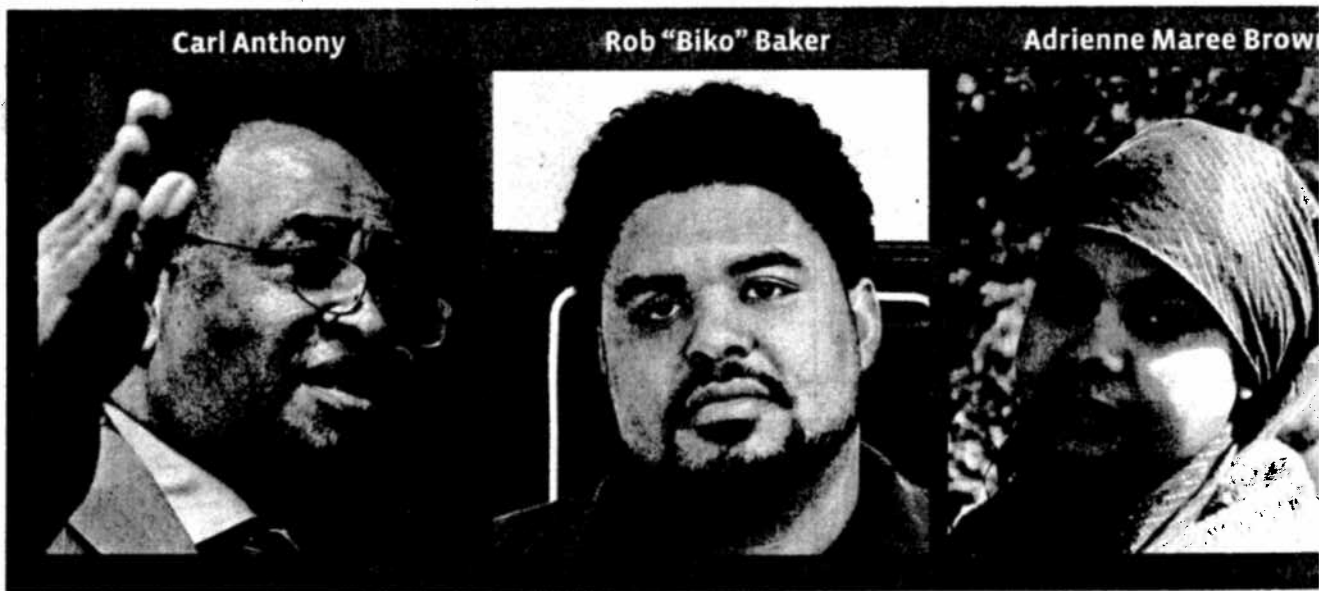


AMERICA: THE REMIX

BARACK OBAMA'S ELECTION DIDN'T LAUNCH A POST-RACIAL ERA. BUT A RACIALLY JUST, INCLUSIVE, AND EVEN LOVING SOCIETY IS STILL POSSIBLE, SAYS A YES! MAGAZINE PANEL OF VISIONARIES. *Moderated by Sarah van Gelder*



Carl Anthony
Founder of Breakthrough Communities, based in Oakland, CA.
His article is on page 38

Rob "Biko" Baker
Milwaukee-based organizer and national mobilizer of young voters.
His article is on page 24

Adrienne Maree Brown
Leads the Ruckus Society and coordinates the US Social Forum in Detroit. *See her article, on page 48*

Q: IN THE YEAR 2042, people of color will be in the majority in the United States. They already are in many of our cities and farming areas. Yet America still imagines itself—on television, in advertising, and in political rhetoric—as racially white and culturally European. What would it mean to change our self-image and recognize that we're made up of a mixture of races, nationalities, and cultures?

Carl Anthony: I believe that the biggest change would be the changing of our imagined community. The Eurocentric view of the world rests on a story that goes back probably five centuries. The fact is, everyone has ancestors that go back 200,000 years. The opportunity is to actually develop a shared story that includes everybody and also includes the Earth.

Carlos Jimenez: We'd have an opportunity to break free from chasing a false expectation about who we're supposed to be. A lot of people go through self-denial in order to conform to the image of white European society. We start

looking down on our own cultures, traditions, and practices.

Biko Baker: The other day I noticed on Twitter that many women of color are using Barbie as their status name. It struck me as horrible because white women can't live up to the Barbie standard and African American women definitely can't. I see self-hate on a daily basis in the communities where I work.

Adrienne Maree Brown: Obama's election brought a black man into office, but does he bring black culture with him? How do we carry culture forward along with biological race—which is not even a scientific reality? How do we learn the lessons from our history of displacement, slavery, and colonization, and discover each other and all the cultural history that we carry?

With the ecological situation we're

brought about the changes that we're struggling with today. All our social movements since that time have been a response—the anti-colonialism movement, the struggle against slavery, the labor movement, women's movement, the ecological movement.

I don't necessarily agree that this is going to be difficult to topple. With the emergence of India and China, as well as other developing countries, we

Robert Jensen



Author, organizer, and journalism professor at the University of Texas.

His article is on page 40

Carlos Jimenez



Directs Young Worker Project at Jobs With Justice in Washington, D.C.

His article is on page 27

Grace Lee Boggs



Detroit-based movement activist and theoretician for nearly 70 years.

She blogs at www.yesmagazine.org

But, as Malcolm X highlighted, people of color aren't the minority—the world population is brown. If we can truly represent what's going on in this world and not let the Westernized image get in the way, I think we will see a growing self-confidence. But I don't think this is going to come easily.

Robert Jensen: The changes in demographics may make us a more multicultural society. But politically, we are still Eurocentric. It will not be easy to dislodge the white power structure, in part because society can absorb and co-opt people even when they are not racially white.

in, it's ancestral knowledge that we especially need to connect with. Then we can access the secrets for taking care of the planet that we're on.

Grace Lee Boggs: We need to understand the diversity emerging in this society not only in terms of race. For example, people with physical disabilities are giving us insight into a culture of the heart and of the spirit that can help us evolve.

Carl: I think a pivotal point in our story is the period of European expansion and colonization, which touched every single person on the planet and

will be shocked at how swiftly things change in the next century. Nobody thought that the Soviet Union would disappear, but it did.

I think we need a new story and we need it to be an inclusive story that has all of these dimensions in it: race, class, gender, generations, as well as our relationship with the natural world.

Sarah: Do you see signs of this new culture and this new story emerging?

Adrienne: In my work with national organizations like the Ruckus Society, the Allied Media Conference, and now »

» the US Social Forum, the number one thing I see is the emergence of wholeness. Folks recognize that health care cannot be separated from the environment or the economy. And direct action strategy can't stand alone—it has to be part of a holistic strategy that includes negotiation, relationship building, and what happens after there is some success. This wholeness is coming from leaders who are getting more comfortable showing up in their whole identity.

Carlos: I agree about restoring wholeness. At the last World Social Forum, the indigenous Aymara people from

would tell you that they don't think they will make it to 30. I felt that way. It's a generational thing caused by the war on drugs and the crack epidemic.

While the progressive movement is doing a lot to tackle the contradictions of race, the lived experience of people of color, especially black males, hasn't changed much. That's a testament to how deep structural racism is, and it's why I do not believe that the new world that we're trying to build will come easily. It will be a struggle.

Also, my generation is increasingly worried about the future because of the impact of climate change. I'm

the movement we're very privileged to have intergenerational interaction. I think of my own experience, for example, with young people in their 20s—the Millennial Generation—and with the generation that came out of the '60s.

The 20th century was a fantastic century. It started with the Russian Revolution and in the middle had the Montgomery bus boycott and then ended with the WTO protests in Seattle. We have such an enormous opportunity to share those experiences and make clear that this is an intergenerational movement.

THE WALLS ARE BREAKING DOWN. WE'RE BEGINNING TO SEE HOW OUR WORK IS INTERRELATED AS OPPOSED TO, "I'M JUST A RACE PERSON," OR "I'M JUST A THIS PERSON... ."

the Andes brought the concept of *buen vivir*, which is about living life in harmony and equilibrium among men, women, different communities, and above all between humans and the natural world.

I was blown away. And when I talked with folks from different countries, with different economic, political, and social realities, we discovered that we have a shared agreement of where we want to go. We will take different roads, but ultimately, we have a shared idea about harmony and equality.

Carl: Wholeness also means taking responsibility for directing and leading society. As long as we just protest against somebody else governing, we run up against limitations. In Afghanistan, for example, it's no longer sufficient to be anti-war.

Sarah: Let's look at the generational divide. What strengths can each generation contribute to the creation of a new American story?

Biko: If you talk to African American men under the age of 30, I think most

young, but I'm worried about dying.

Carl: I have to support what Biko said. As an African American man now turning 70, it has been painful to watch the proliferation of progressive, social movements over the last 30 or 40 years that have forgotten African American men. You see people facing homicide and going to prison. These survival issues have been marginalized in the public conversation about progressive causes.

Grace: In Detroit, we have ex-cons coming back to help who had been part of the crime and crack epidemic. Some are coming back in order to redefine family. They remember Malcolm X, and they realize that carrying on the legacy of Malcolm means transforming themselves and transforming their communities.

That's the sort of thing that we are doing in Detroit, and that's the sort of thing that we have to begin spreading so that people see that there's an alternative to this disgraceful and shameful corporatist government.

I like this discussion, because in

Adrienne: I just want to put in a plug that I moved to Detroit because of the intergenerational dynamics I saw here. They're so powerful.

One of the things that my generation brings to the table is that we are more and more comfortable with a post-divided world. I'm seeing the walls breaking down. We're beginning to see the whole picture and how our work is interrelated—as opposed to, "I'm just a race person," or "I'm just a this person..."

One of the things I'm learning in the US Social Forum process is that the ease of travel and electronic communications makes it easy for the younger generation to forget the hard work of on-the-ground organizing. It's helpful to have elders in our lives to remind us what it was like when the work wasn't about conference calls and going to meetings. Most of your work took place in your city. That way of organizing is something that we need to return to because our planet is demanding that we relocalize and not be traveling all over the place. It's not aligned with our values to be



PHOTO COURTESY OF THE AMERICAN ANTHROPOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION



SIGNS OF A NEW IDENTITY

Museum Exhibit Asks, Are We So Different?

Line up a dozen skin types against your own: Can you tell where black ends and white begins? Not easily, say the creators of the traveling museum exhibit, "Race: Are We So Different?" "Those things that vary [among us] are not racial; they're a part of the range of human variation," says Yolanda Moses, who chairs the exhibit's advisory board.

Visitors to the exhibit learn just how illusory the concept of race is, as they view montages of faces (like the one above) and use a microscope to compare their skin color to others. In a simulated pharmacy, they can check their blood pressure and read explanations for higher rates of hypertension among African Americans. (Hint: the causes have more to do with inequality than genetics.)

More than 200,000 people toured the exhibit after it opened in St. Paul, Minnesota. It has since traveled to Wichita, Philadelphia, and St. Louis, and will eventually head to the Smithsonian Museum of Natural History in Washington, D.C. The online interactive version is at www.understandingrace.org.—Ashlee Green

constantly on a plane.

Many national struggles have to be won at a local level first. It's going to be hard for us to get the kind of health care we want nationally if we don't have local, intergenerational struggles all over the country.

Biko: I think our generation is much more willing to go from opposition to proposition. It's not taking power, but it's making power. We have to come up with solutions. We can't just be angry for the sake of being angry.

Carlos: Young people need elders who can help us younger folks slow down and learn from their experiences. Sit down with us and ask some deeper questions that help us grow strong and reaffirm our commitment to social justice work: Why do we fight? What have you learned? What can you teach others now from your experience?

Sarah: Many of us witnessed in horror last summer's media attack on Van Jones, the White House green jobs advisor. When spurious right-wing attacks forced him to resign, many asked what we should have done to support him. Is there something we can learn from this?

Biko: I think the attack on Van was a response to an attack on Glenn Beck and FOX News with a strategy that wasn't based in love. [Editors' Note: *Color of Change* convinced some of Beck's key advertisers to withdraw their support for his show after he accused President Obama of being racist.]

When you push someone into a corner, you're going to get scratched. As progressives, we need to embrace non-violence because if we're going to push our vision of the world into society, we can't be attacking people, even people as problematic as Glenn Beck.

The other thing is Van and people like him are human beings, and they need our love. As a progressive movement, we need to be more honest with each other and stand up for each other. Maybe it's because I come from >>

» a street background, but you just can't let your people be attacked like that without stepping up.

Grace: To look at the question of Van Jones in isolation from the general paralysis in relationship to Obama would be a mistake. We haven't discovered yet how to struggle seriously with Obama, like, for example, when he failed to stand up to the attacks on Van.

Carl: The people who attacked Van are vicious; they made up arbitrary lies about him. But the fact that they got away with it reveals as much about the weakness in the progressive movement as it does about their viciousness. This was an attack on Obama, and the progressive movement has not built the base to sustain the energy that put Obama in office.

Adrienne: Van was attacked in part for the activist work of his youth. If we have a political culture that's comfortable with multicultural space, then we'll be comfortable with all of the politics brought to the table and with the whole story. So someone like Van could say, "That's who I was when I was younger, and I'm not ashamed of it." And Obama could say, "I met Fidel, and I'm not ashamed of it." Because we are in this country that is a democracy, and we're supposed to have a diversity of political opinions. That's how we're going to survive.

Sarah: What is it that we still don't get about how to work together? Why are wedge issues still able to divide us?

Grace: I think you have to work together on a turf. As long as we're

just talking about different ideologies, we're going to be hostile to one another or compete with one another. We have to ground ourselves in a place and in a community. Activist work has been successful in Detroit because we have lived and worked here for years.

Robert: It's not surprising that we have trouble overcoming differences. We live in a society based on hierarchies that are deeply woven into the fabric of our identities. As someone who's white, male, and belongs to the professional class, I bump into these hierarchies all the time. We are told that they are inevitable and difficult to overcome. But when people commit to common struggles, overcoming them is easier.

In the end, our ecological crises will compel us to overcome our differences. It's possible that the planetary ecosystem

could become unable to sustain human life as we know it, not in some science fiction future but in our lifetime. We are up against something that real, that scary. Recognizing the depth of the ecological crises has not made me despair; it's helped me commit to the difficult work of crossing boundaries.

Biko: I agree with all of that. The only thing that I would add is that talented organizers can get caught up in the cult of personality. I've seen that in my own career as I've gone from the grassroots to the national level. There aren't enough leaders who are challenging their own privilege. It's something that I'm trying to get better at, and I think it's something we all need to do.

Carl: Our social movements are all struggling for a moment in the sun

and for our viewpoints. We need to understand that we're all coming out of a common matrix related to that pivotal moment of European expansion.

All the ecological, human rights, and economic issues that we are facing every day came out of a common matrix: that a few pirates and a few so-called kings managed to conquer the whole Earth and turn it to their own private use. Getting the story right is really important, because if I start asking whether black people are more important than indigenous people, or whether the women's movement is more important than protecting the Earth—those kind of arguments get really dumb.

Adrienne: There are three things that we need to get. First, none of

our issues or our identities exist in a vacuum. The moment we struggle against each other is the moment we weaken our movement. Colonization wasn't color-blind, so the long-term result of that cannot be color-blind or class-blind; race and poverty go hand in hand.

Second, we need to learn to listen to each other's stories. People are developing new solutions, but we're not actually listening to each other enough to develop trust in those solutions.

Third, we need to understand that we're not moving toward some end goal, some win-or-lose point that will make or break our society. This is something I'm learning from Grace. Instead we're involved in a process, and we need to continue to improve ourselves and evolve. ●

Building Beyond Racism

Youth Take the Promise of Obama and Put it into Practice

Rob "Biko" Baker

Even with an African American in its top office, our nation still hasn't figured out how to have a real conversation about race. Most of us would rather dance around this uncomfortable subject than jump into a full-blown discussion of how America continually fails to live up to its principles. Though our Declaration of Independence promises life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness, the sad reality is that if you are a young person of color, you are more likely to be unemployed, incarcerated, or murdered during your lifetime.

But across the country, a generation of young leaders of color is working at the local level to address the problems of structural racism. Building on the energy generated by Barack Obama's campaign and election, members of Generation Y—the "Millennial Generation"—are finding ways to address America's complicated history on their own terms.

Practice Makes Perfect

My generation—kids who grew up in the '80s and '90s—became the battleground on which America fought to free itself of its racial contradictions. The civil rights movement knocked open the doors for equality. Our generation is practicing how to make that promise

a reality. There is no generation better prepared to take on the challenges of the day. For most of our lives we've been having the tough conversations.

Of course, tackling race head-on hasn't been easy. I still have scars from my experiences of getting called "nigger" on athletic fields and school buses. But like so many from my generation, I gained from those traumatic incidents the tools to express my humanity, even in the face of continued oppression.

Long before Obama entered the national conversation, civic-minded young people were making their presence felt in the halls of power. Some of these folks, like founding member of the National Hip Hop Political Convention and green real-estate developer Baye Adofo-Wilson, have used art and creativity to change desolate communities. As the executive director of Lincoln Park Coast Cultural District, Adofo-Wilson is transforming a low-income neighborhood in Newark, New Jersey, into an arts and cultural district.

Others, like Minneapolis' Nimco Ahmed, have challenged the status quo by making sure that people from disenfranchised communities are involved in the civic process. A young leader in the local Somali community, »



» she makes sure her community turns out to vote.

And when people told Pittsburgh's Chester Thrower he couldn't get financing for his weatherization company, he didn't give up. A former cocaine dealer, Thrower was inspired by hearing Van Jones talk about the green economy. He got past numerous obstacles, including lacking the resources to pay for training; has completed several green certification programs; and is currently working with state agencies to secure funding for his business. "When I was in the streets, I never thought I would be working with

invitations to a diverse group of elected officials, traditional environmental activists, tradesmen, labor leaders, and local artists to come and discuss Milwaukee's future. Most of those invited were older than the conveners. Energized by the potential promised by the Obama election, we brought together people who never even thought of working with each other.

At first the attendees were skeptical because they weren't really sure if these young folks were serious. But after several meetings, naysayers started to become believers. The meetings were

agenda, nearly a year after the roundtable discussions started, this collection of community residents has transformed into a diverse alliance called the Making Milwaukee Green Coalition (MMGC). Today the group is tracking stimulus spending, teaching area residents about the green lifestyle, and helping small businesses write green business plans. Most importantly, the MMGC is building bridges into whiter, more affluent parts of the city and state.

Recently, when city officials began discussing privatizing this majority-minority city's water, leaders of the

THE CIVIL RIGHTS GENERATION KNOCKED OPEN THE DOORS FOR EQUALITY. OUR GENERATION IS PRACTICING HOW TO MAKE THAT PROMISE A REALITY.

the state of Pennsylvania—well, except only as an inmate," says Thrower, who hopes one day to provide jobs for other young African Americans who have been shut out of the system. "Trust me, change is possible."

You might not see these stories in the mainstream news, but we are having a transformative impact on our communities. Most importantly, we're not waiting for anybody to give us permission to lead.

From Opposition to Proposition

Thrower's case is admittedly unusual. Far too often, youth of color from inner cities aren't able to overcome the obstacles facing them. But a group of us in Wisconsin hopes to break down the roadblocks preventing people of color from being stakeholders in society. We believe that young people of color have to be involved in all aspects of civic life if society is to become healthier and more productive.

In early 2009, a group of African Americans affiliated with my organization, the League of Young Voters Education Fund, began holding weekly roundtable meetings in Milwaukee with community residents who were interested in greening their neighborhoods. These precocious Millennials sent

professional, focused on outcomes, and democratic. The skills learned while organizing young people came in handy with our older constituents.

Many of these discussions focused on the ways that racial discrimination, both individual and institutional, continues to shape Milwaukee's economic climate. In a city where nearly 50 percent of all African American men are unemployed, these tough conversations uncovered how truly disenfranchised people of color feel. "We spent a lot of time talking about how black tradesmen have been treated unfairly," says Wesley Carter, who helped organize the meetings. "People are mad, and they don't feel like anyone is listening to them."

But rather than dwelling on the historic problems caused by racism, the young facilitators pushed participants to believe that they could collectively come up with solutions for the community's woes. They asked the group to talk about the ways that traditional, racialized, winner-take-all politics have gotten in the way of moving the city forward. The group realized that continuing on that path would make it impossible to build a green economy that would both save the environment and improve Milwaukee's unemployment rate.

No longer focused on an oppositional

MMGC helped organize a diverse, citywide coalition called Keep Public Our Water (KPOW) to protect the public trust. After weeks of heated debate on talk radio shows and nightly news, city officials agreed that they would not pursue the neoliberal policy.

Jayne Montgomery-Baker, MMGC's lead facilitator (and my wife), chaired KPOW's steering committee and facilitated the coalition's meetings. "If it weren't for the Making Milwaukee Green [Coalition] I don't think my community would have been involved in that fight," says Montgomery-Baker, who recently won an award for her work with KPOW.

MMGC is looking for more ways to involve young African Americans in green careers. This won't be easy given the historic obstacles facing the segregated city. But the young leaders are looking for bridges over the traditional problems. "The only way Milwaukee can get better is when we all work together," says Carter. "We don't know what that looks like yet, but we are going to figure it out." ●

Rob "Biko" Baker is executive director of the League of Young Voters Education Fund, a national organization that works to empower non-college youth to become winners and players in the political game.

United by Hard Times

Fight for Workers' Rights Cuts Across Race Lines

Carlos Jimenez

I'm feeling relieved. For a while it seemed like the historic election of our first African American president would give legitimacy to the idea that we live in a "post-racial" America. The idea that race is no longer a part of people's daily experience is not merely false. It's potentially dangerous when a majority of people are struggling to understand what's happening to them economically.

What people are experiencing is exactly what's supposed to happen to them under capitalism and its current variant, neoliberalism. That economic system is grounded on the idea that society must have winners and losers. It has convinced people that those categories are based on race: that people of color are, in the natural course of things, losers; and that white people, regardless of class, are supposed to win.

When hard times hit, as they have >>



US Social Forum—Forging Alliances, a Movement of Movements

In 2001, 12,000 people congregated for the first World Social Forum in Porto Alegre, Brazil. By 2005, the number was 10 times as many, as social movements, labor leaders, indigenous activists, and youth joined under the banner "Another World is Possible." The movement spread around the world. In 2007, the United States joined in with a social forum in Atlanta led by a diverse group of leaders representing grassroots social-justice organizations. Ten thousand people attended.

Organizers expect more than 25,000 when the second United States Social Forum meets June 22–26, 2010, in Detroit. Karlos Gauna Schmieler of the Center for Media Justice says Detroit was a conscious choice: It's a microcosm of the world economy and a center of resistance to foreclosures and joblessness. —Ashlee Green

Need a ride to the USSF? www.YesMagazine.org/go-to-detroit



Article author
Carlos Jimenez
marches with Jobs
with Justice at
the 2007
US Social Forum.

PHOTO BY CARLOS
FERNANDEZ

» recently, people who are losing their grip on their middle-class status—or those who were already poor and are getting poorer—look for someone to blame. They fall back on the official story: White people's troubles are caused by people of color; the troubles of people of color who were born in this country are caused by immigrants. It's a divide-and-conquer strategy that keeps people who are natural allies on a class basis from looking at who's really causing their trouble: the people who run the capitalist system.

This moment presents both a challenge and an opportunity. The challenge is to get people with shared economic interests working together—to

on the brink, and many poorer whites are already off the cliff.

A group of progressive organizations, including my employer, Jobs with Justice, recently released a report entitled *Battered by the Storm: How the Safety Net Is Failing Americans and How to Fix It*, which illustrates that point. It finds that in the current recession, unemployment has risen by 4.5 percent for whites, by 6.9 percent for Latinos, and by 6.8 percent for African Americans. As has always been the case, communities of color are disproportionately affected by job losses, especially since they started with higher levels of unemployment.

In spite of a common interest in

Hotels are places where race, gender, and language play a divisive role in the workplace. Mike Hachey, a northern Virginia organizer with Service Employees International Union (SEIU), notes that race and gender do indeed come into play in hotels. Latina and immigrant women, for example, form the backbone of the housekeeping department, and as a groundbreaking study recently showed, are much more likely to get injured at work than workers who are either male or of another race. The same study showed that men disproportionately hold hotel jobs as banquet servers, cooks, and dishwashers.

Unfortunately, workers in different departments often don't talk to one

WHEN HARD TIMES HIT, PEOPLE WHO ARE LOSING THEIR GRIP ... LOOK FOR SOMEONE TO BLAME.

get them past learned racial divides. As long as poor and working-class white people remain convinced that they win by keeping people of color on the margins, all workers will continue to lose economic ground. The opportunity is to use this economic crash as a way to find common ground among those who are the real losers—regardless of race—in the existing system.

The Current Jobs Reality

The United States is at the edge of a cliff—economically, financially, and ecologically. For many in this country—especially people of color—there's never been anything but a cliff. After all, losing homes, not having enough food, and being unable to find work was a reality for millions across the country before the great crash of 2008. That reality has not changed, but many more people are now experiencing it.

Over the last 30 years, the faces of those standing at the edge of the economic cliff have changed. No longer are they just people of color, immigrants, and people without an education. Today, educated and middle-class whites are joining the ranks of those

challenging a system where the rich get richer and the poor stay poor, people continue to buy into the stories that divide them along racial and identity lines. Working people are all working harder and producing more than ever before, yet most have not seen gains in their wages or benefits.

Organizing on Common Ground

Progressives—those who promote social justice, defend self-determination, and share collective responsibility for creating a more just world—cannot miss the opportunity to use this time of economic hardship to break down racial barriers. The economic crisis puts progressives in a position where we can challenge structures, like racism, that cause natural allies to work against one another. Should we choose to sit it out, we will allow reactionary forces to continue to use economic problems to split us along race lines. Working-class people, searching for answers to their economic realities, will move to attack what is depicted as the face of the problem.

The union Unite Here has succeeded in bringing workers together in their "Hotel Workers Rising" campaign.

another on the job beyond a greeting and tend to self-divide during breaks. The challenge for the union was building a collective movement that could bring together housekeepers, front-desk workers, and servers to improve wages and working conditions, despite race and language barriers. Unite Here helped workers find common ground on which they could relate. The union identified workers from each department who wanted to improve working conditions and built strong, worker-led committees to be the face of Unite Here. Then they asked the workers to take a variety of actions to help grow the organization and put the power structures in clear view of everyone. Those actions included sitting with new people, reaching out to different departments, participating in meetings between management and workers and their supporters, and stating their pro-union views to their peers. This strategy ensured that workers had a chance to relate to one another and realize their shared interest in winning a union contract.

Similarly, SEIU's "Stand for Security" national campaign did a phenomenal job moving workers to connect along class lines, particularly in Los Angeles, where »

» it re-engaged the African American community (once a large segment of the city's labor). SEIU acknowledged rocky experiences in the '80s and '90s, when the black community was bleeding jobs in the union's janitorial division. But the campaign guarded against racial divisions by showing that the real culprits behind low wages and benefits were not other ethnic groups, but building owners and property managers. Union organizers—black, Latino, and white—educated and mobilized security officers to join them as they knocked on potential members' doors. They reminded workers that Fortune 500 companies paid hundreds of thousands of dollars in leasing agreements, yet the security workforce protecting the building did

public-school teachers. Low-income parents are dealing with the loss of low-cost city day cares, which are being replaced with private ones that are less concerned with the neighborhoods than with making a profit. The day-care workers who once held those publicly funded, union jobs have not been permitted to reapply for their former positions.

Take Back DC is using the same organizing principles that worked for Unite Here and SEIU. Rather than point fingers at one another, members of these disparate groups are seeing the cuts in education and social services, increased privatization, and the attacks on unions as a threat to all of them—the people who make the District work. Their work together is building under-

young people today are turning away from old racial divides and leading the way in creating a multicultural America. Data from a 2003 Gallup Poll showed that 82 percent of white 18- to 25-year-olds disagreed with the idea that they "don't have much in common with people of other races."

Spaces like the US Social Forum (USSF) in Detroit serve as opportunities to advance the discussion of building alliances based on class rather than race. The USSF expects more than 25,000 progressive activists and organizers to come together to share their work in areas as diverse as education, stopping the criminalization and incarceration of youth, bringing an end to unjust wars, bargaining col-

... ONLY BY WORKING TOGETHER CAN THESE GROUPS HOPE TO WIN BACK VALUABLE PUBLIC SERVICES AND JOBS THAT MAKE THE CITY WORK FOR EVERYONE.

not earn enough to provide for themselves or their families. They asked workers if they found it acceptable that property managers spent more money on the flower arrangements in the lobby than on raises for the security officers. The message became more powerful as workers learned that many of the same security companies, property managers, and building owners that operated a non-union workforce in Los Angeles were also operating union workforces in Chicago, New York, and San Francisco.

In Washington, D.C., a new Jobs with Justice campaign called "Take Back DC" is working to bring together public-sector workers, teachers, and low- to moderate-income residents to take back economic ground they've lost in the last decade. These are people who are at times divided by education, class, and race. But they share the burden that privatization places on working-class people. Teachers are dealing with a local administration that invests in charter schools, even as it claims lack of resources and fires

standing that issues that traditionally affect working-class communities and communities of color also present a challenge for all of D.C.'s residents. Take Back DC is educating members about the impacts of privatization on the city, and putting people into action confronting the powerful interests, like developers and unscrupulous politicians, who profit from the privatization agenda. As Take Back DC builds the campaign, there is growing recognition that only by working together can these groups hope to win back valuable public services and jobs that make the city work for everyone.

In all three organizing drives, the key was bridging racial divides by highlighting workers' class interests. In order to do so, the unions had to directly involve workers and put them into action to build a sense of solidarity that could move them beyond artificial divides.

Moving Forward, Together

Despite the constant use of race as a wedge, and perhaps as a result of it,

lectively for better wages and benefits, attaining reproductive justice, and protecting the environment and Earth's well-being.

But the overarching theme of the USSF is how we can build a larger movement that addresses not just racism, but the many structures that are impeding people from pursuing life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.

Working people of all races are looking for movements or vehicles through which they can express their self-interest. We cannot allow the right wing and corporate elite to co-opt the anger that is out there, as they have with the "Tea Party" movement and the growing resentment against immigrant workers. Progressives can change the direction of our country for the better by helping working people join together, regardless of race, to be their own champions. ●

Carlos Jimenez was raised in a working-class immigrant family in Los Angeles and currently lives in Washington, D.C. He organizes at Jobs with Justice (jwj.org), is a proud union member, and is working to educate and mobilize young workers to win social and economic justice.