Making Grants Described as Community Organizing Grants, circa 2009-12

California Endowment (\$5,392,295)  
Ford Foundation (\$4,904,000)  
C.S. Mott Foundation (\$3,079,000)  
Marguerite Casey Foundation (\$2,032,500)  
New York Foundation (\$1,158,620)  
Foundation to Promote Open Society (\$800,000)  
David and Lucile Packard Foundation (\$670,000)  
Annie E. Casey Foundation (\$610,000)  
Surdna Foundation (\$597,500)  
Minneapolis Foundation (\$560,000)  
Nathan Cummings Foundation (\$415,000)  
W.K. Kellogg Foundation (\$398,804)  
San Francisco Foundation (\$354,000)  
State Street Foundation (\$350,000)

## Chart B

### Major Recipients of Grants Described as Community Organizing Grants, circa 2009-12

Center for Community Change (\$1,660,000)  
PICO National Network (\$1,126,260)  
Kentucky Coalition (\$1,085,000)  
Washington Interfaith Network (\$600,000)  
Community Catalyst (\$350,000)  
Direct Action Research Training Center (\$290,000)  
Mixteco-Indigena Community Organizing Project, Oxnard, Calif. (\$278,640)  
Padres Unidos, Denver, Colo. (\$275,000)  
Courage Center in Minneapolis (\$250,000)  
Inland Congregations United for Change, San Bernardino, Calif. (\$218,854)  
People and Congregations Together for Stockton (\$211,000)  
Children's Defense Fund (\$200,000)

## Chart C

### Top Foundations with Racial Justice or Racial Equity in Grant Descriptions circa 2009-12

Ford Foundation (\$12,447,158)  
W.K. Kellogg Foundation (\$11,048,000)  
Atlantic Philanthropies (\$3,200,000)  
Arcus Foundation (\$1,165,000)  
Annie E. Casey Foundation (\$1,027,554)  
Foundation to Promote Open Society (\$1,025,000)  
Marguerite Casey Foundation (\$550,000)  
Public Welfare Foundation (\$415,000)  
Open Society Institute (\$400,000)  
C.S. Mott Foundation (\$395,000)  
Surdna Foundation (\$315,000)  
Z. Smith Reynolds Foundation (\$284,400)  
Proteus Fund (\$275,000)  
California Endowment (\$265,900)  
Minneapolis Foundation (\$260,000)

## Chart D

### Top Voter Education Grantmakers 2007-10

#### Top Voter Education Grantmakers 2007

Carnegie Corporation \$4,216,800  
James Irvine Foundation \$3,060,000  
Ford Foundation \$2,620,800  
Open Society Institute \$2,545,000  
Pew \$1,341,000  
Educational Foundation of America \$846,000  
Z. Smith Reynolds Foundation \$784,600

#### Top Voter Education Grantmakers 2008

NoVo Foundation \$5,000,000 (Single grant to the New World Foundation for New Majority Fund)  
Ford Foundation \$4,205,000  
Open Society Institute \$3,710,808  
Carnegie Corporation \$3,075,000  
Cedar Tree Foundation \$2,350,000  
Bauman Family Foundation \$1,940,000  
Educational Foundation of America \$1,085,000

### **Top Voter Education Grantmakers 2009**

James Irvine Foundation \$3,741,000  
Foundation to Promote Open Society \$2,500,000  
Open Society Institute \$1,124,880  
Carnegie Corporation \$1,115,000  
Tides Foundation \$1,113,757  
Joyce Foundation \$1,085,000  
Ford Foundation \$850,000

### **Top Voter Education Grantmakers 2010**

Ford Foundation \$6,734,094  
Vanguard Charitable Endowment \$6,154,729  
Carnegie Corporation \$3,050,000  
Foundation to Promote Open Society \$3,009,951  
James Irvine Foundation \$1,370,000  
Joyce Foundation \$1,310,000  
W.K. Kellogg Foundation \$1,035,069

### **Chart E**

#### **Top Recipients of Voter Education Grants 2007-10**

##### **Top recipients 2007**

Center for Community Change \$1,275,000  
Kentucky Coalition \$1,100,000  
Project Vote \$1,073,500  
Women's Voices Women Vote \$1,023,332  
DC Vote \$776,500  
George Washington University \$753,900  
SPARC \$746,350  
Brennan Center \$660,000  
Strategic Concepts \$650,000  
California Voter Foundation \$641,000  
North Carolina Center for Voter Education \$615,000  
Citizenship Education Fund \$610,000

##### **Top recipients 2008**

New World Foundation \$5,000,000 (for New Majority Fund)  
Project Vote \$2,070,000  
Women's Voices Women Vote \$1,685,000 (plus \$420,000 for action fund)  
Brennan Center \$915,000  
Praxis Project \$900,000

Center for Community Change \$850,000  
State Voices \$833,000  
Progressive Technology Project \$825,000  
League of Young Voters Education Fund \$703,000  
League of Women Voters Education Fund \$696,163  
Rock the Vote \$655,500  
DC Vote \$639,500

##### **Top recipients 2009**

State Voices \$1,300,000  
Asian Pacific Legal Center of Southern California \$880,000  
University of California \$735,000  
Democracy USA \$725,000  
League of Women Voters of California \$676,500  
League of Young Voters Education Fund \$636,000  
Progressive Technology Project \$600,000  
DC Vote \$573,750  
Women's Voices Women Vote \$550,000  
Project Vote \$522,446  
Lawyers Committee for Civil Rights \$521,000  
Pew \$500,000

##### **Top recipients 2010**

Women's Voices Women Vote \$3,775,000  
Rock the Vote \$2,070,000  
State Voices \$1,893,000  
Center for Community Change \$1,300,000  
National Coalition on Black Civic Participation \$1,288,380  
Americans for Campaign Reform \$1,000,000  
League of Young Voters Education Fund \$940,795  
PowerPAC \$940,000  
Voto Latino \$745,000  
League of Women Voters Education Fund \$680,729  
Brennan Center \$600,000  
Southwest Voter Registration and Education Project \$520,000

# Glossary

## Structural Racism

The normalization and legitimization of an array of dynamics – historical, cultural, institutional and interpersonal – that routinely advantage Whites while producing cumulative and chronic adverse outcomes for people of color. Structural racism encompasses the entire system of White domination, diffused and infused in all aspects of society including its history, culture, politics, economics and entire social fabric. Structural racism is more difficult to locate in a particular institution because it involves the reinforcing effects of multiple institutions and cultural norms, past and present, continually reproducing old and producing new forms of racism. Structural racism is the most profound and pervasive form of racism – all other forms of racism emerge from structural racism.<sup>1</sup>

## Structural Racialization

Structural racialization connotes the dynamic process that creates cumulative and durable inequalities based on race. Interactions between individuals are shaped by and reflect underlying and often hidden structures that shape biases and create disparate outcomes even in the absence of racist actors or racist intentions. The presence of structural racialization is evidenced by consistent differences in outcomes in education attainment, family wealth and even life span.<sup>2</sup>

## Civic Engagement

Civic engagement occurs through both political and non-political processes. Examples of civic engagement include electoral engagement; participation in civic associations; mobilization towards collective action; direct or indirect interactions with government institutions or corporate entities; activism on behalf of policy or social change; and the ways in which individuals, groups and communities adopt common priorities, align efforts around shared priorities, and take action to achieve change.<sup>3</sup>

## Community Organizing

Community organizing is the process of building power by involving a constituency and identifying the problems they share, and the solutions to those problems that they desire. It also involves identifying the people and structures that can make those solutions possible;

enlisting those targets in the effort through negotiation, and using confrontation and pressure when needed; and building an institution that is democratically controlled by a constituency that can develop the capacity to take on further problems, that embodies the will and the power of that constituency.<sup>4</sup>

## Movement Building

Movement building is the effort of social change agents to engage power holders and the broader society in addressing a systemic problem or injustice while promoting an alternative vision or solution. Movement building requires a range of intersecting approaches through a set of distinct stages over a long-term period of time. Through movement building, organizers can

- ▲ propose solutions to the root causes of social problems;
- ▲ enable people to exercise their collective power;
- ▲ humanize groups that have been denied basic human rights and improve conditions for the groups affected;
- ▲ create structural change by building something larger than a particular organization or campaign; and
- ▲ promote visions and values for society based on fairness, justice and democracy.<sup>5</sup>

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# Acknowledgments

*PRE is grateful for the many activists, advocates and funders who so generously shared their limited time and abundant wisdom.*

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*Philanthropic Initiative for Racial Equity December 2011, Washington, D.C.*

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## *Philanthropic Initiative for Racial Equity*

The Philanthropic Initiative for Racial Equity (PRE) is intended to build the amount and effectiveness of resources aimed at combating institutional and structural racism in communities through capacity-building, education and convening of grant-makers and grantseekers. We do this primarily through the following strategies:

- ▲ Providing opportunities for grantmakers to learn and strategize about cutting-edge racial equity issues and how they apply to their work within various fields;
- ▲ Increasing grantmakers' understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of different racial equity efforts, and assisting them in assessing their own grantmaking;
- ▲ Engaging in internal assessments of foundations' institutional needs around racial equity, and coordinating or adapting tools to most effectively meet their needs;
- ▲ Consulting with cornerstone nonprofits that explicitly address issues of racism to strengthen their capacity, increase coordination and impact; and
- ▲ Assisting local community leaders and funders on how to choose and sustain effective approaches to achieve racial equity, including identifying appropriate indicators of success.

Since its inception in January 2003, PRE has directly engaged hundreds of foundation representatives (including program staff, management, board members and individual donors) in discussions of racial equity and, in particular, how they can advance the mission of achieving racial equity through their own philanthropic institutions. In addition to national convenings, PRE has conducted local and regional events in the Northwest, West, Midwest, Northeast and Southeast.

Philanthropic Initiative for Racial Equity (PRE) is a project of the Tides Center. PRE is grateful for generous support from the C.S. Mott Foundation, W.K. Kellogg Foundation, Atlantic Philanthropies, Ford Foundation and The California Endowment.

Views expressed in this document are those of its authors and should not be attributed to the Tides Center or its funders.

### **~ Building Resources to End Racism ~**

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