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LA RISING

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



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In developing this document, we asked for the most precious thing busy organizers can give – time – and they were uniformly gracious in doing so. A full list of those who were interviewed or participated in a focus group is provided at the end of this document. They are all important leaders in Los Angeles, and we thank them not only for their words and wisdom but also for their work in changing the political and social landscape of our city. If there is one secret to L.A.'s rise in social movement organizing, they collectively are it.

Of course, when they were done talking, someone had to transcribe, read, and process all the interviews. A veritable village of students worked with Michelle Saucedo to do the patient work of moving the wisdom of our interviewees from audio to Word files, including USC undergraduate students Charday Adams, Noelia Callejas, Tiffany Pereira, Gabrielle Roffe, and Charnan Williams as well as UCLA graduate student Cassie Gardener. Graduate students from both USC and UCLA, including Ameer Chew, Anthony Perez, and Madeline Wander, helped with developing profiles of the interviewees and fact-checking the interviews to make sure distant memories squared with the written record available in newspapers, articles, and books. USC undergraduates Meagan Chin and Andrew Lee also supported Jackie Agnello on the visual design for this report.

Another big debt is due to all the analysts and authors on whose work we draw. We offer more explicit acknowledgement of their work in the full report, but in the hopes of a quicker read for this summary, we eschew footnotes and direct citations and instead offer only a list of additional references at the end. However, we would be remiss not to single out Ann Bastian of the New World Foundation, whose pioneering work on both funding and developing an understanding of the stages and innovations of movement building is the basic framework on which our analysis hangs.

Thanks are also due to Laine Romero-Alston, formerly of the Solidago Foundation and now at the Ford Foundation, whose unmitigated enthusiasm launched this project (of course, when we realized just how massive the effort was, our own enthusiasm faltered . . . so special thanks for keeping us going). Additional funding and support was provided by Atlantic Philanthropies and the James Irvine Foundation, both of which have invested in USC PERE's capacities to document and understand social movement organizing in California. PERE's leadership and staff thank them for their ongoing support.

Finally, we both have families who have often wondered why we are gone so long and so often. This report offers a partial answer: When a city's future is at stake, you have to step up and do what you can, whether it be organizing, funding, or researching the change that we so desperately need. We have been proud to be part of the movements we examine, we feel humble to have witnessed and supported a generation of L.A.'s dynamic leaders, and we are extraordinarily grateful for the patience and support of those we love.

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INTRODUCTION

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

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

Through it all, new constituencies and new coalitions have emerged in dramatic fashion. Black and Brown residents of South Los Angeles, the epicenter for both the Watts and Rodney King uprisings, have fought to demand equal funding for urban schools, expand programs for drug treatment and job training, and secure support for relatives providing foster care. Labor unions have

reached out to immigrants and others, building a powerful machine for electoral victories even as they have forged labor-community partnerships for accountable development, innovative job training, and new standards for worker well-being. Immigrants themselves have taken a perhaps surprising lead (particularly considering the risks activism can bring for those with less than stellar documentation), with Los Angeles the host to immigrant rights marches that have attracted crowds numbering in the half million. Workers’ centers, responding to multiple waves of refugees and immigrants from Central America, Mexico, and the Pacific Rim, have sprung up to address the worst exploits of sweatshops and the underground economy, forging new multi-ethnic campaigns and legislation to improve wages and working conditions.

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

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LOOKING BACK TO LOOK FORWARD

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

– Eric Mann, Labor/Community Strategy Center

This report is our attempt to unravel at least part of the story. It is a long and complicated tale, which partly explains the many pages we take to tell it. Even at this length (and the full report on which this summary is based is even longer), our telling is necessarily incomplete. There were so many actors, so many turning points, and so many skirmishes in the fight for justice. But we try to capture parts of the puzzle, offering key lessons to activists, social movement observers, and funders from our review of the literature, our knowledge of the history, and the perspectives offered in a unique set of interviews with twenty-three of the top organizers involved in the last twenty years of movement building in Los Angeles.

We suggest that 1992 was indeed a turning point for both Los Angeles and the movement leaders we profile. The civil unrest in that year made clear the economic and social distress plaguing the region; analysis conducted after the uprising suggested that the pattern of destruction was more related to poverty than to race or even police brutality. But the very scale of the uprising, stretching across the southland and expanding well beyond

its initial flash points in South L.A., also made clear that progressive forces must be getting something wrong in their analysis of the problem and their strategies for improving conditions. If a populace was frustrated and desperate enough to burn down its own city, surely that anger should have been channeled to something far more constructive. A new approach – one that could tap into rage and translate it into change – was needed.

“ [When the crack cocaine crisis hit in the 1980s], I was frustrated with the progressive movement because it had nothing to offer communities of color and inner-city areas. Families fell apart, kids fell into foster care, and you had all of these social and economic consequences – and the progressive movement was saying that ending capitalism would be the best way to deal with the drug problem. That might be well and true, but the point was communities were suffering right then. ”

– Karen Bass, U.S. Congress and founder of Community Coalition

This is not to say that there were not important efforts to address inequality and build progressive coalitions in Los Angeles prior to 1992. In fact, it is the earlier period that set the stage and the contours for the post-unrest organizing and mobilization. The consequences of deindustrialization, the rise of crack cocaine, and the shift to more militarized gangs created the conditions that groups like Community Coalition – headed by Karen Bass and Sylvia Castillo – would eventually address. A wave of immigration, particularly from Central America, transformed the region; many of these immigrants would eventually become the backbone of the L.A. labor movement. Meanwhile, South Central – the heart of Black Los Angeles – underwent a dramatic demographic transformation, shifting from 20

percent Latino in 1980 to nearly 45 percent Latino by the time of the 1990 Census, and making clear the need to forge Black-Brown alliances.

Through the 1980s, progressives responded to the economic and social pressures in various ways. Some activists – like Leonardo Vilchis and Larry Gross – worked with communities to fight evictions and aid low-income tenants, with many emphasizing the need for rent control to stem the threat of gentrification. Others – namely Anthony Thigpen and Larry Frank – experimented with electoral campaigns, particularly the 1984 and 1986 Jobs with Peace ballot propositions to reduce military expenditures; along the way, they and others developed expertise that would later prove useful to running progressive candidates.

Others, especially those associated with local affiliates of the Industrial Areas Foundation (IAF), a key national organizing federation, launched the Moral Minimum Wage Campaign – and secured an increase in California’s minimum wage in 1987 that hiked the pay of the state’s poorest workers by over \$4 billion over the succeeding four years.

Other activists, including many rooted in or supported by the faith-based community like Alexia Salvatierra, sought to respond to the influx of Central American refugees with enhanced social and legal services. Still others – including Mark Ridley-Thomas, then of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC), and Stewart Kwoh of the Asian Pacific American Legal Center (APALC) – saw an emerging “new majority” of African

Americans, Latinos, and Asian Americans and created new venues to cross racial lines and go beyond keeping the peace to steering the future.

Simultaneously, the labor movement was beginning its transformation towards “organizing the unorganizable.” In 1989, a rank-and-file activist and daughter of Mexican immigrant farm workers, Maria Elena Durazo, was elected to head Local 11 of the Hotel Employees and Restaurant Employees (HERE) union. This came after an earlier election in which Durazo led an insurgent campaign that triggered a decision by the national office to place the Local into trusteeship. Her eventual victory



signaled a pivot in the racial, gender, and political power balance of the labor movement – and more provocative tactics followed, including the release during hotel contract negotiations of “City on the Edge,” a short and pointed video that eerily warned that L.A.’s widespread poverty and deepening inequality could provoke civil disturbances.

Other service workers were also mobilizing. In 1990, SEIU’s Justice for Janitors campaign staged a strike that reverberated through local politics when union activists and their allies were met with police batons in Century City. Garnering the support of outraged civic leaders, including then Mayor Tom Bradley, the janitors soon secured a multi-year contract with significant wage adjustments. Equally significant was the way in which the struggle emboldened other low-wage immigrant workers and signaled that a new form of organizing and alliance building was not only possible but likely to yield higher pay-offs for both unions and communities.

In the same period, the organizers who would eventually form the Labor/Community Strategy Center (LCSC) were working to keep an auto plant open in the San Fernando Valley, pushing strongly against the deindustrialization that was stripping high quality jobs from the economic landscape. Meanwhile, an academic back bench for movement organizers was in development. Paul Ong and a bevy of graduate students from the UCLA’s Urban Planning program released a landmark report on L.A.’s “widening divide” by income and race. The UCLA Community Scholars program was established to bring together community scholars and graduate students to produce “solution-oriented research related to the theme of building grassroots

economic development policy in Los Angeles.” And in 1991, Kent Wong, an activist lawyer working for SEIU Local 660, became director of the UCLA Labor Center, creating yet another bridge between the researchers and the community.

While there was a lot of activity, it was not yet amounting to something big, particularly given the scale of ongoing economic and social challenges. Efforts were often fragmented, unaligned, and sometimes competitive. There was a certain uneasiness about directly confronting a Black mayor who was widely celebrated as a breakthrough leader but whose model of downtown development was not really delivering for low-income communities of color. The rapid demographic shifts may have called forth multiracialism by some, but they also contributed to racial clashes in urban schools, public hospitals, and local businesses – many of

which were operated by new immigrants in older, African-American neighborhoods. With wealth gaps widening, community tensions deepening, and a police force largely out of control, the beating of a Black motorist, the acquittal of the cops that did the deed, and the accumulation of joblessness and working poverty led to widespread riots that shocked the sensibility of the city.

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

– Leonardo Vilchis, Union de Vecinos

GETTING STARTED:

VISION AND ORGANIZATION

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

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

To understand what happened over the twenty-year period after the unrest, we think it useful to define four waves of movement building in Los Angeles: (1) setting vision and developing organizations (1992-1995); (2) creating anchors and forging alliances (1996-2000); (3) fashioning movements and building power (2001-2005); and (4) achieving impact and scaling up (2006-2011). Each of the next sections describes one of these waves, capturing just a few important highlights from each time period.

The first wave of movement building – *setting vision and developing organizations* – was often quiet work that leaned against the political winds of the time. After all, the official response to the civil unrest was Rebuild LA, an effort that was supposed to induce corporations to invest in the very parts of the city they had abandoned. There was a similarly “creative” response on the part of traditional actors: the “Weed and Seed” program, a law enforcement approach that targeted Black and Brown youth for surveillance and imprisonment. Meanwhile, the city electorate reacted to the riots by rejecting the mayoral bid of a progressive

city councilmember and voting instead for a Republican businessman whose slogan was “Tough Enough to Turn L.A. Around.”

It turned out that much of the real toughness came from the progressive forces. Eric Mann, who had led the fight to save the GM Van Nuys auto

plant in the San Fernando Valley, joined with allies of the Labor/Community Strategy Center (LCSC) to release a hard-hitting analysis of the unrest that pointed a finger at the economic conditions. The Strategy Center then used that analysis to turn its attention to organizing the working poor riding the region’s strained bus system. In South Los Angeles, Anthony Thigpenn founded AGENDA (which later evolved into SCOPE), a grassroots vehicle for

policy change – and having concluded that the problems of poverty could not be solved in poor communities alone, strove to build a new Metropolitan Alliance.

Community Coalition – also in South L.A. – had been meeting with Mayor Tom Bradley the night before the unrest to request the shutting of nuisance liquor stores. In the wake of the unrest,

“ We couldn’t impact poverty and unemployment in South L.A. by just organizing in South L.A. From the very beginning, there was a need to anchor the effort in community with grassroots members and leaders but also a need to build a broader alliance – broader both in terms of beyond just one neighborhood but also across sectors. ”

– Anthony Thigpenn, *Strategic Concepts in Organizing and Policy Education*

its leaders forged a campaign to prevent the reopening of many of the stores that had been burned. Gilda Haas, soon to become the founding director of Strategic Actions for a Just Economy (SAJE), testified before Congress on one of the first days after the riots on bank redlining of South Central and was able to leverage the new attention on urban poverty to gain a charter for the South Central People's Credit Union. In Koreatown, another community hard-hit by the unrest, the newly formed Korean Immigrant Workers Advocates (KIWA, now named Koreatown Immigrant Workers Alliance) brought together Korean and Latino workers in a "4.29 Displaced Workers Justice Campaign," (the numbers refer to April 29, the first day of the unrest, also known as Sai-i-Gu in Korean). Under the leadership of Danny Park, KIWA argued that since workers had also suffered losses in the riots, they should be able

to tap into relief funds designated for business owners in the community.

“ Right away into the campaign we knew that we had to organize both Latino and Korean workers. The ethnic loyalty between Korean workers and Korean employers meant that Latino workers were being discriminated from their coworkers as well. ”

– Danny Park, Co-founder of Koreatown Immigrant Workers Alliance

More generally, the immigrant community came alive, marching against Proposition 187, a 1994 ballot measure that sought to limit the access of undocumented residents to educational and other services. Just one year before, the Coalition for Humane Immigrant Rights of Los Angeles (CHIRLA) officially set up shop as an independent organization, and it played an important role in both the community fight back and the provision of information

to anxious immigrant residents. Also emerging in this era was the Tourism Industry Development Council, later re-named the Los Angeles Alliance for a New Economy (LAANE). Incubated within HERE Local 11 and headed by the former director of the Central American Resource Center



(CARECEN), Madeline Janis, LAANE would go on to leverage public capital to affirm economic justice and change the very nature of development and contracting in the city.

In these early days, however, organizations were just getting started and struggling for both resources and recognition. Liberty Hill Foundation, founded in 1976 to support grassroots community organizing, was among just a handful of funders to place early bets on these new organizing groups. How Liberty Hill and other philanthropic allies nurtured these nascent experiments – and stuck with them through the long haul – is a critical element in this story and one that we return to in a subsequent section devoted to recommendations to funders.

Small though they might have been, these emerging organizations nonetheless had a big vision of wide-scale social change, based on an understanding that they needed to reach beyond traditional boundaries and think about larger regional targets. There was also a very evident commitment to multiracial connections: Community Coalition (also known as CoCo) realized that many of the liquor stores it was targeting for shutdown were owned and/or operated by Korean merchants and so sought to avoid inflaming racial tensions with their proposals. KIWA pointed out the marginalization of the Korean community but also tied its fate with the larger immigrant movement. CHIRLA added to the multi-ethnic mix, founding an emergency hotline and services to respond to the indignities suffered by day laborers and domestic workers, thus forging bonds between immigrant cultures from around the world. Meanwhile, CoCo, AGENDA, and the Bus Riders Union, established out of LCSC, were explicit about Black-Brown dynamics, realizing that these two communities, now living in the closest residential proximity in

the city, were the likely backbone of a progressive alliance.

The need to think more critically about what ailed also led to deepening partnerships with academics. As noted earlier, the UCLA Community Scholars

Program was founded in 1991. Spearheaded by Gilda Haas who was teaching in the Department of Urban Planning, the Community Scholars Program began linking grassroots organizers with academics and students through cutting-edge research on L.A.'s most exploitative industries. The UCLA Labor Center, an institution that would

employ or house Larry Frank, Victor Narro, and Pablo Alvarado in the following years, became, in the words of its director, Kent Wong, “a resource to support the transformation of the labor movement of Los Angeles.” As amply documented by Edward Soja, the UCLA Urban Planning program continued to provide needed analysis and train needed analysts.

Much was in the air – but less was on the ground. The problems were big, the organizations were small, and experience and expertise was still in short supply. Still, there was an important spirit and sense that a new sort of deep collaboration was needed. The challenges of injustice were too large, the scale of the region was too grand, the forces in opposition were too powerful for one group to think it could change the flow all on its own. Rather than viewing each other as competitors, there was a quiet realization that L.A. needed all hands on deck, that a movement would be bigger than its members, and that the goal was to build an ecosystem not an empire.

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CONSOLIDATING PRESENCE: ANCHORS AND ALLIANCES

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

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

This set the stage for what we call the second wave of movement building: *creating anchor organizations and forging new alliances* (1996-2000).

Big – or at least bigger – organizations and alliances emerged to anchor the work. Communities for a Better Environment (CBE), a group that was shifting its attention from broad issues of environmental health to a more specific focus on environmental justice, grew in staff and finances and soon led a charge to change rules about facility-level pollution at the Air Quality

Management District. CBE’s activists not only won that fight – surprising even themselves – they created a system of training for smaller grassroots groups as they sought to create a “regional voice” for environmental justice.

Among the more memorable achievements in this era was a decree – partly obtained by legal proceedings but also by organizing and political leverage by LCSC and its allies – that forced the Metropolitan Transit Authority to hold the line on bus fares and dramatically improve service. Meanwhile, AGENDA and others successfully



lobbied Dreamworks, a major film company slated to receive city subsidies to set up a studio, to agree to a job training fund that eventually became Workplace Hollywood. In this same era, the country's first "welfare-to-work" banking account services for public assistance recipients was established by SAJE, providing an alternative to mercenary check-cashing outlets for poor families. The latter two organizations were establishing their niches: AGENDA/SCOPE finding creative ways to leverage public investment for workforce development and SAJE forging innovative and very concrete approaches to improving the daily lives of poor Angelenos.

Alliances were also on the rise. Clergy and Laity United for Economic Justice (CLUE) was formed in 1996 to organize the faith community to bring pastoral care, witness, and credibility to the low-wage immigrants at the center of the struggles waged by LAANE, CHIRLA, and others. CLUE was a key part of a broader multiracial and interfaith coalition, spearheaded by LAANE, to have the City of Los Angeles adopt a living wage ordinance – which the Council did in 1997, overturning the veto of a Mayor who proved to be not "tough enough" to get his own way on this issue. The outlines of what would become known as community benefits agreements (CBAs) were sketched as part of a deal to remake and redevelop a retail complex at the corner of Hollywood and Highland. Meanwhile, immigrant rights groups were forming and flowering, including a pioneering effort to organize day laborers and domestic workers, as well as the securing of city funds for several workers' centers from 1997 to 2001.

The growing alliance between immigrants and labor was essential. Labor unions realized that the future of organizing lay in the service sector and in immigrant workers who were more open

to union entreaties. This, in turn, required that unions become more open to immigrants and their issues – and not just in Los Angeles. In 2000, the national AFL-CIO officially adopted a platform supportive of immigrant rights and comprehensive immigration reform – and its announcement at the L.A. Sports Arena drew an overflow crowd of eager supporters.

Labor was a critical part of another form of movement building in this era: direct involvement in the electoral process. In 1996, the Los Angeles County Federation of Labor, AFL-CIO (County Fed) welcomed a new secretary-treasurer, Miguel Contreras, who soon helped to transform the political operations of the County Fed from an ATM for elected officials to a vehicle for mobilizing its rank-and-file (and often immigrant) members to go to the polls. While progressives had been elected earlier – Mark Ridley-Thomas to the City Council in 1991, Jackie Goldberg to the

City Council in 1993 and Antonio Villaraigosa to the State Assembly in 1994 – labor's new commitment to get-out-the-vote efforts for progressive candidates added a significant punch. In 1998, for example, the County Fed's endorsement of former union official Gil Cedillo in a special election for a State Assembly seat propelled the candidate from a double-digit trail in the polls to an eventual electoral margin of more than twenty points. Meanwhile, labor ally Villaraigosa was appointed to the Assembly Speakership in the same year, and just two years later, Jackie Goldberg, the City Council firebrand who had pushed for the living wage and community benefits deal at Hollywood and Highland, was elected to the State Assembly.

It was not just labor in the electoral mix. Community organizations mobilized against Proposition 209, a ballot measure that sought to strip affirmative action rules in the state. And

“ We have a saying in our work which is that there are people with a particular calling to justice and those are people who feel the pain of other people in their own body, no matter what they do; even if they don't know them. Not everybody does, and if you do, it's a calling to the justice work. ”

– Alexia Salvatierra, formerly with Clergy and Laity United for Economic Justice

between Prop 209 and Prop 21, a measure that sought to increase criminal penalties for youth, younger faces started to get active in organizing and movement building. Indeed, many of CoCo's staff learned-by-doing in these campaigns, working in high school organizing committees that became the model for those that pressed for college prep courses at all LAUSD high schools. On the environmental justice front, Youth for Environmental Justice, a project of CBE, became active in three local high schools, eventually leading to victories that curtailed refineries and blocked power plants in their already overburdened communities.

Meanwhile, in the academy, Occidental College's Urban and Environmental Policy Institute (UEPI) opened in 1997, turning out important research from the likes of Peter Dreier, Robert Gottlieb, and Regina Freer – and later Martha Matsuoka. In 1998, UEPI and Occidental hosted a Progressive LA conference that included a broad range of community organizations and eventually led to a policy agenda "for the next L.A." that became part of the debate in the 2001 mayoral election. And its work has continued: aside from training undergraduate students to be ready for movement building, sometimes with a pit stop at UCLA's Urban Planning program, UEPI has contributed a wide range of useful reports over the years, particularly on issues of food justice.

Also in the mix was the Community Development Technologies Center (CDTech), founded by Denise Fairchild in 1995 and located at LA Trade Tech. CDTech actually inherited the research and other assets of Rebuild LA (RLA) as that organization sunset in 1997. In its later years, RLA had shifted focus to a strategy that involved supporting smaller companies, assisting community-based organizations, and attracting grocery stores to disadvantaged areas, which made CDTech a good match given its mission of economic development, retail development, and community organizing. CDTech has gone on to train several generations of community developers and organizers, support new efforts for green manufacturing, and work with others in campaigns for economic justice.

The bottom line: in this time period, a broad ecosystem was coming into place, with victories accruing, confidence building, youth training, capacities deepening, and alliances forming. It was time to take a next step, one that would involve scaling up the targets and changing even more elements of the political and economic landscape.



STEPPING UP:

MOVEMENTS AND POWER

To build the power that we need to win, we need not just our own powerful organization, but we need our allies and peers to be strong as well. All the alliance building, the training and capacity building was built on that premise.

– Anthony Thigpenn, Strategic Concepts in Organizing and Policy Education

The third wave of *fashioning movements and building power* came in 2001-2005. In this era, the organizing work and a sophisticated inside-outside strategy began to come together, particularly around electoral strategies, new policy innovations, and strategic alignment of multiple efforts.

One key marker of the movement maturation – of working together to achieve something bigger – was the Community Benefits Agreement (CBA) negotiated around the expansion of the Staples Center sports arena in downtown Los Angeles. Completed in 2001, it involved a wide swath of community groups, environmental advocates, and labor allies – and at the top of the negotiating team were SAJE and LAANE. With the pattern set, another group of disparate forces – led by LAANE and joined by many others – secured a \$500 million CBA in 2004, this time around the



expansion of the Los Angeles Airport. LAANE then pivoted to assemble another coalition to defeat a measure WalMart placed on the local ballot in Inglewood that would have allowed the retail giant to build a superstore without going through the usual traffic and environmental reviews.

Meanwhile, immigrant rights groups were also formalizing long-term relationships around a common vision. CHIRLA, KIWA, and the Pilipino Workers Center had formed the Multi-ethnic Immigrant Worker Organizing Network (MIWON) in 1999 to link the efforts of different national-origin groups. In 2000, they were joined by the Garment Worker Center and in 2005 by the Institute of Popular Education of Southern California (IPEPSCA). The National Day Laborer Organizing Network (NDLON) was officially established in 2001, bringing together twelve community-based organizations and workers centers from across the country. And also in 2001, CHIRLA, the Korean Resource Center (KRC), and others fought for and secured legislation that allowed undocumented students with significant time in California to pay in-state tuition for attending public universities.

Reflecting the growing organizational maturity of many groups, CoCo in South L.A. took on multiple issues affecting community well-being. This included working with City Councilmember Martin Ludlow to launch a Summer of Success program in 2003 which became a youth violence prevention model for the city, tackling issues of relative parenting with its “Family Care, Not Foster Care” campaign, and collaborating with InnerCity Struggle (based in East Los Angeles) to launch a youth-driven campaign to get necessary college prep courses in all high schools in the Los Angeles Unified School District. Partnering from

the academy, UCLA’s Institute for Democracy, Education and Access (IDEA), founded in 2000 to address and challenge education inequities, provided research to support this effort.

Another reflection of the movement maturity was a new approach adopted by many organizations to understanding and developing power. In 2004, for example, one of the most power-focused organizing federations, the IAF, was rebooted; after waning in influence over the 1990s, it was rechristened as OneLA-IAF and its “Founding Convention” in July (“Founding” was a bit of a misnomer since its new constituent elements had been up and organizing for several years) drew over 12,000 to the Los Angeles Convention Center. A year earlier, SCOPE published

“ We were going to use the resources on building our own movement and we weren’t going to give those resources directly to the candidates, we were going to use them for ourselves. First, we had to come out of this with a bigger stronger labor movement. Second, one to hook up with progressives outside of the labor movement. ”

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

Power Tools: A Manual for Organizations Fighting for Justice, a document that codified a power analysis approach that arranged organizations and individuals in a matrix that judged not only whether they were allies but also how much power each had. The advantage of this approach soon became clear: It was an unromantic view that persuaded groups to tackle what they could win, strategize how to win, and keep focused on the fact that the fundamental task at hand was about building and taking power.

Of course, one of the most important forms of power is political, and one of the biggest electoral arcs in this period was the first and unsuccessful run of Antonio Villaraigosa for mayor in 2001 and the subsequent victory four years later. Villaraigosa came up short the first time for many reasons but one was that his opponent was far more popular with African Americans. There was, however, an important generational split: Anthony Thigpenn, CoCo founder Karen Bass, and one of the region’s earliest pioneers in interethnic coalition building,

then-City Councilmember Mark Ridley-Thomas, were all younger, built from the movement cloth, and supported Villaraigosa as the progressive alternative. And when Villaraigosa ran the second time, with the field campaign informed by the lessons of door-to-door community organizing and directed by Thigpenn (on-leave from his nonprofit-funded work), his victory signaled that movement organizations would have a bigger voice and a sympathetic ear in city government.

The Villaraigosa success also signaled the embrace of an inside-outside strategy – the idea of keeping one foot in the door of electoral politics and policy making, and another in community organizing and grassroots mobilization. The most obvious evidence of this came in particular personal stories – Karen Bass jumping from being the head of CoCo in South L.A. to being elected to the state Assembly in 2004 to eventually becoming the first African-American woman to serve as Speaker of a state legislative body in U.S. history (and was then elected to Congress in 2010). But there were also key organizational trajectories to match.

Community groups like AGENDA began to experiment with 501(c)4 operations (a category of tax-exempt non-profit that is allowed to engage in unlimited lobbying and limited political campaigning, with contributions to the group taxable) and initiated work on public opinion around progressive issues. Organizations also built an “integrated voter engagement” model realizing that contacting voters only during elections was not sufficient; they needed to be constantly involved in political education and issue campaigns between election cycles. These efforts were a complement to the County Fed’s electoral work, particularly its development of the foot soldiers needed in precinct operations to elect what the

County Fed’s executive-secretary Miguel Contreras called “warriors for justice.”

But the other part of inside-outside had to do with ensuring that those “warriors” – the elected officials put in power by labor and its allies – would actually deliver for constituents, continuing their fight in office as well as their fight for office.

This meant providing both people and policy ideas to sympathetic officials. On the policy side, Occidental’s UEPI had already helped to develop an earlier agenda “for the next L.A.,” USC’s Southern California Studies Center and its Center for Sustainable Cities contributed to the mix with a 2003 report, actually developed in concert with Villaraigosa while he was a Distinguished Visiting Fellow, that argued for L.A. to “grow smarter, grow together, grow greener, and grow more civic-minded.”

But it was the people side of the equation that was perhaps the most important as the election of Villaraigosa created a unique opportunity to serve: City boards and commissions were filled with an unprecedented number of social justice and environmental leaders, while other movement activists, most notably Deputy Mayor Larry Frank and Senior Policy Advisor Torie Osborn, were appointed to key posts. Equally crucial was a commitment that popular mobilization would continue, both to provide cover to the newly elected and appointed officials who wanted to do the right thing and to shift public opinion such that it made political sense for them to do so.

“What we have to do is build a movement, so [elected officials] are just as inspired as anyone else in the movement to say ‘yes’ I’m going to push that agenda. It isn’t just building raw power to control people. It is really building a movement, and there is no substitute for it.”

–Vivian Rothstein, Los Angeles
Alliance for a New Economy

SECURING SUCCESS:

IMPACT AND SCALE

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

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

One of the clearest signs of the new political landscape came in 2006 when half a million Angelenos marched for immigration reform and were greeted at City Hall by the new Mayor. Translating this new positive reception to actual policy victories was one of the central tasks in the fourth wave we discuss in this report: *achieving impact and scaling up* between 2006 and 2011.

One of the most significant policy efforts came when a motley – and we mean that in a good way – crew of various groups formed under the banner of the Coalition for Clean and Safe Ports. Together, the groups fought for and won a Clean Trucks Program at the Port of L.A., cleaning the air, addressing environmental justice, and improving workers' rights all in one fell swoop. Driven by labor, community and environmental forces, it was a perfect complement to aggressive policy action by the Mayor and his commissioners – and as if L.A. was not enough, the organizers of the Coalition have gone on to collaborate with parallel efforts at no less than four other ports, nationally.

The organizing groups also began to engage in new efforts on sustainability that helped to cement ties with traditional environmentalists. SCOPE served as an anchor for the Los Angeles Apollo Alliance and worked to secure a green retrofit ordinance that included job training for less advantaged workers. GREEN LA, an unprecedented coalition of mainstream environmental and environmental justice groups, was established to work with the Mayor and newly-appointed Commissioners to



advance ambitious sustainability policies at the country's largest municipally-owned utility and in one of the most sprawling and heavily polluted regions. The Bus Riders Union (BRU) fought for and won a bus-only lane on Wilshire Boulevard that will help speed the daily commute of thousands of low-wage workers and demonstrate the viability of new approaches to managing congestion – and lest anyone from outside L.A. doubt the significance of this victory, think briefly about the

power it takes to dethrone cars in this auto-centric region.

The labor movement, revitalized to a significant degree by the mobilization of immigrant workers, recognized the need to address the concerns of Black workers and so pushed for the unionization of security guards and the creation of a new Black Workers' Center. Labor also secured the adoption of cutting-edge Project Labor Agreements as well as a Construction Careers Policy for transit investments (with special targets for disadvantaged workers) to assure that city- and other publicly-supported projects would both embrace a high-road economic path and reflect the racial diversity of the city.

Meanwhile, Housing LA, a coalition of renters' rights, homeless advocates, labor, religious groups and affordable housing developers, passed a model policy framework to mandate affordable housing construction and won a unanimous City Council vote to enforce a policy to limit further condo conversions. Given the boom-and-bust housing market, this was not enough to stop the pressures of gentrification or the damage wreaked by the subsequent foreclosure crisis. Housing, including the struggles around developments proposed by the University of Southern California, promoters of a downtown football stadium, and others, remains a tough quandary for progressives.

Yet another aspect of scale had to do with reaching out beyond the local or regional sphere of influence. Connecting the work on ports across the country, mentioned above, is just one instance. LAANE also hooked up with similar labor-affiliated "think-and-do-tanks" from around the country to form the Partnership for Working Families. In parallel fashion, the BRU affiliated with the Transportation Equity Network and led in the Transit Riders for Public Transportation's effort to shift federal funding toward mass transit. Meanwhile, SAJE's "Right to the City" framing and work was folded into an alliance by the same name in 2007 to bring together communities across the nation fighting the excesses of gentrification.

CHIRLA formed the New Americans Partnership with a number of similar groups from other states

to focus on both national immigration reform and immigrant integration at the state and local level. Its work with other groups in the National Domestic Workers Alliance recently won the support of AFL-CIO President Richard Trumka on a statewide bill – signaling the reach and depth of community-labor ties. And stretching to a national scale as well, NDLOD dispatched organizers and support to its affiliates in Arizona and other states to fight a rising tide of hostile anti-immigrant initiatives.

Environmental justice organizations, often among the most locally-focused of groups because of immediate proximate concerns about health and quality of life, connected with others in the state to form the California Environmental Justice Alliance, and reached across state and national boundaries to participate in the U.S. and World Social Forums. LA Voice, a local affiliate of the PICO organizing network founded in 2000, coordinated with other PICO groups and many others to support changes in immigration law, health care reform, and bank accountability. And Anthony Thigpen – who had by now honed grassroots electoral mobilization into a sophisticated and large-scale civic engagement program – helped to bring together over twenty-five groups under the banner of California Calls to mobilize new and occasional voters.

All this occurred against a rapidly shifting national landscape. By late 2008, the economy was in free-fall and a former community organizer had been elected President. The moment was seemingly ripe for progressives to affect change on a national level – but while the opportunity might have been exciting, what seemed to be a rush to Washington D.C. ran straight against the lessons that might have been gleaned from the slow but powerful transformations in Los Angeles: the need to build relationships and trust, the imperative of organizing and mobilizing an authentic base, and an understanding that no elected official – no matter his or her history and convictions – can change the world unless an entire movement is engaged in a combination of political support, policy innovation, and accountability.

LISTING L.A.'S TOP TEN

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

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

What were the key elements of this twenty year period of social justice organizing? How did we go from the L.A. uprising to L.A. rising?

While no short list can get it right, no long list will be remembered. So with what we hope is the proper balance of humility and hubris, we argue that there were at least ten important innovations in the L.A. tale:

- 1. A new focus on multi-racial and multi-ethnic efforts.** Previous strategies had often sought to build on ethnic communities and identities, something that risked balkanization, particularly in the highly segregated residential landscape of Los Angeles. Stressing a multi-racial effort helped to capture the changing dynamics of places like South L.A. that were in the midst of a massive shift from being largely African American to majority Latino as well to link disparate communities across geography.
- 2. A new set of labor-community alliances.** Labor unions had frequently been seen by communities of color as defenders of the status quo. But with union membership shrinking due to deindustrialization, the labor movement increasingly became entangled with the immigrant rights movements and then shifted to become a key leader in broader community alliances, including fights for a living wage, affordable housing, immigration reform, and environmental justice. As a result, unions have been both integral

to progressive change and shaped by it, with ripple effects into more conservative parts of the labor movement such as the building trades that have become highly supportive of outreach to and apprenticeships for disadvantaged workers. Just as striking has been the increasing set of alliances between labor and environmental groups, overcoming the jobs versus environment debate with joint campaigns on cleaning the ports, retrofitting municipal buildings, and now work on reforming L.A.'s waste and recycling industry.

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

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

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

“ To hear Chief of Police Charlie Beck talk about day laborers as being humble people looking for a day of work or hear the City Council President saying that these men are part of the community – that change in attitude takes time. ”

– Pablo Alvarado, National Day Laborer Organizing Network

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

7. A willingness to play the inside and outside game. Traditional organizing often holds electoral politics and elected politicians to one side, inviting them for accountability sessions but not necessarily thinking through the strategy of running your own candidates, and then working alongside them to pass and

implement policy. L.A.’s social movements have tried to maintain a healthy separation from political figures but also a healthy engagement in actual political campaigns. It’s a fine line to walk but it’s one that has been handled gracefully – and with the wisdom of knowing that what ultimately moves policy is power on the ground and not just the helping hand of a friendly elected official.

8. A new philanthropic willingness to fund organizing innovation. While the action happened on the ground and

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

9. A firm commitment to movement building versus organization building.

Traditional organizing often builds on the self-interest of those being organized. While that can lead to immediate and important coalitions, it can also feed into a transactional rather than transformational sort of solidarity. Interest-based organizing, in short, feeds a frame in which the groups doing the organizing can (and perhaps should) see themselves as driven, at least in part, by the self-interest of institutional advancement. Attention then gets diverted to capturing rather than sharing credit for what is accomplished. L.A.'s movement groups are certainly interested in becoming stronger, but they have realized, as Anthony Thigpenn of SCOPE once put it, "it's not about empire

building, it's about movement building." What counts, in short, is the entire organizing infrastructure – and each group needs to do its part to nurture the whole.

10. A vision for scaling up. From early on, organizers seem to have been clear that what happened in L.A. would not stay in L.A. Much as they realized that they needed to scale up their efforts – tying together disparate communities and

strands of organizing – to challenge the root causes of social distress in Los Angeles, they were aware that multi-regional efforts would be necessary to tackle the broader issues that face America. As noted earlier, SAJE is a founding member of the Right to the City Alliance; CHIRLA is part of the New Americans Partnership; local environmental justice groups now comprise the California Environmental Justice Alliance; L.A. is joining as the

organizing gets underway for the national Congress of Excluded Workers and the multi-state "Caring Across Generations" campaign to transform the care industry – and the list goes on and on.

While any top-ten list is convenient – easy to remember, fits on two hands, resonates with Letterman fans – any such list can leave a few key ingredients off the table. Among those in the L.A. case: a willingness to honestly assess and build power; a commitment to partner with researchers to build the scaffold for policy work; a willingness to grow big and capable organizations; and a remarkable history of mentoring leaders and handling transitions. Finally, L.A.'s biggest lesson may be its simplest: the recognition that you are only as strong as the team to which you belong.

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

– Amy Schur, Alliance of Californians for Community Empowerment.

FUNDING CHANGE, CHANGING FUNDING

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

– Madeline Janis, Los Angeles Alliance for a New Economy

One key part of the L.A. experience was the role of a set of key small-scale funders who were willing to provide resources for new experiments in movement building – and then also willing to educate larger funders as the experiments began to work out and change lives for the better.

We see several implications of the L.A. experience for interested funders. Some of them are fairly familiar: fund grassroots organizing so that the real heart of social movements continues to beat; offer multi-year operational support (i.e., “patient capital”) so that groups can pivot from issue to issue as times change; support capacity building, particularly

through peer-to-peer exchanges, so that groups can meet new challenges; provide resources specifically aimed at deep collaboration, recognizing that this takes attention and time and cannot be done just “on the side;” and practice what you preach by engaging in appropriate funder collaboratives (perhaps with less meetings than those usually involve).

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

- **Invest in anchors *and* new organizations:** There is a tendency to think small is

“ Invest where there is no power, but don't divest from where there is power. ”

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



beautiful – but sometimes it’s just small. We do not mean that funders need to go just for bigger groups that may not play well with others; rather, we mean that support is needed for groups that have the scale to affect change and so can serve as a stable center for movements and help buoy new organizations. This will require moving from an either/or (big or small) perspective to the sort of ecosystem framework that we have stressed (which would also allow for a differentiation between size *per se* and capacity to serve as an anchor). As one recent example, Liberty Hill’s seed funding of LGBTQ work in African-American, Latino, and API communities underscores the ever-present need to recognize and empower new voices and constituencies while linking them to the broader movement.

- **Support alliances with labor:** Funders cannot directly support unions and are often wary of supporting other parts of the broader labor movement. But the partnership with labor – and labor’s transformation – in Los Angeles is so critical that several volumes have been written on the topic (including the aptly named *L.A. Story* by Ruth Milkman). Indeed, some of the most progressive work in Los Angeles can be attributed to labor-community alliances – the Ports Campaign (with the Teamsters), the L.A. Apollo Alliance’s Green Retrofit policy (with the building trades), and the many different campaigns to improve the lives of immigrant workers and their families. Funding strong movements anywhere will mean coordinating with progressive labor

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

– Kent Wong, UCLA Labor Center

forces and funding those organizations that also know how to effectively partner with labor.

- **Help create sustainable revenue models:** As Amy Schur of ACCE said, “I don’t really know how community organizing can grow and build to a significant scale if it’s foundation dependent. ACORN’s experience was a very sobering one, because at the end of the day we didn’t have the choice to repair the brand. . . when the major foundations withdrew support.” It is not just an issue for one group faced by an unfortunate (or at least well-publicized) set of scandals: As organizations have become mature, the economic crisis has hit, and executive director transitions are common, foundations need to help institutions experiment with membership dues, individual donor programs, service delivery, and other ways of diversifying resources.
- **Democratize philanthropic decision-making:** In L.A., Liberty Hill was founded with the commitment to a community funding board (CFB) that brought movement activists together to read proposals, conduct site visits, learn about the changing landscape, and make strategic funding decisions. The CFB knit together leadership across issues, geographies, and constituencies in a city that was both vast and segregated, and it created a real partnership between movement actors and philanthropic leadership – and most important, it helped Liberty Hill get the funding right. This sort of democratic philanthropy may be hard to do at a bigger scale, but it is not impossible and experiments in collaboration are in order.

- **Broadcast the good news:** The success of many movement organizations in Los Angeles is due partly to their ability to scale up to the challenges at hand, something connected to their growing capacity to acquire and manage more resources. Management can be taught but breaking into the national funding market occurred in no small part because of the way that the initial fundraisers saw themselves as “circuit riders” and so worked to showcase the L.A. work to national foundations and to also focus the philanthropic conversation on the importance of organizing. Foundation allies of organizers need to do more organizing themselves, sharing stories of success, pointing out key opportunities, and helping to grow the pie.



- **Build metrics that matter:** Part of moving foundations along will involve understanding that the philanthropic world is increasingly (and perhaps rightly) focused on evidence-based giving. Fortunately, the evidence is in: investing in social movement organizing can transform the rules of the game in a metropolitan area as large and as disparate as Los Angeles. The trick is to develop a set of tools that can capture transformations as well as transactions, that can measure movement effectiveness as well as organizational effectiveness, and that can be embraced by both organizers and program officers.

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

thinking and strategy: Organizers know that we need to try something new and that we – activists, academics, funders, civic leaders and others – need to hold ourselves accountable.

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

SOMETHING'S HAPPENING HERE...

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

– Marqueece Harris-Dawson, Community Coalition

This summary is but a partial story – and we know that the full report is as well. We have already hinted at what we left out, partly by virtue of the fact that we could not talk to everyone, partly because we had a specific focus on particular sorts of movement builders, and partly because we had page limits in both this summary and the full report. It is also important to acknowledge that this summary spends virtually no time (though the full report does) on the setbacks along the way, including the campaigns that did not work out, the victories that got lost in the implementation, and the coalitions that proved to be thin rather than thick, temporary rather than long-lasting.

Significant learning did take place when things went wrong. But our main point here is that so much has also gone right on the organizing front since the 1992 civil unrest shattered a city. Walking the burned wreckage of South L.A. and Koreatown, it would have been hard to imagine a world of community benefits agreements, Black and Brown youth advocating together for better schools, and an immigrant rights movement spanning the range of national origins. It would have been equally hard to glimpse this future if one stumbled upon the modest origins of LAANE in the corner of a union office, caught a glimpse of organizers stepping

onto their first bus, or observed environmental justice organizers just beginning to understand how their various communities were linked.

Part of what made it all happen was a particular arc of organizing over the past twenty years. L.A. essentially moved from traditional interest-based organizing to a more intentional bridge-building approach. This made sense: in a fragmented metropolis, interests can divide as much as unite, and one way to overcome this geographic and social reality was to link communities around

Part of what made it all happen was a particular arc of organizing over the past twenty years. L.A. essentially moved from traditional interest-based organizing to a more intentional bridge-building approach.

broader values, broader concerns, and a broader narrative. The new approach led groups to constantly seek new collaborations and do so in a way that would lift up one's partners as well as one's own organization. No one group could have done it alone – to match the depth of the problems, one needed organizations that could get big while

staying true to their mission, that could work effectively with one another in ways that were strategic not just tactical, and that could be thinking early on about how to align with parallel efforts in other metro areas. The remarkable sense of mutual support many have seen in L.A.'s social movements was not simply an accident of intertwined personal histories (although there was plenty of that) – it was a strategic choice.

We believe that we may be at the cusp – in L.A. and elsewhere – of yet another shift: a move toward *transformative organizing*. This sort of organizing is also based in a values frame but it pays closer attention to the personal growth and spiritual development of the organizer and community leaders, takes seriously that motivations are about purpose and passion as much as they are about politics and policy, and interacts well with faith-rooted efforts to shift the discourse on after divisive topics such as immigration. In a sense, this attention to deeper values has always been part of the picture: the earlier generation of activists featured in this report grew up at a time of mass social movements – the United Farm Workers, the Civil Rights

movement, the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee – and were able to draw some of their spiritual motivation from those movements and their leaders. A new generation is having to operate and rise to tremendous challenges in what may be more arid times and a new transformative approach can help the movement and its organizers to have more sustainable lives – more inspiration, deeper reflection, and less burn-out.

The shift to transformative organizing may have an important additional merit: it can help progressives reach the middle of the political and cultural spectrum. That middle – the solid group of everyday residents working hard to get it right for themselves and their families – is driven by

everyday concerns that must be addressed by a set of effective policies. But it is also convinced that there is something deeply wrong with a nation that is drifting apart rather than growing together. A ragtag group of activists managed to capture that national mood with Occupy Wall Street, lifting issues of inequality, pointing to a system jury-rigged for the rich, and finally breaking through into a national discourse long dominated by the cacophonous discourse of an individualist right. The fight is on – and it is not just about politics and policy, it is about the very soul of the country. And nothing less than transformative organizing will fit the bill.



MOVING ON UP

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

–Pablo Alvarado, National Day Laborer Organizing Network

So why review all this history – and why now?

To be clear, we came to this project not to celebrate the past twenty years in Los Angeles but rather to initiate a conversation about the next twenty years in America. After all, many challenges remain in the City of Angels: poverty and joblessness remain high, racial tensions continue, and problems of housing affordability, environmental inequity, and limited community voice in the policy-making process are still with us.

The organizing infrastructure is also uneven, with some issue areas weaker in their coverage, some alliances still lacking, and some neighborhoods still desperately under-resourced.

Still, there are lessons to be learned for both L.A. and the nation. Just as Los Angeles was a city on the edge in 1992 – and one that was soon tipped over by the riots and rebellion – we are a country close to a particular type of brink. As in Los Angeles in 1992, the economic inequalities often tolerated in a market society have become extraordinarily extreme, the racial tensions kept hidden by polite conversation are bubbling up, and the path ahead will be a choice between being “tough enough” to slash our federal deficit or creative enough to forge an economy that works for all. In the current national morass, it is

movement building like that seen in Los Angeles that may provide a way forward.

The Fall 2011 rise of the “Occupy Movement” was inspiring – but just as important was the public’s widespread acceptance that the 1 percent had gone too far, that the scales of economic injustice were tipping wildly, and that something very much needed to be done. Movement builders are increasingly finding themselves able to tap into that sentiment, drawing

people from an individualist account of what went wrong (“I borrowed too much”) to a structural account (“we bailed them out too much”). What we do with this sentiment – and whether it can be translated to specific policy proposals and linked to organizational infrastructure – is still unsettled, but so too were the emotions about working poverty until they were channeled into unionization drives, living wage campaigns, and the struggle for transit justice.

There is also a growing recognition that social movements are key to social change. The 2008 Obama election triggered some progressives and some philanthropists to think that the key task then was to bombard newly sympathetic Washington D.C. policy makers with bright ideas and fully-baked policy packages. Everyone should

The strength of a national movement is about leveraging the maximum power in places where you can take it to the furthest limit but also recognizing that in other areas they are doing the hard work and it's slower.

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

likely have gone running in the other direction: back to the communities and the grassroots organizing that can hold elected officials accountable. After all, Villaraigosa may have been a movement mayor – but the individuals in the L.A. milieu who contributed to putting him in that position knew that they had to be both realistic about what could be done and pushy when it was not happening. Organizing and base building are crucial – and this is increasingly seen by both organizers and their foundation partners.

So what do we take from the last twenty years of organizing in Los Angeles that is relevant for the next twenty years in America? We draw three simple lessons – and we make them alliterative for easy recall.

The first is that movements are about people. The arc of the organizing in Los Angeles may have been related to key structural factors – the way that the disappearance of industrial jobs triggered a new form of organizing with service workers, the way that the ravages of the crack epidemic created a holistic approach to health in South Los Angeles, the way that the wars in Central America triggered new movements of solidarity and fed an immigrant stream that became a mobilized working class, the way in which the geographies of racial segregation meant that multicultural alliances worked best when aimed at big regional targets. But it is also and profoundly about an inspiring cast of characters who were deeply committed, remarkably strategic, and profoundly relational.

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

- Larry Frank, City of Los Angeles



One takeaway could be that Los Angeles was lucky in its leaders – and we were. But another interpretation is that movements and their funders must double-down on a new kind of leadership development, the sort of transformative approach that builds soul as well as skills. This is particularly important because many of the Los Angeles groups and their national counterparts are at the point of key generational shifts and organizational successions – and all this is occurring in a very different world in terms of the technology, the role of social media in organizing, and even the strength and depth of the right.

The second lesson we draw is that movements are about power. One element characteristic of the L.A. experience was the development and implementation, primarily by SCOPE but now used by nearly all the groups (and by many throughout the nation), of a “power analysis.” As we have stressed, this was a hard-headed look at not just who was with you and who was against you, but how much power each ally or enemy brought to the table. The analytical process served to build bridges between diverse interests by deepening collective political understanding and offering more concrete strategies to take on larger regional targets. But it also helped with something else – losses were not taken emotionally but were instead seen as a reason to amass more power, politicians were not viewed as saviors but as actors with their own interests, and attention always returned to the *sin qua non* of movement-building: organizing the base.

The takeaway for the national scale is that the palpable disappointment with aspects of the Obama presidency seems oddly misplaced. Sure, hope and change were in the air, but as Deepak Bhargava of the Center for Community Change reminds us in a recent paper on “Social Justice Movements in a Liminal Age,” very little had actually changed in 2008 regarding the underlying balance of forces in the country. Over the last several years, we have come up way short in terms of immigration reform, labor rights, and so much more – but that simply calls for more organizing on the outside to make the inside accountable.

Fortunately, much of this is underway across the country – with inspiring campaigns for economic justice in Ohio, for immigrant rights in Mississippi, and an emerging campaign called “Caring Across Generations” that is now spanning states, age brackets, and ethnicities.

Finally, successful movements are polycentric (we admit – it is an academic word, but it makes our point, and it does alliterate with people and power). By this, we return to the notion of the ecosystem for social change. There is, after all, no single “L.A. Story” – there were instead a multiplicity of different strategies, different organizations, and different political tendencies, all circling each other, at first warily and then more closely as they realized that the problems were so big, the politics so difficult, and the community needs so great that there was little time for the sectarianism of the past.

The takeaway for the nation is, we think, obvious: the battles of labor unions fighting for protection in Wisconsin, undocumented immigrants asserting their human rights in Arizona and Alabama, and gays and lesbians striving for marriage equality all over this nation may seem very different but they really comprise a single struggle for human dignity. We need to be putting together multiple issues, multiple generations, and multiple institutions in the service of one America. As Van Jones once commented, Martin Luther King did not proclaim “I have an issue” but rather thundered “I have a dream” – and its singularity as one dream should not disguise but rather envelop our differences.

In 1992, Los Angeles was a city and region ripped by violence, plagued by inequality, and riven by divisions about how to rebuild. We, as a country, are facing much of the same – shaken by economic crisis, tilting left, then right, then left, struggling to find a narrative and a set of policies that will move us to new common ground. It was hard to know with a city in flames that another world was possible – but it was, it is, and it will be if we put our skills to work and our souls to bear in creating a more socially and environmentally sustainable American future.

INTERVIEWEES FOR L.A. RISING

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FURTHER READING

There have been a number of books and articles detailing various aspects of the Los Angeles experience, both analyzing the factors that produced the social divisions behind the unrest and chronicling one aspect or other of the organizing that took place in its aftermath. There are also a number of very good books and articles simply reviewing innovations in social movement organizing. While this is just a partial list of the good work that has been done, we cite and discuss many of these in the longer report this summarizes.

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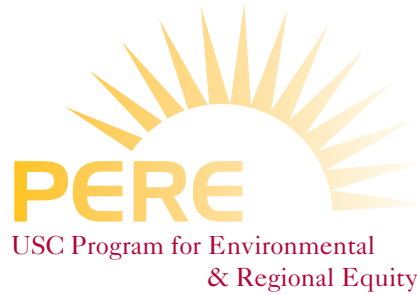
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