

LA RISING

**The 1992 Civil Unrest, the Arc
of Social Justice Organizing,
and the Lessons for
Today's Movement
Building**



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Acknowledgements

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— Manuel Pastor & Michele Prichard, Los Angeles, CA, December 2012

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[This is a longer version of a report of the same name]

Introduction

Something remarkable has occurred in Los Angeles. Long known as the “Wicked City” for its hostility to labor unions, famous for its tense relations between police and community, and host to two of the nation’s most racially charged and physically damaging riots, the city – and its surrounding region – have, in the last twenty years, become celebrated for innovative large-scale, multi-racial, multi-sector movement building.

The achievements of this organizing are impressive. Community benefits agreements – in which developers commit to provide good jobs, affordable housing, and improved environments for local residents – have become nearly standard operating procedure. The mass transit system has been expanded dramatically, with the buses that serve the working poor now a linchpin – rather than a leftover – in an evolving system. Inner-city schools have been pushed to offer college preparatory classes for young people previously tracked for low-wage jobs or for the school-to-prison pipeline. Residents from low-income neighborhoods burdened with an overconcentration of liquor stores, fast food outlets, and transient motels have organized to demand healthier and safer land uses. Environmental justice communities, once considered dumping grounds for the region’s industrial wastes, have been able to shift key policies, collaborate with others to force the cleanup of the ports, and are now challenging the very nature of zoning and development.

Through it all, new constituencies and new coalitions have emerged in dramatic fashion. Black and Brown residents of South Los Angeles, the epicenter for both the Watts and Rodney King uprisings, have fought to demand equal funding for urban schools, expand programs for drug treatment and job training, and secure support for relatives providing foster care. Labor unions have reached out to immigrants and others, building a powerful machine for electoral victories even as they have forged labor-community partnerships for accountable development, innovative job training, and new standards for worker well-being. Immigrants themselves have taken a perhaps surprising lead (particularly considering the risks activism can bring for those with less than stellar documentation), with Los Angeles the host to immigrant rights marches that have attracted crowds numbering in the half million. Workers’ centers, responding to multiple waves of refugees and immigrants from Central America, Mexico, and the Pacific Rim, have sprung up to address the worst exploits of sweatshops and the underground economy, forging new multi-ethnic campaigns and legislation to improve wages and working conditions.

What happened? How did Los Angeles go from the despair of 1992 – when the economy, race relations, and the city itself seemed shattered – to the vibrant organizing of 2012? What was the path from being “ground zero” for economic injustice and political disenfranchisement to a new “common ground” vision in which organizing is key and organizers see themselves as part of a movement ecosystem? And what are the lessons for a nation that is itself facing a sharp economic and political crisis – but also glimmers of possibility in the form of an emerging recognition that an economy run by and for the few is truly not sustainable?

Plan of the Report

Capturing the history of movement building in Los Angeles would require an entire encyclopedia with volumes covering topics such as organizing, alliance building, electoral engagement, leadership development, and policy campaigns, to name a few. This report itself could have been a book – and may become one in the future (particularly if we can, in good L.A. fashion, pre-negotiate for the movie rights). But for this effort, we eschewed both cinematic ambitions and book-length targets, and instead went for something relatively short and accessible.

Our focus is on a particular set of individuals and organizations that: 1) emerged in response to or were significantly impacted by the events of April 29, 1992; 2) believe that marginalized communities (low-income, working class, immigrants) must be the engines of social justice, and 3) build for long-term, structural change. As we have suggested above, they have helped to create one of the most vibrant, multi-ethnic movements for social justice in the country. And, collectively, they have secured commitments and policies that prioritize public transit over cars, energy efficiency over new power plants, and living wages over poverty wages.

Both the length and the focus mean that there are many campaign victories and battle scars that we left out – and we apologize in advance to those whose important and vital struggles did not make this cut. Indeed, the organizations interviewed for this report are not the only important movement actors in Los Angeles. Funders themselves played a role: Liberty Hill Foundation, Solidago Foundation, and New World Foundation among many others have played an instrumental role in seeding and sustaining community organizing groups in Los Angeles. Local labor unions, legal and policy advocates, service providers, and research institutions also comprise the broader movement.

We equally apologize to those scholars whose work we cite only briefly along the way to present the account captured here. We know that a full discussion of those works would require more depth, particularly of the relationship to theories of social movements and comparisons to other locales. However, our primary audience for this report is not the academic researchers more enamored of those sorts of discussions and debates but rather the new generation of social justice leaders, the philanthropic leaders and donors who currently support or would like to expand the pool of resources for progressive movement building, and students of history and social change work.

To help tell this story, we draw primarily from two sources: a large and growing body of existing literature and an insightful cadre of social justice leaders who each spent many hours with one of our authors, Michele Prichard who herself has been a tireless leader in building a strong and powerful movement in Los Angeles. Michele conducted multi-hour, in-person interviews with nineteen first-generation “veteran” leaders. In addition, the authors hosted a small group discussion with a handful of what we call “second-generation leaders” who came of age in the organizations discussed to capture their insights and analysis about where the movement is headed.

The interviews were conducted using a guide that started with asking for reflection on respondents’ personal stories and founding organizational visions, and then queried about their approaches to ten different components of movement building (organizing/base building, policy campaigns, leadership

pipeline, alliance building, labor coalitions, electoral engagement, inside-outside relationships, building to scale, organizational infrastructure, and role of funding). We – or we should say, Michele – also solicited the respondents’ insights on which approaches might be replicated elsewhere. The interviews generated an amazing wealth of insights and analysis from the frontlines and, here, we offer an account that synthesizes that collective story to offer lessons and inspiration in movement building that might be used in Los Angeles and throughout the nation.

We have structured this report in the following way. We begin with an overview of the characteristics and evolution of social movements in general. We, then, chart four distinct waves of movement building in Los Angeles: setting vision and developing organizations (1992-1995), creating anchors and forging alliances (1996-2000), building movements and taking power (2001-2005), and achieving impact and scaling up (2006-present). For each wave, we offer a brief description of the economic and social conditions at the time, highlight just a few victories, and identify key themes and lessons. Because philanthropy has played such an important role in building strong movements in Los Angeles, we devote an entire section to telling its story and implications for interested funders. Then, we step back to highlight the broader lessons of this tale that are essential for building movements with the depth, power, and scale to meet the nation’s challenges.

Because there is so much information that could not be included in the text of the report, we encourage readers to also peruse the appendixes. There we include our list of references, interviewees, and profiles of each person we interviewed. Those familiar with the world of organizing in Los Angeles know that all these individuals are amazing leaders in their own right. Reading their bios will convince you further of that fact.

L.A. Rising is our attempt to unravel at least part of the story of social movement building in Los Angeles. It is such a long and complicated tale – with so many actors, so many turning points, and so many skirmishes in the fight for justice – that our telling is necessarily incomplete. Our tendency is to be hopeful and optimistic, but we realize that there is much progress still to be made – that there are many, many setbacks along the way. But we try to capture parts of the puzzle, offering key lessons to activists, social movement observers, and funders looking for ways to move forward towards a more economically and socially just future.

Movements, Moments, and Momentum

Social movements are not built overnight, but in stages. They require strong anchor organizations, grassroots organizing, strategic alliances and networks among multiple constituencies. They need to generate new agendas and vision, foster many layers of leadership, and enlarge power for social change through focused and sustained mass action from the local level to the centers of power.

– From the New World Foundation’s *Funding Social Movements* (2000)

Movements Defined

Social movements – regardless of political ideology – are more than single organizations, single constituency-based groups, or single issue-focused coalitions. They are sustained groupings of formal, and sometimes informal, organizations that develop a frame or narrative based on shared values, maintain a link with a real and broad base in the community, and build for long-term transformations in power (Pastor & Ortiz, 2009).

Movements may be more than organizations but they are comprised of organizations of a particular type. Lounsbury introduces the concept of a social movement organization (SMO) as a complex, or formal, organization that identifies its goals with the preferences of a social movement or a counter-movement and attempts to implement those goals (2005). Davis and Zald discuss how both movements and organizations within the movements develop collective action, which requires work at the “field,” or grassroots, level (G. F. Davis & Zald, 2005). We would use a much simpler frame: social movement organizations are those organizations that have learned to “play well with others” in order to pursue a broader set of objectives than those typical of episodic coalitions.

After all, the civil rights movement had much more in mind than securing better bus services for Southern Blacks. The organizations that comprised that movement worked together – sometimes warily – in the understanding that their varying strengths and skills would help capture the imagination of the nation and transform the reality of life for African Americans. The Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer (LGBTQ) movement may have been launched into public consciousness with the infamous effort to resist police harassment at the Stonewall Inn in Greenwich Village, but that explosion of protest morphed into a larger campaign to defend the civil rights of the LGBTQ community that continues today. And the organizations that have pursued this vision of civil rights have learned to co-exist even as they have differed on priorities, timing, and presentation.

In our view, there are ten major components that comprise movement building and allow one to determine whether an organization is a movement-builder (although, to be clear, one organization may not have all the characteristics but rather relates to a movement in its complexity and completeness of those elements it does contain). The essential components are: a strategic vision and frame, an authentic base and commitment to community organizing, and a commitment to the long haul. There are also a set of capacities to be effective: an underlying economic model that can support arguments for redistribution, a theory of government and governance, a scaffold of solid research to support

analysis and demands, a pragmatic policy package that can help achieve wins, and recognizing the need to build organizational capacity. And finally, movements need a strategy for scaling up to bigger issues and broader geographies, and a willingness to form alliances and engage in movement-building (Pastor & Ortiz, 2009).

We think this is an elegant, simple, and relatively complete list (we came up with it so naturally that is our assessment). At the same time, we acknowledge that there are several key dimensions to movement building buried here that should be lifted up, particularly given their importance to the L.A. story.

One such dimension is the need to honestly assess and build power. Social change only happens when a group that has typically lacked voice is able to not only find its voice but make sure it is heard. That requires framing and communication, but also organizational capacity, strength in numbers, and consideration of who else is talking and how loudly in order to create an ecosystem of advocates coming together to address the big picture of social justice. One striking feature of the L.A. social movements has been this confident embrace of both power analysis and power building as a necessary element for large-scale and irreversible change.



Another dimension is having an inside-outside strategy. By this, we mean an understanding of the need to be involved in electoral politics, and to support campaigns and candidates without falling prey to the belief that any one elected official will solve all problems. This has led to strong advocates elected to office and less disappointment once in office. Organizers understand that political figures will only go as far as strong and organized forces can push them; therefore, base building cannot be abandoned once electoral victories are achieved.

Finally, we want to reiterate that one critical element delineated above is a commitment to the long haul. It matters whether an organization is trying to secure one small victory or whether it is willing to collaborate with others to more fundamentally correct the symptoms of deeply rooted economic or social ills. And if the long haul matters and collaboration is critical, getting there involves one step at a time.

Stages of Movement Building

Building social movements takes time, purpose, and hard work that often goes un-recognized and under-appreciated – until the explosive, more visible moment occurs. In borrowing from the New World Foundation’s *Funding Social Movements* (2003) and Masters and Osborn’s *Social Movements and Philanthropy: How Foundations Can Support Movement Building* (2010), we think it is helpful to think about movement building in four stages.

It starts with *building movement infrastructure*, or the cultivation of organized groups that are strongly rooted in a constituency base. As groups gain capacity and experience, they connect with others across place, race, issues, and sectors. Organizations need to make an explicit effort to expand their membership base in order to build the movement. This is not merely about growing their base but ensuring that growth informs the organization to be engaged and responsive to its constituency’s needs. This is often the hardest stage of movement building and takes time and many resources.

Building movement infrastructure also requires fostering leadership. Movement leaders need to be recognized, have their roles identified, and be supported to develop new skills and capacities. They must be able to do more than represent and further their own group; they must be allies versatile enough to support others and address multiple issues while making progress toward the larger goals at hand. Because of this, movement organizations must collaborate in the strategic development of explicit goals, the analysis of the problem (developing the “frame”) and in developing relationships with each other and setting the alliance anchors. Finally, the organizations need to identify the advocacy skills, for example, policy research and analysis and communications, necessary to affect change.

Secondly, movements need to *build identity and intention*. At this point, building strategic alliances around a long-term vision and analysis of power, deepening connections between constituencies and interests, and building power to win greater demands occurs. Organizations continue to recruit and expand their individual agenda while building trust amongst organizations to engage in strategic joint planning and prioritizing. Movement leaders identify shared philosophies and interests and the narrative of the movement begins. This allows movement organizations to fundraise together and share the resources necessary to lead policy campaigns.

The next stage is the *movement moment* – the point, or series of events, at which spontaneous waves of mobilization outpace existing organizations and spark prodigious changes in mass activism, social consciousness, and civic discourse, thus shifting the political terrain and making large-scale change more possible than before. Think of the following examples: In 2006, immigration marches astounded a nation convinced that undocumented residents would never stand out publicly for their rights; when the organizing strategy of “Camp Obama,” a training ground for the President’s supporters during the 2008 campaign, led to a sharp increase in participation by occasional voters; and most recently, when a simple focus on the rising tide of inequality resonated so strongly with the public that occupying public spaces was not only welcomed but widely supported in the form of Occupy Wall Street.

Finally, movements either *consolidate or dissipate*. In this phase, either the momentum subsides or gains new ground. If the latter occurs, new organizations are built and new laws are put in place. The

risk of consolidation, of course, is ossification. The labor movement of the 1930s gave way to the business unionism of the 1950s and 1960s, and the long and steady decline of union representation has only recently been challenged by a new wave of organizing and activism. Keeping the spark of reinvention even as you consolidate is critical.

Seizing Momentum

So while mass mobilizations can capture people's attention and imagination, it is the painstaking work of building movement organizations that will sustain the momentum between those explosive moments, build common identity and intentions amidst shifting conditions, and consolidate organized power into significant policy reforms and electoral victories.

With this report, we suggest that 1992 was a turning point for both Los Angeles and the movement leaders we profile. The civil unrest in that year made clear the economic and social distress plaguing the region. But the very scale of the uprising, stretching across the southland and expanding well beyond its initial flash points in South L.A., also made clear that progressive forces must be getting something wrong in their analysis of the problem and their strategies for improving conditions. If a populace was frustrated and desperate enough to burn down its own city, surely that anger should have been channeled to something far more constructive. A new approach – one that could tap into rage and translate it into change – was needed. And it is this new approach that we turn to now.

Looking Back to Look Forward: Pre-1992

Someone once said that there were some centuries where nothing happens. And there are whole years in which a century happens. And those were years in which a century was happening.

– Eric Mann, Labor/Community Strategy Center

Context

For long-time observers of Los Angeles, it is a delicious irony that L.A. has become such an important regional nexus of labor and multi-ethnic social movement activism. After all, L.A. was once known as the “Citadel of the Open Shop” (Fogelson, 1993, p. 130) and the historical anti-labor antics of its civic leaders – and its major newspaper, the *Los Angeles Times* – has been well-documented (Gottlieb, Freer, Vallianatos, & Dreier, 2005; Milkman, 2006). The region, moreover, nearly perfected the practice of racially restrictive housing covenants and even when these were struck down, divisive racial fault lines remained part of the metropolitan DNA (Avila, 2006 for 1940 to 1970; M. Davis, 1990). The 1965 Watts Riots, the nation’s most destructive wave of civil unrest until 1992, signified that things were desperately wrong in Los Angeles. And the 1992 uprising showed how something radically new would be needed to change course. Economic and social distress plagued the region, and studies suggest that the riots were as much related to poverty as issues of race (Pastor, 1995).

Tom Bradley’s mayoralty (1973-1993) initially held promise for healing racial wounds in the region. Backed by civic elites hoping to change the city’s image and linking together voters from South and West L.A., Bradley offered a vision of a more inclusive Los Angeles. Minorities were appointed across city government and the city had a strong vision for securing economic prosperity. The problem, however, was that his vision tended to be centered on downtown development – something that pleased elites but frustrated both low-income neighborhoods that felt shut out and higher-income homeowners that were worried about excess growth and traffic resulting in their more desirable locales (Pastor, 2010).

Bradley’s attempt to find the middle ground between conflicting demands and constituencies might have held if the economy had kept growing – when jobs and income are expanding, squabbles over how it is divided tend to be muted. But the 1980s were a tough time economically and demographically. Deindustrialization was replacing good, middle-class jobs in durable manufacturing with less-paying jobs in non-durable manufacturing and in services.

Meanwhile, the national scene saw the election of President Ronald Reagan – later succeeded by his Vice-President, George H.W. Bush – and the rise of neo-conservatism. Even as the need for an income cushion was rising, Washington’s willingness to provide one was in decline. In California, Proposition 13 had passed in 1978 and it was becoming clear that this attempt to constrain property taxes would inhibit the state’s ability to spend and invest in the most essential things, like public education. Added to the volatile mix were the explosion of crack-cocaine, the militarization of gang activity, and growing tension between the police and local communities.¹

The effects were felt quite deeply in Los Angeles and among communities of color in the inner cities, particularly given a sharp uptick in the immigrant population. The percent of immigrants rose from 11 percent of the population in 1970 to 22 percent in 1980 to 33 percent in 1990.² As the immigrant community grew, South Central – long considered the core of Black Los Angeles – witnessed a dramatic demographic shift. Latinos made up 23 percent of the community in 1980. By the time the 1990 Census was reported, that number rose to 45 percent, which created a sense of displacement for some in the community.³

Pre-Unrest Examples of Multiracial Collaboratives

1986: The L.A. County Commission on Human Relations created the **Black-Korean Alliance** and the **Black-Latino Roundtable** in the hopes of easing inter-ethnic tensions. However, both collaboratives, comprised of middle-class professionals, were removed from conflicts happening on-the-ground and were dismantled.

1987: A group of professional African-American activists formed **The Ethnic Coalition** as a forum for African-American, Latino and Asian leaders to discuss multicultural policy issues.

1989: The **New Majority Task Force** formed as a progressive alternative to top-down models and included multicultural professionals and community representatives, arguing that downtown development needed to be better “linked” to neighborhoods, among other things.

1990: The **Southern California Civil Rights Coalition** formed to advance civil rights at the regional, state and national levels; it was an umbrella for over 50 local organizations spanning race and culture.

Charles Dickens begins the novel *A Tale of Two Cities* with the line: “It was the best of times, it was the worst of times . . .” By the late 1980s, it was just so: income disparities were growing, aptly documented

¹ For one in-depth perspective on the excesses of the LAPD, see Connie Rice’s *Power Concedes Nothing: One Woman’s Quest for Social Justice in America, from the Courtroom to the Kill Zones* (2012).

² Author calculation using National Historical Geographic Information System (<https://www.nhgis.org/>) data extracts for Los Angeles County.

³ PERE analysis of data from the U.S. Census Bureau and Geolytics, Inc. used in “South Los Angeles: Demographic Sketch” presentation by Manuel Pastor on April 20, 2012.

by a study from Paul Ong of the UCLA Urban Planning program (Ong et al., 1989; see also Purcell, 2000; Williams, 1993). By the late 1980s, a few multicultural collaboratives formed, some building on the organizing of the “Third World Left” in the 60s and 70s (Pulido, 2006), others simply trying to build ties in the wake of the aforementioned demographic changes (Regalado, 1994). Nascent efforts were underway to organize workers, address environmental disparities, and create new vehicles for community development. But still the tinderbox had been created for the L.A. unrest in 1992, and the spark – the acquittal of the police officers who beat Black motorist Rodney King – was soon to create a burst of flames.⁴

A Brief History of Movement Building

Many of the major organizing trends in Los Angeles during this period were connected to global events. Local activists were contributing to a broad national campaign to pressure South Africa to end apartheid. Others were focused on pushing the U.S. government (and the former Soviet Union) to end nuclear weapons development and invest in local workforce development instead, with the local form of this being the Jobs With Peace (JWP) campaign. The Central American civil wars prompted a burst of solidarity organizations including the Sanctuary Movement – a fusion of religious values and social activism to provide voice and refuge for Central Americans escaping violent conditions in their countries. At the same time, immigration was ratcheting up. The 1986 passage of the Immigration and Reform Control Act (IRCA) created a pathway to citizenship for some undocumented residents who arrived prior to 1982, while making it illegal to hire others, while a Mexican economy in crisis continued to propel new migrants northward.

Los Angeles quickly became the epicenter for Central American refugees during the Central American Civil Wars (Chinchilla, Hamilton, & Loucky, 2009). They brought with them their own political repertoires, including roots in liberation theology. But their stories and struggles captured the empathy and support of many non-Central Americans, especially faith-based activists who founded the Southern California Interfaith Taskforce on Central America, and service organizations, such as El Rescate and Clinica Oscar Romero. The Central American Refugee Center (CARECEN, and later renamed to the Central American Resource Center) was established in 1983 by a group of Salvadoran refugees with a mission of helping Central Americans, who were fleeing violence in their home countries, to achieve legal status here in the U.S. Madeline Janis served as Executive Director from 1989 until 1993 when she left to help start the Tourism Industry Development Council, which would later become LAANE. This new sense of activism around the plight of immigrants is also reflected by the establishment of the Asian Pacific American Legal Center (APALC) in Los Angeles in 1983 by Stewart Kwoh. The center specialized in providing legal assistance and education in Asian-American community.

In the meantime, the JWP campaign was occupying the attention of other up-and-coming leaders. JWP was intended to decrease military spending and redirect those funds to domestic needs including education, health, housing, roads, job training, and local infrastructure. It led to local ballot initiatives, including a winning initiative in 1984 that asked the City of Los Angeles to study annually what share of

⁴ See Pastor, 2010 for a more detailed explanation of the Bradley Era leading up to the 1992 unrest.

residents' taxes went to military expenditures and then a loss in 1986 when the JWP sought to create an advisory council at City Hall that would lobby for shifting federal dollars from defense to social services.

The work of the JWP had several important impacts that went beyond this win-loss record. It was one of the first efforts to bridge grassroots activism and community organizing into the electoral arena at a time when not many progressives were thinking about elections. Even when they lost, JWP activists had been able to garner the petition signatures necessary to place their initiative on the ballot proving their ability to establish grassroots precinct operations. Says Kent Wong, director of the UCLA Labor Center:

People were questioning, 'Why are you wasting your time in electoral politics? We know that it's all bankrupt, all the politicians are bankrupt, Democrats/Republicans are all capitalists, why are we wasting our time?' So this was really going against the grain even in terms of the progressive movements. Saying no, we can actually win tangible victories in the electoral arena.

The second effect of the Jobs With Peace campaign is that it, along with other institutions, brought together a circle of activists who would influence each other for years, including Mark Ridley-Thomas, Sharon Delugach, Jackie Goldberg, Michele Prichard, Larry Frank, and Anthony Thigpenn. Another meeting ground was Peoples College of Law, an institution that Kent Wong, Antonio Villaraigosa, Gil Cedillo, Maria Elena Durazo, and others passed through – leaders who have been critical to the progressive movement in Los Angeles.

Simultaneously, the labor movement began to “organize the unorganizable.” In 1989, activist and daughter of Mexican immigrant farm workers, Maria Elena Durazo was elected president of Local 11 of the Hotel Employees and Restaurant Employees union (HERE). This followed an earlier election in which Durazo led an insurgent campaign resulting in a decision by the national office to place the Local into trusteeship. Her election marked a pivot in the racial, gender, and political power balance of the labor movement – and more provocative tactics followed, including the release during hotel contract negotiations of “City on the Edge,” a short and pointed video that eerily warned that L.A.’s widespread poverty and deepening inequality could provoke civil disturbances.

And in 1990, Service Employees International Union (SEIU) Local 399’s Justice for Janitors campaign staged a peaceful march and demonstration in Century City that was met with physical attacks by police. With the support of outraged local officials, which included then-Mayor Bradley, the janitors soon secured a multi-year contract (Milkman, 2006). Equally significant was the way in which the struggle emboldened other low-wage immigrant workers and signaled that a new form of organizing and alliance building was not only possible but likely to yield higher pay-offs for both unions and communities. Among other labor-community innovations, in 1989, Eric Mann and the nascent Labor/Community Strategy Center (LCSC) were fighting to keep a General Motors auto plant open in the San Fernando Valley in a push against deindustrialization that was stripping jobs from the community. And just months before the civil unrest, Danny Park would establish the Korean Immigrant Workers Advocates (KIWA), that would go on to win important local labor battles. And tangible victories were won, despite a shoestring budget and minimal staff.

Working around community empowerment through the 1980s, progressives responded to economic and social pressures in various ways. In 1987, the local affiliates of the Industrial Areas Foundation (IAF) launched its Moral Minimum Wage Campaign and secured an increase in California's minimum wage that boosted the pay of the state's poorest workers over \$4 billion over the succeeding four years. Some activists – like Leonardo Vilchis and Larry Gross – worked with communities to fight evictions and aid low-income tenants, with many emphasizing the need for rent control to stem the threat of gentrification. In 1990, local leaders Silvia Castillo and now-U.S. Congresswoman Karen Bass, founded the Community Coalition for Substance Abuse and Treatment (now, Community Coalition or CoCo) in response to the 1980s crack-cocaine epidemic that had devastated families and neighborhoods in South Los Angeles. Bass says that while many activists were focused on issues abroad, she was compelled to address the disease and inequality that existed at home:

If we really wanted to show commitment to the community, we needed to start where the community was at, which is something I learned at Dolores Mission. If the biggest issue is gangs, gangs will take you everywhere – to education, to the projects, to immigration, to racism, to police abuse, etc. So, if sidewalks were a problem, we were going to start talking about it.

– Leonardo Vilchis, Union de Vecinos

In the 70s I worked with a lot of solidarity issues: Solidarity with Latin America, with Southern Africa, the anti-apartheid movement, and then the 80s hit and this phenomena happened around drugs and crack-cocaine. To me, it felt a bit like a contradiction to be working to free Nelson Mandela when South Central was becoming unglued.

Bass also notes that while the progressive movement became increasingly convinced that domestic issues were a result of our capitalist structure, she was concerned with helping communities in immediate need:

At that point, I was very frustrated with the progressive movement because, frankly, they had nothing to offer communities of color and inner city areas. . . . Crack-cocaine actually redefined how science looks at addiction. It was the first time where we had a drug epidemic where women and men used equally. Families fell apart, kids fell into foster care, and you had all of these social and economic consequences – and the progressive movement was saying that we needed to end capitalism and that would be the best way for us to deal with the drug problem. Or [saying] “It was the CIA’s fault.” All of that might be well and true, might be, but the point is communities were suffering right then.

It was becoming clear that ideological prescriptions that lacked any meaningful solutions for the every day problems of the poor were just about useless. Any new approach would have to build on the authentic concerns and voices of community residents. Progressive politics had to be not only principled but pragmatic. And early efforts to elect progressives into office helped to pave the way. For example, Jackie Goldberg, an early champion for school integration and urban education reform, was elected to

the Los Angeles Unified School District Board in 1983, and Mark Ridley-Thomas, who led the L.A. branch of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, was elected to the City Council in 1991.

Though this era did not see a broad sweep of grassroots coalition building that would be witnessed after the '92 unrest, there were attempts made at collaboration. Coalition '88 was formed in 1988 as an attempt to bring together social justice groups as well as community and religious leaders to coalesce around various issues facing the city. The New Majority Task Force formed in 1989 –initiated by Mark Ridley-Thomas, Stewart Kwoh, and Manuel Pastor, then at Occidental College – as a progressive alternative to top-down models and included African-American, Latino, and Asian-American community leaders and urban planners to create a new economic vision for the city. Indeed, the seeds were being planted for the multi-ethnic and multi-sector collaboration that would be imperative in the coming years.

Finally, there was increasing connection between research and activism. In addition to the aforementioned report by Paul Ong and colleagues and the New Majority Taskforce that was kickstarted by a 1989 conference at Occidental College, the UCLA Community Scholars program was also established in 1991, to bring together community scholars and graduate students to produce “solution-oriented research related to the theme of building grassroots economic development policy in Los Angeles.”⁵ In that same year, Kent Wong, who was then an activist lawyer working for SEIU Local 660, became director of the UCLA Labor Center with the hope of transforming the Center to be “a resource to support the transformation of the labor movement of Los Angeles” (Wong, 2011). Since then, the interconnection of research and activism have become a hallmark of L.A. movement building (Soja, 2010).

A Calm Before a Storm?

If you have ever had the misfortune to experience a hurricane, it is the day before that is perhaps the eeriest. The winds pick up, a light rain foreshadows what may soon be overwhelming, and people begin either quietly securing their houses or getting ready to leave. L.A. in the late 1980s and early 1990s felt like that uneasy day before the hurricane. The economic pressures were building, the demographic changes were sweeping, and the approach of the Bradley regime – trying to unify unsettled elites and disgruntled masses with a combination of symbolic government appointments and hopes that downtown growth would trickle out to other neighborhoods – was coming under increasing strain.

While there was a lot of activity, it was not yet amounting to something big. Efforts were often fragmented, unaligned, and sometimes competitive.

And while there was a lot of grassroots activity to match this political activity, it was not yet amounting to something big. Efforts were often fragmented, unaligned, and sometimes competitive. There was a certain uneasiness about directly challenging a Black mayor who

⁵ For more on the ongoing Community Scholars' program, visit <http://www.spa.ucla.edu/dept.cfm?d=up&s=academic&f=prwinpr6-3.cfm>

was widely celebrated as a breakthrough leader but whose model of downtown development was not really delivering for low-income communities of color. The rapid demographic shifts may have called forth multiracialism by some, but they also contributed to racial clashes in urban schools, public hospitals, and local businesses – many of which were operated by new immigrants in older, African-American neighborhoods. With wealth gaps widening, community tensions deepening, and a police force largely out of control, the beating of a Black motorist, the acquittal of the cops who did the deed, and the accumulation of joblessness and working poverty led to widespread riots that shocked the sensibility of the city.

Getting Started: Vision and Organization, 1992-1995

There are moments of crisis that take things that have been going on and on, and elevate them into a relief, like as though the tide has [gone] out, and now you can see the sand, and there's a picture there and now everyone can see and touch and feel it . . . but [it was] there all along.

– Gilda Haas, founder of Strategic Actions for a Just Economy

Context

On April 29, 1992, a “not guilty” verdict was rendered in the case of the police officers who had beaten Rodney King. Within hours, there were protests at Parker Center, the headquarters of the L.A. Police Department, and shortly thereafter came the infamous event caught on video at the corner of Florence and Normandie Avenues in South Los Angeles when white truck driver Reginald Denny was hauled out of his vehicle and beaten by an angry crowd. Denny was rescued by four African Americans, one a fellow trucker, but the fact that there was zero police presence signaled that a new game was on.

In the next few days, the failure of the police presence, the anger at police treatment, and dissatisfaction about economic stress spilled over into rioting, looting and arson that rocked the city and other parts of the county. The chaos of 1992 did produce a clear question for progressives: If residents were so upset that they were willing to burn down their own city, why was that anger and rage not being channeled to more positive social change?

Moreover, while the media focused on the racial tone of the unrest, ongoing economic disenfranchisement was also a main driver leading up to April 29 (Oliver, Johnson Jr., & Farrel Jr, 1993; Pastor, 1995). Racial tensions had been escalating and clashed dramatically between the Korean and Black communities in 1991. A Korean merchant shot and killed a 15-year old Black girl who she accused of shoplifting and was then let off with five years of probation, 400 hours of community service and a \$500 fine. But progressives pointed to the deeply embedded and intertwined economic and racial disparities as the source of the trouble. Kent Wong says, “The civil unrest in 1992 was a clear manifestation of the horrendous racial and economic inequity. The acquittal of the cops who beat Rodney King was the trigger, but there could have been many other triggers that would have led to the 1992 civil unrest.”

The more conservative response was a desire to gain control over a city that was seething with tension and dis-ease and to re-establish a stable business climate. In 1993, voters rejected the mayoral bid of a progressive city councilmember, Michael Woo, and instead elected conservative Republican, Richard Riordan, whose campaign slogan was “Tough Enough to Turn L.A. Around.” With the support of L.A.’s corporate elite, homeowners in the San Fernando Valley, and residents frightened by the riots (Pastor, 2010), Riordan won and became a foil against which the nascent progressive coalition would organize.

The period from 1992 to 1995 was generally stressful for Los Angeles. While the region’s social fault lines had just shifted, its geological ones echoed: in 1994 the Northridge earthquake killed 57 people, caused serious property damage, and exposed the problems of inadequate housing for the regions’ most vulnerable communities. That same year, Proposition 187 passed and further excluded immigrants. And throughout it all, the Southern California economy continued to be wracked by recession, with unemployment rates far exceeding those of the state and the nation. The lagging recovery made clear that fundamental economic restructuring was afoot, particularly as the old manufacturing base related to auto and defense production continued to shrink, taking with it the blue-collar jobs that had afforded upward mobility for previous generations. These economic trends, coupled with the demographic shifts, would combine to shape the landscape of progressive organizing in Los Angeles.

There was the sense of overwhelm that we all had when we all were crowded in this room hearing from Rebuild LA and feeling like this was just about more of the same corporate solutions, trickle-down solutions to what is an endemic, structural problem of inequality and poverty. We need something different. We need a different approach, we need a different vision.

– Madeline Janis, Los Angeles Alliance
for a New Economy

A Brief History of Movement Building

Awakened by the civil unrest—or “the rebellion” as many organizers preferred to call it, the signs of something new and something big began to bubble up. The Bus Riders Union was established in 1992 and sued the Los Angeles County Metropolitan Transportation Authority (MTA) in 1994. The reconfiguration of labor was signaled by the establishment of organizations such as LAANE (1993) who sought to take on the plight of low-income communities in search for better jobs and thriving neighborhoods. Newly aware of the Latino presence in South L.A., both CoCo and Action for Grassroots Empowerment and Neighborhood Development Alternatives (AGENDA) worked on new multiracial models. Miguel Contreras began his work as political director of the Los Angeles County Federation of Labor in 1994 and Coalition for Humane Immigrant Rights of Los Angeles (CHIRLA) formed in 1993, with both events signaling the enduring importance of immigrants to the region, and particularly to its labor movement. Meanwhile, Antonio Villaraigosa captured the 45th District Assembly seat in 1994, the beginning of a long line of candidates from the progressive movement. In so many ways, all of this was a reaction to a decade of struggle and the realization that something radically new was needed.

On the other hand, the official response to the 1992 civil unrest was anything but innovative. At the federal level, conservatives’ response to the 1992 civil unrest and to overall deteriorating inner-city

conditions was “Weed and Seed.” This federal law enforcement program focused on “weeding out” so-called bad elements of the community while “seeding” social services. In a city already brewing with police-community tension, community leaders criticized the initiative for being little more than a justification to further criminalize minority youth in Los Angeles. Mayor Bradley called for the formation of “Rebuild Los Angeles,” an unlikely five-year plan aimed to draw investors to the very communities they had long abandoned. Orange County businessman and 1984 Olympic planner Peter Ueberroth was brought in to lead the effort; he subsequently left the leadership of RLA in 1993 as community leaders voiced discontent, particularly with outsiders whose negligence had caused the frustration leading to the unrest tried to swoop in and “fix” their communities.

[Weed and Seed] was an integrated program between LAPD, justice department, and the FBI. Their theory was that you had to weed out the bad elements of our communities, and once you weed them out [and] just seed the good elements, and that’s going to solve the problem.

– Anthony Thigpenn, Strategic Concepts in Organizing and Policy Education

Community activists used this time to come up with their own ways to “turn L.A. around.” New groups emerged, such as the Multicultural Collaborative and the Coalition of Neighborhood Developers, with one rooted in inter-ethnic alliances and the other seeking to coordinate the efforts of the region’s many disparate community development corporations. There was a range of human relations efforts and gatherings held to see whether we all really could “get along.” There was no shortage of activities or conversation, but in the rush from one meeting to the next, one organizer leaned back and said: “There is an urgent need to think long-term” so as to decipher how they could offer sustainable solutions for the most pressing needs of disenfranchised communities in Los Angeles.

Anthony Thigpenn saw this time as a time of new possibilities, one in which there was opportunity for an entirely new vision of the city and the means by which to achieve it:

*The 1992 rebellion was both the event and the impetus for starting what we initially characterized as an experiment. The elements of that experiment were the need to have vehicles for poor grassroots folks, particularly in South L.A., to understand the conditions and policies that were shaping their communities. It was deeply important to have a voice, and organize some sense of **power** to influence those decisions. A second piece was...the need to develop **proactive agendas**. Not just be against something, but trying to think of a vision and a set of policies and goals for what we were for. A third was the understanding that you could do great organizing in a community or neighborhood but given regionalization and globalization, if you didn’t **build something broader**, you really couldn’t impact the conditions.*

One of the clearest expressions of this new type of organizing was the effort that would lead up to a major transit justice win. Eric Mann of the LCSC recalls, “1992 was clearly a major shifting point, a pivotal point in the development [of the Strategy Center].” While the Center had had been working on air pollution caused by oil refineries in Wilmington, it realized that there was a huge opportunity to

reach masses of low-income, working class people by responding to steep fare hikes and bus service cutbacks, and linking that immediate pressure to the longer-term need for clean-fuel buses, an expanded bus system and healthy air. Of note, research supported their efforts from the start: their leaders wrote an influential report called *Reconstructing Los Angeles from the Bottom Up* (Labor/Community Strategy Center, 1993) an analysis of the unrest that pointed to economic conditions as a main cause.

Still, moving forward with a new, positive, and progressive vision would require the development of leadership and organizational capacity. As Anthony Thigpenn notes, “the organizations needed this time to build a base and leadership” and to think about long-term solutions to solve Los Angeles’ major issues. The inability of Rebuild LA to produce any results revealed to community organizations that they needed to establish the infrastructure and power to deliver those results themselves – or at least to hold government officials accountable for being responsive.

The Community Coalition was – and remains – a prime example of leadership development and holding decision-makers accountable. In an attempt to curb the growing drug epidemic in Los Angeles, the Community Coalition’s first campaign was to address the overwhelming presence of liquor stores in South Central as sites of drug trafficking and prostitution and major contributors to community violence. Karen Bass notes that the civil unrest eradicated many of these nuisance stores on one hand, but also complicated CoCo’s campaign:

We launched a campaign in August of 1991 to close down and clean up liquor stores. Most people think we did it in response to the civil unrest. The civil unrest was a coincidence to our work. Ironically, the very night that the civil unrest happened we were in a community meeting with Mayor Bradley’s office talking about cleaning up or closing down the liquor stores. The next day and for three days after that, fires happened and over 200 of the stores burnt.

The campaign soon shifted to preventing the rebuilding of liquor stores. However, since many of these were Korean-owned in historically Black neighborhoods, the mainstream media framed this as a Black-Korean conflict. It became absolutely essential for CoCo to focus on its objectives while at the same time not making Korean merchants feel targeted. Consequently, it supported a city pilot program to help Korean American merchants convert their family businesses into laundromats rather than liquor stores. Taking this position helped to underline that it was not against Korean American businesses as long as they were supplying goods and services that contributed to a better community (Sonenshein, 1996). The task at hand was creating multi-racial coalitions that brought the common interests of the community to the fore.

At the same time, KIWA was working on building across race, too. Soon after the unrest, KIWA began the “4.29 Displaced Workers Justice Campaign,” arguing that since workers had also suffered losses in the riots, they – specifically both Korean and Latino workers in Koreatown – should be able to tap into relief funds designated for business owners in the community. Danny Park says that KIWA immediately recognized the need to make a multiracial commitment at the beginning of campaigns:

Right away we knew that we had to organize both Latino and Korean workers. The ethnic loyalty between Korean workers and Korean employers meant that Latino workers were being discriminated against by their coworkers as well. We hired Latino organizers and sent some of our Korean organizers to Guatemala to learn Spanish. They came back with language skills and better knowledge of the community.



KIWA and others working with the Korean community also faced a special challenge, as many Korean merchants felt they had been targeted by rioters. Such storeowners suffered a disproportionate share (perhaps as much as a third) of all the losses incurred during the days of violence (Ong & Hee, 1993). Some sought to defuse the tension, while younger activists tried to keep multiracial linkages strong, including developing an analysis of the damage. As Danny Park puts it:

We talked about the history of Koreatown in Los Angeles, beginning when it started down on Jefferson and Vermont then it got moved up to Olympic. The reason why it moved up is because the city had claimed this area to be a business improvement district (BID) where it was much easier to get a loan or start up a business. When the 1992 civil unrest or rebellion happened, all that we had talked about . . . proved itself. Racially, we were used as a buffer zone. With the BID, we were the barrier between Beverly Hills and the South. We felt intentionally placed there.

And what emerged, in large part, was the need for organizations to work together at the grassroots level. Anthony Thigpen notes that it became clear that unity would have to be found across space and sector if justice was to be brought to Los Angeles:

From the very beginning, there was a need to anchor the effort in community with grassroots [members] and leaders but also to build a broader alliance – both in terms of broader arenas beyond just one neighborhood, but also across sectors. That was the other element of the experiment.

And as a result, Thigpenn founded Action for Grassroots Empowerment and Neighborhood Development Alternatives (AGENDA) – which later became Strategic Concepts in Organizing and Policy Education (SCOPE), an anchor for movement-building in Los Angeles. In this period, Anthony Thigpenn’s efforts concentrated on building a strong grassroots base in South Los Angeles and connecting that base with other low-income communities to voice their concerns and engage in the policy-making process.

Another brilliant innovator in her own right, Madeline Janis was approached by HERE Local 11 to found the Los Angeles Alliance for a New Economy (LAANE, initially known as the Tourism Industry Development Council) in 1993. With a vision to create jobs, a thriving economy, and a healthy environment, LAANE would pioneer organizing and policy strategies to leverage public capital for economic justice and change the very nature of development and contracting in the city. In a related organizing strategy, Clergy and Laity United for Economic Justice (CLUE) was founded in 1996 to bridge faith-based institutions and labor in the region.

Organizations were fresh, [they] all emerged out of the unrest of 1992 . . . there weren’t many nonprofit institutions, there was a weak labor movement, the environmental movement was very white and externally focused . . . most of the organizations that are strong now started around that time from nothing.

– Madeline Janis, Los Angeles Alliance for a New Economy

On the labor front, new paradigms for organizing had been tested before the unrest and returns on those early investments were already coming in. Even as unionization was declining in tandem with the sharp deindustrialization of Los Angeles, unions turned to the emerging service sector. Initiated by SEIU, Justice for Janitors planted seeds in Los Angeles in 1988 and accomplished victories by “masterfully combining top-down and bottom-up strategies” (Milkman, 2006, p. 161). The campaign used corporate and industry research to help organizers develop strategies at the national level, while a stepped-up commitment to organizing empowered rank-and-file members on the ground. Additionally, the campaign leveraged legal strategies, guerilla-style media events, and relationships with local political leaders to build power in Los Angeles. In 1990, after a violent police attack against janitors demonstrating against the national cleaning company, International Service Systems (ISS) in Century City, the campaign used its relationship with Mayor Tom Bradley and national SEIU leadership to establish a five-year contract with ISS (which already had an SEIU contract in New York). Following this victory, the mostly immigrant Latino janitors of Los Angeles “consolidated their gains and expanded the size of their membership” (Milkman, 2006, p. 160). In 1995 – and again in 2000 – they renewed their five-year contract with ISS.

The clear connection between labor and immigrant rights continued to crystallize. In 1994, the Institute of Popular Education of Southern California (IDEPSCA) was founded and organized hundreds of day

laborers for the first time. Workers built their self-confidence and organizing skills through literacy programs, English classes, and education about health, labor and immigration laws. IDEPSCA also provided a free service to connect workers with employers in order to eliminate the danger associated with looking for work on street corners and to ensure fair wages and proper working conditions.

But, in 1994, Proposition 187 was a wake-up call to immigrant communities who were just beginning to gain a foothold in stabilizing their lives. Intended to strip undocumented immigrants of access to tax-funded social services including childhood education, Prop 187 was passed by California voters. Although nearly every portion of the legislation was eventually ruled unconstitutional in federal court, Prop 187's direct attack made many immigrant organizations realize that a long-term need was the political mobilization of immigrants, documented and undocumented.

Coalition for Humane Immigrant Rights of Los Angeles (CHIRLA), founded in 1986 and established as a 501(c)3 in 1993 with a mission "to advance and to protect the civil and human rights of immigrants and refugees in Los Angeles," was initially a multi-ethnic collaborative of advocacy groups and social and legal service providers. But in the wake of the campaign against Prop 187 and the divisive, anti-immigrant sentiment it fostered, CHIRLA decided to do direct immigrant organizing. It launched public awareness and education campaigns, and instituted an Information Hotline and Referral Service, that provided accurate, reliable information to the immigrant community and dispatched hundreds of speakers throughout Los Angeles to deter growing fear within the immigrant community. CHIRLA also released the report, *Hate Unleashed*, which documented 267 confirmed cases of discrimination after the passage of Prop 187.

None of this new organizing work could have been done without the commitment of funders to a new vision for change. The story offers lessons such that we dedicate an entire section of this report "Funding Change, Changing Funding" to the role of philanthropy. Liberty Hill, founded in 1976, was among the most experimental of the funders. With a long-term commitment to funding community organizing, Liberty Hill established the "Fund for a New Los Angeles" in 1992 (The Howard Samuels Center, 2006) to focus on economic and racial justice organizing campaigns in the wake of the civil unrest. By providing larger grants to anchor organizations, Liberty Hill helped to underscore the role for "patient" funding over a course of years to allow for the slow work of movement building. Liberty Hill, along with a core group of social justice funders, committed to Los Angeles' base-building and alliance-building model of organizing early in this period. Later, they were joined by more established foundations such as the Ford Foundation, the James Irvine Foundation and The California Endowment. This crucial funding support allowed for significant experimentation in the decades to come.

Other types of organizations not engaged in base building were also important in the overall ecosystem. In 1995, Denise Fairchild founded CDTech (Community Development Technologies Center) to empower low-income resident through education and training in growing sectors of the economy as well as to provide a space to train new organizers. In that same year, legal advocates flexed their power as the Asian Pacific American Legal Center began work with community activists to release and win status adjustments of 72 Thai garment workers who were found enslaved in an El Monte sweatshop. After several years of legal proceedings, a victory was won in 1999 which shifted legal precedent in the

garment industry about employer responsibility, and eventually led to the establishment of the Garment Workers Center and the Los Angeles City Council adopting one of the strongest anti-sweatshop laws in the U.S. in 2004.

Research institutions and programs were also in the mix. The UCLA Community Scholars Program was started in 1991 by Gilda Haas, founder of Strategic Actions for a Just Economy (SAJE), who was teaching in the Department of Urban Planning at the time. The program linked organizers with academics and students' innovative research on L.A.'s most exploitative industries. For instance, in 1994 the program conducted the L.A. Manufacturing Action Project, in which ten labor unions collaborated to find strategies to improve the working conditions in the Alameda Corridor, the densest manufacturing region in the U.S.

In one of the early forays into the electoral world, in 1993, Jackie Goldberg was elected to City Council based on her teachers' union activism and advocacy for inner city schools. The next year, Antonio Villaraigosa was elected to State Assembly after several years of organizing for United Teachers of Los Angeles. In 1992, Mark Ridley-Thomas used his City Council position to establish the Empowerment Congress, which was a precursor to neighborhood councils to come. The Congress focused specifically on engaging constituents in the workings of government and making sure they had a voice in the decision-making process. This was accomplished largely by linking community members with neighborhood groups, religious institutions, nonprofit organizations, businesses and community leaders.

Fight Back or Frame Back

Something new was needed to turn around Los Angeles. In Marshall Ganz' volume, *Why David Sometimes Wins: Leadership, Organization, and Strategy in the California Farm Worker Movement* (2009), he shows how old forms of labor organizing could not accomplish what agricultural workers needed – so César Chávez and his *compañeros* created something new. The parallels in Los Angeles are striking – from suffering and struggle, organizers realized they would have to completely refresh organizing models in the multi-ethnic, multi-sector, sprawling, deindustrialized region.

Organizations began to establish themselves as permanent institutions with organizers on payroll, membership structures, and committed funders seeking to expand these organizations' capacities and strengths. This created an opening for new approaches and perhaps signaled a shift in what sort of organizing would work in the new Los Angeles. Part of this innovation came from realizing that no one could make the changes needed alone – the new culture of organizing was rooted in collaboration rather than competition, movement building rather than organization building, and long-term thinking rather than tactical considerations.

This early period was largely characterized by fighting back, yet it laid the groundwork for what would come next. Campaigns were defensive and reactionary: demanding MTA accountability, fighting the rebuilding of liquor stores, pushing against Prop 187, etc. But this need to “fight back” would soon give way to “frame back” – an attempt to shift movement organizing to an approach that would work across difference to build power, take control of the narrative, and institute policies that would work for low-income communities.

Consolidating Presence: Anchors and Alliances, 1996-2000

Every time that we have gotten closer, it was because we had gone out of our comfort zone – whether it was going to a new geographic area, entering a different sector, or engaging a different kind of ally.

– Angelica Salas, Coalition for Humane Immigrant Rights of Los Angeles

Context

By 1996, it had become clear that the Los Angeles economy had fundamentally changed. Former business elites had left the region, and developers were taking over as the economic powerhouses – creating their own vision for downtown and finding new friends in City Hall. The elaborate plans for the downtown Staples Center sports arena and the Frank Gehry-designed Disney Concert Hall were a painful contrast to the reality of life for most. Although the economy was beginning to limp into recovery, entrenched poverty and disinvestment remained (More et al., 2000; The United Way of Los Angeles, 1999).

Threatening to push more people into poverty was the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996, the federal welfare reform bill signed by President Bill Clinton. The reform limited the time people could be on welfare so as to encourage recipients to “work first.” But the results, particularly given the widespread level of working poverty in Los Angeles, were hardly encouraging. The Los Angeles-based Economic Roundtable offered a series of analyses documenting the failure of the work-first model and described a “cage of poverty” in which former welfare recipients remain trapped in low-wage jobs. Even mainstream groups began to sound the alarm; the United Way of Greater Los Angeles issued a 1999 report called *A Tale of Two Cities* noting that Los Angeles County was home to more wealthy and more poor households than much of the nation.

The city seemed to be coming apart in more ways than one. Demographic changes led to a perception of job competition in industries like healthcare, hotel and hospitality, with many African-American workers feeling displaced by an increasingly Latino and immigrant workforce. And the city itself was at risk of being torn apart with the heated up efforts in the San Fernando Valley – a whiter, richer, and more conservative suburban community – to secede from the rest of the city (Sonenshein, 2004). In the end, their efforts led to charter reform, which propelled the creation of neighborhood councils. While the councils held the possibility of bringing government closer to the people, they often reflected the disparate nature of the city itself. Many councils, especially those in more affluent neighborhoods, focused on addressing their own immediate needs and were less concerned with change that would improve the city as a whole. Councils were often dominated by homeowner associations and local businesses, with weak representation from tenants who were typically more low-income and isolated from public decision-making.

Against this backdrop of fragmentation, progressives began to form new city- and region-wide coalitions to address some of the economic and social challenges. If the previous time period was characterized by the establishment of new independent organizations that were intentionally multi-racial, multi-spatial,

and multi-sector, this period is best described as the transformation of those organizations into regional anchors.

The new set of organizations that emerged in response to, or were dramatically transformed by, the events of 1992 began to consolidate their victories and develop a level of capacity that enabled them to maintain their autonomy while forming alliances with new sectors and movements. Anchors are critical players in building and sustaining social movements. While there was more accomplished than can be covered in a single report, four themes emerge from this period: new alliances for worker and economic justice, new approaches to hold regional agencies accountable, new modes of labor and tenant organizing, and a new and different embrace of electoral politics.

A Brief History of Movement Building

One of the hallmarks of this period was the emergence of new efforts to advance economic justice and workers' rights that involved traditional union forces yet went beyond them. In 1997, the Living Wage Coalition – headed by LAANE – influenced the L.A. City Council to vote unanimously to approve an ordinance, “requiring city contractors to provide their workers with health insurance and an hourly wage several dollars over the minimum” (Meyerson, 2003). LAANE hit its stride in this campaign and began building coalitions, proposing creative policies, and getting them passed to raise standards for workers. Though the victory was significant in itself, the fact that it overrode a mayoral veto also signaled a direct progressive challenge to Riordan, who proved to be not “tough enough” to get his way on this issue.

Also beginning in 1997, SCOPE organized a Metro Alliance that linked together different groups and neighborhoods around a campaign for job training and placement for low-income residents. At issue was a proposal to provide \$90 million in city subsidies to DreamWorks in return for the building of a new studio in Los Angeles (Berbeo, 1999; Pastor, Benner, & Matsuoka, 2009). For the next two years, the Metro Alliance mobilized residents to demand accountability from DreamWorks, city officials, and training partners for the use of public funds. In 1999, they won a private-sector-funded workforce development program even though the deal between the city and the studio had fallen through. The program became Workplace Hollywood, an organization dedicated to job training and placement of inner-city residents in the entertainment industry. Since then, harnessing public dollars to connect disadvantaged workers to opportunities in key regional industries has become a trademark of SCOPE.

It is also in this period (in 1998) that the first community benefits agreement (CBA) was negotiated, which financed the commercial development at Hollywood and Highland that would eventually house the Kodak Theater. In some sense, the CBA effort provided a new level of recognition to the reality that developers were the business drivers in Los Angeles. The CBA strategy sought to ensure that new developments would be more inclusive with tangible benefits for area residents. This CBA included traffic improvements, a standard concession, but also a promise that the businesses that would eventually move into the development would hire local workers, pay living wages, and be neutral on union organizing. While the approach continues to evolve, this was a pioneering effort which showed the benefit of an inside-outside strategy. That is, while LAANE used its “outside” power as a diverse

coalition of labor and community supporters, it also needed the “inside” savvy of then-City Councilmember Jackie Goldberg to negotiate with other members of the council. It was becoming clear that elected allies were a necessary element of any winning strategy and a significant force within the ecosystem of social change.

Another attempt to secure a new level of accountability for the community was the effort of the Bus Riders’ Union (formed in 1994) against the seemingly untouchable Los Angeles MTA. Obtained partly by legal proceedings but also by organizing and political leverage, LCSC and its Bus Riders Union (BRU) charged the MTA with operating a racially discriminatory, separate and unequal transit system. On one side, it operated an overcrowded, underfunded bus system for a predominantly low-income African-American, Latino, and Asian American ridership. On the other, it spent more than a majority of its resources on a rail system connecting the mostly white suburbs to the downtown district. The civil rights lawsuit filed by the NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund resulted in the groundbreaking ten-year consent decree in 1996 that required the MTA to reduce overcrowding, freeze fare structures, and provide special services to facilitate access to jobs, education, and health centers. Rather than rely solely on a legal strategy, the BRU continued to organize so that by 1996 it could claim 3,000 dues-paying members – and further wield its leverage for more improvements, such as clean-fuel buses (Kelley, 1996; Mann, 2001). LCSC/BRU was one of the early organizations engaged in environmental justice in Los Angeles bringing a racial justice lens to air quality issues which, until then, had been largely the concern of mainline environmental groups. Its focus on transit equity and justice largely drove the debate (Soja, 2010).



Another effort to hold regional agencies accountable to community needs was a burgeoning movement for environmental justice. During this period, Communities for a Better Environment (CBE) shifted its attention from broad issues of environmental health to a more specific focus on environmental justice. In 1997, CBE filed a Title VI Civil Rights Complaint against the South Coast Air Quality Management District (SCAQMD) for the discriminatory impacts of the car scrapping program, which concentrated pollution in communities of color near the Ports of Los Angeles and Long Beach (Chinn, 1999). SCAQMD agreed to adopt an Environmental Justice Initiative, which led to changes in law reducing the allowable cancer risk from air contaminants from existing sources from 100 in a million to 25 in a million. The collaborative between CBE, Liberty Hill, and researchers that formed during this time also created a series of workshops and capacity-building strategies to help support smaller groups just beginning this work (see Liberty Hill Foundation, 2004).

The fight for quality of life did not end there. In 1996, Union de Vecinos was founded in Boyle Heights out of residents' struggles against the demolition of public housing. Politicized parishioners of Dolores Mission took matters into their own hands, when the church was unable to take a stand against plans to evict 700 families at Pico Aliso housing project. According to Executive Director and Founder Leonardo Vilchis, what started as a few concerned families grew into a force eventually occupying four buildings. He says it was residents who propelled the force in that, "You had people who were wearing different hats at that point. They would go to church on Sunday, but the rest of the week they were fighting for their homes... if the community did not want to continue with this stuff we would have been ready to walk off."

Union de Vecinos was able to negotiate a contract that prevented 250 families from being evicted and allowed others to have a say in their relocation. Leonardo credits Jesuit liberation theologians, the Justice for Janitors campaign, and solidarity efforts with Central-American struggles as laying the political groundwork for this campaign. Today Union is a network of neighborhood committees with 1,950 volunteers working for economic and environmental justice, as well as affordable housing.

New faith-based organizations emerged during this period. In 1996, Clergy and Laity United for Economic Justice (CLUE) was formed. Its focus was on organizing the faith community to bring pastoral care, witness, and credibility to the low-wage immigrants at the center of economic justice struggles. CLUE was a key voice during the Living Wage campaign. In 2000, L.A. Voice, an affiliate of the national PICO network, was established as an interfaith organization composed of over 20 congregations created to improve the life of L.A.'s most vulnerable communities. It made its mark largely through becoming a member of the collaborative Housing L.A., which seeks to ensure affordable housing in the city.

A number of community-based organizations waging campaigns related to the new wave of immigrant workers. In 1994, KIWA launched a restaurant campaign which marked a shift in strategy from addressing individual workers' claims for back wages and other work-related disputes to taking on the entire industry. According to Danny Park, there was a culture of abuse and a general lack of consideration for workers' rights and, "it did not make sense to use our resources to serve one worker or change one restaurant when the whole industry is at that level... we felt that it has to be a change

that is brought into the whole industry... changing the culture of that industry – they were not paying minimum wage, they were not paying overtime, they were really ignoring the minimum labor standard.”

By the end of the campaign, what had begun as a focus on labor issues broadened to encompass concerns for the humanity of workers and immigrants alike: “There was a whole campaign where Koreatown media took up saying that we are immigrants too, we are people of color too, we shouldn’t be treating our coworkers in that way,” says Park. In this case, identifying as immigrants was useful way to create new alliances and see each other’s interests.

The day laborer movement took hold during this period. In 1997, CHIRLA and IDEPSCA won funding from the City of Los Angeles and established a Day Laborer Program. The worker center model of running hiring halls, providing services, building leadership, and waging campaigns became a blueprint for efforts in other cities in California, Washington, and Oregon. Those relationships formed the foundation for the National Day Laborer Organizing Network (NDLON), established in 2001, which went on to broker partnerships with traditional labor unions and the national AFL-CIO (Fine, 2006; Narro, 2009).

In 1996, the Los Angeles County Federation of Labor, AFL-CIO (often referred to as the County Fed) elected a new secretary-treasurer, Miguel Contreras, triggering a turning point for labor and its relationship to Los Angeles’ new and growing immigrant workforce. Labor leadership realized that the future of organizing lay in the service sector and in immigrant workers who were more open to union entreaties. In 1999, SEIU Local 434B organized 74,000 homecare workers in L.A. County. At the time, this population of workers was one of the largest and most ethnically diverse within the county and the state – homecare workers spoke over 100 languages in Los Angeles County alone. This group of workers was also primarily women who had been largely underrepresented in the past. While some worried that organizing workers could cause them to demand higher wages from the elderly consumers they served, the union addressed this by building a collaboration of workers, advocates and consumers that not only led to better working conditions and wages, but also policy changes that provided better care for consumers.

Perhaps the most seminal event in the labor movement during this time was the Justice for Janitor’s strike in 2000. Under the leadership of Mike Garcia, SEIU 1877 built up its membership to 8,500 people who were more active than those of typical unions and predominately immigrant and over half female – largely representative of the changing demographic of labor. This was America’s new low-wage workforce fighting back to improve their working conditions, and this strike had implications nationwide.⁶ Indeed, organizers had found a way to organize the “unorganizable” and win (Milkman, 2006). This shift required that unions become more open to immigrants and their issues – and not just in Los Angeles. In 2000, the national AFL-CIO, influenced by the County Fed, officially adopted a platform supportive of immigrant rights and comprehensive immigration reform – and its announcement at the Los Angeles Sports Arena drew an overflow crowd of about 20,000 supporters (Narro, 2009, 72).

⁶ For an excellent overview of how SEIU 1877 and their allies set up a campaign with the power to win, see Harold Meyerson (2000).

Labor was a critical part of another form of power building in this era: direct involvement in the electoral process. Miguel Contreras transformed the political operations of the County Fed from an ATM for elected officials to a vehicle for mobilizing its rank-and-file members to go to the polls. While progressives had been elected earlier – Mark Ridley-Thomas to City Council in 1991, Jackie Goldberg to City Council in 1993, and Antonio Villaraigosa to State Assembly in 1994 – labor’s new commitment to get-out-the-vote efforts for progressive candidates added a significant punch. In 1998, for example, the County Fed’s endorsement of former union official Gil Cedillo in a special election for a state assembly seat propelled the candidate from a double-digit trail in the polls to an eventual electoral margin of more than twenty points. Meanwhile, labor ally Villaraigosa was appointed to the Assembly Speakership in the same year, and just two years later, Jackie Goldberg, the City Council firebrand who had pushed for the living wage and community benefits deal at Hollywood and Highland, was elected to the State Assembly.

It was not just labor in the electoral mix. Many community organizations began voter outreach efforts to fight off several statewide ballot initiatives. In 1996, Prop 209, an initiative to end affirmative action, passed statewide, but it was defeated in Los Angeles where a citywide precinct network formed, composed largely of university students. In 1998, Prop 226 would have banned political contributions by union members, but it was defeated. To add to the mounting anti-immigrant sentiment, that same year, Prop 227 ended bilingual instruction in public schools. And between Prop 209 and Prop 21, an initiative that would have increased criminal penalties for youth, younger people started getting involved in organizing and movement building. Many of CoCo’s staff, for example, learned by doing in these campaigns, working in high school organizing committees that became the model for the A-G campaign, which pushed for college preparatory classes (the so-called A-G series of required courses) in all schools in the Los Angeles Unified School District and launched a new generation of young activists in the process. Further, Youth for Environmental Justice, a project of CBE, became active in three high schools, eventually leading to victories that curtailed refineries and blocked new power plants in their already-overburdened communities.

Another important capacity was taking root in the academic realm. Occidental College’s Urban and Environmental Policy Institute (UEPI) opened in 1997 churning out important research by Peter Dreier, Robert Gottlieb, Regina Freer, and later Martha Matsuoka. In 1998, UEPI and Occidental hosted the Progressive L.A. Conference that included a broad range of community organizations and eventually led to a policy agenda “for the next L.A.” that became part of the debate in the 2001 mayoral election. And its work has continued to evolve: aside from training undergraduate students for movement building organizations – some of whom later went on to UCLA’s graduate Urban Planning program. UEPI has contributed a wide range of useful reports over the years, particularly on issues of food justice.

The Community Development Technologies Center (CDTech), founded by Denise Fairchild in 1995 and located at Los Angeles Trade-Technical College, a community college in downtown with a focus on vocational and technical training took hold during this period. CDTech inherited the research and other assets of Rebuild LA (RLA) as that organization sunset in 1997. In its later years, RLA had shifted focus to a strategy that involved supporting smaller companies, assisting community-based organizations, and attracting grocery stores to disadvantaged areas, which made CDTech a good match given its mission of

economic development, retail development, and community organizing. CDTech established a certificate program in community organizing and community development at the community college giving students college credit – and a new sense of self-worth and purpose, especially for the adult learners who are stepping onto a college campus for the first time.

Notably not in the mix during this time were the IAF organizations that had been important in the 1980s, namely United Neighborhoods Organization (UNO) and the South Central Organizing Committee (SCOC). We would argue that they lost traction, in part, because they were less successful at working in concert with the multitude of new organizations emerging at this time. In contrast, the Los Angeles chapter of the Association of Community Organizers for Reform Now (ACORN) made an important shift in the mid-1990s joining efforts such as LA Coalition on Hunger and Homelessness, ALLERT, Metropolitan Alliance, and Housing LA. It could later tap these relationships when it needed to rebuild after the scandal that hit the national organization many years later.

Getting To Know You

A new and fundamental understanding was rising to the surface during this time: an ecosystem rather than an empire needed to be built. And a broad ecosystem, indeed, was coming into place as anchor organizations were emerging and new alliances were forming. Organizations began establishing their niche, finding new allies, and developing lasting and multi-dimensional capacities.

Newly established organizations – like LAANE, SCOPE, Bus Riders Union, SAJE and KIWA – had faced down powerful developers, entertainment executives, and regional agencies and won. The usual, somewhat ragtag, struggle of local communities against environmental inequities was being replaced with a new and more comprehensive approach. And labor, which traditionally was less likely to partner with anyone, especially, with those outside labor, had developed a new set of community alliances.

Organizations became more comfortable with themselves and then with one another. And in the process of working and struggling together in coalitions, the leaders of various movements began to understand each other's analysis, styles, and strategies – and began to deepen trust, at least the extent to which they could trust each other. All this was setting the stage to step it up.



Stepping Up: Building Movements, Taking Power, 2001-2005

Given regionalization and globalization if you didn't build something broader, you really couldn't impact the conditions. For example, we couldn't impact the conditions of poverty and unemployment in South L.A., just organizing in South L.A..

– Anthony Thigpenn, Strategic Concepts in Organizing and Policy Education

Context

The end of 2000 was marked by one of the closest and most controversial presidential elections in the history of the United States. Ultimately, George W. Bush was declared the winner – by a 5-4 ruling of the Supreme Court – and his presidency was set in motion in January 2001. Less than a year later, a set of terrorist attacks on September 11 brought the nation together to both mourn this national tragedy and think about how we would move forward.

It would have served us to think longer and harder. A new “war on terror” was soon launched that provided a justification for a rush into Afghanistan and then Iraq, as well as an excuse to circumscribe civil liberties here at home. As the Iraq war quickly became a morass, the traditional notion of raising taxes to pay for the effort was politically unpopular. Government deficits, driven by rising expenditures and a decision to actually slash taxes, grew. Monetary authorities kept interest rates low, financial markets were deregulated, and the housing market boomed, setting the stage for what would later be the worst financial crisis in nearly seventy years.

In Los Angeles, the mayoral seat was also up for grabs. After two terms, Republican Mayor Richard Riordan stepped down in 2001, and the election turned out to be a two-man contest between Democrat City Attorney James Hahn and progressive-favored Antonio Villaraigosa. With complex racial and geographic dynamics underlying the contest, Villaraigosa failed to put together enough votes to win. But the campaign itself – just like Bradley’s first failed campaign – suggested there was potential for a new electoral coalition in the city’s political future. Social movement organizers who were busy building anchors and alliances would be a crucial part of that coalition.

And even as the social movement forces faced an electoral setback in 2001, they were able to make major progress on many of the issues confronting their communities. That year marked a victory in the form of a major community benefits agreement as part of the Staples Center expansion as well as a crucial living wage victory (though later reversed) in Santa Monica. In the same year, immigrant rights organizations were able to secure the passage of state legislation that would allow undocumented students to pay in-state tuition at public institutions of higher learning and youth leaders from Community Coalition organized (and sued) to ensure that dollars for school construction would be spent in low-income areas. This all set the stage for an election that would close this period and bring Villaraigosa, an emblem for the growing power of the progressive labor and community coalition, to mayoral office.

A Brief History of Movement Building

This era marked a shift in the movement towards long-term strategies for building deeper alignment between Latinos and African Americans, between community and labor, and between City Hall insiders and community outsiders. And by working together, organizations started garnering greater power and delivering bigger victories.

Kicking off this period was the first and unsuccessful run of former union organizer Antonio Villaraigosa for Los Angeles City Mayor in 2001, a contentious battle which revealed racial tensions between African American and Latinos triggered by the city's swift demographic changes. After eight years of Riordan's reign, two Democrats – then-City Councilmember Antonio Villaraigosa and then-City Attorney James Hahn – ran neck-and-neck for mayor. Villaraigosa received support from the Los Angeles Federation of Labor and an army of precinct walkers hailing from the rank-and-file membership of community organizations and unions representing workers such as janitors and hotel employees. With this support, the Villaraigosa campaign succeeded in pulling the political conversation left to address needs of traditionally marginalized communities (Gottlieb et al., 2005).

It was not enough to secure victory. As Harold Meyerson observed immediately following the election in 2001, "Something of a rift between the local Black and Latino communities emerged during the campaign." The African American community was concerned about how the growing immigrant community was affecting their job prospects – and political influence, and the possibility of a Latino mayor brought those concerns into sharper focus. Moreover, while he himself was white, Hahn was the son of Los Angeles County Supervisor Kenneth Hahn, whose early actions in favor of civil rights (including welcoming Martin Luther King to Los Angeles when Mayor Sam Yorty refused to do so) had captured the long-term good will of L.A.'s Black community.

There was, however, an important generational split: younger Black leaders who saw the strategic importance of building multi-racial coalitions, like Anthony Thigpenn, Karen Bass, and then-City Councilmember Mark Ridley-Thomas, supported Villaraigosa. In the end, Hahn, whose moderate views garnered votes from more conservative white communities as well as the city's most heavily African American district, won by a slight margin (see Vaca, 2004). But the electoral fight made clear that bridging the Black-Brown divide and the community-labor gap at both organizational and grassroots levels would be essential to building a powerful progressive movement in Los Angeles.

Community Coalition focused on building strong connections between Latino and African American residents in South L.A. and took on multiple issues affecting community well-being. Though its work stemmed from the specific conditions in South L.A., it rippled out and benefited other communities. This included working with City Councilmember Martin Ludlow to launch the "Summer of Success" program in 2003 which became a youth violence prevention model for the city and tackling issues of relative-parenting with its "Family Care, Not Foster Care" campaign that has dramatically shifted L.A. County's approach to child welfare. In 2005, CoCo and InnerCity Struggle, a grassroots organization based in East L.A., collaborated on the "Equal Access to College Prep Classes" A-G campaign mentioned earlier with Black and Brown high school students at the lead. Their victory came in 2007 in a 6-1 vote by the LAUSD Board.

Efforts to increase electoral power in Latino and African American communities reached a new level during this period. In 2002, SCOPE established Alliance of Local Leaders for Education, Registration and Turnout (ALLERT) as a 501(c)4 non-profit organization, which is allowed to engage in unlimited legislative lobbying and limited candidate campaigning. ALLERT was an attempt to build a lasting infrastructure of trained precinct leaders from community and rank-and-file union membership and a growing database of new and occasional voters in African American and Latino neighborhoods (The New World Foundation, 2005). Partners included Community Coalition, ACORN, Justice for Janitors, HERE Local 11, and others.

CHIRLA jumped into electoral work when, in 2003, a statewide bill was repealed which allowed undocumented immigrants to obtain driver's licenses. In 2004, it joined a statewide multi-ethnic collaborative to form Mobilize the Immigrant Vote (MIV) specifically to work in immigrant communities to build their capacity to register, educate and mobilize residents for voter participation. That same year, CHIRLA established its 501(c)4 operation CHIRLA Action Fund, which targets new and low-frequency voters.

But these organizations realized that contacting voters only during elections was not sufficient – nor could they afford to drop their ongoing issue campaigns to engage in tactical, defensive fights that came along with every election. Thus organizations built a new model of “integrated voter engagement” that sought to involve new voter contacts made at the doors and on the phones in their ongoing political education, leadership development, and campaign activities. This model became the foundation for the national Pushback Network, which was started in 2005 in order to “push back” on national, top-down electoral strategies that relied on periodically parachuting in election workers rather than on building lasting capacity over the long haul.

Reflecting the movement's maturity was a growing sophistication in understanding and developing power. SCOPE had brought together grassroots organizations across the state through its Strategic Training and Education for Power (STEP) project that focused on building alignment around a long-term theory of social change based both on a clear analysis of and on strategies to build power. In 2003, SCOPE codified its curriculum and published *Power Tools: A Manual for Organizations Fighting for Justice*. The advantage of a systematic approach was an unromantic view that measured how much influence one had and kept in focus the fundamental task at-hand of building power.

Understanding power was no more important than understanding what it would take to build authentic community-labor alliances. In the electoral arena, the relationship was still relatively new and very uneven – with resources (thus influence and power) tipped in favor of labor. But ties were growing stronger through policy fights. One marker of movement maturity was the Community Benefits Agreement (CBA) negotiated around the proposal to build an entertainment center next to the Staples Center (what is now LA Live, including the Nokia Theatre, the J.W. Marriot, various restaurants, and other attractions). Since the expansion required city permits in the form of re-zoning, leverage was possible.

Amongst those leading the charge and eventually the negotiations was Strategic Actions for a Just Economy (SAJE), an organization founded by Gilda Haas in 1996 that had cut its teeth on issues of tenants' rights and welfare reform. With the support and collaboration of nearly 30 other community organizations, environmental advocates, and five unions, SAJE, LAANE, and others negotiated "a precedent-setting community benefits agreement in May 2001, the highlight of which included job guarantees, affordable housing, living wages, parks, and additional parking spaces for neighborhood residents" (Pastor, Benner, & Matsuoka, 2009, p. 128).

Just as impressive as the victory was the collaboration that helped create it. Labor joined up with local tenants, environmental justice groups, and others, signaling that a new way of doing business was coming to Los Angeles. That was reinforced in the 2004 effort to secure a CBA with Los Angeles World Airports, the agency that runs the region's airports. A seemingly motley crew of local activists, labor leaders, environmentalists, and others secured a \$500 million agreement that promised to soundproof houses and schools, provide jobs to local residents, and generate small business opportunities. These victories revealed the new political reality of growing progressive power and coalition building.

And the immigrant rights movement was maturing as groups began formalizing long-term relationships and new groups were forming, such as NDLO and the Garment Worker Center. CHIRLA, KIWA, and the Pilipino Workers Center formed the Multi-ethnic Immigrant Worker Organizing Network (MIWON) in 1999 and were later joined by the Garment Workers Center and IDEPSCA. MIWON helped to build solidarity among the organizations so that they were contributing not only to each other's campaigns but to each other's organizational development as well. Perhaps its most widely recognized contribution was its ability to mobilize tens of thousands of immigrants and their supporters in a march for immigrant rights on May 1, Immigrant Worker Day in Los Angeles (Narro, 2006).

The immigrant youth-led DREAM movement planted its early roots during this period. In 2001, a group of immigrant high school students organized with CHIRLA to spearhead the fight for AB 540, a measure that would allow undocumented students to pay in-state rather than out-of-state tuition at California's public universities. CHIRLA developed a strong student base to act as spokespeople for the campaign, used ethnic media outlets, and secured state senators Marco Firebaugh and Abel Maldonado to carry the bill through the state legislature. The Korean Resource Center was a key ally, as was UCLA IDEAS – Improving Dreams, Equality, Access and Success (Rabkin, 2004).



As significant as the collaboration was the shift in tone. Together, they crafted a message that went beyond the immigrant rights movement, and declared, “Education is a human right.” Angelica Salas, Executive Director of CHIRLA says the organization and its leaders began to understand the importance of developing a broad base of support outside of the immigrant rights community: “Every time that we have gotten closer, it was because we had really gone out of our comfort zone – whether it was going to a new geographic area, asking a different sector, or approaching a new ally.”

When I first came to LA, there was no connection at all between immigrant rights and the labor movement, they were like two totally separate movements. But in 2000, Miguel Contreras as Secretary-Treasurer of the County Fed started reaching out to immigrant workers, both union and nonunion, day laborers, and domestic workers.

– Victor Narro, UCLA Labor Center

In 2002, the UCLA Downtown Labor Center opened its doors in MacArthur Park – home to one of the city’s largest immigrant communities and many union halls and worker centers. It has served as a bridge between not only the university and the labor community but also between the emerging immigrant worker centers and traditional labor. As noted earlier, the AFL-CIO had just officially adopted a pro-immigrant platform supporting legalization – a stark switch from its traditional anti-immigrant stance. And in June 2003, the AFL-CIO held an immigrant workers freedom ride from metros across the U.S. to Washington D.C. Then-President of HERE Local 11, Maria Elena Durazo, chaired the national committee for the Freedom Ride.⁷

All the work on building power and on forging Black-Brown alliances helped pave the way for a second – and this time successful – mayoral campaign by Villaraigosa in 2005. His campaign gained an extra push when Mayor Hahn, in one of first acts in office fired Black Police Chief Bernard Parks, engendering a sense of betrayal on the part of the older African Americans who had supported him.

However, Villaraigosa’s victory was not a given. A great challenge presented itself when the County Fed, citing a long-established practice of backing pro-labor incumbents, endorsed Mayor Hahn in his reelection bid. But this turned out to be a gift in disguise to the broader progressive movement. With labor unable to mobilize its electoral machinery, Villaraigosa turned to Anthony Thigpenn to serve as director of field operations, and the progressive movement’s new capabilities in voter mobilization were put to the test.

Villaraigosa won in a run-off, taking nearly sixty percent of the vote, with support coming from rank-and-file union members, over fifty percent of African Americans, and a wide swath of Angelenos. He was not the only progressive to achieve a major electoral gain during this time period. Gil Cedillo was elected to the Senate and Mark Ridley-Thomas to the State Assembly in 2002; and Fabian Nuñez was elected to the State Assembly in 2003. Karen Bass decided to build on her years of work at CoCo by running for and winning a State Assembly seat in 2004. She later became the first African-American woman to serve as

⁷ The ride originated from 12 cities, nationwide, converging in Washington, D.C. with the purpose of putting immigrant issues squarely in the national debate in preparation for the 2004 elections. http://www.aflcio.org/aboutus/thisistheafcio/publications/magazine/0903_iwfr.cfm

Speaker of a state legislative body in U.S. history (then was elected to U.S. Congress in 2010). Collectively, these successes signaled the grassroots movements' embrace of an inside-outside strategy that was starting to change the political dynamics of the city.

This period also introduced a number of statewide and national alliances. Both SCOPE and CoCo (along with other local organizations) became involved with a statewide network, the California Alliance (now California Calls) in 2003. The alliance grew out of the STEP project and a subsequent process of exploring issues around which it made sense to the affiliates and the alliance to focus on. Reforming Proposition 13 and addressing the root cause of the cyclical budget cycles and crises became its rallying cause. CBE and EJ groups across the state continued the ties strengthened in this project as the California Environmental Justice Alliance.

Reaching Out, Growing Up

The racial divisions exposed during the first Villaraigosa campaign stressed the importance of doubling down on the need to address demographic shifts particularly in neighborhoods like South Los Angeles, a traditionally African American community that had become majority-Latino. Conflict arising from competition for jobs, housing, and political recognition needed to be channeled into collaboration for the betterment of both communities. So the intentional work of building bridges was embraced.

Reaching out, however, involved more than race. Organizations that had been founded or dramatically influenced by the 1992 civil unrest were now ten years old. In that decade, the organizations had racked up lots of experience and significant victories. They also began to see the limits of working alone. More leaders realized the need to step beyond the silos of issue, place, and sector in order to build broader political power. Even the Los Angeles-based affiliates of national organizing networks of ACORN and PICO (LA Voice), networks not always known for working well with others, began to see that they were part of a broader ecosystem.

The second big feature of this period was the recognition and formulation of an approach to power. Organizers know power is necessary and that it is often deployed against them, but they less frequently have a strategy for achieving it. During this period, leaders were beginning to realize that electoral power was a necessary, even if insufficient, element for success. They made a serious commitment to figure out how strategically to run and win candidates as the next step in expanding their influence and their ability to deliver programs and policies that would meet the needs of their constituents.

Though there was still much work to be done, the movement was well positioned for success. With allies in power and growing capacity, the vision of a more just city was a closer reality. But there were new questions: How would the progressive movement relate to their "friends" once in office? How could electoral campaigns bolster grassroots organizing and policy development? It was these challenges that would characterize the next wave of movement building in Los Angeles.

Securing Success: Impact and Scale, 2006-2012

The first five years you find out what you're good at, or what your space is, or what you have to offer. The next 5 or 10 or 20 years, you figure out what you're going to do with that – which is a moving target.

– Gilda Haas, Strategic Actions for a Just Economy

Context

One of the clearest signs of the new political landscape in Los Angeles came in 2006 when half a million Angelenos marched for immigration reform and were greeted at City Hall by the new Mayor. At the city, regional, and state levels, organizers in this era were met by an unprecedented number of friendly faces whom they had helped to seat in the halls of power. In this period, 2006-2012, organizers were figuring out how best to work with peers and allies in power, achieving impact and scaling up lessons that could have been usefully applied to the large national opportunity afforded by the Obama victory.

In 2008, mass mobilizations swept Barack Obama into the U.S. Presidency with the message of hope and possibility, and potential for consolidating the momentum into new forms of organization, new laws, and an optimistic and inclusive worldview. Progressive policies were under real consideration:

immigration reform, universal healthcare, and green jobs. A window of opportunity seemed to have opened. This era is one characterized by the “movement moments” that erupted against a rapidly-shifting national landscape.

The new President entered office with a host of challenges waiting for him. The Great Recession set in, hitting the most vulnerable first and the hardest. Anti-government forces galvanized in the form of the Tea Party, and states like Arizona, Mississippi, and Georgia passed draconian anti-immigrant legislation (with the Supreme Court subsequently striking down the precedent-setting law from Arizona nearly in its entirety). Just as our nation’s most vulnerable communities became hopeful for change, it became evident that efforts would have to be redoubled.



But as the period progressed, the hope and optimism of 2008 were tested. The exuberance of 2006 and 2008 were dampened quite pointedly by Obama's failure to deliver on comprehensive immigration reform and a general level of frustration around the difficulty of making practical change to which so many had looked forward. Organizations themselves felt the crunch of the downturn as new directors cut their teeth in one of the tightest funding environments in a long time.

In City Hall, the deep economic recession translated into threats of layoffs that strained the relationship between the public sector unions and the Mayor – a longtime labor ally. In the face of double-digit unemployment, which took an especially hard toll on African-American and Latino communities, the Mayor moved to adopt more business-friendly policies to attract private investment and stimulate job growth. As he assumed this more explicitly pro-business stance, some activists became disillusioned and found it more challenging to move their agendas.

And despite the ongoing struggle and sometimes disillusionment at both the federal and local levels, social movement forces kept pressing. LAANE and its labor allies, for example, continued to move forward with new policies, such as the "Don't Waste LA campaign" to improve worker safety, increase recycling, and decrease air pollution through a systemized and regulated trash hauling program. The innovative Clean Carwash Campaign had (relatively) quick success in unionizing their first three carwashes – with support from the Steelworkers. The Dreamers – with a large Los Angeles contingency – challenged their allies; occupying Obama headquarters, the potential of embarrassment contributed to the President issuing the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) memorandum.

At the same time, and unexpectedly, a new movement was birthed in fall of 2011. The Occupy Wall Street (OWS) movement emerged, putting a megaphone to unjust economic disparities in the nation and giving progressives a needed slogan: "We are the 99%." In Los Angeles, protestors "occupying" the lawn at City Hall were met – at least at first – by a friendly Mayor who handed them rain ponchos and a sympathetic City Council which passed a resolution stating its support.

This image is par for the course for the period – bittersweet, sometimes confusing, and but headed in the right direction. The many "movement moments" were won amidst the backdrop of a global economic recession, an upsurge in activism at both ends of the political spectrum, and a disillusionment with a President on whom so many hopes were cast. But in the midst of economic and social uncertainty, long-time movement builders remained trained at consolidating movement practices and broadening their geographic scope of influence. As 2012 draws to a close, organizational leaders are now figuring out how Obama's second term can be better leveraged by the progressive coalitions that returned him to office.

A Brief History of Movement Building

In any case, the election of a former labor organizer to Los Angeles' top office created a window of opportunity to move senior organizers into the official halls of power. Larry Frank became Deputy Mayor, former-Executive Director of Liberty Hill Torie Osborn and Denise Fairchild became Senior Advisors, and Jerilyn Mendoza (an environmental lawyer with Environmental Defense who helped negotiate the LAX community benefits agreement) was appointed to the commission overseeing the

Port of Los Angeles, to name a few. Progressive leadership in the labor movement was also affirmed: In 2006, Maria Elena Durazo was elected Secretary-Treasurer of the County Fed.

But much as in Bradley’s era, though many like-minded people were in high places, they were working in the face of a city and nation in need – and full of frustration (Pastor, 2010). Expectations for the Mayor were high, and a backlog of needs meant that any administration would fall short. But what movement organizers in Los Angeles recognized was that although they may have had an ally in office, they had a responsibility to use that relationship to continue to build and deploy power.

During this period, it was an inside-outside game that allowed progressives to make significant gains. Coupled with a connection to institutional power was an increased alignment and capacity within the social justice ecosystem itself. Organizations had almost two decades of building empowered grassroots leadership, research and policy expertise, and demonstrated victories. With “insider” relationships, organizations could push for progress with even bolder demands for change from the ground-up.

One of the most visible expressions of the depths of this shift was the Clean Ports campaign victory. The Coalition for Clean and Safe Ports, formed by LAANE in collaboration with labor, community, environmental, and community health organizations, fought for and won a Clean Truck program at the Port of Los Angeles in 2006. While the implementation of these standards has been as much of a fight as passing the plan itself, the campaign demonstrated a few things.⁸ One, that labor and environmental groups can move the needle on economic and environmental sustainability and equity better together than apart (Pastor, McMorrow, & Carter, n.d.). Two, that mature social movement organizations (like LAANE) are able to lead coalitions with traditional environmental groups and labor in a way that does not compromise their values. And three, that strong, “unlikely” coalitions can have huge impact.

In this period, labor also secured the adoption of cutting-edge Project Labor Agreements as well as a Construction Careers Policy for transit investments (with special targets for disadvantaged workers) to assure that city- and other publicly-supported projects would both embrace a high-road economic path and reflect the racial diversity of the city.

The ripple effects of unlikely partners coming together in the Ports campaign are numerous: the local Teamsters taking a position against drilling in the Arctic; truck drivers working at the Ports of Los Angeles and Long Beach voting for union representation for the first time in 30 years in 2012, with a common motto of “Good Jobs and Clean Air;” and environmental organizations supporting the plight of low-wage warehouse workers who are exploited by major corporations, like Walmart, which support a global goods movement industry with dire environmental and public health impacts.

Other alliances formed among unlikely partners. SCOPE launched the Los Angeles Apollo Alliance which brought together environmental advocates, building trades and public sector unions with community organizations to secure a green retrofit ordinance that included job training for disadvantaged workers. GREEN LA, a coalition of mainstream and environmental justice groups, was created to collaborate with

⁸ For more on the Clean Truck Program and subsequent action, see: <http://www.laane.org/clean-and-safe-ports/>.

the Mayor and his newly-appointed commissioners to advance sustainability policies throughout all City departments, including at the country's largest municipally-owned utility in one of the most heavily polluted regions. Both the Los Angeles Apollo Alliance and GREEN LA were able to cement ties with traditional environmentalists. The CLEAN Carwash campaign was started with backing from the United Steelworkers – a less than likely partner – along with support from CLUE, the UCLA Labor Center, CHIRLA, and many others, advocating for improved working conditions. The campaign succeeded in unionizing a carwash for the first time in 2011 and has had other victories since. And, a “bus-only lane” was approved for the region's most heavily traveled corridor, through the joint efforts of bus riders, environmental advocates, and veterans and disability rights groups.

Such uncommon alliances require a measure of organizational maturity and a willingness to expand the consciousness of members about multiple social issues. CHIRLA has had to balance its commitment to LGBTQ and women's choice values with its alliance with the Catholic Church. At one point the organization returned funds to the Catholic Campaign for Human Development (CCHD) because of their differences so as not to ruin its relationship with the Church, which has been a close ally in the fight for immigrant rights. To make uncomfortable alliances work, organizations have to be committed to expanding their vision, sharpening their analysis, and being flexible as they work through tough “wedge” issues.

Finally, Los Angeles has been one of the epicenters for challenging but important alliances between African-American and immigrant communities (Pastor, De Lara, & Scoggins, 2011). At the grassroots level, this alliance has been a tenuous one, with real and perceived tensions around neighborhood change, jobs, and political power. In a region where the most vibrant labor actors are predominantly Latino, and often immigrant, SEIU made concrete commitments to the economic health of African Americans by unionizing the predominantly Black security worker industry, while HERE has promoted hotel contracts that require the hiring of African Americans to reflect their proportion of the population. In addition, the UCLA Labor Center created the Black Workers Center and is working closely with the building trades to bring African Americans into construction careers; and CLUE-LA has been at the heart of bringing African-American and Latino ministers together for community change.

And alliances have captured wins for housing, too. Housing LA, a coalition of renters' rights advocates, homeless advocates, labor, religious groups, and affordable housing developers, applied pressure to pass a model policy framework to permit affordable housing construction and landed a unanimous City Council victory to enforce a policy limit on condo conversions. However, because of the housing crisis the city still faces the strain of gentrification, mounting foreclosures, and rising rent. Housing, including the struggles around developments proposed by the University of Southern California, promoters of a downtown football stadium, and others, remains a struggle for progressive groups in the city.

In coordination with new alliances in the region, this era saw a real blossoming of state and national alliances as long-time movement builders took their work to scale. The Right to the City Alliance spun out of SAJE's effort to convene over 20 grassroots organizations and their allies, to develop a stronger national movement for urban justice. SCOPE's early testing of integrated voter engagement strategies gave rise to California Calls which now brings together over thirty groups to mobilize new and occasional

voters in support of progressive tax reform. LAANE joined with other labor-oriented “think-and-do tanks” from around the country to form the Partnership for Working Families. The Labor/Community Strategy Center launched a training program for organizers starting bus riders unions elsewhere and anchored the Transit Riders for Public Transportation which is pushing for increased federal funding for mass transit. LCSC founder Eric Mann codified and published his organizing model in *Playbook for Progressives* (2011) to share with a wider national and even international audience.

Environmental justice organizations, often among the most locally-focused of groups because of immediate proximate concerns about health and quality of life, connected with others in the state to form and sustain the California Environmental Justice Alliance, and reached across state and national boundaries to participate in the U.S. and World Social Forums. LA Voice, a local affiliate of the PICO organizing network founded in 2000, coordinated with PICO groups and many others to support changes in immigration law, health care reform, and bank accountability at the federal level.

Immigrant rights organizations also extended their reach from Los Angeles. In 2006, NDLO and the AFL-CIO reached an historic agreement – the Worker Center Partnership – that formalized ties between the worker center movement and traditional labor, including working together for comprehensive immigration reform (Narro, 2009). The Partnership includes a commitment to taxi and domestic workers, as well. NDLO with Puente Arizona also created the “Alto Arizona” campaign to oppose Arizona’s anti-immigrant law SB 1070, and a solidarity campaign “Todos Somos Arizona” rose up in Southern California to join in the fight.

While the momentum of the 2006 immigrant rights marches did not result in comprehensive reform, the region’s activists were able to redirect that energy. In 2011, Gil Cedillo – the former general manager at the Los Angeles SEIU– sponsored the California Dream Act while organizations like DREAM Team L.A. (DTLA), CHIRLA, the UCLA Labor Center, and others organized students and allies. The California Dream Act made provisions for undocumented students who were brought to the U.S. as children and attended California secondary schools to apply for state funded financial aid benefits. And, in 2012, President Obama exercised his power of prosecutorial discretion and granted DREAMers relief from deportation in the form of renewable work visas – a victory that DTLA and other allies here and nationwide had been building towards. In many ways, CHIRLA, the UCLA Labor Center, and NDLO have been the glue of the immigrant rights movement, in the region – and increasingly, elsewhere. Indeed, CHIRLA acts as a regional anchor for the California Dream Network, the National Domestic Workers Alliance, and the Reform Immigration for America Campaign.

Advances in technology have helped to increase the scale of organizing, as well. Predictive dialing systems – which increase the efficiency of phone banking significantly – have allowed groups to reach more people. As a result, Alliance of Californians for Community Empowerment’s (ACCE) statewide database has grown to 25,000. This will never replace one-on-one engagement needed for organizing, but has its role, especially in during election cycles and when building potential membership lists. Similarly, CHIRLA recently helped make calls to Connecticut around an in-state tuition law for immigrants and through more advanced technology was able to patch supportive residents through to their Congressional representatives. For CoCo, video and telephone town hall meetings with U.S.

Congresswoman Karen Bass have been key to keeping in contact with residents and connecting local issues to national policy.

Figuring out how to remain rooted locally while working at higher levels of influence has marked this era. The electoral capacity built in Los Angeles has positioned progressive allies at different levels of government. Karen Bass became State Assembly Speaker in 2008 and then was elected to Congress in 2010. Mark Ridley-Thomas ascended to the L.A County Board of Supervisors in 2008 and Victor Narro was appointed to the Board of Commissioners of the Community Redevelopment Agency in 2011, joining Madeline Janis who had been serving as a CRA Commissioner since 2002. Long-time Community Coalition organizer, Alberto Retana, was appointed the Director of Community Outreach for the U.S. Department of Education. An ally of movement builders, Hilda Solis from nearby El Monte, rose from the ranks of Congress and was appointed Secretary of Labor by the Obama administration in 2009 while immigrant rights attorney Julie Su was appointed California Labor Secretary.

How do you genuinely represent the interests of your community and stay true to that while at the same time be cognizant of the realities of politics? What is the ideal versus what is winnable? In the recent immigration fight, CHIRLA did not want to leave behind the day laborers and domestic workers and have the policy change focus solely on the DREAM students. It created a split in the student movement.

– Angelica Salas, Coalition for Humane Immigrant Rights of Los Angeles

And when there have not been allies in office, organizers have cultivated relationships to help close the gap. Pablo Alvarado, director of NDLO, has done so with the LAPD and Chief Charlie Beck. After years of work, the fruits of this relationship building are that “Chief Beck talks about day laborers as being humble people that are looking for a day of work ...the City Council President says that these men are part of the community.” That change in attitude is transformative and can affect broader public understanding of the role of day laborers. Organizations can transform an entire industry not just through improving wages and work conditions, but through building these relationships with police and elected officials.

Angeleno activists have learned that with any ally in office, the challenge is to provide support while simultaneously holding them accountable – a very clear lesson for organizers around the country since Obama’s 2008 election. Organizers need to continue building for power to provide cover and backing for elected officials who take controversial stands to support progressive policies, and to show that same power when they do not. NDLO’s Pablo Alvarado does not confuse having access with having power; for him, inside-outside relationships require both extending a hand of friendship and having a picket sign ready to go in the other.

Scaling Up, Looking Ahead

By late 2008, the economy was in free-fall and a former community organizer had been elected President. The moment was seemingly ripe for progressives to effect change on a national level. While the opportunity might have been exciting, what seemed to be a rush to Washington, D.C. ran straight against the lessons that might have been gleaned from the slow but powerful transformations in Los

Angeles: the need to build relationships and trust, the imperative of organizing and mobilizing an authentic base, and an understanding that no elected official – no matter his or her history and convictions – can change the world unless an entire movement is engaged in a combination of political support, policy innovation, and accountability.

While there are differences in the inside-outside games at the regional, state, and national levels, Los Angeles has shown that grassroots support and accountability can move policies in a new way. In fact, this shift goes beyond policy. Marqueece Harris-Dawson, current President and CEO of the Community Coalition said that, “anything like [the ’92 civil unrest would not] happen again in South L.A. . . . that’s not to say there wouldn’t be any big mass action, but it wouldn’t look like the ’92 civil unrest.” The two decades of organizing has resulted in not only a more just region, but one with more empowered residents who belong to organizations that can help to press for their concerns and aspirations.

To keep Los Angeles at the forefront, organizers will have to consolidate the lessons of their organizations and have vision broad enough to encompass shifting sands. Many founding executives are moving on, so that will mean not only ensuring that vision is shared, but that leadership transitions are handled well. A new frontier for Los Angeles organizers may be figuring out how to build on the inside-outside strategy to deliver ever more meaningful policies and programs, statewide and nationally. Indeed, it will require an alignment of local, state, and national policy objectives to rebuild the country from its many years of recession and stagnation to a new era grounded in hope and possibility – a transition Los Angeles has faced with some important success.

Funding Change, Changing Funding

...it's the commitment to the whole program and to taking the time and then the support from the funders to take that time – a proposal to do a major piece of policy that's going to take less than two years is not serious...you have to be committed to working on a piece of policy for the long haul.

– Madeline Janis, Los Angeles Alliance for a New Economy

A critical part of the L.A. experience was the early efforts of a set of small-scale yet committed and visionary funders who were willing to place bets on new experiments in organizing – and were also willing to educate larger funders as the experiments began to work out and change lives for the better. These pioneers saw a static civic infrastructure ready to crack under the pressure of a changing demography. It was an opportunity that the aging civil rights and community groups of the time failed to take on, but this new generation of organizers was poised to create a new political destiny.

What can we learn about the role of funding in building movement capacity over the past twenty years that we can carry forward to the next twenty years in Los Angeles – and beyond?

In our attempt to answer this question, we draw primarily from our personal knowledge (that would be primarily Michele's), from an interview with Ann Bastian of the New World Foundation – one of the very first pioneers – and feedback on an earlier draft of this report from Shelley Zimbalist of the Solidago Foundation and Laine Alston-Romero, formerly with Solidago and now with the Ford Foundation. We also tapped the wisdom and advice of movement leaders about the role of funding in our interviews – and bring in their recommendations in this section.

The kettle was beginning to boil and pressure was building against a closed city of static politics.

– Ann Bastian, The New World Foundation

The Early Pioneers

We start by recognizing the early supporters: the New World Foundation, Liberty Hill Foundation, Unitarian Universalist Veatch Program at Shelter Rock in New York (UU Veatch), the Solidago Foundation, The Needmor Fund, and the Arca Foundation. A later wave included Common Counsel, the Discount Foundation, McKay Foundation, French American Charitable Trust (FACT), Jewish Funds for Justice, Rosenberg Foundation, and the Jessie Smith Noyes Foundation.

They came to the work both with a theory of change grounded in grassroots organizing and deep ties to social justice work themselves. For example, Ann Bastian of the New World Foundation had been a union organizer, labor educator, and movement activist. Frank Sanchez of The Needmor Fund was a community organizer who helped found Southern New Mexico Legal Services which spearheaded redistricting and voting rights lawsuits impacting Mexican Americans. These former organizers brought the practical knowledge of what it took to organize on the ground as well as a strategic vision that was aligned with those on the ground.

For these early pioneers, Los Angeles was a strategic and intentional investment from the start. Many relationships date back to the Jobs With Peace efforts in the 1980s, when Anthony Thigpenn, Larry Frank, Michele Prichard, and others first met Ann Bastian. When asked why The New World Foundation, as a New York-based foundation, chose to invest in Los Angeles, Bastian pointed to a confluence of factors:

It was evident that new immigration was changing the demographics of the city...building up a structural pressure for inclusion and changing the system....No place had the pressure for inclusion that L.A. had against the liberal power structure and the reactionary power structure (police). The old power structure would have to change. But there was opportunity to change the old power structure with the caliber of leadership which was so impressive. And no sector was so dominant that there wasn't room for others to grow.

Perhaps equally important was the open field in the philanthropic sector as well. There was a lack of philanthropic institutions with a broad social justice frame, though there were some important attempts to channel funding to under-resourced neighborhoods and populations – Brotherhood Crusade (established in 1968), Los Angeles Women's Foundation (established in 1980), and United Latino Fund (established in 1989), to name a few. Liberty Hill Foundation was unique in that from its inception in 1976, it supported grassroots community organizing and leadership. In 1991, Liberty Hill brought together organizers to discuss issues of race and poverty at its Communities in Crisis conference, signaling its foresight in recognizing the crisis that would erupt a year later. Through the years, it has been instrumental in raising the visibility of issues often ignored by broader philanthropy and has been a forerunner on key issues like environmental justice and LGBTQ equality.

The Spark and the Boomerang

The 1992 civil unrest created the urgency and the opportunity to try something new. Liberty Hill established the Fund for a New Los Angeles, one of its core granting programs that funded most, if not all, of the key organizations leading the new wave of multi-racial organizing and alliance building. Liberty Hill and the other committed social justice funders provided often the first grants and the most impactful grants – multi-year, general support, and flexible – what Gilda Haas has called “patient money.” Such seed funding was a risk-taking investment – but necessary in order to nurture new experiments in organizing and new organizations, especially since many groups fell outside the funding framework of most mainline foundations.

Just as organizations were building up their infrastructure and capacity, two new foundations were established infusing the state and the region with new resources: The California Wellness Foundation (established in 1992) and The California Endowment (established in 1996). Though these foundations were more narrowly defined in their missions (health focused) and approaches (funding service provision and short-term programs) than the social justice funders, they provided larger-scale funding for those types of groups, such as Community Coalition, SCOPE, SAJE, LAANE, and many others, which could make the case that addressing social determinants of health could be more impactful. And over time, groups also pushed those institutions to think more expansively about the issue of health and

healthcare, as reflected by those two foundations' later commitments to environmental health, violence prevention, the built environment, workforce development, and civic engagement.

This skill of finding – and constantly redefining – programmatic funding while building long-term infrastructure was particularly strategic once the Los Angeles social justice organizations began attracting the interest and investment of major national institutions, such as the Ford and Rockefeller Foundations, and the Open Society Institute (OSI). In addition to the impressive gains demonstrated by the social justice organizations, there was the intentional work by the committed core of funders to relate to their peers in mainstream philanthropy and connect to their program priorities. They were able to leverage relationships through such networks as the Council on Foundations (established in 1949), National Network of Grantmakers (established in 1980), Neighborhood Funders Group (established in 1980), Environmental Grantmakers Association (established in 1987), Grantmakers Concerned with Immigrants and Refugees (established in 1990), and other regional grantmaker associations.

More people of color have moved into high levels of foundation leadership. In 2000, The California Endowment led the way in appointing Dr. Robert K. Ross, former clinician and public health administrator, as President and CEO and Stewart Kwoh as Board Chair. In 2004, Antonia Hernandez, formerly with the Mexican American Legal Defense and Education Fund, became President of the California Community Foundation. In 2007, Kafi Blumenfield was appointed President of Liberty Hill.

Marking a significant shift in the field was the Ford Foundation's Fund for Community Organizing, which launched in 2000 and sunset in 2006. The multi-year initiative invested in local community organizing and grassroots advocacy in a total of five sites: Los Angeles, Chicago, Denver, Florida, and the South. Liberty Hill served as the local intermediary for Los Angeles – folding the multi-year grant from Ford into its existing "Fund for a New Los Angeles." This extra infusion of resources allowed Liberty Hill to make larger, two-year grants for the first time (which were decided by a community funding board of organizers and donors – a standard grantmaking practice for Liberty Hill) and to coordinate a technical assistance program that drew from the strengths of anchor organizations to offer skills building for new and emerging groups. This approach also served as a kind of "glue" for stronger relationships across organizations and fostered cross-fertilization of ideas and collaborations (Gittell, Price, & Ferman, 2009). Ford's initiative helped to raise the visibility and legitimacy of community organizing as a strategy for policy and social change – strengthening Los Angeles' anchor organizations, and Liberty Hill, in the process.

This attention from national funders had what Ann Bastian coined a "boomerang effect," meaning that once national funders invested in LA's social justice infrastructure, it convinced more California foundations to provide funding, and to provide it at more substantial levels, as well. From 2006 to 2009, the James Irvine Foundation's California Votes Initiative supported a number of organizations throughout the state, including APALC, SCOPE, CARECEN, PICO in Los Angeles, to increase electoral engagement among infrequent voters, especially in low-income and communities of color. The California Community Foundation established the Immigrant Integration Initiative in 2009, which seeks to improve the life of immigrants by providing them the tools to strengthen their social, economic and

civic engagement. The California Endowment expanded its support of many LA anchors for community organizing around low-wage, environmental health, and housing issues during the mid-2000s, and by 2010 launched its Building Healthy Communities initiative with civic engagement as a core strategy. Such funding has been critical to building strong anchor organizations in Los Angeles with an ability to pivot from issue to issue as the times change, as well as the capacity to scale up efforts to the state and national levels.

Circuit Riders and Tour Guides

How did the core set of small-scale social justice funders do it? What tactics were successful in expanding the pool of resources to support movement building in Los Angeles?

A key lesson to take away from the L.A. experience was how the early funders actively organized within their own sector to promote Los Angeles with the goal of bringing more resources to Los Angeles for movement-building work, and to showcase more broadly what successful social justice organizing looked like. They dedicated time and energy to building networks and relationships through numerous philanthropic associations over a 20-year span. In 2001, a group of New York funders from Ford, Nathan Cummings, Rockefeller, New World, and Veatch formed the Social Justice Infrastructure Group to study Los Angeles. The New World Foundation published its booklets on funding social movements (2003) and on electoral organizing (2005) to help provide an historical and theoretical framework for understanding the work. Documentation, both formal and informal, was important in communicating with the funding world.

Site visits and tours, such as those led by Liberty Hill, Community Coalition, and Communities for a Better Environment's toxic tours, proved to be an effective means for educating and demystifying grassroots organizing for many funders. Liberty Hill has also organized bus tours and briefings as part of an overall strategy to raise funds from individuals and to connect them to efforts in their very own city to improve housing conditions, clean up and prevent environmental injustices, and fight for living wages. Liberty Hill staff, along with grantees and others, organized 23 site visits for participants at the Council on Foundations' annual conference when it was held in L.A. in 2000. And twelve years later, with its annual conference once again in Los Angeles, the Council awarded Michele Prichard its Distinguished Service Award – marking a shift in philanthropy through its appreciation of Liberty Hill's funding strategy.

Funders also served as “circuit riders” among grantees, especially during the start-up years. Funders can hold a birds-eye view that comes with distance from the day-to-day, boots-on-the-ground efforts and with the very nature of the work itself: reading proposals, talking to grantees, and conducting site visits. Bastian, for example, reflects on how she found herself sharing updates between SCOPE and Community Coalition, which were just a few miles down the road from each other. Today, linkages are stronger and technology more readily able to foster communication throughout the network of leaders, but at that time, with people so focused on building up their own base, there were limited avenues for shared learnings.

Liberty Hill’s model of grantmaking was centered in the community funding board (CFB) in an effort to make philanthropy more democratic and representative of those it was trying to help and empower. The CFBs were comprised of movement activists and donors who came together to read proposals, conduct site visits, and learn about strategic opportunities for funding. First, it provided the CFB activists with the opportunity to understand a broader landscape of issues impacting the region, and how their work fit into a bigger picture. Second, it brought together organizers and other staff across sectors, issues, and constituencies, and provided a chance to build relationships and trust between the movements they represented. Third, it created a space in which donors and organizations were true partners. And both perspectives were needed to get the funding right.

Successful Practices of Philanthropic Movement Builders

The movement in Los Angeles was certainly part circumstance and part intention, but there are many implications and practices that are replicable for interested funders. Some implications are standard fare on the menu of funder recommendations: fund grassroots organizing so that the real heart of social movements continues to beat; offer multi-year operational support (i.e. “patient capital”) so that groups have room to be responsive to changing times; support capacity building, particularly through peer-to-peer exchanges so that groups are building the trust needed to meet new challenges together; provide resources specifically aimed at deep collaboration, recognizing that this takes attention and time and cannot be done “on the side;” and practice what you preach by engaging in appropriate funder collaboratives, both informal and formal.

Some recommendations that we think are perhaps a bit more novel and worth stressing:

- **Invest in anchors *and* new organizations:** There is a tendency to think small is beautiful – but sometimes it’s just small. We do not mean that funders need to go just for bigger groups that may not play well with others; rather, we mean that support needs to be expanded for groups to reach a scale of organizing to affect widespread change to serve as a stable center for movements, and help buoy new organizations. However, there are always new and emerging issues that deserve support and which can help expand and strengthen the larger social justice movement. This understanding requires moving from an either/or (big or small) perspective to the sort of ecosystem framework that we have stressed (which would also allow for a differentiation between size *per se* and capacity to serve as an anchor). As one recent example, Liberty Hill’s seed funding of LGBTQ work in African-American, Latino, and API communities underscores the ever-present need to recognize and empower new voices and constituencies while linking them to the broader movement.

*Invest where there is no power,
but don’t divest from where
there is power.*

– Angelica Salas, Coalition for
Humane Immigrant Rights
of Los Angeles



- **Support alliances with labor:** Funders cannot directly support unions and are often wary of supporting other parts of the broader labor movement. But the partnership with labor – and labor’s transformation – in Los Angeles is so critical that several volumes have been written on the topic (including the aptly named *L.A. Story* by Ruth Milkman). Indeed, some of the most progressive work in Los Angeles can be attributed to labor-community alliances – the Ports Campaign with the Teamsters, the L.A. Apollo Alliance’s Green Retrofit policy with the building trades, and the many different campaigns to improve the lives of immigrant workers and their families. Funding strong movements anywhere will mean coordinating with progressive labor forces and funding those organizations, whether community, environmental, or labor itself, who know how to partner effectively and strategically.
- **Help create sustainable revenue models:** As Amy Schur of ACCE said, “I don’t really know how community organizing can grow and build to a significant scale if it’s foundation dependent. ACORN’s experience was a very sobering one, because at the end of the day we didn’t have the choice to repair the brand. . . when the major foundations withdrew support.” It is not just an issue for one group faced by an unfortunate (or at least well-publicized) set of scandals. As organizations have become mature and the economic crisis has hit, foundations need to help institutions experiment with membership dues, individual donor programs, service delivery, and other ways of diversifying resources.
- **Support leadership and transitions:** From his vantage point in the worker center movement, Victor Narro emphasized the importance of nurturing leaders, giving them pause, and refreshing their vision for the work. And, especially in smaller cities, he noted that at this point in time leadership skills are imperative to an organization’s sustainability – in some cases, even more urgent than policy change. With leaders such as Anthony Thigpenn, Danny Park, Karen Bass, and Madeline Janis moving on from executive director positions (sometimes in new roles within the same organization), steps need to be taken to ensure that the vision and funding does not leave with them. Responsibility lies not only within the organization to put succession plans into action but also with funders, allies, and other leaders in the ecosystem to support the new generation of leadership and the organization as a whole.

- Democratize philanthropic decision-making:** In L.A., Liberty Hill was founded with the commitment to a community funding board (CFB) that brought movement activists together to assess the changing landscape and make strategic funding decisions. The CFB knit together leadership across issues, geographies, and constituencies in a city that was both vast and segregated, and it created a real partnership between movement actors and philanthropic leadership. And most important, it helped Liberty Hill get the funding right. This sort of democratic philanthropy may be hard to do at a greater scale, but it is not impossible and experiments in collaboration are in order.

To really allow the people making change to make the decisions with regard to where funding resources go is basic democratic philanthropy.

– Kent Wong, UCLA Labor Center

- Broadcast successes:** The success of many movement organizations in Los Angeles is due partly to their ability to scale up to the challenges at hand which entailed growing their capacity to acquire and manage more resources. Management can be taught, but breaking into the national funding market occurred in no small part because of the way that the initial fundraisers worked to both showcase the L.A. work to national foundations and also to focus the philanthropic conversation on the importance of organizing. Foundation allies of organizers need to do more organizing themselves, sharing stories of success, pointing out key opportunities, and helping to grow the pie.
- Take new risks:** Part of this is about putting your ears to the ground to listen to what organizers are seeing on the horizon. For example, both Alexia Salvatierra and Maria Elena Durazo spoke of the critical need to organize in the evangelical community as Latinos are increasingly identifying as “born again” (Pew Hispanic Center and Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life, 2007). CLUE has been gaining traction with evangelicals on immigration, though LGBTQ rights remain a divisive issue for now. But organizers who are ready to take on this challenge need allies in philanthropy. Other risks may be in forming partnerships with labor and other non-traditional partners that together could reach far greater scale and impact.
- Build metrics that matter:** Part of moving foundations along will involve understanding that the philanthropic world is increasingly (and perhaps rightly) focused on evidence-based giving. Fortunately, the evidence is in: investing in social movement organizing can transform the rules of the game in a metropolitan area as large and as disparate as Los Angeles with widespread implications and benefits for low- and middle-income people. The challenge is to develop a set of tools that can capture transformations as well as transactions, that can measure movement effectiveness as well as organizational effectiveness, and that can be embraced by both organizers and program officers.

While much more needs to be done on the measurement side, in recent research from one of our organizations, we found a surprising eagerness by the field itself to get evaluation right (Pastor, Ito, & Rosner, 2011). The reason to us seems straightforward, and parallel to our notion that the unchannelled anger of the L.A. unrest forced a reconsideration of progressive thinking and strategy: Organizers know

that we need to try something new when we do not get the hoped-for results, and that we – activists, academics, funders, civic leaders, and others – need to hold ourselves accountable.

After all, when a country ravaged by Wall Street, damaged by high unemployment, and marked by racial inequality finds itself whipsawed between the Obama surge and the Tea Party reaction, between the need for stimulus and calls for austerity, between an embrace of our multiracial future and an ugly anti-immigrant hysteria, we are clearly at a precipice. Whether we tip into the abyss or find our way into a more promising future will require that we rethink and reinvent our national politics in exactly the ways that the movement organizers in L.A. did at the metro level: step by step, working together, with a hard-headed analysis of power and a warm-hearted commitment to common ground.

Ten Components of the L.A. Power-Building Model

Our theory of change is that everyday people pulling their power and being strategic can change the trajectory of development in their community and the development of their society. And our work is to prepare people and involve people in that process. We take the position that history doesn't happen, history is what people make happen – and we want to be those people.

– Marqueece Harris-Dawson, Community Coalition

How did we go from the L.A. uprising to L.A. rising?

This report is but a partial story – limited not only by the number of pages people will likely read but also by whom we talked to and the fact that we have chosen to emphasize successes over setbacks – though arguably more learning often takes place when things go wrong rather than when they go right. We, in fact, have emphasized here and in other reports that a new culture of risk-taking and innovation is needed in order to achieve breakthroughs in progress and impact. But our main point for this report is that much has gone right in the past twenty years of organizing since the unrest tipped a city on the edge – and much remains relevant for a country close to a similar brink.

Over this period, Los Angeles essentially moved from traditional interest-based organizing to a more intentional bridge-building approach. It was a strategic choice given the external forces shaping the region: economic restructuring, globalization, rapid demographic changes, to name a few. The disappearance of industrial jobs triggered a new form of union organizing with service workers; the ravages of the crack epidemic spurred a holistic approach to health in South Los Angeles; and the civil wars in Central America fueled new movements of solidarity.

Los Angeles essentially moved from traditional interest-based organizing to a more intentional bridge-building approach.

Perhaps the most salient ingredient of the “L.A. model” lies in its collective ability to keep its eyes on the prize: building power. While changes in government and corporate policies and practices are essential gains, the long-term goal has been to tip the balance of power – to rearrange the very power relationships that govern decision-making. So an honest assessment of power (of one’s own and of the opposition) led groups to amass power by building bridges because no one group could have done it alone. The remarkable sense of mutual support many have seen in Los Angeles’ social movements was not simply an accident of intertwined personal histories (although there was plenty of that) – it was about strategy, and even survival.

While no short list can get it right, no long list will be remembered. So in our keeping with our tradition à la David Letterman, we argue that there were at least ten distinct strategies in the “L.A. model” of building power:

1. **A new focus on multiracial and multi-ethnic efforts.** Previous strategies had often sought to build on ethnic communities and identities, something that risked balkanization, particularly in

the highly segregated residential landscape of Los Angeles. Stressing a multi-racial effort helped to capture the changing dynamics of places like South L.A. that were in the midst of a massive shift from being largely African American to majority-Latino as well as to link disparate communities across geography.

Lessons learned:

- *Be creative and patient.*

As MIWON organizers learned, you have to be patient. In involving workers with different language capacities (Korean, Spanish, Tagalog), meetings may take longer with translation – but it is essential in building the worker-to-worker solidarity to support each other’s campaigns and emerging organizations. Other creative means are also important: taking inter-ethnic tension out of the workplace and onto the soccer field has been a successful tactic developed by NDLO in organizing male immigrant workers across race and culture.

- *Be diverse to attract diversity.*

Organizers have to have a deep connection to and understanding of the community they are working with. This takes commitment and a patient process to recruit, develop, and retain staff of color. As Madeline Janis shared, “you attract who you are so you have to be diverse.” And deliberate thought and action needs to be devoted to putting internal structures in place to create a pipeline for diversifying top organizational leadership.

- *Develop a multi-ethnic agenda.*

Access to transportation affected not just one racial group but many communities of color. The Labor/Community Strategy Center had organizers on the bus to organize and build a multiracial base. For Maria Elena Durazo, it was about sustaining active support for African American candidates from Latino and immigrant communities. KIWA changed its name early on to reflect its commitment to multi-ethnic workplace organizing.

2. **A new set of labor-community alliances.** Labor unions had frequently been seen by communities of color as defenders of the status quo. But with union membership shrinking due to deindustrialization, the labor movement increasingly became entangled with the immigrant rights movements and then shifted to become a key leader in broader community alliances, including fights for a living wage, affordable housing, immigration reform, and environmental justice. As a result, unions have been both integral to progressive change and shaped by it, with ripple effects into more conservative parts of the labor movement. For example, the building trades have become highly supportive of outreach to and apprenticeships for disadvantaged workers. Just as striking have been the alliances between labor, traditional environmental interests, and environmental justice groups: joint campaigns on cleaning the ports, retrofitting municipal buildings, and reforming L.A.’s waste and recycling industry have overcome the jobs versus environment debate.

Lessons learned:

- *Strive to be equal partners.*

To keep partners at the table, there has to be give-and-take, joint strategy development, and meaningful involvement. This can be especially tricky given the vast differences in resources and power between labor and community groups. However, the benefit for both is a broader constituency of support. Part of being equal partners means a commitment to sharing expertise and learning from others, humility and a willingness to do things differently, and participation from the base to deepen ties at the organizational level. It also means following through on commitments and not overstating your own ability to deliver for the coalition effort.

- *Understand each other's interests and cultures.*

As Victor Narro shared, “the first meeting of any coalition is probably the most important meeting.” Transparency is key – laying out agreements, expectations, and mutual self-interests at the very beginning is critical. Understanding different personalities, different organizational cultures, and each other’s limitations when working in alliances helps to address conflict when it comes up – a vital capacity that involves being pro-active and maintaining ongoing dialogue.

- *Build over time.*

Relationships of trust come through working together and creating common agendas. In L.A., most of these relationships started with campaigns of importance to all partners then continued in alliances for subsequent campaigns – each fight leading to a deeper and more broadly-shared agenda. LAANE facilitated this between labor and environmentalists at the Ports (and now with its “Don’t Waste L.A.” campaign) and NDLO and the UCLA Labor Center have done similar work between the building trades unions and day laborers.

We need to not be afraid of letting go to create campaigns in which others are equal partners and not feel like we have to control everything...We should be real, equal partners in coming up with strategies.

- Maria Elena Durazo, Los Angeles County Federation of Labor, AFL-CIO

3. **A recommitment to base building.** Organizing is about building grassroots support – but frequently the lure of power or influence over policy leads groups to deemphasize this in favor of key ties with elected officials or decision makers. The unrest demonstrated that it was not just civic leaders who were out of touch but also the non-profit sector that had not fully appreciated the underlying desperation and, frankly, rage of residents. Organizers stepped in with a willingness to listen, bring together residents, and work with community members to find a stronger voice to change conditions. This led to an eventual focus on sustained leadership development activities, with an eye towards political education, critical thinking, and campaign skills.

Lessons learned:

- *Connect to issues of everyday life.*

Organizing needs to speak to the struggles of ordinary people – and provide them a concrete way to be involved in the solutions. To do this, organizers need to keep an ear to the ground to know what issues are bubbling up and what dynamics exist within the community or workplace. This requires an ability to experiment, evaluate, and adapt when needed—and an ongoing and real commitment to engaging base constituencies and letting their voices and concern steer the course.

- *Build leadership capacity.*

Social movements are made authentic and vibrant through community leadership – which also sustains them. As a result, significant resources are needed to develop strong, skilled, and politically conscious leaders over the long-haul. These skills range from running a meeting, to public speaking, to motivating others to take action – at the outset – to developing a sophisticated analysis of power, creating a campaign strategy, and keeping the community’s vision alive in more advanced stages of leadership. This means a sustained program of political education and building political consciousness. Through its neighborhood-level organizing of very low-income people, Union de Vecinos creates “small cell[s] of democracy where people need to participate. People learn to speak, and people learn to run a meeting.”



- *Commit to the next generation.*

Supporting youth leadership is both about sustaining movements and having a hand in shaping an alternative future. CHIRLA came to understand the necessity of youth organizing when it looked at its base of day laborers, street vendors, and domestic workers as parents of the next generation of the movement. CLUE developed a systematic process for bringing up young clergy to address aging leadership in the faith community. And while Community

Coalition was founded to look for solutions to the crack-cocaine epidemic at the systemic level, some of their deepest organizing is now with youth in high schools. Indeed, some of their current organizers began as youth leaders.

4. **A new emphasis on multiple organizational capacities.** While grassroots organizing is key, so too is research, policy development, and communications. Unfortunately, these worlds are often separate with experts recruited to handle the “policy stuff” while passionate community members handle the base building. In fact, organizing is as much science as art, and so organizers are also experts. Recognizing both their own expertise and the need for seamless skills, organizations stepped up their training even as they developed new internal capacities for research, policy, and messaging, *and* made effective ties with allies, including academics, who could help on that front. Multi-faceted anchor organizations – unafraid of scale and eager to have big impacts – were one result.

Lessons learned:

- *Be the smartest in the room.*

Research is key to campaign strategy, from being informed about root causes, to developing a policy proposal, to getting the implementation right. Industry research is central to workplace and most environmental justice campaigns: Who is in the industry? How is it structured? What is the policy and legal environment? Policy research is essential for organizations seeking to craft alternative proposals for education or tax reform, for example. Having the facts, figures, and analysis gives organizations a level of credibility needed to make their case and to counter business opposition or resistance from decision-makers.

- *Have a bold communications program.*

Communication can be key to getting out ahead in a fight – framing the issues can help organizations gain a leg-up. Beyond winning how an issue is framed, messaging is important for reaching the broader public and for recruiting new allies. Whether building in-house, contracting out, or employing a combination of both, a strong communications program takes resources. LAANE, an early innovator in this capacity, has a dedicated communications staff on each campaign. Madeline Janis remarks, “We need to be the most articulate people in the room, we need to have a really bold and innovative and comprehensive communications program so that it develops spokespeople, it frames the message, moves the message in creative ways.” With the rise of social media, organizations are now building this capacity in-house.

- *Provide services linked to an empowerment process.*

In underinvested communities, a balance must be made between delivering relief and changing the system. Organizations like KIWA, NDLON, and CoCo provide direct services, like

connecting day laborers with jobs or helping foster youth and their families navigate the social service system. However, social change organizations prioritize connecting services with leadership development, political education, and organizing to change the system, and in so doing, empower the constituents. Along the same line, when doing research, community surveys are not only important tools for gathering data but also for training residents and workers in door knocking, surveying, and identifying new leaders.

5. **A conscious effort to reframe and revision.** Even as L.A.'s social movement organizers have engaged in specific campaigns, they have also sought to change the ideas, attitudes, and framework of the city and the region. Consider that the very name of the Los Angeles Alliance for a New Economy seeks to both capture the hoopla about economic innovation in a "new economy" and insist that justice for working people is part of that picture. This focus on frame and values has also meant that many – albeit not all – groups have tried to "message to the middle" as well as to those who were already committed to the cause.

Lessons learned:

- *Develop pro-active agendas.*

As Anthony Thigpenn says, "it is not just being against something, but having a vision and a set of policies and goals for what we are for." And central to the L.A. vision and agenda is asserting a role for government – and ensuring its active role in moving society towards equity. LAANE's multiple campaigns are as much about making industry-wide changes as they are about a progressive "Economic Strategy" for all of Los Angeles. For the Labor/Community Strategy Center, only a strong public sector commitment to an extensive, high-speed bus system can meet the transit needs of working class Angelenos and significantly reduce the carbon footprint of this auto-centered megalopolis.

When we do a public policy campaign and there is no ally in sight, it takes us two years just to make the issue legitimate—of direct action and pressure and lobbying. Then we have to win it. That is less the case when you have an ally on the city council, on the board of advisers, on the state assembly.

- Anthony Thigpenn, Strategic Concepts in Organizing and Policy Education

- *Change norms and perceptions.*

As important as policy wins are, so too are the lasting changes in people's attitudes, perspectives, and beliefs. For example, what Karen Bass characterizes as the most enduring impact of CoCo's liquor store campaign is that "we changed community norms. By that I mean it was no longer acceptable to open up liquor stores after that. To this day it has not been acceptable." Similarly, as a result of the work of SAJE, LAANE, and others, developers know that in L.A. they need a plan to work with community and labor, or face having their projects stalled.

- *Take the long view.*

In the aftermath of the unrest, it became clear to organizers that a new, more long-term, thought-out vision for the region was needed – immediately. “Having a long-term view is not about having a two-year plan but a ten-year plan,” says Gilda Haas. “It is not necessarily what the work will be, but having long-term goals and knowing that the changes you’re going for is transformation – as opposed to incremental change.” Taking the long view also means carrying a vision that is broad enough to allow for changes in issues and tactics over the years.

6. **A strategy that relied on concrete policy innovation.** Too often, progressives promise that another world is possible without making today a whole lot better than yesterday. In Los Angeles, vision has been complemented by steps forward – a living wage ordinance, an agreement to freeze bus fares, a strategy to clean the air and promote unionization at the ports, actual changes in school curriculum and construction practices, developer agreements to hire locally and build affordable housing. Such victories have helped convince people that progressives really can bring progress, that they can move from “no, you can’t” to “yes, we can,” that they can shift from “opposing” others to “proposing” a positive and pragmatic alternative.

Lessons learned:

- *Have meaningful grassroots participation.*

Ensuring that the base is engaged in the decision-making process of campaigns builds buy-in among the members and keeps the organization and its issues true to its constituency. In the struggle to decriminalize day laborers looking for work on public sidewalks, NDLO and its national partners made a strategic decision to elevate a case against the City of Redondo Beach with the Ninth Circuit Court. It was a decision that organizers recognized had to be made by the workers. In the end, they decided, “If we win, we win for everybody. If we go down, we all go down, and we’ll have to find other ways to fight back.”

- *Have wins along the way.*

To keep those who are most impacted by inequities engaged in the long-term effort, you have to have – and celebrate – wins along the way. While there are countless problems immediately needing solutions, pausing and celebrating will go a long way to lift the morale of the community and keep people in the fight. To celebrate its wins, the CLEAN Carwash Campaign organized a dance party that brought together partners from across the region. Organizers and members need moments to refresh their spirits and remind them that their efforts are moving forward towards real progress.

- *Take a comprehensive approach.*

As Kent Wong sees it, all campaigns have the same elements: develop the base and leaders, identify targets and what to win, set a timeframe, do research, establish the policy demand,

develop a media and messaging strategy, and build coalitions and alliances. The steps to winning are clear – and while winning might not always be the result – Madeline Janis warns that skipping steps can result in getting caught in a defensive stance.

7. **A willingness to play the inside and outside game.**

Traditional organizing often holds electoral politics and elected politicians to one side, inviting them for accountability sessions but not necessarily thinking through the strategy of running your own candidates, and then working alongside them to pass and implement policy. L.A.'s social movements have tried to maintain a healthy separation from political figures but also a healthy engagement in actual political campaigns. It is a fine line to walk but one that has been handled gracefully – and with the wisdom of knowing that what ultimately moves policy is power on the ground and not just the helping hand of a friendly elected official.

You need allies who are not only going to lead the charge on the policy side but who will actually help see it through to implementation.

*- Marqueece Harris-Dawson,
Community Coalition*

Lessons learned:

- *Take a hard-nosed approach towards understanding power.*

Power mapping helps clarify where to build power – on the inside and/or the outside. Allies on the other side of the country have admitted that the power analysis tool developed in Los Angeles is what sets the amateurs apart from the pros when it comes to organizing. It is not enough to have a smart policy; organizers need a sober assessment of who holds power – and their own. Is the path to building power through registering voters, getting someone into office, or motivating communities to get to the polls?

- *Engage the base directly with elected officials.*

Several leaders mentioned that having grassroots residents at key meetings helps policy makers connect the issues with – and keep their accountability to – their constituents. Moreover, connecting with the base helps inspire elected leaders. According to Vivian Rothstein, “We have to build a movement, so [elected officials] are just as inspired as anyone else in the movement to say ‘yes,’ I’m going to push that agenda.” Community leaders are also empowered as they speak directly to those in power and are reminded that the community’s fate can be determined by their actions.

- *Find a champion who will also be a partner.*

No matter the landscape of power, a champion on the inside is nearly always needed. One of the factors that Angelica Salas thinks made passing AB 540 successful was the genuine, respectful partnership with a state assemblymember who championed the legislation. Champions navigate the halls of government to garner broad support but are also willing to

be a partner to the outside organizations and constituencies who have a real stake in the legislation.

8. **A new philanthropic willingness to fund organizing innovation.** While the action happened on the ground and at the grassroots, such action requires resources. Philanthropy has traditionally been timid about the sort of strategies L.A.’s organizers took on, often funding projects that would demonstrate what is possible rather than resourcing the power building that makes the possible a reality. Into the breach stepped a number of philanthropic entrepreneurs (among them the Liberty Hill Foundation, the New World Foundation, the Solidago Foundation, the Unitarian Universalist Veatch Program at Shelter Rock, the French American Charitable Trust (FACT), the Rosenberg Foundation, the McKay Foundation, the Jessie Smith Noyes Foundation, and many others) that provided small seed grants for experiments in organizing bus riders, environmental justice activists, immigrants, and so many others.

Lessons learned:

- *Why repeat ourselves?*

There are so many lessons learned that we dedicated an entire chapter to the funder story. For a much longer list of lessons learned and recommendations, see section entitled “Successful Practices of Philanthropic Movement Builder.”

9. **A firm commitment to movement building versus organization building.** Traditional organizing often builds on the self-interest of those being organized. While that can lead to immediate and important coalitions, it can also feed into a transactional rather than transformational sort of solidarity. Interest-based organizing feeds a frame in which the groups doing the organizing can (and perhaps should) see themselves as driven, at least in part, by the self-interest of institutional advancement. Attention then gets diverted to capturing rather than sharing credit for what is accomplished. L.A.’s movement groups are certainly interested in becoming stronger, but they have realized, as Anthony Thigpenn of SCOPE once put it, “it’s not about empire building, it’s about movement building.” What counts, in short, is the entire organizing infrastructure – and each group needs to do its part to nurture the whole.

So we are all about building up collectively, and building the capacity of partners. We don’t see it as competitive; we see it as building a movement. But if you don’t have strong partners playing different roles, you’re not going to have a movement.

- Stewart Kwoh, Asian Pacific American Legal Center

Lessons learned:

- *Have a broader aspirational vision.*

In the wake of the unrest, the need for a healthier, stronger Los Angeles was clear – and most people could easily connect with that sort of vision. Maintaining such vision has helped

connect residents to the movement. “People are interested in a broader vision, they do want to be connected to something beyond just themselves, that’s greater than just family or even greater than just a neighborhood,” says Anthony Thigpenn. More recently and especially among youth, the need for an *aspirational* vision has been strong.

- *Incubate new and innovative organizations.*

One way to further the movement is for more established anchor organizations to incubate new ones. The UCLA Labor Center, for example, is incubating the Black Workers Center and the Dream Resource Center; APALC re-grants to smaller Asian American and Pacific Islander groups and houses partners in their building for deep mentoring and capacity building; and CLUE was originally a project of LAANE. In Los Angeles, it has been about building an ecosystem for change.

- *Learn to give and take.*

In movement building, there are times when the interest of the movement may come before the interest of one’s organization. Maria Elena Durazo describes, “Somebody has to step up and say, “I’ll be the first to change the way we’ve done things to prove to the others, I can be an equal partner here.” But over the long-haul these smaller decisions are less costly – because an organization or community may give on one campaign but then really benefit from the next.

We did good work on our own, but at some point, thankfully, we woke up and realized that we wanted to be part of something bigger; whatever we wanted to accomplish, we couldn’t do it alone.

- Amy Schur, Alliance of Californians for Community Empowerment

10. **A vision for scaling up.** From early on, organizers seem to have been clear that what happened in L.A. would not stay in L.A. Much as they realized that they needed to scale up their efforts – tying together disparate communities and strands of organizing – to challenge the root causes of social distress in Los Angeles, they were aware that multi-regional efforts would be necessary to tackle the broader issues that face America. As noted earlier, SAJE is a founding member of the Right to the City Alliance; CHIRLA is part of the New Americans Partnership; local environmental justice groups now comprise the California Environmental Justice Alliance; L.A. is joining as the organizing gets underway for the national Congress of Excluded Workers and the multi-state “Caring Across Generations” campaign to transform the care industry – and the list goes on and on.

Lessons learned:

- *Start with a deeply-rooted local base.*

When anchored in well-organized grassroots membership, a movement can leverage authenticity, mobilization capacity, and power to scale up for state or national impact. Several leaders working at the national scale say that having a true, grassroots base

provided the legitimacy needed to build equal partnerships with labor and other national groups; it is what set them apart from Washington, D.C.-based policy groups.

- *Keep balance between local and national work.*

New national grassroots-led alliances are emerging and gaining traction – a few originating in Los Angeles: The Right to the City Alliance and the Coalition for Clean and Safe Ports, in particular. Local groups partnering with the larger alliances helps in balancing local and national efforts, in consolidating training, and establishing consensus around policy demands. A key challenge is developing sufficient resources to maintain a strong local base which provides the true power to leverage negotiations while learning to navigate the complex policy environment at the national level.

- *Move the middle.*

Scaling up also requires reaching new constituencies. As organizations have matured, they have realized the need to move the middle to make real policy change. Alexia Salvatierra has engaged conservative pastors who head major national evangelical Christian organizations around the issue of immigration reform. California Calls is focusing on how to craft a new majority by mobilizing the contested middle to reach a tipping point in the electoral arena in support of progressive reforms to the state's tax and fiscal system.

While any top-ten list is convenient, any such list will inevitably leave a few key ingredients off the table. Among those in this case: a willingness to engage in multiple arenas of struggle (legislative, legal, and electoral), a culture of experimentation in balancing depth and breadth in organizing, and a commitment to build permanent, anchor organizations. But our purpose here is to distill the essential components of efforts to build progressive power that has shaped a city and a region. And perhaps the real punch line is: You are only as strong as the team to which you belong.

Something's Happening Here...

The strategies that have gotten us here are not going to be the same that will take us forward.

– Burt Lauderdale, Kentuckians for the Commonwealth

We came to this project not to celebrate the past twenty years in Los Angeles but rather to initiate a conversation about the next twenty years. In 1992, Los Angeles was struck by widespread violence, plagued by deep inequities, and riven by divisions about how to rebuild. When walking the burned wreckage of South Los Angeles and Koreatown, it would have been hard to imagine a city in which developers agree to provide community benefits, Black and Brown youth advocate together for better schools, and hundreds of thousands of people dressed in white flooding the streets to stand up for immigrant rights. We recognize that many challenges remain in the City of Angels: poverty and joblessness remain high, racial tensions continue, and problems of housing affordability, environmental health, and limited community voice in policy decision-making are still with us. Still, there are lessons to be learned for both L.A. and the nation.

Just as Los Angeles was a city on the edge, the country is facing much of the same. Economic inequalities often tolerated in a market society have become extraordinarily extreme, racial tensions kept hidden by polite conversation are bubbling up, and the path ahead will be a choice between being “tough enough” to slash our federal deficit or creative enough to forge an economy that works for all. As we stare across a widening political divide and struggle to reach a mutual understanding and recognition of a common destiny and a set of policies that will get us there, it is the arduous and winding road of movement building that may provide a way forward.

So what do we take from the last twenty years of movement building in Los Angeles that is relevant for moving forward over the next twenty years in America? We draw three simple lessons that are alliterative for easy recall: power, polycentric, and people.

The first takeaway is that **movements are about power**. One critical characteristic of the L.A. experience is the systematic understanding and analysis of power. Developed by SCOPE and used by many organizations in Los Angeles and across the country, the power analysis as a tool keeps in clear focus the complex dynamics of decision-making, the varied commitments and capacities of groups all along the social change spectrum, and the potential power of unorganized constituencies. Though the analysis is only as effective as the objectivity of the analyzer (unrealistic assessments of one's own power may lead to ineffective, go-it-alone strategies), the process itself was used to build bridges between diverse interests by deepening collective understanding of not only who was with you but what you were up against.

All of these years, we invested in comprehensive immigration reform, we forgot that the Sheriff is ultimately the one who goes after people in L.A. We make the case for immigration reform from the bottom up, at the local level, by having strong vibrant efforts at the local level that can have a national impact.

- Pablo Alvarado, National Day Laborer Organizing Network

Furthermore, it kept the broader goal of turning the tables of power into focus so that the fight was never just about defeating one harmful proposition at the ballot, negotiating a single good contract for workers, or getting a particular progressive ally into elected office. What that meant in practice was that every (relatively) short-term campaign was carried out with an eye towards building lasting, and escalating, capacity upon which to carry out larger-scale change.

The power analysis also helped with something else – something that is quite relevant for today’s palpable disappointment among progressives with aspects of the Obama presidency. The power analysis provided a clear framework for interpreting losses politically rather than personally, strategically rather than tactically – an important skill particularly when leaders were played against each other (most often community vs. labor and labor vs. environmentalists) in divide-and-conquer strategies of opponents. Losses provided motivation to amass more power and to build more alignment; politicians were not seen as saviors but as actors managing multiple interests; and thus attention could stay focused on the *sine qua non* of movement building – organizing the base. As the Center for Community Change’s Deepak Bhargava reminds us in a recent paper, very little had changed in 2008 regarding the underlying balance of forces in the country (2012). So the Obama Administration’s failure to make big leaps in immigration reform, labor rights, climate change, and much more should be seen as a call for more organizing on the outside to make the inside accountable.

The second lesson we draw from Los Angeles is that successful **movements are polycentric**, an admittedly academic term (which is, actually, not something that L.A. organizers shy away from) but one that makes our point. There is no single “L.A. Story” because there was a multiplicity of ideologies and theories driving a multiplicity of organizations and movements – all circling each other, at first warily then more closely as they realized that the problems were too big and politics too complex to address through one campaign, one model, or even one movement. Having such vibrancy, creative tension, and multiple centers of influence woven into the very ecosystem of social movements is exactly what makes it healthy and resilient in the midst of constant flux and crisis and capable of winning significant policy reforms.



The takeaway for the nation is clear: unions fighting to save workers' rights in Wisconsin, undocumented immigrants asserting their human rights in Arizona and Alabama, and gays and lesbians striving for marriage equality across the nation may seem like different fights, but they really comprise a single struggle for human dignity. We need to thread together multiple issues, multiple generations, and multiple institutions in the service of one America. As Van Jones once commented, Martin Luther King, Jr. did not proclaim "I have an issue" but rather thundered "I have a dream" – and its singularity as one dream should not disguise but envelop our differences. And an understanding that together we constitute a new, dynamic, and mutually supportive "whole" that is greater than the sum of our parts would represent a significant shift from a focus on bolstering one's own group to a self-awareness about strengthening one's allies as well.

Last but not least, a key lesson from Los Angeles is that **movements are about people**. Los Angeles' movements are rooted in a complex network of relationships at all levels from executive directors, staff, and community residents. It is not uncommon to encounter a South Los Angeles resident who is part of multiple institutions – Community Coalition, SCOPE, SEIU, and a local church. Organizers often transition between organizations but stay within the movement. Ties between individuals and institutions are often tapped in the formation of new alliances – and taxed in the heat of campaigns. But over the years, an inspiring cohort of leaders has remained deeply committed to the work, remarkably strategic in approach, and profoundly respectful of one another. And what ties them together is a belief that the people who suffer the greatest social, economic, and environmental inequities must be the engines of the fight towards justice.

L.A. has served itself well by having a core group of people who came together, learned to respect each other then never completely abandoned each other.

- Larry Frank, Deputy Mayor, City of Los Angeles

One takeaway could be that Los Angeles was lucky in its leaders – and we were. There was a unique sociology to the leaders of Los Angeles – greatly shaped by the mass movements of the 1960s and '70s but too young to have been in leadership positions then; many were raised in Los Angeles' communities of color and immigrant communities; and all were disciplined and studious in their analysis and methods. But a more useful interpretation is that movements and funders must double-down on a new kind of leadership development moving forward. This is particularly important because many of the Los Angeles groups, like their national counterparts, are at the point of key generational shifts and organizational successions. The experiment twenty years ago was establishing permanent, non-profit, foundation-supported organizations with professional organizers as vehicles for social justice. Today's experiments are occurring in a very different world in terms of the funding environment, technology, the role of social media in organizing, and even the strength and depth of the right.

Today, the social justice movement building field may be at the cusp of another shift: towards *transformative organizing*. While "transformative organizing" risks being the term *de rigueur* and there are many different operating definitions, we see this renewed emphasis on people – addressing individuals with their complex identities, contradictory attitudes, and conditioned tendencies – as having important merit for the effectiveness and sustainability of movement building. Organizers across the country are leading forward by taking the best of strategies like the top ten proven effective in Los

Angeles (understanding of power in a systematic way, developing long-term alliances across sectors and movements, and building to scale in multiple arenas of struggle) while paying equal attention and importance to the personal transformation and healing process of organizers, the organized, and the unorganized.⁹

The shift towards transformative organizing may have an additional merit: it can help dig deeper into the tectonic plates of societal values and views that shape public discourse and decision-making. In Fall 2011, a ragtag group of activists managed to capture the national mood with Occupy Wall Street, lifting up issues of inequality, pointing to a system jury-rigged for the rich, and finally opening the space for a national conversation long-dominated by the cacophonous discourse of the individualistic right. And a new cohort of transformative leaders are reaching across movements, generations, and organizing models with emerging campaigns like 99% Spring and Caring Across Generations.

The fight is on – and it is not just about politics and policies, it is about the very soul of the country. Movements are about transforming the very people who are part of the struggle and re-imagining and re-making the possible. In 1992, it was hard to know with a city in flames that another world was possible – but it was, it is, and it will be, if we put our best skills to work and our deepest sense of purpose and passion to bear in creating a more socially, economically, and environmentally sustainable American future for all.



⁹ For more on transformational approaches, see Zimmerman, Pathikonda, Salgado, & James (2010), Social Justice Leadership (2010), and Gass (2012).

Meet the Authors



Michele Prichard is stalwart of L.A. progressive circles, partly through her long history of coalition building but mostly because of her role as Executive Director of Liberty Hill at the time when it provided the seed funding for much of the work we profile here. She has been instrumental in forming and forging the Los Angeles Collaborative for Environmental Health and Justice, a partnership of organizations that has pioneered work to lift up the health and equity concerns of low-income communities of color overburdened by toxic pollution.

Meanwhile, Manuel Pastor has been engaged in this world of organizers since the late 1980s when he, Mark Ridley-Thomas (then head of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference in L.A.), and Stewart Kwoh (then and now head of the Asian Pacific American Legal Center), co-organized the New Majority Task Force: a group of African American, Latino and Asian American community leaders and urban planners to forge a more progressive economic vision for the city.

As important as the histories of the individual authors are the roles of their institutions. For more than thirty-five years, Liberty Hill Foundation – Michele’s organizational home base – has been funding and innovating alongside leaders on the frontlines of social change in Los Angeles. It was the first foundation in California to create a dedicated funding program to address environmental justice and was also an early – if not the first – supporter of many Los Angeles organizations advancing living wages, immigrants’ rights, urban education reform, and affordable housing. It has also been a leader in supporting equality for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Queer (LGBTQ) Angelenos. But its role has been much more than grantmaker. It has served as a trusted funding intermediary that brought national philanthropic dollars to community organizing in Los Angeles; it has provided mentorship, leadership skills, and organizing training for people on the frontlines; and it has built alliances between its social change grantees, other nonprofits, research institutions and elected officials to advance progressive social and environmental policies.

Meanwhile, Pastor’s institutional home is newer: the USC Program for Environmental and Regional Equity (PERE) was founded in 2007. But since the 2009 publication of *Making Change: How Social Movements Work – and How to Support Them* (Pastor and Ortiz), PERE has developed a growing body of research looking at today’s progressive social movements. Its reports include looking at interethnic youth organizing, grassroots alliance building, and metrics for measuring the value and impact of movement building. Throughout its research, PERE has looked to grassroots community organizers and movement builders for the best thinking and cutting-edge strategies, and has attempted to translate the work in a way that could help efforts to grow the field of philanthropic supporters.

So we hope we have added some insight to understanding Los Angeles’ social change context, but we also have two important reasons to offer our humility. The first is simple: We are writing about the

contributions of a generation of social movement organizers for whom we have the deepest respect. We can only hope to capture part of their brilliance. The second bit of humility is geographic: If you are reading this in another part of the country, we can hear you groaning, “There go those Angelenos again, thinking they’re the center of the world.” We admit that Californians can be a bit self-absorbed – maybe it is the weather, or Hollywood, maybe it is that we really do experience demographic and economic changes ahead of the rest of the country, and so think the organizing innovations here may also prefigure our country’s social movement future. Nonetheless, we know that there are elements of this story that are replicable and those that are not.

Meet the Leaders

Pablo Alvarado



social justice.

Some would argue that soccer is the universal sport of the world; it is played in almost every nation and every four years the world stops to watch and participate in the World Cup. For Pablo Alvarado, soccer has always been a part of his life and its unifying spirit embodies his own commitment to labor organizing. Growing up in El Salvador at a time of political turmoil and violence, Pablo recalls that his social consciousness was awakened by a local struggle over a soccer field. As an act of resistance to a family trying to destroy the field, the villagers came together and took over the field. Pablo remembers that he saw fear in the villagers' eyes, but their determination kept them fighting. It was then that he learned about the dynamics of power and social struggles. Since then, Pablo has been engaged in the struggle for

Before coming to the United States, Pablo worked as a teaching assistant, served as a lay preacher and earned a high-school teaching credential from La Universidad de El Salvador. He immigrated to the United States hoping to escape political persecution in El Salvador, and worked a range of jobs including: day laborer, gardener, factory assembly line worker, driver and painter, experiencing much of the same isolation and discrimination that immigrants encounter upon arrival in the United States. While working at a studio-equipment factory, Pablo realized that there was tension between Mexican and Salvadoran workers. In response, he organized a soccer team amongst the workers. The soccer team built and solidified the relationships between the workers at the factory, and demonstrated for Pablo the power of organizing.

From 1991 to 1995, Pablo volunteered as a program coordinator for the Institute of Popular Education of Southern California (IDEPSCA) where he developed and implemented literacy programs for immigrant workers. Soon, Pablo was organizing day laborers in Pasadena, helping them fight off hostile city ordinances and mediating tension between laborers, police and community residents, and helping to win unpaid wages from exploitive employers. This resulted in the establishment of a day-labor worker center, where Pablo served as a coordinator and developed educational, recreational and cultural programs for workers and neighborhood residents. In 2002, Pablo became the national coordinator of the National Day Laborer Organizing Network (NDLON) where he now serves as the Executive Director. The movement for workers' rights keeps on growing thanks to the type of leadership that Pablo provides, including: working with home improvement stores to establish workers centers, exposing wage theft, fighting city ordinances banning day laborers; and pushing back against anti-immigrant campaigns to criminalize and deport law-abiding undocumented people. All along, Pablo has helped to keep the spirits of immigrant laborers strong by integrating cultural programs, including the creation of a soccer league to unify day laborers, and the founding of the Jornaleros del Norte to share the immigrant workers' life experiences through popular music and theatre.

Karen Bass



Representative Karen Bass recalls that as a young child she watched the Civil Rights Movement unfold before her eyes in the news media, and that her father, who had grown up in the South, would translate what was going on and help her connect to the movement. She noted especially how young students were pushing to make a difference, which instilled in her a passion to get involved and fight for justice. Her activism took off at a young age when she began canvassing in support of Bobby Kennedy's presidential campaign and signed up her mother to be a precinct captain. His assassination – shortly after Martin Luther King, Jr.'s assassination – left a lasting impact on Karen's dedication to activism: she developed a sense that it was her job in life to contribute to building a movement for social and economic justice. While in college she joined various student movements such as the Anti-Apartheid Movement as well as the Solidarity Movement for Central America. Karen never saw her activism as a career, but rather an expression of her values. She trained to become a physician assistant and served as a clinical instructor at USC's Keck School of Medicine.

In 1990, in response to the growing crack-cocaine epidemic and gang violence in South Central Los Angeles, Representative Bass saw an urgent need to focus her attention on domestic issues and to fill a gap within the progressive movement that had ignored urban communities of color. She started the Community Coalition, a community-based social justice organization that empowers residents to become involved in making a difference. It was then that her activism became a full-time profession. Through her leadership, the Community Coalition worked to address the drug and violence epidemic and to engage community residents by focusing on liquor stores as places fostering criminal activity. This effort led to the closure or conversion of about 200 liquor stores throughout South Los Angeles, a major community victory. Her leadership continued in the state legislature where she made history by becoming the first African-American woman in California history to serve as Speaker of the Assembly. Today Representative Bass continues to use her role in the U.S. Congress to champion issues impacting communities of color.

Maria Elena Durazo



Maria Elena Durazo is the daughter of farmworker migrants. As a child, she, too, was a farmworker, working right alongside her parents and nine siblings. Growing up in a large household in the migrant farmworker camps outside of San Jose, CA, Maria Elena learned early on the importance of community and helping each other out. And even with nine children to support, her parents always found a way to be of service to others less fortunate than themselves. A strong work ethic and commitment to others were part of her family experience that led her to where she is today.

Maria Elena was the first in her family to graduate from college, and while there she became involved in the student activism movements in the early 1970s. There she met a great labor leader, Bert Corona, who had a tremendous impact on her political development. Corona was a community-based organizer,

especially committed to undocumented workers and to challenging the racist, exclusionary, and anti-immigrant attitudes held by the traditional labor movement in that era.

After Maria Elena moved to Los Angeles, she enrolled in the Peoples College of Law. During the mid-1980s, as a lawyer working with hotel and restaurant workers, she became known for her energetic organizing skills and passionate public speaking which she used to challenge traditional union leadership to be more responsive to the workers. The strategy was to implement an active rank-and-file movement, creating significant power for workers in the services industry, and, equally important, for immigrant workers and workers of color more broadly. Central to her work has been connecting African Americans and Latinos. In the process of hotel industry organizing, Latino and immigrant rank-and-file brought to light the fact that the industry had stopped hiring African Americans. HERE Local 11 developed and negotiated with major hotels the adoption of an exemplary diversity program in which African Americans are recruited through Black churches and provided with training and confidence. Her courageous and innovative work across racial lines, which she continues as head of the Los Angeles County Federation of Labor, has been a major factor in reinvigorating the labor movement in Los Angeles.

Larry Frank



Born into a fundamentalist family where his father was a preacher, Larry Frank grew up attending, and later teaching, Sunday school. However, he broke away from fundamentalism when he attended college and decided to pursue a degree in religious studies – taking courses on liberation theology and becoming intrigued by their social justice convictions. After college, Larry enrolled in Princeton Seminary but decided to take a year off which would ultimately change the course of his career aspirations. During that year, Larry went to Colorado to work for a nonprofit that provided health care outreach to farmworkers. But by the time he got there the organization had lost its funding, so he decided to join the farmworkers in the field. Larry was exposed to the working conditions and exploitation they faced and joined in strikes against unfair employers. Larry played a key role in the strikes, organizing the full-time Anglo workers to join the 500 part-time Latino workers in solidarity. These experiences would ultimately lead him to California where he joined the United Farm Workers and was trained by Fred Ross on how to become an effective organizer. The labor movement has benefitted from his dedication and brilliant organizing sensibilities since then.

As an organizer, Larry Frank has demonstrated keen instincts and know-how in building alliances between unlikely partners to move social justice forward. He was able to bring labor, religious groups, civil rights, and peace movement organizations together to launch the Jobs With Peace Campaign to oppose increased military spending during the Reagan Administration which was forcing deep cutbacks in many social programs. They adopted the motto “Jobs not Jails, Peace not the Pentagon, we still have a dream,” and were able to successfully knit together a broad and diverse coalition that initiated a public debate. After earning a law degree from UCLA in the late 1980s, he worked in private practice for nearly ten years in the field of alternative sentencing, witnessing the injustices of the court system for

many low-income people of color. In 2001, he was recruited by Kent Wong to the UCLA Labor Center where he developed a series of programs to engage students in labor research and internships. When Antonio Villaraigosa was elected as Mayor in 2005, Larry Frank was drafted to serve as Deputy Mayor for Community and Neighborhood Services, using his new post from inside government to promote green/blue initiatives, including the Clean Trucks Program and the unprecedented Construction Careers policy to create a pathway for inner-city youth and unemployed to become trained and apprentice for union jobs. Larry's astute and strategic work helped build the progressive labor/community coalition that elected Villaraigosa, and his involvement has been central to the administration's adoption and implementation of some of the most forward-looking social justice policies in the country.

Larry Gross



The U.S. involvement in Vietnam and the growing anti-war movement of the late 1960s provided the entry point through which Larry Gross developed his activism and began his career as an organizer. In 1972, Larry participated in the demonstration against the Miami Republican Convention; a direct expression of his opposition to the Nixon Administration. He returned to California and continued his work with the anti-war movement, attending events and protests, and then was propelled into the "Impeach Nixon Campaign" after the Watergate Scandal had come to light. As federal spending cuts took effect to pay for the war effort, Larry realized there was a vacuum in Los Angeles: no one was discussing the economic issues that were taking a huge toll on working families. He joined several other community leaders and organized a "Rally for Economic Survival" that put forth a Los Angeles statement on a range of economic justice concerns – from unemployment, to expensive bus fares, to utility bills, to the high cost of rents. From that, the Coalition for Economic Survival was born.

Under Larry's leadership, the first organizing campaign that CES launched was around expanding the food stamp program to ensure that poor families and individuals who qualified for the program were actually receiving the benefits to which they were entitled. In the 1970s, CES shifted its attention towards preserving affordable housing as rents across Los Angeles began to skyrocket and the supply of rental apartment units dwindled under a "condo craze."

Through Larry's leadership, CES was able to pass a rent control ordinance in the City of Los Angeles in 1978 which became the model for the rest of the county. When residents in the West Hollywood area feared an end to the County's rent control law, CES helped to organize a coalition of seniors, Russian immigrants, and gays – all of whom were renters – to sponsor a successful 1984 ballot measure for Cityhood. Today, the City of West Hollywood boasts one of the strongest rent control and inclusionary zoning policies in the region. Through his nearly 30 years of service to CES, Larry has worked to organize low income tenants to lead countless campaigns to preserve and strengthen rent control, prevent unjust evictions, protect Section 8 housing, and eliminate the destruction of rental housing for luxury condos so that every Angeleno will have access to affordable, decent, and safe housing.

Gilda Haas



Gilda Haas was a self-described “hippie” during the 1960s at a time when many had already taken up political activism and leftist ideology. After a stint as a blues music performer, Gilda attended urban planning school at UCLA, and volunteered at the Coalition for Economic Survival where she brought neighborhoods together around redevelopment issues. Later, she worked in Pico Union on displacement and tenants’ rights that accompanied the expansion of the Convention Center and downtown redevelopment.

This work is also at the heart of the organization she founded and formerly directed – Strategic Actions for a Just Economy (SAJE). SAJE played a key leadership role in organizing community residents, and other allies, in the historic Staples Center Community Benefit agreement that resulted in living wage jobs, a commitment to unionization, open space and affordable housing guarantees for area residents. To this day, SAJE continues to press for inclusive development along the Figueroa Corridor. To win equitable development, SAJE was founded to be a popular education center to provide residents the training to fight and win victories themselves. With deep respect for the intelligence of residents in lower-income communities – where degrees might be scarcer – she believes that the people need to decide and that they will always make up a constituency for justice as long as residents’ lives are being impacted. In 2007, SAJE co-founded the national Right to the City Alliance which galvanized a national movement for urban justice. The alliance has since expanded to include over 43 organizations in ten states and thirteen cities across the U.S.

Gilda's insight and deep commitment to the notion that the scholarly resources of the academy could be united with the deep local knowledge of the community led to the establishment of the Community Scholars Program in 1991 at UCLA, where she taught economic development for over 25 years. The Community Scholars Program, which joined together graduate students, faculty and community organizers in a systematic program, began to turn out action research reports that would help to lay the basis for numerous community campaigns around banking reform, welfare reform, affordable housing and just economic development.

Having moved on from SAJE, she now teaches at Antioch University's Urban Sustainability Program and manages a popular education website called Dr. Pop (drpop.org), where she is innovating in the use of on-line technologies to increase the reach of progressive ideas to new constituencies.

Marqueece Harris-Dawson



During the Great Migration, Marqueece Harris-Dawson’s grandparents moved to South Los Angeles from the American South. As a young man, South Los Angeles was a place where a high school diploma could earn one an entrance onto the factory floor that would provide a sufficient income for a middle-class lifestyle. But by the 1980s, deindustrialization, Reagan’s drastic cuts to social services, and crack-cocaine had taken over South L.A., and Marqueece’s parents – along with others in his family – moved away, looking for safety, good educations for their children, and a better quality of life.

After graduating Morehouse College, Marqueece returned to South L.A., never feeling settled about having left and wanting to change the conditions of his home rather than escaping them. Referred to CoCo more than once when applying for jobs elsewhere, Marqueece started as a youth organizer at CoCo. He was later promoted to direct the youth program in 1999. After a couple of brief stints working on the Mark Ridley-Thomas and Antonio Villaraigosa campaigns, Marqueece stepped up to become co-director of CoCo when founding director Karen Bass decided to run for public office. In 2004, Marqueece became the head of the organization.

Like other leaders of the L.A. progressive movement, “ideology and philosophy have been very central” to Marqueece. From his experience of living in and then leaving South L.A., he watched his peers who stayed and the disadvantages they confronted when competing in the world. “History doesn’t happen; history is what people make happen,” says Marqueece. And now Marqueece is a major force in the social justice history being made in South Los Angeles.

Madeline Janis



Madeline Janis credits the time she spent living in Mexico and her college activism as two events that contributed to her journey into social justice work. Madeline moved to San Miguel De Allende, Mexico at the age of thirteen. During her two years there, she developed a life-long identification and commitment to Latin American people along with a sense of solidarity, an awareness about poverty, and a desire for justice. During college, this yearning would come into full fruition as Madeline became actively involved in various social movements including opposition to U.S. involvement in Central America, as well as exposure to the socialist movement in Spain. After college, Madeline worked with the Committee for the Rights of the Disabled in Los Angeles before heading to law school at the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA). While at law school, she continued actively working with the Central American Solidarity Movement.

From 1989 to 1993 Madeline served as Executive Director for the Central American Refugee Center (CARECEN). Under her leadership, CARECEN led a successful effort to combat civil rights abuses of Central American immigrants by the Los Angeles Police Department and the Immigration and Naturalization Service. In addition, the Center provided legal assistance to help tens of thousands

Central American immigrants achieve legal status and/or citizenship. In 1993, as a response to the civil unrest in Los Angeles and growing community frustration with poverty and unemployment, Madeline established LAANE with the vision of empowering the working poor by creating good jobs, thriving communities, and a healthy environment. Under her leadership, LAANE passed several living wage and worker retention ordinances throughout Los Angeles (raising wages and benefits and creating job security for thousands of workers); worked with a broad coalition of labor and environmentalists to reduce environmental health impacts at the Port of Los Angeles; and led a campaign against Wal-Mart's attempt to build a superstore in Inglewood without conducting a public review or environmental impact report. Madeline's dedication and strategic thinking has propelled this work bringing improved living standards and dignity to the lives of hundreds of thousands of low-wage workers throughout Los Angeles.

Stewart Kwoh



While the Civil Rights Movement marked a watershed moment in U.S. history, when community engagement and protest was used to push for equity and justice in the lives of racial minorities, it certainly was not the first time that minority-led collective action had yielded social and political advancements for minority populations. As Stewart Kwoh points out, the history of Asian American exclusion, struggle, and hard-won victories has not often been told. Although Stewart did not grow up knowing about this history, he did grow up in a household that was active with the local church and engaged in civil rights issues, helping him develop his social consciousness. In addition to providing him with a platform to get involved, his church allowed him to connect with people outside of his local community. He attended the Brotherhood-Sisterhood U.S.A. Camp for three summers where he met with youth from across the nation to promote understanding and respect for other individuals and their life struggles.

Stewart's activism continued at UCLA, where he became involved in the push for an Asian American Studies Center, a student movement to establish study centers focused on the history and social struggles of racial minorities. As an organizer for this campus effort, he became the head of the Asian student group in 1970 during the time of the invasion of Cambodia by U.S. troops. The students organized a demonstration to protest U.S. involvement, and some were arrested for allegedly throwing objects at the National Guard troops during the protest. Stewart and several other leaders organized to represent and get the students out, an act that would later mark a critical shift in his career ambitions. After helping fellow students navigate the justice system, his focus shifted towards law and advocacy. Thus, Stewart attended UCLA Law School with the intention of learning how to advocate and provide legal services for poor people. During this time he started the Asian Law Collective and then shortly after began his community law practice. In 1983, he founded the Asian Pacific American Legal Center, which has become the largest organization to advocate for civil rights, provide legal services and education, and build coalitions to positively influence and impact Asian Pacific Americans.

Eric Mann



Growing up, two experiences would help Eric Mann develop an affinity for movement organizing: his family's involvement with the labor movement and his own personal experience with prejudice. His grandmother was a sweatshop worker in New York City and would go on to join the International Ladies Garment Workers Union, while his father was an organizer for the Luggage Workers Union. Eric's experiences of anti-Semitism shaped his consciousness and helped him develop a deep relationship to the Black movement going on around him in Harlem, where he grew up. While attending Cornell University, Eric had aspirations of becoming a lawyer or a congressperson to promote social justice ideals. However, when he joined the Congress on Racial Equity (CORE) at the age of 21, he found his real passion. He became an organizer and never looked back.

While at CORE, Eric led the Trailways Bus Movement campaign, an effort to fight the racially discriminatory hiring practices of the Port Authority in New York City. Pointing to violations of the Fourteenth Amendment and Civil Rights Act, CORE was victorious in their efforts – ensuring the hiring and promotion of minority workers at the Port. Eric was able to develop his skills as an organizer, and learned the complexities of unifying workers across race and class boundaries. He would later apply those skills in the Campaign to Keep GM Van Nuys Open in Los Angeles, an effort that confronted one of the biggest corporations in the world by forging a powerful alliance of Black, Latino and Anglo workers, forcing GM to keep the auto plant open for ten additional years. Building on the GM experience, Eric realized the ongoing need to wage multi-racial, multi-issue and multi-sector campaigns that could highlight the necessity of systemic change. This realization sparked the launching of the Labor/Community Strategy Center in 1989. The Strategy Center has become a key institution in the Los Angeles progressive movement, establishing the powerful, 3000-member Bus Riders Union and winning landmark litigation.

Victor Narro



The labor movement in Los Angeles has relied on both strategic and tireless organizing as well as thoughtful litigation throughout its many campaigns and victories. Often, lawyers and organizers are at two polarizing ends of the spectrum and other times – as is the case with Victor Narro – they are embodied in one. Victor's dedication to this work is rooted in his upbringing. His family immigrated to New York from Peru when he was only three and he grew up watching his family and friends struggle, working under harsh conditions with no upward mobility. These struggles, nonetheless, instilled in Victor a passion for social justice. He also developed an affinity for the teachings of the Catholic faith – primarily liberation theology. While in college Victor became involved with various social justice activists, including the Quakers (who were doing solidarity work in Central America), the Sanctuary Movement, and a group of immigration lawyers working with refugees from Central America.

The latter provided a turning point for Victor, who saw firsthand the way litigation could be utilized to win justice for political refugees. He decided to go to law school.

After graduating from law school, Victor moved to Los Angeles which had just emerged from the civil unrest and was ripe for social justice work. He started at the Mexican American Legal Defense and Educational Fund (MALDEF), working on day laborer issues and against Proposition 187. Victor worked closely with CHIRLA and other immigrant groups to ensure they were collectively addressing the issues impacting immigrant workers. He was involved with organizing day laborers, domestic workers, garment workers, and gardeners which led to the creation of the Multi-ethnic Immigrant Workers Organizing Network (MIWON). Through Victor's leadership, the day laborer project was able to grow into the National Day Laborer Organizing Network that today includes forty community-based worker centers from around the country. He also established Sweatshop Watch, which launched a boycott against Forever 21 and ensured the passage of AB 633 which substantially revised regulations within the garment industry and established joint liability for violations extending to some manufacturers and retailers.

In 2003, Victor joined the UCLA Labor Center where he still serves as a project director. It has been during his time at the labor center that he has been able to make strong connections between labor and immigrant rights, such as bringing the AFL-CIO to embrace immigrant struggles and begin organizing the car wash industry as well. He uses his law background to help day laborers and worker centers gain many protections that guarantee their own existence; such as the ability to organize and bargain. It has been his ability to use the law as part of community organizing that has made Victor an invaluable force in the social justice movement in Los Angeles.

Danny Park



Danny Park grew up in Korea and immigrated to San Francisco at the age of 13. As a child of a pastor to an immigrant church, Danny continually helped his father to meet the everyday needs of members of the congregations. He saw firsthand what it meant to help others. As an immigrant, knowing two different languages and cultures, he was able to connect to people on multiple levels. In college, he learned the history of struggles in Korea and it was upon this learning that he realized his deep commitment to help serve his community. While in the Bay Area, he founded the Korea Resource Center and Young Koreans United group.

But this was only the start.

Upon moving to Los Angeles, he noticed that although the media portrayed Korean immigrants as “model minorities” which tended to pit them against other communities of color, the reality was that many Korean immigrants were working low-wage jobs and facing the same social and economic struggles as others. Danny joined with several other progressive activists to discuss the challenges facing Korean immigrants in Los Angeles, which led to the launch of the Koreatown Immigrant Workers Association (KIWA).

The 1992 civil unrest in Los Angeles revealed the deeply embedded racial tensions and the need for Koreans to build alliances with other immigrants and people of color. One of their first major campaigns was the Restaurant Campaign, an effort to take on the restaurant industry for many workplace violations including wage theft and mistreatment. It was the diverse coalition and solidarity that KIWA built with Latino workers, labor unions, and other community organizations that led to the success of this campaign. Danny played a key leadership role in founding and strengthening KIWA during a time of rapid change in Los Angeles, and providing visibility and a strong connection to the broader progressive movement for the Korean American community.

Vivian Rothstein



Vivian Rothstein was introduced to community organizing at the height of the Civil Rights Movement, and continues to be inspired by the valuable traditions and culture of activism of that time. Her mother was a refugee from Nazi Germany, and she grew up in a community of other refugees who located in Studio City, California. Her mother's only expectation was for Vivian to attend a university, which she fulfilled by attending the University of California, Berkeley. It was the peak of the Civil Rights Movement, and the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) was concentrating its outreach efforts on university campuses. Vivian joined CORE and trained in non-violent civil disobedience, staging multiple non-violent protests and demonstrations. But it did not take long for Vivian to realize that she wanted to be more than a single body in a mass demonstration; she wanted to play a larger leadership role in the movement. Therefore, she went to work in Mississippi in 1965 for the Freedom Summer Movement, a transformative experience in her development. After organizing in Mississippi, Vivian would go to Chicago to continue doing community organizing. Later she would travel to North Vietnam as part of the anti-war movement.

By 1982, Vivian started working for the City of Santa Monica as a community liaison officer. It was a progressive era for the city, which allowed her to work as a community organizer and encourage people to get involved in city government. Five years later, she went to work at Ocean Park Community Center (OPCC), which was a pioneer in providing community-centered social services to address domestic violence, homelessness, and runaway youth. Her ten years at OPCC allowed her to see the overwhelming problems facing the "working poor" who could not sustain themselves on minimum wages alone. So she made the shift from social services to labor organizing, working as a union organizer for HERE 11. Vivian led the Respect at LAX project, aimed at raising wages for service workers at the airport, as well as the Santa Monicans for Responsible Tourism project, a LAANE-supported campaign that worked to lift wages in the booming Santa Monica tourism industry. Vivian was recruited to LAANE where she continues as a senior advisor to its many economic justice campaigns.

Reverend Alexia Salvatierra



Having grown up in a working class community in North Torrance, Alexia has always been able to relate to the struggles facing working families in Los Angeles. When she was young, her family lived across the street from a refinery, which threatened her own and her neighbors' health. Although she was always deeply aware of social and environmental injustices around her, she did not feel empowered to create change. Discovering Christianity changed everything for Alexia by providing the hope and strength to join the struggle for social justice. As she describes, "my faith gave me the power to engage."

Since then, Alexia has devoted her life to what she calls "faith-rooted organizing," an alternative model to traditional Alinsky-style organizing that is shaped and guided by faith traditions and promotes coalition building. She discovered this model during her work with women in the Christian Community Movement in the Philippines and developed it further in Los Angeles. She explains that faith-rooted organizing adds an important element to labor organizing. It allows people to connect with others on a deeper, more personal level, appealing to social conscience and religious spirituality. She attributes the faith-rooted approach with one of the successes of the 2004 grocery workers' strike in which faith leaders were able to appeal to the Vons CEO's moral values and exact an agreement to meet workers' demands.

After serving as the founding executive director of Clergy and Laity United for Economic Justice (CLUE), an organization of faith leaders working statewide to support low-wage workers in their struggles for economic and social justice, she founded FaithRooted.org to broadly promote this new way of thinking and organizing. Alexia continues as a leader in the New Sanctuary Movement fighting for immigrants' rights.

Angelica Salas



As an immigrant child growing up in the United States, Angelica Salas learned firsthand the challenges that immigrants face in this country. This experience enabled her to connect with people and be an exemplary leader. Her parents came seeking economic opportunities and to provide a better life for their children: her mother worked in a garment factory where wage theft and harsh working conditions were commonplace, while her father worked multiple jobs to provide for their family. They used the money they had earned to send for their daughters, including Angelica, and reunite their family. Their reunion, however, was short-lived. Angelica recalls that her mother and other relatives were taken away during an immigration raid at the garment factory and it was at that point that her social consciousness began to form. She began to question why this was happening to her family. Were they somehow inferior? Angelica began to worry about her family's future in the US.

Naturalization was her family's only chance at having some certainty in this country, so they decided to go through that process. It was then that Angelica took on a new role. As the only family member who

spoke English and used a typewriter, Angelica became the bridge that was helping her family connect and set roots in this country by helping her family fill out applications, translate letters and help them navigate through the process. Soon she was helping family friends and other recent immigrants. But it was not until she was in college that Angelica had a political awakening. Learning about the systemic oppression and struggles that immigrants face in America, and becoming actively involved on campus, Angelica finally grasped the full scale of what her family had gone through and felt a sense of duty to continue helping other immigrants.

Shortly thereafter, she discovered and began volunteering at CHIRLA, doing outreach to immigrant communities and running workshops to explain current immigration laws and rights. She moved up the ranks of CHIRLA from an administrative assistant to her current role as Executive Director. During this time, Angelica has seen the organization and movement in Los Angeles grow and evolve and build strategic partnerships to respond to the needs of its constituents. Angelica reflects that the AB 540 campaign, which provided for immigrant students to qualify for in-state tuition rates, helped to both mobilize and reenergize immigrants, while building a new level of collaboration with legislators. As Angelica puts it, the work must always build the base of informed and empowered immigrant so that policy gains can continue to be won for ongoing integration and inclusion.

Amy Schur



Although Amy Schur grew up in a politically-conscious household that enabled her to see the inequities and injustices surrounding her at a young age, it was not until college that she began to get a more analytical understanding and make sense of her experiences. While at Oberlin College, Amy immersed herself in student movements protesting U.S. involvement in South Africa and Central America. Her college activism not only enabled her to engage in something meaningful – fighting injustice – but connected her with other like-minded students, which led her to a career in labor organizing.

In 1998, Amy followed many of her fellow students to become involved in the Association of Community Organizations for Reform Now (ACORN), where she discovered the meaning and the methodology of community organizing. Starting as a junior community organizer, she engaged in multiple campaigns ranging from living wage to predatory lending. From these fights, she learned the importance of building an engaged and committed membership base that has a stake in the work. She also realized that little wins along the way help build momentum and power, and provide the lifeblood of community organizing. Amy spent 11 years as head staff person of California ACORN and became head organizer.

In 2010, after ACORN closed its doors, Amy co-founded the Alliance of Californians for Community Empowerment (ACCE), a statewide community organization helping communities build power to take on economic justice issues such as banking reform, the foreclosure crisis and raising the minimum wage—most of which ACCE has tackled with a strong degree of success. Amy’s long-term dedication, as well as her experience in coordinating between local chapters, statewide infrastructure and national

headquarters, has given her a realistic sense of the tremendous effort required to build to a meaningful scale of social change impact.

Anthony Thigpenn



After the 1965 Watts Riots, Anthony Thigpenn's family moved from Watts to Pacoima. He recalls these years as a time of both social movement activism and community conflict. Racial tension between Latinos and African Americans would turn into weekly riots at San Fernando High School where he was a student. This context prompted his politicization. While in high school, Anthony ran for student body president on a unity platform supported by a coalition of Black and Latino students that he helped to organize, and which, in turn, helped him get elected.

Through his youth leadership, he became connected to a larger community-based political collective that was actively engaged in the myriad of social movements flourishing in Los Angeles and Oakland, including the Black Panther Party which offered a compelling political analysis of the role of race and poverty in America.

Following his involvement in the Black Power Movement, he worked a day job as a machinist, while continuing his activism through the fight against police abuse. Even in this early grassroots campaign, which advocated the need for a civilian police review board, Anthony understood the need for proactive agendas that could offer practical solutions and build community-based power. In 1984, he led the Jobs With Peace Campaign, helping to forge a diverse coalition and marshal it to collect thousands of signatures to qualify a popular referendum in favor of social investment, rather than continued military spending.

Following the 1992 L.A. civil unrest, which revealed growing community frustration with poverty, lack of services, and unemployment, Anthony founded Action for Grassroots Empowerment and Neighborhood Development Alternatives (AGENDA) to address harsh social and economic conditions in South L.A. AGENDA's tenets were to build a powerful vehicle for those left out of decision-making processes to organize and make their voices heard, construct strategic alliances at the intersections of race and single-issue efforts, and launch innovative policy campaigns.

By 2007, AGENDA's South L.A. focus had expanded into a multi-capacity, regional organizing institution and established its own 501(c)3 organization called Strategic Concepts in Organizing and Policy Education (SCOPE). In addition to grassroots organizing and alliance building, SCOPE engaged in research and policy analysis in order to build capacity and strengthen their grassroots work. Under his leadership, SCOPE has been able to build power from the bottom-up and "democratize" public policy making to achieve lasting, systemic change. Anthony now leads a statewide alliance of organizations, California Calls, taking on tax and fiscal reform to address economic inequalities.

Leonardo Vilchis



1968 marked a critical year in the history of social movements: large scale protests and movements happened throughout the world, led mostly by students and workers, as a direct response to years of government oppression and dissatisfaction. Leonardo Vilchis recalls that his parents participated in the Movimiento Estudiantil (Student Movement) in Mexico, so he grew up in a politicized environment focused on social justice and government accountability. His own direct experience with racism in the U.S. at the age of 18 – being told he was not good enough to attend a university – led him to get involved in social activism. His trajectory started as a campus activist, participating in “Students Against Reaganism” and “Free South Africa Coalition,” along with the Central American solidarity movement. During this time, he would learn about Liberation Theology and popular education theories. Leonardo then went to work at Dolores Mission in Boyle Heights.

While at Dolores Mission, Leonardo began organizing local residents around housing and living conditions. He also participated in the Justice for Janitors campaign as some of the residents he was organizing in the housing projects were also janitors. Leonardo would also launch the Comité Pro Paz en el Barrio, which was a response to an outbreak of gang violence in their neighborhoods. While Leonardo kept working with local residents to improve living conditions in the housing projects, he realized that the local church might not have the capacity to sustain and support all the work that the community wanted to take on; the momentum had grown from 12 families who were ready to fight to about 200 people gathering in the parking lots. The group collected enough money through donations and food sales to rent an office in 1996. That is when Union de Vecinos was formed. Since then, Leonardo has seen Union de Vecinos grow to take on housing, transit, youth and environmental health issues. But its success stems from its roots in organizing residents to improve living conditions in their neighborhoods, even while connecting to larger social and economic justice issues in the region and the state.

Kent Wong



Kent Wong embodies the fighting spirit of labor organizing: it is a lifetime commitment to advocate for the disadvantaged and underserved. Starting his activism at an early age, Kent became a boycott organizer for the United Farm Workers of America during high school, bringing national attention to the plight of some of the nation’s lowest wage earners. Kent continued his activism through college and then into law school, where he recalls working with students “to find creative ways of using their skills to build movements around Los Angeles.” After graduating from the Peoples College of Law, Kent was hired as the first staff attorney for the Asian Pacific American Legal Center, where he developed worker rights programs to serve the needs of Asian American workers and worked on a major class action employment discrimination case.

Shortly after, as a staff attorney at Service Employees International Union (SEIU), Kent experienced a changing tide in the labor movement. New leaders were emerging within the largest unions in the labor

movement – The Los Angeles County Federation of Labor, UNITE HERE Local 11 – that were completely opposite to the old guard both in their ethnic makeup and in their labor organizing strategies. He was involved in a lot of the strategy development during these changing times – including helping to lay the groundwork for the election of Hilda Solis to the 31st congressional district, who now serves as Obama’s Secretary of Labor. Kent reflects that these years were an exciting time to be a part of labor organizing.

Since 1991, Kent has served as director of the UCLA Labor Center. The Center provided Kent the space to bridge unionized and non-unionized workers in the low-wage sector to expand the larger labor movement. Under his leadership, the Labor Center launched the first Spanish Language Union Leadership School, ran the first LGBT Union Leadership School, the first Asian American Union Leadership School, and one of the first African American Union Leadership Schools in the country. This latter program spawned the Black Workers Center in Los Angeles which is now developing unprecedented partnerships between unions and leaders in the African American community around the job crisis affecting Blacks. The Center has also been connecting young activists with the labor movement both to expose them to labor organizing and to inject new energy into the labor movement. As Kent puts it, part of the work of those leading the labor movement, like the broader social justice movement, is to set the foundation for others to continue the work.

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