Oakland and other historically African American cities in the United States have undergone dramatic demographic shifts over the past 20 years. Even as the overall U.S. population has become increasingly diverse, and politicians like President Barack Obama and General Colin Powell have risen to the top, African American cities have seen a steady erosion in both local and national power.

New coalitions are developing as the United States becomes a “majority minority” nation. African Americans, who have led the fight for racial justice in the U.S. for well over a century, have a critical role to play in guiding the country toward a more equitable distribution of wealth and resources. To get there, our cities will need to start guiding their economic development toward building pan-ethnic/working class power—with an educated, capable population that can guide the growth of their own communities. Some battles will have to be fought by winning community benefits agreements from specific developers, others might be won by citywide ordinances, and still others by collaboration with state and national entities capable of moving a progressive and community-centered politics. In this section we get a glimpse of some case studies of what is wrong and what is right with our polity. —Ed.
When the United States Census Bureau released its first 2010 census data for California in early March, the news that got immediate attention in the Bay Area was the steep drop in the number of African Americans in the city of Oakland in the last 10 years.

According to the data, Oakland’s African American population plummeted from 142,000 (38 percent) in 2000 to 109,000 (28 percent) in 2010. Even if you included all mixed-race (a new category this census) Oakland residents with some Black ancestry—something which often happens in real life—the number of African Americans in Oakland would only increase by 9,000, or two more percentage points.

Both of the Bay Area’s daily papers emphasized the de-African-Americanization of Oakland in their census coverage. The Oakland Tribune story was headlined, “Census: Blacks Leaving Urban Core For East Bay Suburbs,” while the San Francisco Chronicle led with “25% Drop In African American Population In Oakland.”

While the actual census figures qualified as news, the trend of African Americans leaving Oakland has been obvious for a while to anyone paying attention. One sign was the growing Black population in North Bay cities like Antioch and Hercules with Oakland exiles. Another was the replacement of African American households with whites over broad swaths of West Oakland and with Latinos in East Oakland neighborhoods. Moreover, it’s hardly a ‘new’ trend in a city once considered ‘Black.’

Oakland’s 30-Year Black Exodus

Between 1970 and 1990, Oakland may have actually been a majority-Black city, with the typically undercounted African American population at an official high of 47 percent during the 1980 census. During that period, African Americans also achieved virtual dominance of Oakland’s political offices with a majority-Black City Council and School Board and an African American mayor. But the drop in Oakland’s Black population began in the 1980s. By the time of the 1990 census, the percentage of African Americans was down to 44.

The Chronicle speculated that “[a] lower cost of living, the lure of jobs, frustration with schools and the search for safer communities all played key roles” in the Black flight from Oakland. Speaking to the Tribune of a similar trend in nearby Richmond, the Rev. Andre Shumake, president of the Richmond Improvement Association, put it more succinctly: “From what I’ve observed over the past 10 years, I think it’s redevelopment and violence.” By redevelopment, he was referring to the reconstruction of Black neighborhoods in the Richmond and Oakland flatlands, which bumped up housing prices to a point where moderate-income African Americans could no longer afford them.

Significantly missing from the list of reasons was Oakland’s uneasy relationship with its African American youth. Many young Black people feel that there is no place for them in Oakland and are moving away as soon as they are old enough to do so. Also missing from the media discussion was the question of what steps Oakland was taking to preserve the diversity that it—quite justly—is so proud of.

A Trend Based on Economics

Long before the census confirmed what was already known to Oakland’s Black community, political and business leaders had been advancing solutions to the
problem. One suggestion was to strengthen the African American business community. Blacks are leaving Oakland because Oakland no longer has jobs for enough of them.

Last summer, Oakland political columnist Brenda Payton painted a grim picture of the African American economic situation in Oakland in The Root magazine online. She wrote: “In recent years, the city’s black population has become more stratified, rich and poor, with the middle and working class disappearing... [I]n August the unemployment rate among African Americans was 16.3 percent (compared with 8.7 percent for whites and 9.6 percent overall), 18.8 percent for black males, 14 percent for black females and, among African Americans 16 to 19 years old, an incredible 38.1 percent for females and 51.7 percent for males.”

The rapid decline of Black economic power has come as a sudden jolt. “As one older African American man noted,” Payton wrote, “when he was raising his family, he could moonlight at the cannery if he needed some extra money. Young black men and women can’t even find a job, let alone get moonlighting work to earn extra money.”

In a city that has seen its industrial economy virtually vanish, African Americans stand a far better chance of being hired at Black-owned companies than any other small business. “Chinese hire Chinese people, white folks hire white people, Blacks hire Blacks,” said Michael Carter Sr., national chair of Black Wall Street District U.S.A., in a recent interview. “That’s across the board.” Black Wall Street is an Oakland-based national organization that promotes Black business.

**Pullman Employees Brought Prosperity to Oakland**

At the turn of the last century, the railroad brought porters and waiters to the Bay Area, all of whom were African American and most of whom settled in West Oakland, near the station that marked the end of the railroad lines. The railroad workers—helped enormously by the economic benefits gained from their hard-fought union contract with the Pullman rail car company following a national strike—formed the core of Oakland’s rising Black middle class. They bought homes in West Oakland and opened businesses. C.L. Dellums (uncle of former mayor Ron Dellums and one of the founders of the railroad porters’ union) operated a West Oakland pool hall that became the congregating point for many famous African American entertainers, including Bill “Bojangles” Robinson.

When the World War II shipbuilding boom opened up jobs to thousands of African American immigrants from the South, West Oakland became their entertainment and cultural center. Black businesses flourished along 7th Street, which became one of the major stopping points for African American entertainers in the middle of the 20th century. People like Count Basie, Ella Fitzgerald, and Ray Charles graced the hot spots along the street.

When the war ended, the African Americans who had migrated west for wartime work moved into Oakland’s booming manufacturing industry. And the sons and daughters of the Pullman porters’ union members formed both the core of Oakland’s dominant Black political leadership of the 1970s through the 1990s, and the leadership of its radical African American organizations, including the Black Panther Party. They also made up the core of Oakland’s Black business owners, which increasingly became the main entry point for jobs for many African Americans coming out of East Bay schools.

**When Mom & Pop Ruled Oakland Business**

“I started working at my parents’ record store very early,” said David Reid, owner of Reid’s Records in Berkeley. “I could read record labels before I could read books. I think I was working on Saturdays when I was seven or eight years old.”

Reid’s Records was one of the first Black-owned West Coast record stores in 1945. Even when it expanded from its original location on Berkeley’s Sacramento Street Black business center, to satellite stores in Vallejo and downtown Oakland, it remained a Mom and Pop
record store. “I had cousins, uncles, great uncles who worked there,” said Reid. “A lot of extended family [who] grew up in the store.” Because of Berkeley’s relatively small African American population, the store depended on Oakland residents for most of its clientele.

“We were the place to come to for Black music,” Reid continued. “Because you couldn’t get ‘race music’ in the ‘regular’ record store. [Our stores] were the only outlets [where] African Americans that had newly migrated to the Bay Area [could] get the music they grew up with and knew. We sold a lot of blues. We sold a lot of everything. But in the late ’60s and early ’70s, the large discount houses started to come to the Bay Area—like Leopold’s, Tower Records, and Warehouse. The mainstream record stores started to get into African American music and sell it cheaper than we could purchase it for. Basically, a lot of our R&B, blues, and jazz clientele left us.”

Reid took over the record business from his parents after it compressed back into the single Berkeley store from which it had started. And Reid’s Records, which once hired six or seven people, is now run by Reid and his eldest daughter. Apart from the competition, Reid says his business has also been badly hurt by the Black out-migration.

“We seem to get hit the hardest,” Reid said, referring to Black businesses in the East Bay. “We seem to be the ones, when the economy goes down, to really catch hell. I think about the times when if I wanted to go eat some soul food, I had all kinds of places to go to. You have to really dig to find an African American-owned restaurant now—with African Americans who actually cook the food. We don’t even have liquor stores anymore. Or Mom and Pop grocery stores. Or the nail shops. The only thing we probably have are hair stores: barber shops and beauty shops. And churches and funeral homes. That’s about it. Our Black professionals have been assimilated into corporate America.”

“We [need] the small Mom and Pops to give these kids jobs, that’s the first line of defense, that’s taking care of our own!” continues Reid. “If we don’t have that kind of support in the Black Community, we’ve seen what it’s done. The Hispanic community has business districts and all kinds of community support and social support. You go to the Asian districts, they have all of this, too. Where is the Black district? The only Black districts we have are where you can go purchase drugs.”

Wanted: A Black Business Center

Black Wall Street’s Carter estimates that there are currently 8,500 African American businesses in Oakland, a steep drop from the 9,800 catalogued by his organization six years ago. But those businesses have no center. Oakland’s core Black business district—7th Street—was broken up during the city’s redevelopment, which began in the early 1960s.

Along East Oakland’s International Boulevard, for example, interspersed with the chain stores are shops owned by various ethnic groups. Black Oakland—one of the three largest ethnicities in the city—has no Black business center. Could the establishment of a Black business center in Oakland—like Chinatown or the Hispanic Fruitvale—or even greater support of scattered Black businesses in the city help stem the tide of Black out-migration? Black Wall Street U.S.A. thinks so and, furthermore, believes that it can lead to an economic revival within Oakland’s Black community and the city as a whole.

“[Establishing] Black Wall Street in Oakland... is in fact an existing example of how to use recycling of black wealth to better the community,” according to the organization’s 2010 national plan of action. “By supporting local black businesses, black urban neighborhoods can help establish a wealth building system whereby they rebuild themselves internally rather than waiting or relying on external or governmental support.”

Los Angeles Coalition Wins Health Clinic and Jobs from Developer

By Diana Pei Wu

When you walk into the yellow building of the Esperanza Community Housing Corporation in Los Angeles, you are greeted by bright paintings done in the Diego Rivera and José Orozco muralist styles. This office and the brick warehouse down the street, which houses the UNIDAD Coalition and the sites where one of the first community benefits agreement (CBA) fully funded by a private developer was negotiated.

“This agreement with Palmer provides South LA residents with health services, jobs, affordable housing, small business development, and transit-oriented development (TOD) planning—all desperately needed in this historically underserved community,” notes Paulina Gonzalez, executive director of SAJE.2

The developer, Geoffrey Palmer, calls his own projects “fortress-like” and in 2003, pleaded “no contest” to criminal charges of illegal demolition.3 His ornate, market-rate (high-rent), Italian-named complexes are designed to draw affluent professionals to the urban core. In 2009, Palmer won a case in the California Supreme Court against the City of Los Angeles’ attempt to mandate affordable housing in his luxury developments. Despite his political and economic clout, the UNIDAD Coalition and a team of community lawyers was able to negotiate a groundbreaking deal with Palmer in just over three months over the Lorenzo Project, which includes:

- A 20-year free lease and operational funding for a 7,500 square foot community health and wellness clinic.
- A local and at-risk jobs hiring program for the project’s construction workers.
- A living wage and local hiring program for the project’s permanent workers.
- Funding to promote community health.
- An affordable housing trust fund in South Los Angeles.
- Job training.
- Support for local small businesses.
- Funding for community-led TOD strategies in South Los Angeles planning.

According to Jim Mangia, President and CEO of St. John’s Well Child and Family Center, “In this federally-designated medically underserved area, this clinic is a significant win and will provide an estimated 20,000 patient visits a year for low-income and uninsured South Los Angeles residents.” Coalition members hope that this agreement becomes part of a suite of CBAs that will stem the tide of displacement by new development in the area by providing anchors for good jobs and much-needed community serving institutions.

Demolishing Health Care in South LA

South LA has the highest rates for diabetes and diabetes-related amputations, asthma, hypertension, and childhood lead poisoning in Los Angeles County. It also has a high rate of preventable hospitalizations but the lowest ratio of hospital beds to residents in the county.

From 1995 to 2005, Nancy Halpern Ibrahim, executive director of Esperanza Community Housing, ran a nationally recognized, award-winning program that trained hundreds of community health promoters in partnership with the Orthopedic Hospital Foundation and the St. John’s Well Child and Family Center.

Promotoras are multilingual low-income residents who become neighborhood health leaders, patient advocates, and health educators. They provide a crucial link to health care access for an underserved community, as well as increasing patient retention and filling...
areas of need where traditional public health strategies are neither suitable nor accepted, according to Ibrahim.

In 2005, a part of the hospital and medical offices building were demolished without notice to the community and many health services located in the building, such as St. John’s Well Child and Family Center, the promotoras program, and an innovative medical magnet high school program, were evicted. The land was sold to G.H. Palmer Associates in 2006 in a cash transaction.

Annually, the facilities had provided over 15,000 emergency room visits, 1,350 inpatient surgeries, 1,036 outpatient surgeries, and served an additional 8,500 dental and 4,300 podiatry patients. The sale resulted in the loss of health services that included: inpatient, surgical, and emergency care, recuperative and physical therapy, orthopedic surgery and specialty care, and over 100 licensed hospital beds. Also lost were preventative services for diabetics and a full range of dental and oral health services.

Since 2006, the area has lost four more hospitals, escalating an already severe health care shortage. South LA residents now have to travel several miles for primary care and over 10 miles to access specialty care.

**Gentrification and Displacement in South LA**

The former site of the Orthopaedic Hospital (at 23rd and Flower Street) is located alongside the Expo Line of the Los Angeles Metro currently under construction. The shiny lofts of downtown have crept down Figueroa Street in the last decade and now loom close, just across Interstate 110 and the 23rd Street overpass.

In her office, Ibrahim points at an aerial photo of the area taken in the 1980s. To the north are the tall buildings of downtown Los Angeles, to the west is the imposing campus of the University of Southern California (USC), and to the east lie the industrial areas. You can almost feel the pressure generated by downtown development and USC, squeezing this community of predominantly working class African American and Latino families towards the warehouses in the east and further south along Figueroa.

“Before this current wave of development, over 60 percent of the housing units in this neighborhood were family-oriented,” says Ibrahim. “Many of those units have now been converted to student housing, which increases rents, lowers population density, and increases neighborhood instability. Esperanza has been at the forefront of continuing to build affordable housing for families, in an attempt to stem the waves of gentrification. It’s been a long process.”

At the UNIDAD office, Coalition Community Organizer Gabriela Garcia says: “We have a unique opportunity to stop displacement—of families, of workers, of businesses—without stopping growth and development. Through public planning now underway, we can set guidelines for smart growth that is also fair growth, and neighborhood development that is true community development. We can improve more than just our buildings and streets; we can improve the lives of the people who live and work in our neighborhoods—the old and the new, the rooted and the recent.”

South LA native and current Community Affairs Manager at TRUST South LA, Tafarai Bayne says: “[We are] working towards a South Los Angeles where economic and social opportunities for youth are not gangs but abundant jobs in the private sector as well as in community organizations; where there is room for community gardens and living wage jobs; and housing in price ranges that honor the contribution of the residents that have made the community a desirable place to live.”

“This community benefits agreement is important,” Bayne adds, “because it provides an anchor for the community to get much-needed health care and also

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Photo: UNIDAD Coalition members speak with staff of Councilmember Jan Perry’s office following the December 2010 Council meeting. © 2011 Tafarai Bayne/TRUST South LA
puts money in a land trust to support the development of family-oriented housing units that are affordable to working class families.”

**A Combination of Organizing and Legal Strategy**

Serena Lin, an attorney with the Community Development Project at Public Counsel, joined the campaign in November 2010 and played a key role in negotiating the CBA.

“We sent a message at a critical time that communities are powerful and can win,” says Lin. “When UNIDAD started this campaign, the deck was stacked against us. The combined power of organizing and legal claims brought the developer to the negotiating table. The lesson for planners, politicians, and developers is that communities need to be involved from the start and not as an afterthought to development.”

In Los Angeles, the requirements for public participation are more stringent for developments where public funds are involved but the proposed development at the former Orthopedic Hospital site is 100 percent privately financed. The UNIDAD Coalition and the legal team started working in earnest on this campaign only in November 2010, and the final agreement was signed in February 2011. In comparison to most CBAs, which can take years to negotiate, this was an extremely short timeline.

As with many local planning and development campaigns, Esperanza and SAJE had submitted comments on the draft and final Environmental Impact Reports (EIR) back in 2007. The final EIR was released in November 2010, and the hearing date before the Los Angeles County Planning and Land Use Commission scheduled for December 9. As it was the middle of the holiday season, the community groups successfully argued for the hearing to be delayed until January 13, 2011. They also convinced the commissioners to hold the hearing in downtown Los Angeles rather than in the San Gabriel Valley—county-wide meetings typically alternate between the two locations—as the proposed project was one of the largest in South LA and community access to the public process was important.

On December 10, nearly 1,000 people crowded into the Los Angeles Convention Center for the Second Annual South Los Angeles Health and Human Rights Conference. Later, hundreds of participants bussed to the Orthopedic Hospital site to demonstrate against the loss of health services to the proposed luxury housing development. Their slogan, “Save the Q!,” referred to a special zoning category, which restricts use of the land for medical and educational purposes. The event signaled the beginning of the Coalition’s efforts to mobilize the broader community in the campaign to preserve health services at the site.

**Showdown at City Hall: January 13, 2011**

On January 13, organizers Ibrahim, Garcia, Bayne, the legal team and others arrived at the Planning Commission meeting at 8:30 a.m. to find the room full of men in hard hats and orange shirts that said “Approve Lorenzo” on the front and on the back, “GH Palmer provides jobs” and “Si se Puede!” The nervous organizers were relieved when Coalition members began arriving in the hundreds with their “Save the Q!” stickers, forcing the Planning Commission to move the hearing to the largest room in the building.

The Palmer representatives presented their proposal and asserted that they had adequately responded to community concerns in the EIR. When the UNIDAD Coalition was given 15 minutes to present their collective testimony, members spoke forcefully about the health and environmental conditions in the neighborhood. They also pointed out why the EIR was insufficient because it used incorrect baselines for assessing changes to pedestrian traffic, air quality impacts during construction, and impacts of the loss of Q zoning to the neighborhood.

As comments from community members followed,
it became apparent that the Planning Commission was taking the concerns of the UNIDAD Coalition seriously and it was decided to delay decision on the plan until the next meeting.

What followed was a month of intense negotiations during which the CBA was drafted and agreed to by the developer in exchange for the coalition’s retraction of their objections to the development. “In many ways,” says Zahirah Washington, an attorney with the Legal Aid Foundation of Los Angeles’ Community Economic Development Unit, “this CBA helps to shift the power dynamics, bringing both commercial and community interests to the table. This CBA and other efforts show that community and economic interests do not have to be at odds.” UNIDAD hopes it will set a precedent for future public and private developments, especially along public transportation corridors.

“It is critical that community residents have a real seat at the decision-making table for development projects to ensure that their voices are heard and that community residents benefit from any proposed developments in their neighborhood,” says Paulina Gonzalez, executive director of SAJE. “This agreement marks a step in that direction.”

What was truly significant in this instance, as Lin points out, “is that the UNIDAD Coalition was able to get a private developer to be accountable to the public’s interest. We were also able to get key officials and planners to recognize that developments near transit should be accountable in part because they receive the benefits of public transportation. When billions of dollars are going to trains and buses, those dollars are also serving the housing, stores, and neighborhoods nearby. A transit-oriented development can become a conduit for moving current residents out of their neighborhoods. But, if we’re going to responsibly build transit-oriented development, we need to make places where not only everybody wants to live, but where everybody can live.”

Although not everyone in South LA is happy that the development is happening, most are extremely excited at the prospect of a new community health center, small business spaces, new jobs at living wages, and other benefits to be implemented at the new development. The hope is that this can become an anchor for community well-being, instead of something that contributes to community displacement.

Already, community organizations throughout southern California have started requesting support from the UNIDAD Coalition and the legal team to negotiate and implement their own CBAs. UNIDAD is currently working with USC on its expansion plans and coalition members Bayne, Garcia, and Ibrahim are hopeful that the lessons learned from the Lorenzo Project CBA will help them negotiate with other developers who want to build in South LA.

Endnotes
1. UNIDAD stands for United Neighbors in Defense Against Displacement, a campaign for South Los Angeles development that benefits all members of the community.
4. Organizations that make up the UNIDAD Coalition include SAJE (Strategic Actions for a Just Economy), Esperanza Community Housing, St. John’s Well Child and Family Center, Community Development Technologies Center, PV Jobs, TRUST South LA, St. Francis Center, United University Church, Coalition for Responsible Community Development, and Vermont Village Community Development Corporation.
5. The UNIDAD Coalition was represented by Public Counsel, Chatten-Brown & Carstens, Legal Aid Foundation of Los Angeles, Natural Resources Defense Council, and the Community Benefits Law Center.
6. Link to VIDEO: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GrD_FNilqYQ
7. TRUST stands for Tenemos que Reclamar y Unidos Salvar la Tierra (Spanish for “We Must Fight and Unite to Save the Land”), formerly called the Figueroa Corridor Community Land Trust.
8. An Environmental Impact Report (EIR) or Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) is required whenever a project is determined to have potentially significant impacts on the physical environment.

Diana Pei Wu is a frequent contributor to RP&E. She has worked on and written about youth organizing, environmental justice, climate justice, immigrant and refugee rights, and community planning and development in the age of gentrification.
The Oakland Renaissance: A Blessing for Some

By Eric K. Arnold

On February 4 this year, a long-dormant block on Oakland’s 14th Street came alive as throngs of people—newly-elected Mayor Jean Quan and City Councilmember Desley Brooks among them—flowed out the doors at the Joyce Gordon Gallery for the opening reception of "Aerosoul 2," a Black History Month event honoring African American urban calligraphers and style writers (otherwise known as graffiti artists).

Down the street, another gallery owned by Gordon was showing blown glass art by Aziz Diagne and further down, the recently reopened Events Center was holding a live rehearsal by the youth group, Pop Lyfe.

At the same time, just over a mile away, members of Oakland’s international street dance phenomenon, Turf Feinz, were wowing astonished crowds with gravity-defying moves at the Oakland Museum. And in the Uptown district, a large crowd had gathered to view a 100x100 foot projection installation known as the Great Wall of Oakland. Just south of that, public art and music performances, gallery openings, and burlesque shows were engaging hundreds at Oakland’s monthly Art Murmur.

“That was Oakland. That was diversity,” Gordon later said, proudly. “There were young Blacks, young whites, Latinos, Asians, families with babies in strollers, seniors like myself. It was truly a gumbo. It was a good mix. And that’s what we want to see all over.”

These dynamic happenings were all part of the First Friday events, the most visible symbol of Oakland’s arts-driven cultural renaissance, which has altered perceptions of a town long associated with high crime rates.

“That energy right now in Oakland around the arts is really exciting,” says Evelyn Orantes, Cultural Arts Developer for the Oakland Museum of California (OMCA). Since its re-launch in 2010, OMCA has become the hub for Oakland’s arts resurgence—its forward-thinking, multi-faceted programming, a magnet for both local residents and out-of-towners. “We showcase the richness of our community,” Orantes says, which in turn brings “positive energy” to Oakland.

Gordon agrees. The First Friday art walk, she says, has had a positive effect on economic development overall because “after the openings, everyone’s at the restaurants, or at the clubs.”

Oakland Links Arts to Commerce

Oakland has always been home to a large number of artists and grassroots arts organizations but has historically been overshadowed by the San Francisco arts scene. With the emergence of the Art Murmur (featured in the Wall Street Journal, among other publications), Oakland has found its own niche in the national arts scene.

Arts funding in Oakland is directly linked to economic development initiatives, such as redevelopment. According to Steven Huss, the city’s Cultural Arts Manager, the $1 million that the city invests in its cultural fund, leverages between $11 and $14 million annually. Hess believes the total economic impact of arts in Oakland is significantly higher, but says his office currently only tracks “nonprofit arts and culture organizations and their audiences,” so that figure doesn’t reflect the economic impact of the city’s public art program or for-profit arts businesses.

“City funding,” Huss explains, “allows organizations to find matching monies to produce and gener-
(Top) Turf Feinz at the Oakland Museum of California. ©2011 Eric K. Arnold

(Bottom) Aerosoul 2 Art Exhibit, Joyce Gordon Gallery in Oakland, California. ©2011 Christine Joy Ferrer/Eyes Opened Blog

www.eyesopened-blog.com
ate a lot of private spending on the arts in the city, [which in turn generates] ancillary spending on food... parking... travel and other entertainment.”

Because of its sizeable artist community, Huss says, Oakland has a “policy of awarding 51 percent or more of contracts to Oakland artists. We usually exceed that. It’s been 60-75 percent in the last few years. I don’t know of any other city that requires so much to be spent locally.”

In addition to supporting over 100 non-profit arts organizations through its cultural fund, the city also has a public art program whose 2011 budget earmarked over $843,000 for streetscapes and other projects aimed at improving Oakland’s image. That figure includes $64,000 for improvements to Cesar Chavez Park, located in the heavily Latino Fruitvale District; $75,000 for the West Oakland Teen Center, which serves a predominantly African American demographic; and $100,000 for a walkway at the 17th St. BART entrance—a gateway to the mostly-white Uptown business district—completing a project whose cost over two years totals $700,000.

Murmurs of Discontent Among the Excluded

The Art Murmur, which started in 2006, was part of the “10k” initiative launched by former Mayor Jerry Brown in 1998 to bring 10,000 new residents to Oakland. Although the initiative was not entirely successful (vacancy rates in some parts of the redeveloped...
area have been as high as 40 percent) the influx of new residents, combined with a burgeoning nightlife scene anchored by the restoration of the historic Fox Theater and the edgy hipster appeal of the Art Murmur have made the Uptown district an identifiable symbol of a “new” Oakland—less “Chocolate City,” more “multi-culti” melting pot.

Despite a 25 percent dip in its African American population over the last decade, Oakland remains extremely diverse compared to other cities in the Bay Area, in California, or the United States. Seventy-four percent of Oakland is non-white, with Blacks making up the largest ethnic population (27 percent), followed by Latinos (25 percent), and Asians (16 percent), according to the most recent U.S. Census.

The Art Murmur has been a big part of Oakland’s rebranding—touted on the city’s website as part of its “Sustainable Oakland” initiative. But it has also created different Oaklands when it comes to cultural arts and economic development.

According to Elena Serrano of the East Side Arts Alliance (ESAA), the nonprofit collective that produces MXJF, the festival received just $2,000 in city funding in 2010—barely enough to pay for park rental and police. ESAA had to come up with the remaining $28,000 needed to produce the festival, which is $8,000 more than what the organization receives from Oakland’s cultural fund program for a whole year.

On the other hand, Art & Soul has an annual budget of $650,000—90 percent of which comes from “admissions, concessions, booth fees and sponsorships,” according to Samee Roberts, Oakland’s cultural arts and marketing manager. “We are operating a successful small business/enterprise within a government bureaucracy, which is quite unique and a formidable task,” she adds. The 2010 festival website lists hotels, a winery, McDonald’s, and a commuter transit program among its major sponsors.

“If the city’s response is that the Malcolm X Jazz Festival should be corporate-sponsored, corporations go where the money is,” says Serrano. “Everything cannot be based on wealth. There have to be some other priorities that drive action.”

ESAA’s priority is to “build a sense of unity and community” in the neighborhood by offering “world-class art,” supporting youth development, and inviting neighborhood vendors and nonprofits to participate in the MXJF. The highest ticket price for an ESAA event is $10; many events are offered free.

If the cultural arts are only used as a tool to generate wealth, cities like Oakland run the risk of creating a system of haves and have-nots, which only exacerbates existing problems. Producing numbers to justify the allocation of cultural funds to redevelopment is one thing, but “how do you measure community health?” Serrano asks.

“We don’t generate a huge amount of revenue,” admits Serrano. “However, what we do [produce are] young people who have some sense of how things work in their city or in the world and have invested in their own talent in making things better, if you can measure that. That’s a good return on the city’s investment.”
a backlash among long-term residents upset by the gentrification of their neighborhoods, and ethnic artists who feel excluded.

The official Art Murmur website map (http://www.oaklandartmurmur.org/) lists galleries from Telegraph and 48th down to Broadway and 22nd—effectively confining the Murmur’s boundaries to the North Gate/Temple and Uptown districts—neighborhoods where gentrification has been the most prominent.

Gordon, who sits on Oakland’s Cultural Arts Commission, says African American artists have rarely been featured in First Friday showings. When they do exhibit in Uptown galleries, it is on off days.

Still, Huss characterizes Uptown as “a really good success story,” and hopes that the momentum will carry over to other parts of the city. His statement speaks to a common perception in the artist community that in the last decade, much of the city’s attention around the cultural arts has focused on funneling resources to the redevelopment zones at the expense of poorer and more ethnically-diverse neighborhoods.

There is a dichotomy in “the way the city funds things in the neighborhoods, as opposed to things which are being used to create more wealth [and] tied to economic development,” says Elena Serrano, a founding member of the East Side Arts Alliance (ESAA) collective, a nonprofit arts organization based in the San Antonio neighborhood.

The reality of Oakland is that “the neighborhoods, specifically our neighborhood, deep East Oakland, West Oakland, are so far away from being hubs for economic development,” Serrano says. “We feel like our track is being completely ignored.”

Art, but No Money In the ‘hood

Oakland’s Refa One, an African American graphic designer and aerosol artist who co-curated the “Aerosoul2” exhibit, says that it has been a struggle to get city funding for art in the ‘hood. In 2010, Refa received a $20,000 commission through the Community Economic Development Agency (CEDA) to do a mural along I-880 facing the freeway. But when he approached city officials for funding to do a project of that caliber in his neighborhood, which is full of urban blight and does not have any edifying or uplifting imagery, they could not spare the resources.

“City officials say they want Oakland to change [but] they do not invest in these neighborhoods for artists to bring about that change,” says Refa.

His point is well taken. The controversial and divisive civil litigation against street gangs in North Oakland and Fruitvale pursued by the City Attorney’s office has cost upwards of $750,000 (with “mixed results,” according to Mayor Quan). But Refa claims that two murals he and other artists created for free at 14th and Campbell—a West Oakland “hotspot”—had the same intended effect: to curb drug activity and increase the perception of public safety.

“This corner was a highly-contested drug zone since the 1980s,” Refa explains. “People have been shot and murdered there. Lots of drug traffic, gambling... very disruptive to the neighborhood. There would be 40 dudes there in a dice game. I didn’t want to come home some days because I knew at that corner by my house, it was gonna be drama.”

After the murals were painted, the dope dealers told him, “We respect what y’all trying to do, we gon’ leave this block.” And they did. Proof that community-oriented cultural arts projects can effectively
support youth development and public safety efforts.

Refa’s experience is paralleled by that of graffiti artist Desi, whose nonprofit organization, Community Rejuvenation Project, has created a series of murals—both commissioned and illegal—promoting peace and nonviolence in high-crime areas throughout West and East Oakland. Desi secured permission from a building owner and CEDA funds to do a mural at 41st and International Boulevard, in the heart of the Fruitvale District, where graffiti often marks the presence of Norteno street gangs. Over the course of several months he led a team of artists, including aerosol legend Vulcan and numerous neighborhood youth, to create the approximately 4500 sq. ft mural on the side of a Smart & Final building. One key focus of the Community Rejuvenation Project, Desi says, is to further the notion of cultural arts districts and arts corridors throughout Oakland with concentrated works in a specific area, such as the Funktown Arts District they created with murals within a one-block radius of Park Boulevard.

Desi points to the closure of the Parkway Theater and its adverse effect on local business. CRP’s murals on the Parkway’s building and in surrounding areas, he claims, “bring that neighborhood back to life.”

ESAA’s Serrano warns against an overly-bureaucratic view of cultural arts that is weighted toward the economic bottom line. She would rather talk about the other bottom line—community health. “That’s where the return on investment is. That’s where our strength is,” she says.

Serrano is also wary of creating a cultural divide along racial, economic, and class lines. “I don’t want the city of Oakland to act like arts and culture is some dessert that not everybody deserves,” she says. “Everybody deserves art and culture. Everybody comes from culture.”

Despite Some Discontent, Mindblowing Changes

“Gentrification is always a charge that’s leveled at any place that artists move into and improve, then get priced out of,” says Huss. “We’re very mindful of the fact that it sometimes seems like all of the focus is on Uptown/Downtown. But we’ve always been funding all corners of the city where there are any arts groups. And [we] want to start to diversify that too.”

However, Huss concedes that securing city funding for art projects is somewhat dependent on the ability of artists and arts organizations to negotiate bureaucratic procedures and protocols and work within the guidelines and inherent limitations of established programs. “There are a lot of exciting ideas which don’t always fit into what we do.” But it is evident from current and future projects being funded that diversity and outreach to underserved communities are part of the plan. The panels that parcel out arts funding “are very keen [on] things that relate to social justice,” Huss says, “we really want art to also make an impact.”

An example he points to is a cross-disciplinary food justice project conceived by activist-artist
Favianna Rodriguez, which is “all about educating the community in the Fruitvale district about healthy eating and buying locally.” Another project, conceived by artist Rennie Young, is an oral history archive at an East Oakland library, which grew out of a public art commission for a stained glass window. Huss also hopes to work with ESAA on an art park in the San Antonio district. The city is in the process of drafting a 10-year plan for cultural arts development, which will involve organizations from all over Oakland, he says.

Unfortunately, Governor Brown’s proposal to slash redevelopment funds from California’s cities—ironic, given his use of those same funds to steer millions of dollars into Uptown—threatens to kill many proposed streetscape projects in Oakland’s underserved neighborhoods and could also have a ripple effect on arts funding overall.

Also unknown at this point is whether Mayor Quan’s administration will approach the marriage of arts and economic development with emphasis on establishing cultural arts districts throughout Oakland—as per her campaign slogan, “Block by Block”—or whether a lion’s share of resources will continue to be funneled into areas with newer and wealthier residents. At present, there are some hopeful signs. The 14th street corridor is quietly transforming into a cultural arts district that could soon rival Uptown as an entertainment destination. The emergence of new nightclubs, restaurants, art spaces, and cafes on and around 14th, in close proximity to existing centers like the Malonga Casquelord Center for the Arts, has created an increased sense of vibrancy and the once-deserted streets now have foot traffic after nightfall.

D’Wayne Wiggins, a founding member of pioneering neo-soul group Tony Toni Tone and Oakland community activist, recently signed a multiyear lease for the Events Center, which he plans to rename The House of Music. Wiggins envisions a multiuse space housing a café, restaurant, dance studio, music studio, historical and cultural archive, and live performance space. Such a venue fits perfectly into the progressive notion of equally upholding both arts and economic development in Oakland to create true sustainability. “We’re gonna make that street so hot!” he says. “This change which is going on now is blowing my mind.”

To Wiggins and others, the mix of new energy with Oakland’s historical contributions to the arts represents not just a cultural renaissance, but a cultural revolution.
Europe’s “Living Cities” Model
Coming to the States

By Tamar Shapiro

In October 2010, Living Cities, a collaborative of 22 major funders, brought together the mayors of five U.S. cities in Detroit to announce a significant new investment program to support revitalization and economic development in their communities. The host city received over $20 million in grants, program-related investments, and loans that will be invested in the Woodward Corridor under this initiative. The investment is intended to be more than yet another infusion of desperately needed cash. It is meant to herald a new integrated approach to reinvestment and redevelopment that could serve as a model for other cities.1

It is a strategy that integrates economic development, community development, housing, and transportation in one neighborhood or area. While relatively new for the United States, European cities have been taking an integrated approach to planning for years and can offer valuable lessons despite differing legal and political structures. In particular, older, industrial cities in the United States, which are addressing staggering challenges due to declining population, high vacancy rates, and distressing unemployment and poverty levels, might find inspiration on the other side of the Atlantic. A number of European cities faced with similar challenges over the past two decades have had marked success in revitalizing their economies and attracting and retaining residents.

From Distressed to Impressive

Manchester, England, once a poster child for industrial collapse, is now generally considered the second most important economic engine in the UK—driven in large part by the new media industry. Population levels have been rising since 2001. Torino, Italy, the seat of the Fiat Motor Company and long a prototypical one-company town, has also succeeded in diversifying its economy, building significant new strengths around the food and media industries. Leipzig, in former East Germany, suffered an almost complete industrial collapse and a rapid loss of population after 1989, but has seen steady population growth and reduced vacancy and unemployment rates since the early 2000s.

Each of these cities has significant challenges remaining. Recent studies show that Manchester has a higher level of child poverty than any other city in the U.K.,2 while Leipzig was labeled the poorest large city in Germany by a city-commissioned report.3 These statistics raise the question, what impact has the revitalization had on lower-income residents of these cities? The answer is complicated. On the job front, both Leipzig and Manchester have attracted significant new employers, but have struggled without much success to reintegrate the former industrial workforce into these new jobs. Many neighborhoods in Leipzig, Manchester, Torino, and other post-industrial cities have witnessed improved quality of life and economic vitality, while a weak housing market has created a cycle of decline and concentrated poverty in other neighborhoods. Of course, any revitalization and economic restructuring effort is a long-term process and its success should be measured not just over years, but decades.

The Gate Project: A Tale of Two Torinos

Despite this mixed picture, there are certain projects and programs that stand out, suggesting that the kind of integrated approach now being promoted by Living Cities can prove successful in revitalizing neighborhoods in a way that benefits all residents. One example is the Gate Project, a multifaceted revitalization effort in Torino’s Porto Palazzo neighborhood. Torino’s ups
and downs over the past half century mirror much of what Detroit has been experiencing. Once an economic powerhouse in Northern Italy with 80 percent of its industrial activity derived from the automobile industry, Torino saw a downturn in its fortunes beginning with the oil crisis of the 1970s. A dramatic shedding of jobs and a steady decline in population marked the next few decades until Valentino Castellani became the first directly elected mayor of Torino in 1993. Castellani ushered in an era of recovery and growth that relied on a wide-ranging strategic plan developed by a committee of public and private sector leaders, with significant input from the public.4

But even as Torino prospered, Porto Palazzo remained one of the city’s most distressed neighborhoods in the early part of the 21st century. With an unemployment rate more than double that of the city as a whole and a reputation for crime, the area also housed a significant percentage of the city’s immigrant population. The largest open-air marketplace in Europe is located in Porto Palazzo—a bustling, chaotic place that traditionally served as a market for everything from clothes, mint, and bread, to stolen electronics and weapons. In the words of Luca Cianfriglia, director of the Gate Project, the Porto Palazzo market was a “fascinating and problematic place.”5

In 1998, Torino launched a revitalization project for the area with the motto: “The Gate—living not leaving.” With funding from the European Union and leadership from a public/private committee, the Gate Project undertook major renovations to the area’s physical infrastructure. When the initial funding expired, Torino launched a successful fundraising effort to continue the project. The Gate’s organizing committee took on the role of a local development agency and managed the revitalization process with a strong emphasis on public engagement.6

One of its more recent undertakings was an effort to reduce conflict, violence, and illegality at the Porto Palazzo market. Most of the tension arose from conflicts between legal vendors, sellers of illegal goods, and those who are part of a “gray market,” i.e., unlicensed vendors of legal goods. In partnership with the police and the City Council, project leaders began to engage local vendors with the goal of creating a resident-led association to manage the market, to create and enforce appropriate rules, and reduce traffic in stolen goods, while providing legitimacy and support to previously unlicensed vendors. This multi-year process, which culminated in the launch of the association in 2010, resulted in a significant reduction in criminal activity at the market, according to Cianfriglia.

Importantly, this market legitimization strategy was never viewed in isolation, but as part of a wider approach for the neighborhood that integrated the physical, social, cultural, environmental, and economic aspects of revitalization. While reaching out to vendors at the market, the project also offered vocational training for young immigrants, advising landlords and tenants with regard to the rental process, and providing grants for the rehabilitation of facades and common areas. Additionally, the project instituted a series of ongoing cultural and sporting activities to encourage greater resident involvement.

One key achievement of this multidisciplinary strategy was the establishment of a broad coalition of active and involved residents and service providers working across a range of disciplines and government levels. In the words of Cianfriglia: “The mission of the association was to start from the citizens and link all the way up to the City Council, so that the project was not designed at a desk, but was rather an organic development… if you support a wide dialogue and collaboration (including local residents, the City Council, the police, developers, and even the rubbish collector), then you are a node in a network that can link all the necessary activities to revitalize the neighborhood.”
The Social City: Integrated Urban Development

Why are some European cities seemingly so far ahead when it comes to fashioning integrated strategies for urban development? Though much of the innovation must be credited to local leaders with bold, place-based visions, it is unlikely that integrated approaches would be as widespread without the strong support of the European Union (EU) and national governments. In May 2007, all the government ministers responsible for urban development in the EU member states signed the Leipzig Charter on Sustainable European Cities, which explicitly promotes integrated planning. In addition, a number of EU funding sources can or, in some cases, must be used to support integrated urban development.

National governments in Europe have also created similar funding programs, some aimed specifically at the revitalization of lower-income neighborhoods. In the late 1990s, for example, the German government launched the joint federal-state Socially Integrative City program (a.k.a. “Social City”) in response to the perceived increase in segregation by race and income within urban Germany. Among its goals was to link rehabilitation of physical infrastructure and buildings with social and economic support for families in distressed neighborhoods. To facilitate integration of different activities within a neighborhood and ensure that local residents were driving the revitalization process, the program established “neighborhood management” structures. The underlying idea—similar to that illustrated by Porto Palazzo—is to incorporate residents into the process of creating an integrated spatial, social, and economic strategy for the neighborhood.

The Social City program has its share of critics. To be sure, the neighborhood management structure is not always successful at engaging participation from the most disadvantaged residents, particularly those with language barriers. And any program that targets investments for neighborhoods identified as needy risks further stigmatizing the area. Nevertheless, there is strong underlying support in Europe for integrated urban development at citywide and neighborhood scales and a growing recognition that linking physical, social, and economic revitalization is an absolute necessity for distressed neighborhoods. Perhaps this explains the uproar among municipal officials in Germany in response to the recent federal budget, which cuts funding for the Social City program by about 70 percent and eliminates the possibility of using federal funds for projects that integrate physical and social elements of urban development. We can only hope that the Living Cities initiative in Detroit represents a growing commitment toward integrated planning and development in our most distressed neighborhoods, and that federal, state, and local officials will support this approach even in these very difficult economic times.

Endnotes
5. Interview with Luca Cianfriglia, director of the Gate Project, March 9, 2011.
7. Information on Social City can be found at www.soziestadt.de.
9. The German Association of Cities issued a press release in February 2011, strongly condemning the funding cuts and the reduced emphasis on integrated planning. See http://www.staedtetag.de/10/pressecke/dst_beschluesse/artikel20110209/00317/index.html

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Chicago School Trains Inner City Youth for Manufacturing Jobs

By Erica Swinney

The 2007 founding of the Austin Polytechnical Academy, a public high school on Chicago’s Westside with a focus on college preparation and careers in engineering and manufacturing, began with the closing of a candy factory. Brach’s—the largest candy manufacturer in the world at that time—was threatening to move production to Mexico and eliminate more than 2,100 jobs following a series of misjudgements by the company’s new owners. In other words, the company’s desire for short-term profit was going to create long-term job and income losses for the workers and their community—a common enough scenario all over Chicago and the rest of the United States.

In 1990, the International Brotherhood of Teamsters (IBT) Local 738 and the Garfield/Austin Inter-faith Action Network (GAIN), approached the Center for Labor and Community Research (CLCR) for help with research and strategy to tackle a problem in their community. Assured by the knowledge that Brach’s was still a viable company despite recent crises, CLCR, IBT, and GAIN spearheaded the Save Brach’s Coalition, which organized about 100 Chicago and Westside community, civic, and religious organizations. Although their efforts did not prevent Brach’s from closing its Chicago plant in 1996, it placed a magnifying lens over the critical role of manufacturing in local economic development and quality of life. Unlike any other sector, manufacturing generates middle-class incomes, creates five new jobs in related sectors for every manufacturing job created, and increases the local tax base because most manufacturing companies are domestically owned, privately-held, small businesses.

In 2001, CLCR and the Chicago Federation of Labor (CFL) published a report—“Creating a Manufacturing Career Path System in Cook County”—detailing the gaps in the workforce development and training system as it related to the manufacturing industry. It shows: (1) the lack of standards to define and measure quality training; (2) the paucity of required skills training within the public school system and community colleges; and (3) the absence of identifiable recruitment mechanisms to attract young people into the field. The report also outlined ways to address these issues, which led to the creation of the Chicago Manufacturing Renaissance Council in 2005, a multisector coalition of government, labor, business, and community leaders seeking to make Chicago the global leader in advanced manufacturing. The Renaissance Council’s first major project was the development and design of the Austin Polytechnical Academy.

A School After Arizmendiarrrieta’s Heart

Austin Polytech is not just another vocational school trying to plug Kid A into Job B. Inspired by international best practices in community and economic development, it serves to catalyze community development instead of simply being a portal for the best and brightest to leave the community.

In 1943, a catholic priest named Don Jose Maria Arizmendiarrrieta founded an engineering high school in the small industrial town of Mondragon in the Basque region of Spain after it was devastated by the Civil War and economic depression. Arizmendiarrrieta believed that if the youth learned skills in engineering and manufacturing based on Catholic social values they would start businesses that could help improve the community by providing gainful employment, which would generate the wealth needed for rebuilding the community infrastructure. Five of the first
batch of graduates did start their own manufacturing company in 1956 making small stoves that sold successfully all over Spain. More importantly though, the company was created as a worker cooperative grounded in community-building values, which ensured that profits were reinvested in the business to provide more jobs, foster new businesses, and thus help the broader community. Today, the Mondragon Cooperative Corporation is a network of 100 cooperative businesses employing over 85,000 people in Spain and around the world. It still espouses the same values of community-driven economic development.

In 2009, when CLCR sponsored nine Austin Polytech students on a trip to Mondragon, they were impressed by the lack of visible poverty—the clean streets and quiet neighborhoods—and surprised to learn that almost everybody who wanted a job had one. While Austin Polytech is still in its formative stages, the school’s mission of educating the next generation of leaders in advanced manufacturing holds a strong promise for community-driven development and revitalization.

Good Overcomes Ugly Side of Manufacturing

Manufacturing has a mixed legacy in the United States. Although always credited with creating a middle class, manufacturing also has an ugly history of pervasive racism in its assignment of the most dangerous and dirty work to people of color. Following the wave of plant closings in the 1970s and ‘80s, all the positive effects of manufacturing—hundreds of thousands of jobs and living wages—evaporated, leaving behind the empty shells of factories, toxic contamination, and massive urban blight. So, when the Renaissance Council and CLCR approached the Austin community with a proposal for a public school dedicated to preparing youth for careers in manufacturing, the community feedback was ambiguous.

Critics in the community accused the proposal of trying to repeat the racist patterns of manufacturing from the past and targeting African American youth to serve as grist for the mills of industry. Critics in the business sector expressed deep concern and cynicism over the ability of public education—especially inner-city public education—to meet the needs of today’s high-tech manufacturing industry. And critics in the educator community, including several closely associated with the school, were hostile to the notion of linking education to manufacturing, which they believed only led to dead-end jobs.

It took persistent and meticulous engagement with stakeholders before many of the critics and skeptics were won over. CLCR repeatedly stressed the importance of integrating college and career education—
the benefit of rigorous college preparatory academics for students of all abilities and the value of contextual learning through hands-on career preparation experiences. We also emphasized the nationally-recognized industry credentials students could earn while in high school. For example, individuals who earn National Institute for Metalworking Skills (NIMS) credentials are typically preferentially hired and could start entry-level, career-track positions earning an average of $16/hour. Moreover, the average compensation (wages and benefits) in the manufacturing industry is about $69,217 per year, compared to $46,789 per year in the medical industry, and a paltry $27,411 per year in the retail industry.

CLCR also pointed out that manufacturing is no longer simple assemblyline work but often involves designing and producing increasingly sophisticated and precise components for the most advanced technologies—from MRI machines to wind turbines. Enhanced opportunities for business ownership was another selling point. A CLCR study of 800 manufacturing companies in Chicago revealed that 40 percent of companies with an owner aged 55 or older were at risk of closing solely because there was no successor. Finally, CLCR also shared its vision for an innovation center to facilitate research and development for the wind turbine industry and its belief that Austin could one day be a global leader in the development of technologies and components for the renewable energy industries. Austin Polytech could be an integral part of cultivating the next generation of talent that develops the technologies and starts the businesses to manufacture them. It could be a springboard for the redevelopment of the entire community—in economically, socially, and environmentally sustainable ways—guided by the skills and values of its students.

Perhaps the most persuasive argument in the end was the ongoing development of a dynamic program to directly engage Austin Polytech students, most of whom were ignorant of what a career in manufacturing and engineering entailed, prior to enrolling in the school. Every one of the school’s 380 students is required to take three to four years of pre-engineering courses and a NIMS machining course. To date, 86 have earned a NIMS credential.

Career Exposure Key Part of Curriculum

CLCR staff works closely with Polytech teachers and administrators to coordinate a variety of career exposure activities for the students. Since each of the stakeholders—students, teachers, administrators, and manufacturers—has different expectations, needs, and interests, there is a steep learning curve for all involved and adjustments required all around. In addition, CLCR facilitates extracurricular leadership development programs, such as SkillsUSA.

Most freshmen and sophomores go on at least one manufacturing facility or trade show fieldtrip per year. The experience usually is an eye-opener for the students who may have certain preconceptions about manufacturing facilities. A freshman trip to Winzeler Gear last summer revealed a factory facility full of sunlight and art on the walls and engaged employees...
working with highly sophisticated machinery. The students learned that the employer had paid for several of the staff engineers to earn their Masters degrees. And that the factory, like most of today’s manufacturers, relied on innovation rather than on manual labor to remain competitive and profitable in a globalized economy.12

With juniors and seniors, the school focuses on job shadowing, summer jobs, and internships. Last summer, 30 students found employment in the manufacturing sector. A great deal of preparation and evaluation goes into ensuring that these are high-quality experiences for the students and the manufacturing companies.

CLCR also looks for opportunities to bring manufacturers and employers into the classroom to work with teachers on finding intersections between lesson plans and real-world applications. Through a unique partnership with the John Marshall Law School—known for its intellectual property law program—Austin Polytech was able to offer a patent law workshop over two semesters, which resulted in 11 students collectively earning $108,000 in scholarships to John Marshall. Recently, the school started a new leadership in sustainability initiative in which 10 freshmen are learning about environmental sustainability in their community and careers in the green economy.

The ultimate goal is to have students experience the full breadth of manufacturing career possibilities—from machinist to engineer, from business owner to patent lawyer, from environmental sustainability expert to nanotechnology scientist.

A School of Dreams and Possibilities

Operating within a disenfranchised community with one of the highest rates of violent crime13 in Chicago and an unemployment rate of over 20 percent,14 and where the average incoming 9th grader reads at the 4th grade level,15 Austin Polytech seeks to create a nexus between its students and local small manufacturers who are facing a significant shortage of skilled employees,16 despite increased automation and the recession. In the short term, the school hopes to provide students with access to skilled, living-wage career paths and in the long term, cultivate a fertile landscape for leadership development and empowerment, business ownership and entrepreneurship that can fuel community revitalization.

CLCR is currently working with leaders in the San Francisco Bay Area Manufacturing Renaissance Council to explore the possibility of replicating the Austin Polytech approach in West Oakland. The idea is to help guide others through the opportunities and challenges inherent in this model—not only to create clear pathways out of poverty for low-income people of color, but also to effectively use economic development as a tool for long-term community revitalization driven by community values.

Endnotes
2. Ibid.  
8. Based on the starting wage for all Computer Numerical Control (CNC) operators and machinists hired through ManufacturingWorks, Chicago, IL, from July 1, 2008 through January 31, 2009.  
13. Loury, Alden K. “If Chicago’s West and South sides were their own cities, they’d be the deadliest and most violent in America.” The Chicago Reporter, June 16, 2010. www.chicagoreporter.com.  
15. Data results from Reading Scantron Test administered by Chicago Public Schools to Austin Polytech 9th graders, October 2010.  

Erica Swinney works at the Center for Labor and Community Research (www.clcr.org). For more information on Austin Polytechnical Academy, visit: www.austinpolytech.org.
Equitable Growth: Turning Diversity into an Asset

By Angela Glover Blackwell

The face of America is changing. Any day now, more than half the babies born will be nonwhite. In the past decade, people of color accounted for 92 percent of our total population growth—up from 65 percent in the previous two decades. California, Hawaii, New Mexico, Texas, and the District of Columbia already have nonwhite majorities, as do nearly 50 metropolitan regions. At a time when much about the future is uncertain, our demographic future is clear: by the year 2050, we will be a majority people of color nation.

Our growing diversity can and should be a source of strength in an ever-globalizing international economy, but this cannot happen without a significant change in course. Inequality is at an all-time high and racial disparities in income, wealth, health, education, and opportunity are wide and persistent.

For instance, half of all new jobs in the next 10 years will require postsecondary education but the share of adults with some advanced education is projected to decline in all but six states. Among 18 to 24 year olds, only 32 percent of African Americans, and 26 percent of Latinos are enrolled in college. One reason is a lower percentage of high school graduates coming through the pipeline, with African Americans and Latinos dropping out at two and three times the rate of whites, respectively.

Inequity as a Structural Economic Weakness

By not sufficiently investing in the emerging majority, the nation is hemorrhaging talent. Rapid demographic transition—combined with an economic model that has failed to produce widespread prosperity—may be bringing us to the point where inequity becomes a structural economic weakness. Traditionally, economists have believed that a certain amount of inequality was beneficial as it provided an incentive for growth. The theory was that inequality created incentives that drove people to work harder. But new research by Manuel Pastor, Chris Benner, Mark Partridge, and others shows that inequality actually is a drag on growth, whereas greater racial and economic inclusion corresponds with more robust economic growth.

It is becoming clear that to truly “win the future,” we must turn our diversity into a competitive asset. We need to recognize that equity is not just a moral issue for our society but a superior model for economic growth that can pave the way to prosperity.
Four First Steps for Equitable Growth

Economic inclusion—integrating everyone into the mainstream economy—will maximize the potential of the American workforce while reducing the social costs of joblessness and underemployment. Simultaneously, rebuilding a broad middle class will provide the necessary consumer base to stimulate economic growth and catalyze business investment.

Clearly then, the country is in need of a set of strategies that can help lift up those at the bottom of the income distribution, grow the middle class, and provide upward mobility for all. We propose the following four first steps towards that goal:

1. Reframe the national conversation about equity to focus on the economic imperative so that it engages many more people—especially, leaders in the private sector.

2. Craft a policy platform for equitable growth by defining a set of priorities at the federal, state, and local levels that link disenfranchised people and places to opportunities in economic growth. The platform should cover the key arenas of education, economic development, workforce development, infrastructure, transportation, and tax policy.

3. Disseminate local equity innovations. The inspiring efforts highlighted in *Race, Poverty & the Environment* exemplify innovations being incubated in communities across the country—efforts that will generate a more inclusive, sustainable economic recovery and eventually a more prosperous America. These innovations need to be widely shared and taken to scale.

4. Cultivate equity leadership in the economic growth arena. To integrate equity concerns into strategies for growth and competitiveness, we must draw from the wisdom and experience of local equity leaders. These leaders should be recruited to sit on the commissions, task forces, and other policy bodies deliberating about our competitiveness strategy.

Equity Summit 2011: Detroit (November 8-11)

For three days this November, thousands of activists, organizers, policymakers, elected officials, philanthropists, researchers, and equity advocates will gather in Detroit for the Equity Summit 2011: Healthy Communities, Strong Regions, A Prosperous America. (www.policylink.org/summit.)

As with the previous three national summits convened by PolicyLink, Equity Summit 2011 will provide a space to reflect, learn, share, and strategize, especially about equitable economic growth. The summit can also serve as a launching pad for new ideas. A plenary about infrastructure at the Equity Summit 2008 in New Orleans, for example, galvanized a whole new field of advocacy pertaining to infrastructure equity. Detroit will provide an excellent platform for a new conversation about why more equitable growth is needed, and how to make it a reality.

Angela Glover Blackwell is the founder and chief executive officer of PolicyLink. For more information about Equity Summit 2011: Healthy Communities, Strong Regions, A Prosperous America, visit www.policylink.org/Summit.