

“WE ARE A FORCE TO BE RECKONED WITH”: BLACK AND LATINA WOMEN’S LEADERSHIP IN THE CONTEMPORARY U.S. LABOR MOVEMENT

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In the face of growing race/gender labor market inequality, women-of-color unionists are calling for greater responsiveness of the labor movement to the needs of workers of color. This article details how women of color within the labor movement are pushing for structural change within the institution to increase the voice of women and people of color in the labor movement and explores the significant impact these women are having on the institution of labor. In noting the emergence of black and Latina female leaders, the study explores what factors propelled and continue to motivate their careers, and asks what effect, if any, their leadership has on the labor movement’s agenda with respect to diversity. To address these questions, the study relies on interviews with key actors affecting institutional change: black and Latina female union leaders, survey data, resolutions, speeches, current labor force data on black and Latina workers, and data on union involvement by race and gender.

Clayola Brown, head of the Labor Coalition for Community Action, addressed an assembly of minority unionists who gathered at a summit held before the 2005 American Federation of Labor–Congress of Industrial Organizations (AFL–CIO) convention and declared, “We are a force to be reckoned with.” In the face of persistent and growing race/gender labor market inequality, women-of-color unionists are calling for greater responsiveness of the labor movement to the needs of workers of color. These leaders are convinced that unionization and collective organizing are vital routes to addressing these problems and believe in the promise of the labor movement. While they hold the labor movement to be a crucial vehicle to address the problems of minority workers, they feel that fundamental changes within the house of labor are necessary for it to do so. As democratic organizations, unions should represent the interests of all their members (Clark and Gray 1991; Strauss 1991). These leaders are calling for the inclusion of minority leaders in real decision making and for the labor movement to actively pursue a civil rights agenda.

This article details how women of color within the labor movement are pushing for structural change within the institution to improve the labor market status and increase the voice of women and people of color in the labor movement, and explores the significant impact these women are having on the

institution of labor. In noting the emergence of black and Latina female leaders, the article explores what factors propelled and continue to motivate their careers. This article also assesses the policies minority leaders are advocating to address the problems of women of color. Throughout, the article draws on personal interviews conducted with key black and Latina female union leaders, union documents relating to recent diversity initiatives (resolutions, constitutional amendments, speeches) as well as labor force and survey data on black and Latina workers.

Persistent Inequality: A Labor Market Profile of Black and Latina Women in the U.S.

The initiatives begun by the black and Latina union leaders interviewed in this study arose out of their dissatisfaction with their own working conditions and their concern with that of other women of color. Women of all racial and ethnic groups in the U.S. tend to work in female occupations and are rewarded significantly less than men of all races/ethnicities for their work. However, black and Latina women are uniquely disadvantaged in the labor market relative to both minority men and white women on a number of dimensions.

One of the most critical sites of divergence for black and Latina women from other women in the labor force is in their occupational differentiation from white women and all men. Black and Latina women tend to be concentrated at the bottom of female occupations. Although all women are more likely to work in predominantly female occupations, white women are more likely than black and Latina women to work in the highest status and thus higher-paid occupations: teacher, secretary, and manager (Lovell, Hartmann, and Werschkul forthcoming; Reskin 1999). Further education does not seem to fully account for these disparities. Bound and Dresser (1999) found that one-third of college-educated black women are employed in clerical jobs (Bound and Dresser 1999). Because race gaps in pay are largely attributable to the segregation of women of color into different types of occupations, these differences are significant.

Women of color face further difficulty moving out of low-status, low-paying jobs. In their study of black and white clerical workers, Power and Rosenberg (1993) found that black women are less likely to advance out of clerical work than are white women, and that the return to additional training and education increases their earnings less so than it does for white women. Latinas are worse off than black women in this respect, as they are overconcentrated in service, farm, and blue-collar work, and the least likely of all groups to be professionals. Their occupational differentiation from white women, the most privileged of female workers, is higher than black women's; that is, they are less likely than black women to work in the same type of occupations that white women do (Reskin 1999). A large number of Latina workers are subject to seasonal and temporary work, largely as migrant workers. They face some of the harshest working conditions. Three-quarters are in the secondary labor market and they have the lowest rate of unionization of all groups (Amott and Mathaei 1996). In

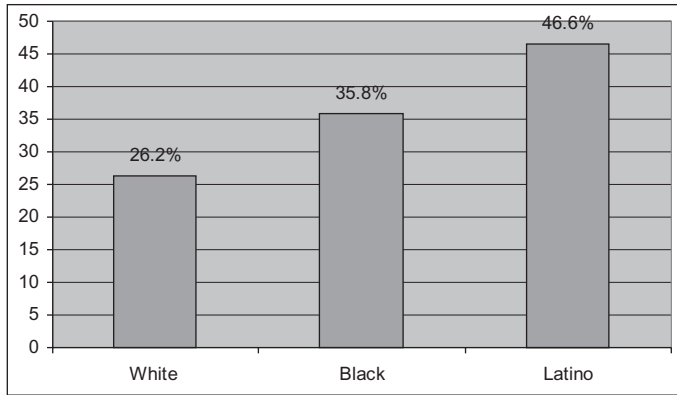


Figure 1. Percent of Women Earning Poverty-Level Wages, 2001
Note: Bernstein, Mischel, and Boushey (2003), dollar amount \$8.30/hour.

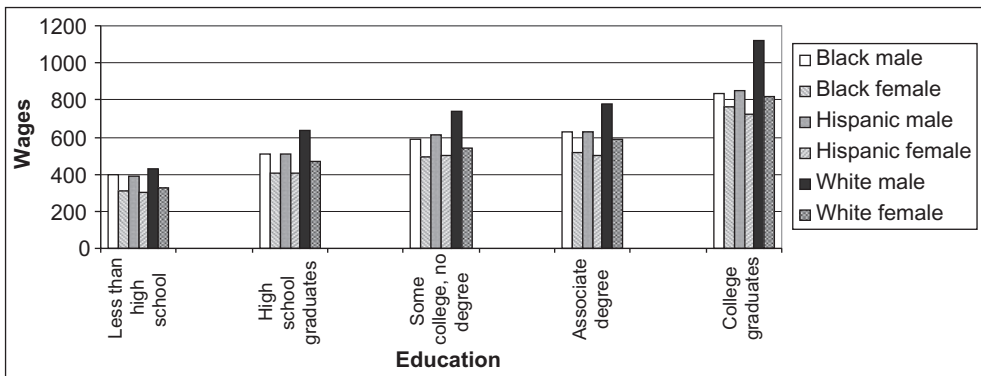


Figure 2. Median Weekly Earnings Among Full-Time Workers

border states, union workers face constant harassment. Additionally, as single-earner households rise among Latinas, so does poverty.

Concentration in low-status female work accounts for women's low earnings. Figure 1 shows the percentage of women in each racial/ethnic group earning poverty-level wages (Bernstein, Mischel, and Boushey 2003). The racial hierarchy again is straightforward, with nearly half of Latinas earning poverty-level wages, followed by black women at 10 percentage points lower, and white women the lowest at 26.5 percent. These earnings deficits are a particularly acute problem for black women, who are more likely to be single earners in households than are other women. Worse still, these income disparities are widening.

The median wages of full-time male and female workers by educational attainment is shown in Figure 2. It is evident that there are significant race and gender differences. Men of all races earn more than their female counterparts. There are racial differences among women and men as well. Black and Latina women are the lowest earners of all the race/gender groups, including white

women. Additionally, because minority women tend to work more hours per week, these figures may mask further inequality. These figures only include those able to find full-time work, which in today's "flexible" economy represent the most advantaged workers relative to the most vulnerable and marginal workers (disproportionately minority workers). Thus, it represents another dimension that understates the overall disparities in the labor market.

Employment discrimination continues to pervade hiring practices in the labor market (Bertrand and Mullainathan 2004; Goldin and Rouse 2000; Turner, Fix, and Struyk 1991). The most rigorous evidence of hiring discrimination is found in audit studies. These studies consistently reveal a clear preference employers have for white male workers and an accompanying reticence to hiring other categories of workers; they are certainly suggestive of the barriers women of color face in finding good jobs. Audit studies send equally qualified applicants of different races to apply for the same job. These studies have shown that white men are more likely to be hired than equally qualified black and Latino workers (Turner, Fix, and Struyk 1991). Kirschenman and Neckerman (1992) found that employers' stereotypes of black workers are gendered. That is, they hold different beliefs about black women than they do black men. Browne and Kennelly's (1999) interviews of Atlanta employers found that employers' misconception of black female workers as single mothers element was pervasive. The authors' complementary survey of Atlanta's workforce, however, revealed that this presumption was not born out, not even among the so-called "low-skilled" workforce; the majority of black women did not have children under the age of eighteen. However, these facts count for nothing apparently when employers make uninformed hiring decisions.

Given prevailing weak antidiscrimination law enforcement, the failure of increased education to eradicate these disparities, and apathy in society at large, these problems are not going away by themselves. Women-of-color leaders in the labor movement feel the unique social justice orientation of the labor movement makes it most suitable to address this inequality and the problems of minority female workers.

Black and Latina Women's Growing Involvement in the U.S. Labor Movement

Black and Latina women have been fighting to improve their and their communities' positions in U.S. society for a long time. Thus, their current activism within the labor movement can be viewed as a continuation and expansion of these efforts. Their historical exclusion from institutions identified by Vanneman and Cannon (1987) as the primary vehicles of class struggle, specifically labor unions and political parties, has been cited as an underlying cause for the varied and innovative forms of their resistance and activism (Collins 1991). Collins divides black women's activism into two dimensions: the struggle for group survival and the struggle for institutional transformation. These struggles take place in various spheres of social and political life, ranging from the private

households in which domestic workers work, their own homes, churches, and communities, to broader political and economic institutions. Their efforts range from individual action to organized group action such as those embodied in the washerwomen's strike and the Ladies' Auxiliary of the Pullman Porters' Association.

As they eventually gained access to the labor movement, they strove to improve working conditions for people of color from within the labor movement. Today, minorities have become a significant presence within the U.S. labor movement. Nationally, 29 percent of union membership is minority: either black, Latino, or Asian (AFL-CIO 2005). Union density is 15.1 percent among blacks, and 10.1 percent among Latinos, compared to the overall average of 12.5 percent. (U.S. Census Bureau 2005). The industries where minority workers tend to be concentrated—leisure, hospitality, education, and health services, and public administration—are the same industries in which the number of union members grew in 2004. Between 1998 and 2004, the only race/gender groups that experienced growth in unionization were Latino women and men and white women (U.S. Dept. of Labor 2005). Further, given the substantial wage advantage for unionized black and Latino workers (29 percent and 59 percent respectively) over their nonunionized counterparts, unionization and collective bargaining seem to be effective and necessary tools for addressing the labor market problems detailed earlier.

In addition to the higher unionization rate of black workers relative to other workers, there is also evidence that black union members are more likely to be involved and active in their unions. Women of color also tend to be more effective at organizing other workers than other unionists. Bronfenbrenner and Hickey (2004) found that the organizing campaigns headed by women of color had significantly higher success rates than other groups. Organizing the unorganized is the most crucial goal for the labor movement. National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) election win rates are 53 percent when a majority of workers are minority vs. 35 percent with white male workers and 82 percent when 75 percent or more are minority women workers (Bronfenbrenner and Hickey 2004).

The increasing leadership of black and Latina women has been noted by several observers. Labor education centers report that participation in minority leadership development programs is increasing (AFL-CIO 2005), echoing earlier findings of high levels of leadership among black women in the Coalition of Labor Union Women (CLUW) (Harriford 1993) and the emergence of minority women leaders in the AFL-CIO itself (Cobble and Bielski Michal 2002). One of the highest-ranking women in the U.S. labor movement is Linda Chavez-Thompson, a Latina who in 1995 became the executive vice-president of the AFL-CIO. Additionally, of the seven women who joined the AFL-CIO executive council in 1995, four were either black or Latina (AFL-CIO 2000).

So, what implications does their growing involvement have for the labor movement? As the labor movement is a social justice institution, the greater inclusion of an increasingly diverse workforce at all ranks of the movement seems a strategic necessity. The persistence of exclusionary structures within an

institution centered on social justice ideals undermines its credibility and larger claims for equity and fairness for all workers. To have power concentrated among one group (white men) within the labor movement recreates the same power imbalances in the larger economy that the labor movement is fighting. Power must be shared, and as many of the women I interviewed argue, women of color must be in decision-making roles in the movement for its agenda to change. Second, inclusion serves the interest of building a broad-based, diverse movement. The perception among many minority workers, both unionized and nonunionized, that unions do not represent the interests of minority workers, is in part because of the paucity of minority leadership. The visibility of minority female leaders would send a clear signal to minority and female workers that this is their organization. Further, minority leaders are more likely to be better able to reach out to minority communities and organizations to build crucial alliances.

This essay also examines the organizational changes within unions where women of color's leadership has the potential to affect, much in the same way that women's growing involvement and leadership has. Cobble and Bielski Michal (2002) demonstrate the growing influence that women's involvement has had on the organizational practices of the labor movement. They argue that unions such as National Education Association (NEA) and Service Employees International Union (SEIU), heavily constituted of female workers, began reshaping their organizational and representational practices away from the traditional adversarial model of representation to reflect the reality that service work requires representation that *promotes* the service-provider/client relationship. We might arguably expect women of color to press similarly for their concerns and those of workers of color, and in doing so potentially reshape the policies and structures of today's unions. The women of color union leaders interviewed in this study cited improving the employment opportunities and working conditions of workers of color as their motivation for joining and serving as leaders in their unions.

To select the leaders I interviewed, I relied on snowball sampling because of the paucity of minority female leaders in unions, most acutely at the national level. Snowball sampling involves the use of a key informant in a particular network who identifies for the researcher other potential subjects who fit the study criteria. The informants were individuals who had been in the labor movement for their entire careers. The interviewees were all leaders at the national level in national or international unions. All were heads of departments or officers of the union. Three of the leaders were Latina and four were black.

Strategies Black and Latina Women Employ to Gain Leadership Positions

The ability of some women to penetrate the highest levels of leadership in the labor movement has been widely documented (Cobble and Bielski Michal 2002; Gray 1993). So how did they get there and most importantly, what

motivated them to pursue such a challenging road, especially in opposition to the entrenched norm of predominantly male and white leadership?

Gray (1993) identifies four career paths to a leadership position in unions: (1) historical route in which the leader is the founder of the union, (2) inheritance (early craft unions), (3) professional/technical route, which is the predominant path today, especially for women, and (4) election from the rank and file of the union. The most typical route for the women leaders she interviewed, the professional/technical route, involved entering the union through a professional staff position before slowly getting promoted into management. This common path for women contrasts the more traditional up-through-the-ranks-from-the-shop-floor route. Gray finds that the professional/technical route to leadership is the most advantageous and valuable for women because it allows them to demonstrate their leadership abilities, in contrast to the arduous election-from-the-rank-and-file-of-the-union route, which is typically not fruitful for them.

While the literature on women's advancement emphasizes the role of mentors, all of the top women leaders interviewed for this article emphasized the role of self-reliance and personal diligence. Most said they primarily relied on themselves and their own determination. While they acknowledge that they benefited from help along the way, this assistance most often came in the form of senior people granting them critical opportunities, most often after having demonstrated their capability and commitment. This theme of having to demonstrate their ability, or prove themselves, was recurring; their career trajectories were comprised of a succession of positions that had incremental increases in responsibility.

Few spoke of a coach who invested a lot of time grooming and teaching them the skills necessary for leadership; they were largely self-taught. They primarily identified mentors who offered advice, information, and opportunities. Union leaders who participated in the survey also identified personal diligence and mentors as the key factors that contributed to their success in achieving leadership. Maria Neira and Carmen Alvarez, both of the United Federation of Teachers (UFT) were mentored by Sandra Feldman of the UFT. Ms. Neira (Interview, November 4, 2005) recalls, "[Sandy] was very involved in the civil rights movement, had a core value, had a vision, tapped you and saw things in you, and then gave the opportunity, allowed you to do it."

Carmen Alvarez (Interview, November 9, 2005) of UFT mentioned the crucial role of a protector in her career, or as she called it, a *madrina* or *padrino* (godmother or father).

[when you] get in a position with responsibility, a budget, you become a target. I tell people coming up they need a *madrina* or *padrino*. People try to sabotage you, people are after your position, [you] have to watch out or they will misrepresent you to the people in power.

During the early part of her career, she was stymied by the attempts of others to undermine her projects. To head off these attacks, she identified someone high up in the leadership "that they [her opposition] were afraid of," convinced

him of the value of the project she was undertaking, and asked him to “watch her back” so she could see it to completion. This is the type of protection she currently advises other minorities with leadership ambitions to seek.

This resourcefulness and strategic gamesmanship was another common characteristic among the women interviewed. Another woman took out a personal loan to finance her campaign for president of her local. Yet another woman had to devise a way to successfully manage being the only female business representative for a predominantly male craft union. The male workers she represented challenged her ability to handle their grievances because she did not know their craft and the other union representatives, who were all male, offered her no assistance. She said she had to rely on herself, finding a way to get advice on the technical information she needed to successfully negotiate on their behalf with management, and eventually won their respect. Her involvement in one of the key functions of unions, bargaining, likely contributed to her path to leadership. Needleman (1998) notes the need for women to be involved in these central operations, negotiating, and political action, to be in line for key leadership positions in the union.

In facing the numerous obstacles they cited, some women noted a shift at some point in their careers in their understanding of how the world worked and adjusted their strategies accordingly. These realizations lead to other tactics that included building their own bases of support, actively *finding* and developing mentoring relationships and the necessary support, resources, and information crucial to their advancement. Finally, most cited the importance of minority networks as a form of social support.

Some of the women located their individual trajectory of moving up into leadership within the broader sociopolitical context concurrent with their careers: the social movements (labor, civil rights, women’s) concurrent with their own mobility. All the women cited an interest in civil rights or politics and making a difference as reasons for joining the labor movement. They were motivated by an avid belief that the union was the best vehicle for improving their own lives and those of minority workers in general; many advocated for increased union involvement in minority communities.

Maria Neira (Interview, November 4, 2005) of UFT was motivated by her father’s involvement in union as a shop steward. He told her to, “Be a voice, know what your rights were, take a lead.”

Gloria Johnson (Interview, November 2, 2005), an African-American leader of the electrical workers and former president of CLUW, simply “fell in love with the labor movement.”

Minority women union leaders often report that they are motivated to become activists and take on positions of responsibility out of a belief that their participation will make a difference. Maria Portalatin (Interview, November 15, 2005) of American Federation of Teachers (AFT) travels around the country and urges other Latinos, “I tell people to get involved or no one will hear your voice . . . the labor movement is the only way for Hispanics to obtain dignity and respect . . . have to make this org work for you, have to get involved.”

All tied their individual careers to the larger campaign for inclusion. "The important goal is helping people of color move through the institution," notes AFL-CIO Civil and Human Rights Director Roslyn Pelles (Interview, October 31, 2005). In fact, a number of cases were noted in which a woman of color gained a position of leadership after the collective efforts of a minority constituency group for increased representation won them a designated seat on the union's governing board or the creation of an office of minority affairs. Most of the women reported a deep sense of responsibility and duty to representing and advocating for the needs of people of color.

The predominance of collective leadership and shared responsibilities in black women's organizing has been cited by various researchers, as noted earlier, and has been tied to black women's tradition of activism in black social institutions, namely the black church and the civil rights movement (Harriford 1993). The continuity with these traditions very likely accounts for minority women's ability to campaign for the interests of their communities even from a position of powerlessness.

Problems in the House of Labor: Barriers to Participation

While the careers of these exceptional cases offer hope, recent surveys of minority and female union leaders commissioned by the Civil Rights Department and the Working Women's Committee of the AFL-CIO (2004, 2005) revealed that racism and sexism are prevalent both on the shop floor and in the organization. "The labor movement is no different than the rest of society," said Susan Washington (Interview, October 21, 2005), AFL-CIO executive assistant to Linda Chavez-Thompson. Statements such as these highlight the reality that the labor movement is a social institution that is informed by the larger social context in which it operates, including the racial and gender hierarchies which continue to be normative in our society.

The survey commissioned by the AFL-CIO identified the lack of training and opportunities to gain leadership experience as the chief barriers to minority unionists accessing leadership positions. They also mentioned the lack of mentoring, "[There was] no one to guide them in navigating the political terrain of their organization or in transferring institutional knowledge to them."

Women of color have to overcome substantial *structural* hurdles in the unions to gain leadership positions. These barriers to the participation of women and minorities in union leadership are embedded in the institution itself. Survey respondents pointed to disparate access to information and poor timing of when they received information. They felt they were not sufficiently involved in the decision-making process of their unions. Assignment of people of color and women to positions with less power and influence was cited as a common problem as well. Even when people of color and women do have leadership roles, they are most often assigned to peripheral positions in the organization with less power and influence. Women are more often excluded from the primary functions of the union, negotiating contracts and building

constituencies, which bring visibility and the esteem necessary to garner support for leadership positions (Gray 1993). Another problem cited was that programs and offices devoted to diversity usually only have one staff person, thus the resulting programs are fewer, and the support structures are marginalized in the union. Even at the state or local level, union leaders of color primarily serve on boards and do not necessarily serve as principal officers (AFL–CIO 2005).

Survey respondents also pointed to *climate* issues such as an unwelcoming environment and union governing bodies that were unresponsive to their concerns. The experiences of the leaders interviewed exemplify these findings. Royetta Sanford (Interview, October 24, 2005) recounts her experiences as the only female business representative at International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers (IBEW), an electrical workers union:

I was thrown into male crews on my own. The black guys didn't like me, the white guys didn't like me. I didn't know their craft. But eventually they grew to respect me because I was a good advocate. I could handle their grievances. I was able to do that well . . . I didn't have any support. The other reps were all male and white (a few were Latino). They were openly racist and sexist, in meetings; had their own way of thinking and doing things.

When Maria Neira (Interview, November 4, 2005) moved from a local union in Spanish Harlem to the national union, UFT, she felt she had to “. . . set a tone of respect, it wasn't easy, very few women of color in the room.”

Survey respondents also felt they were not valued, “It could be that the leaders feel we may not be interested or smart enough to be considered. It could also be they fear that we will gain too much power, and they are insecure.” A hostile environment is not only detrimental to a person's career, but also to the overall morale, effectively marginalizing minority union members. “The union leadership puts very little importance into the inclusion of people of color in union leadership.”

The lack of *political will* to change the institution was cited as the most fundamental cause of this ongoing problem, underlying many of the other factors responsible for the exclusion of minorities from leadership positions in the labor movement. Several of the women leaders interviewed linked the resistance they encountered to the call for increasing the participation of minorities to the immediate crisis facing the labor movement as it struggled for basic survival. Many in the general membership and mainstream leadership see the push for inclusion as secondary and distracting. Needleman (1998) observes that the prevailing bent toward crisis decision making has served to sacrifice more important long-term goals, such as worker empowerment and leadership development, to the detriment of the movement. Echoing Needleman's commentary, Royetta Sanford (Interview, October 24, 2005) of IBEW noted, “People don't have the foresight to think about other aspects of a good movement.”

The survey respondents also noted the need for fair and impartial labor leadership elections; some referred to the selection of leaders as arbitrary and unfair, and that family and friends get appointed. An examination of conventional

union electoral procedures, or how leaders get selected, reveals that there is low turnover of leadership and thus younger union members (disproportionately women and minorities because of their later entry to the movement) have more difficulty accessing these positions (Barlinger, Fullagar, and Kelloway 1992). The lack of term limits is one of the chief culprits of this phenomenon. Similarly, because leadership positions are often filled by appointment or nomination to a slate, belonging to the “in-leadership crowd” is a prerequisite for even having a chance at being selected. The issue of dominant union culture plays a significant role in this process: Women and minorities are less likely to know someone in the union office or belong to the important social networks from which leaders are drawn. Further, current leaders tend to identify potential future leadership in those who are most like themselves, and are less tuned to recognizing similar strengths packaged differently (Needleman 1998).

Institutional practices of unions such as slating, filling positions by appointment, and the reliance on closed networks and word-of-mouth to share valuable information benefits insiders and disadvantages those outside these networks, typically minorities and women (Needleman 1998). These patterns serve to reproduce the racial and gender makeup of the current leadership. Some of the women interviewed characterized the business as usual of their unions as baldly unfair.

Progress and Change Thus Far

Between 1995 and 2005, several broad, sweeping victories that offer tremendous promise to address these problems were won. This section will trace the progress made toward inclusion during this ten-year period that led up to the victories of 2005.

In 1995, as mentioned earlier, a historic first occurred when a third position was added to the slate of executive officers resulting in the election of the first female and first woman of color executive officer of AFL–CIO: Linda Chavez–Thompson. A new leadership team strove to incorporate more women and minorities in the administration of the organization with the addition of nineteen seats to the executive council, four of which were occupied by women of color. The number of female department heads increased as well, from 6 to 50 percent (many of whom were women of color) (Cobble and Bielski Michal 2002).

Some have identified a shift in the labor movement that they attribute to AFL–CIO President John Sweeney’s leadership beginning in 1995. Roslyn Pelles (Interview, October 31, 2005) describes “. . . a new energy and hope within the AFL–CIO and a greater consciousness about the value of diversity.” Also, in 1995, the AFL–CIO Executive Council’s Committee on Full Participation issued a report outlining general principles regarding diversity and inclusion, providing basis for the AFL–CIO’s Resolution on Diversity and Full Participation, which was adopted by the 21st Constitutional Convention of the AFL–CIO, October 1995. This resolution called for the AFL–CIO to review its

structures and programs to achieve full participation and granted a provision for the affiliation of the minority constituency groups.

In 2000, the Labor Coalition for Community Action (LCCA), comprised of six national constituency groups to the AFL–CIO, came together for the first time during the voter registration drives for the presidential election. They held town hall meetings across the local chapters of the various constituency groups to increase participation in the upcoming election among their members. They felt this first collaboration was a success and decided to keep working together on issues that were of importance to all of the groups. This first collaboration laid the foundation for the major victories of 2005.

They turned their attention to the upcoming 2005 AFL–CIO convention, where they noticed the absence of inclusion from the agenda. They hosted three major town hall meetings focused around this issue to hear from their constituents. The LCCA met in January 2005 during the Martin Luther King conference held annually by the constituency groups. A priority at this conference was the planning of a conference on full participation, in cooperation with the AFL–CIO, to be held immediately preceding the AFL–CIO convention and the development of a resolution outlining changes to increase minority participation at all levels of the movement.

The AFL–CIO Working Women’s Committee and the AFL–CIO Civil and Human Rights Committee then developed a set of diversity principles designed to achieve full participation. In March 2005, these principles were adopted by the AFL–CIO Executive Council (AFL–CIO 2005). Three key recommendations were made: (1) develop a diverse core of future union leaders by creating a strategy to foster the transfer of skills (i.e., mentoring opportunities and training), (2) engage people of color in all aspects of the union’s work, especially in the core work of organizing and political action, and (3) actively create an inclusive atmosphere by devoting resources to build infrastructures that support diversity. It was further recommended that the leadership assess progress on previous recommendations.

In April 2005, the AFL–CIO’s executive council’s Civil and Human Rights Committee initiated a survey of union leaders of color who hold elected or appointed positions in unions, state federations, central labor councils, and constituency groups, in preparation for the convention. This survey complemented a similar survey on women’s issues conducted the previous year (see Nussbaum forthcoming). According to Roslyn Pelles (Interview, October 31, 2005), AFL–CIO director of civil and human rights, these surveys represent the first time the federation had undertaken such an evaluation. The results of the surveys helped inform the resolution ratified at the convention that summer.

In advance of the 2005 AFL–CIO convention, the LCCA sponsored a Summit on Diversity in Our Union Movement in July 2005. Seven hundred union leaders and rank-and-file members from around the country attended. The summit was successful in raising consciousness about inclusion and consequently in making diversity a major issue at the AFL–CIO convention. From this conference, they issued a Unity Statement, which outlined specific demands

aimed at increasing the involvement and voice of minority groups in the labor movement (women, minorities, gays, and lesbians).

We are united in our commitment to build a strong, democratic labor movement in the United States, one that represents the hopes and aspirations of all working people for social economic justice . . . We support multi-racial unity, working-class solidarity, and the full democratic participation of all in the pursuit of progress and prosperity.

Their recommendations were organized around four key points: (1) insist that the leadership of the labor movement at all levels represent the diversity of its membership, (2) increase organizing among women workers and workers of color in organizing campaigns, which includes increasing the number of organizers who are women and people of color, (3) increase the mobilization of people of color and women in political action and the civic process, and (4) maintain a strong civil and women's rights agenda focused on ending discrimination in the workplace and include it in the labor movement's larger campaigns of organizing and political action.

At the AFL-CIO convention following the summit, the delegates passed Resolution 2: A Diverse Movement Calls for Diverse Leadership, which committed decisive measures to increasing diversity in the labor movement. The resolution's mandates were concretized by Constitutional Amendments 1, 3, 28, and 31 passed by the 25th Constitutional Convention of the AFL-CIO, July 2005.

Several tangible outcomes emerged from this resolution. By the next AFL-CIO convention, every union that attends must have a diversity plan and the delegate representation must reflect the union's membership. Additionally, provisions were added to allow the constituency groups to join the state federations. The following is a complete list of requirements resulting from the resolution:

1. Affiliates' delegation to the AFL-CIO convention generally shall reflect the diversity of its membership;
2. Diversity in participation at AFL-CIO-sponsored/supported conferences and trainings is required;
3. The AFL-CIO shall serve as a model of diverse hiring and promotion practices
4. Increase leadership development of state federation and central labor council leaders to build a diverse pool of leaders;
5. Increase efforts to recruit a diverse pool of young people into the union movement;
6. Fully integrate AFL-CIO constituency groups into state federations;
7. Designate seats on the federation's general board for each of the six constituency groups on the executive council and diversify the executive council;

8. Urge affiliates to sign diversity principles and to report annually on the representation of women and minorities in membership and leadership;
9. Set targeted levels of diversity in leadership among governing bodies

The role of the constituency groups and minority caucuses in these gains was and is paramount. The LCCA leaders who propelled this forward were particularly strategic in successfully timing and coordinating these successive victories, following up on each win to ensure follow through. They were sure to involve both AFL-CIO President John Sweeney and Secretary-Treasurer Richard Trumka in the discussions crafting the resolution. The women of color interviewed were at the forefront of and centrally involved in these efforts, but clearly as part of grassroots collectives organized into the constituency groups. Maria Portalatin (Interview, November 15, 2005) was the only woman invited to the first meeting of Labor Council for Latin American Advancement (LCLAA) held in 1971. "It was 15 guys and me," she recalls.

The changes to the constitution in 1995 and 2005 regarding the affiliation status of the constituency groups significantly increased the power of those groups to affect change in the organization. The 1995 resolution allowed for the delegates of those groups to hold office and introduce resolutions and amendments, *provided that* the state federation/area councils or central labor bodies had changed their constitutions (twenty-five had done so prior to 2005). The resolution of 2005 made constituency group affiliation automatic, removing the necessity of state federations to change their constitutions for constituency groups to affiliate. The 2005 changes additionally garnered six seats on the executive council for the constituency groups; each group is now responsible for submitting a name.

Constituency groups and minority caucuses launch careers of individual minority leaders, organize to get minority concerns on the broader labor movement agenda, and build bridges between unions and the minority communities. The minority caucuses have provided a venue that allows for the visibility and exposure of minority leaders. Some have launched the careers of individuals who otherwise may not have had the opportunity. They provide the leadership experience these individuals would not otherwise have in the larger organization: opportunities to run group meetings, elections, plan programs, conferences, organizing, and political campaigns. They provide networking opportunities and most importantly, because they often are able to garner audience with the union's leadership at the national and international level, they offer minority leaders opportunity to build these critical relationships. For example, Robbie Sparks was nominated to the AFL-CIO executive council by the IBEW international president after having met her through her work as head of IBEW's minority caucus. Additionally, many minority caucuses offer other venues for networking by hosting their own conferences. For example, IBEW's minority caucus conferences have been noted for their useful workshops and are considered to be so well organized that they have attracted attention and interest beyond the minority constituency.

There are other success stories as well. Minority leaders who participated in the AFL–CIO survey noted the success of advanced leadership training seminars for people of color, in which small groups of people are invited to intensive study programs that focus on advanced mobilizing, strategic planning, and organizing skills for political campaigns and organizing drives. Additionally, some unions have begun to put in place diversity plans. An excellent illustration of how productive a strong diversity plan can be is provided by the IBEW's inclusion efforts. Each of IBEW's ten national districts holds an annual meeting to which only officers and the business manager can attend. Responding to pressure from the minority caucuses, the international president mandated that representatives from the minority caucuses could have time on the program to present their issues at these meetings. There was resistance. However, their presentations were highly effective. Responses from union leaders revealed that the presentations by the minority caucuses were eye-opening, including comments such as, "We didn't understand why we had to have you [present], now we do; you helped us more than you know," relayed Royetta Sanford (Interview, October 24, 2005), IBEW civil and human rights director.

Vital Next Steps: Strategies for Change

The leaders interviewed felt that tremendous advances have been made but that much more is needed. They are now focused on bringing these goals to fruition. "The [labor movement] has made tremendous advances, but there is a long way to go," declares Roslyn Pelles (Interview, October 31, 2005) of the AFL–CIO.

As an immediate follow up to the passage of the diversity resolution, the committee of civil and human rights directors of all AFL–CIO affiliates will be convening to strategize on how to make the goals of the new resolution a reality throughout the institution. The chief objective of this day-long meeting, says Roslyn Pelles (Interview, October 31, 2005), who will convene the meeting, will be to refine thinking about how to move from the recommendations of the surveys to actually increasing diversity in the leadership by determining the best diversity practices. Employing a highly organized structure featuring facilitators and sub committees, it will center on strategic thinking about a problem.

Some see the work of realizing the recommendations as specifically as their responsibility, while others feel it is the organization's responsibility in the spirit of the union's responsibility to address the needs of all its members. Weary of lip service, the key word on the minds of these activists is action. For example, although a majority of the survey participants said their union had a diversity plan (64 percent), only half of these said their plans were being implemented. Gloria Johnson (Interview, November 2, 2005) identified the need for constant vigilance. Follow through must be intentional; she calls for the accountability of those responsible for acting on the mandates set out in the resolution. She places responsibility both on the current leadership and on the constituency groups. "Our [members who proposed it] have a responsibility to follow up on this." For

example, the constituency groups proposed and won six seats on the executive council; each group is responsible for submitting a name. The challenge now is for the groups to submit names: "we will be there ready and waiting," Ms. Johnson (Interview, November 2, 2005) proclaims.

One of the key first steps to follow up the resolution is to educate people around the language and push them to make it a reality, according to Ms. Pelles (Interview, October 31, 2005). Her first task is to show the civil right directors of their affiliate unions how to implement the mandates and get the information out to the rank and file. Because the goal for inclusion is based on the numbers of women and minorities in the union, collecting demographic data at the local level is of primary importance. Thus, it is now a requirement that each local collect demographic data on their members. The minority leaders interviewed advocate a bottom-up strategy in which they let members at the local level know what has been decided and push for its implementation at the local level. This approach is likely founded on the realization that unions will not institute these resolutions on their own, but have to be pushed by their members.

The creation of structured opportunity, which Needleman (1998) defines as a vehicle for sharing responsibility and power, seems to be a promising avenue for change. An example of a structured opportunity is the CLUW's stipulation that because its membership is 40 percent minority, its two cochairs have to be of different ethnicity. Other structured opportunities include the suggestion of a survey participant, in which 50 percent of delegates to the convention were to be male and 50 percent female, or the idea of establishing post-training action plans for those who participate in leadership development training.

Organizations create structures of opportunity by providing networking and mentoring opportunities, hands-on intensive training, developing post-training action plans for trainees, and by reserving opportunities for minorities and women to conduct union business (Trebilcock 1993). Needleman (1998) believes that the progress achieved in the AFL-CIO thus far has been a result of structured opportunities endorsed by the AFL-CIO leadership through its use of appointment, affecting structural change at the institutional level.

Strategies such as these would tap the hidden talent that the minority leaders interviewed insist is out there. Many of them are committed to one-on-one leadership development to groom the next generation of minority leaders; there are a lot of missed opportunities to include minorities and women, they suggest. Gloria Johnson (Interview, November 2, 2005) argues that leaders have to be really conscientious about finding good candidates. As she travels to local unions, Maria Neira scans the meetings for active and vocal minority unionists and then approaches them and begins a relationship with them with the goal of building a pool of minority leaders. Ms. Johnson (Interview, November 2, 2005) says it is the responsibility of the old guard to meet with newly appointed women on the executive council and support them and share expertise with them. Most of the leaders interviewed are actively committed to developing and coaching

the next generation of minority and women leaders. Now that this first generation of women-of-color leaders is established, many are turning to encourage and develop the next crop of leaders. Gloria Johnson (Interview, November 2, 2005) sees that as her primary goal these days: "My focus has been on women and developing them." Facing insecurity, she gives a concrete example of coaching someone selected to give a speech for the first time: "When they say, 'I can't do this, I can't make this speech', I ask, 'What's holding you back, how do you feel?'" This kind of one-on-one support and development is a key factor in changing the leadership structure within the movement.

Constituency groups play an important role in developing minority union leaders. These self-organized groups along with civil rights departments provide an organizational structure within the institution to incorporate the issues of minority groups into the union's agenda (Bielski 2005). They provide crucial independent space outside of the mainstream union culture (Briskin 1993; Needleman 1998). In addition, because constituency group meetings and elections run in the same manner as union meetings and elections, they provide opportunities for leadership development.

Caucuses also play a critical role in creating relationships between the labor movement and communities of color, a necessary step toward increasing the pool of minority leaders and the movement's broader goal of increasing the representation of workers of color.

The labor movement should not assume that nonunion workers lack any organization. Indeed many workers of color and immigrant workers participate in their community through civic, religious, and other forms of "identity-based" organization that are potential allies of the labor movement . . . The constituency organizations are uniquely positioned to build strong enduring bridges of solidarity between unions and civil rights, religious, women's, immigrant, minority, and LGBT organizations. (AFL-CIO 2005)

The importance of a collective approach cannot be overemphasized. Gloria Johnson (Interview, November 2, 2005) affirms, "Those of who believe in what we're doing have got to stick together." These women are using their positions to disperse power and knowledge to others throughout the institution to affect change at all levels within the house of labor and to workers in general. They employ both a top-down and a bottom-up (grassroots) approach. At the Summit on Diversity in Our Union Movement, Clayola Brown urged the minority unionists to ". . . go back and speak up within your unions." Further, women of color's efforts for inclusion are allied with other groups to broaden their base of support and strengthen their efforts.

The survey recommended that the labor movement revisit previous recommendations, assess progress, and consider new approaches to improving diversity. Comments from minority leaders such as, "Create a diverse presentation at all gatherings that is more than show," speak of the thinness of many current diversity programs. Thus, minority leaders called for workable policies

that have resources behind them and include monitoring and enforcement mechanisms. To address the problem of a lack of availability of information, one respondent suggested posting job openings within local and international unions.

Another strategy used is that of framing their concerns in alignment with the broader philosophy of the labor movement: justice, equality, fairness (Tarrow 1998). The women interviewed are aware that many resist inclusion because they fear giving up their power and lack the political will to implement policies and programs that will bring about real change. Minority leaders recommended diversity training programs with the aim of improving climate and support for inclusion efforts. Royetta Sanford (Interview, October 24, 2005) of IBEW said, “[we need to] show them how it can work for them; show them how having a woman in their position won’t be a catastrophe, it won’t tear their union apart; it can work . . . show them how inclusion can help the movement win.”

Conclusion

There is a great deal at stake at all levels of the labor movement, particularly as it wrestles with the uneasy disjuncture between its ideology and practices established in a previous era and the shift in the nature and quality of work and the demographic makeup of the workforce. Fortunately, these developments represent as yet unrealized organizing opportunities that can only strengthen the movement. While the progress toward inclusion described in this article has brought about a greater consciousness about these issues, it is important to be conscientious about how to move forward. While moving more minorities into leadership offers promise, the danger is that the line between tokenism and real change is often thin. Instituting policies is different from implementing and enforcing them. It is imperative to challenge the existing structures within the labor movement that prop up the status quo and undermine progress toward true equality and fairness. Minority leaders are in principle best suited to lead the campaign to make the fundamental changes within the house of labor necessary to confront gross inequalities that persist in the labor market and within the movement itself. To confront the larger goal of remedying the unique problems of women-of-color workers, labor’s agenda must be transformed. Policy initiatives such as living wage ordinances and reforming the Family Medical Leave Act are important for all working women, but for too many women of color, they are the last hope in often particularly fragile economic circumstances. These policies disproportionately affect women of color and must be pursued vigorously and prioritized on labor’s agenda.

The incorporation of women-of-color leaders at all levels of the labor movement is an important step in achieving this objective. Historically, we have seen women’s activism and leadership in the movement has most often

galvanized around the concerns of female workers that are often marginalized in the movement at large, for example, the fair pay campaign, launched by the AFL-CIO's working women's department head Karen Nussbaum and the "work and family bill of rights" promoted by female labor activists in New York (Cobble and Bielski Michal 2002). The inclusion of women-of-color-leaders offers the promise of addressing the unique concerns of minority female workers and workers of color in general as well. Only through a reconceptualization of its core mission, a reconfiguration of the process by which it identifies and develops leaders, and conscious and sustained action will real change be possible. In our conversation, Gloria Johnson (Interview, November 2, 2005) continually stressed, "We have to be ready for the next step." Current initiatives aimed at creating new organizational structures and practices such as those embodied in Change to Win's goals and the innovative strategies employed to organize previously difficult to organize sectors, also offer potential and promise.

As the labor movement increasingly incorporates a wider diversity of workers than it previously had, it must find ways to address identity politics and reject the insistence of a universal class identity or consciousness. The resistance to acknowledging and confronting the reality that while all workers face increasing challenges, minorities and white women experience different challenges, is strategically unsound. It undermines the image of the labor movement as a democratic institution representing all workers and it weakens support for the movement among those who feel that their needs are not being met.

The women leaders interviewed are well aware of these concerns and are thoroughly capable of meeting these challenges. "We can't give up"—their loyalty and commitment are unwavering and their service to the movement offers enormous promise for change. Gloria Johnson said it well, "I love the union for what it has done, but more important, for what it can do" (Needleman 1998).

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