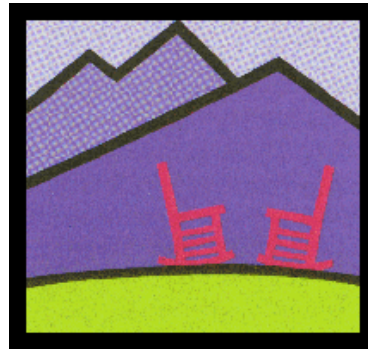


**Across Races and Nations:
Building New Communities in the South**

Case Studies of Collaboration



CASE STUDIES OF COLLABORATION

Efforts to create alliances between Latinos and other Southerners, particularly working class whites and African Americans, are fraught with potential obstacles: racial/ethnic rivalry over job access; language barriers; limited knowledge of Latin American and African American history; employers' tactics of racial/ethnic division; and situational differences between new immigrants seeking economic opportunity and those who have been racially and/or economically exploited for centuries in the U.S. The following case studies illustrate instances of multi-racial/ethnic collaboration, primarily between Latino immigrants and African American Southerners, in which participants have coalesced either in relatively brief alliances over specific issues, or in more long-term organizational relationships. The one exception is the North Carolina Center for International Understanding, which is included because of its important role in influencing responses to immigrant settlement in a number of communities across the state.

The summaries are by no means comprehensive or even representative of all multi-racial/ethnic alliances, but compose a set of selective examples that offer some insight into the factors that contribute to successful coalition-building. Several were drawn from a special publication of the Southern Regional Council, *Creative Collaborations*; those written by other authors are so indicated. Because the profiles were compiled over a period of a few years, some of the organizations and projects may have changed in emphasis or in a few instances even ceased operation. Nonetheless, they are included because they illuminate one or more of the elements necessary for successful collaboration. These include commonalities in strategy and goals, close relationships between strong organizational leaders, and similarities in constituents' class backgrounds.

Black Workers for Justice and the Farm Labor Organizing Committee (FLOC) North Carolina

Overview

Black Workers for Justice (BWFJ) is a community-based organization that unites workers to fight for their rights in the workplace as well as for justice in their communities. Focused on the South, BWFJ has offices in North Carolina and Georgia. The Farm Labor Organizing Committee (FLOC) has been organizing the overwhelmingly Latino work force on the cucumber farms of eastern North Carolina to attain union recognition, higher wages and better working conditions. It has also launched a national boycott of Mt. Olive Pickles, which has received wide support among faith-based, racial justice and labor organizations. The two organizations have teamed up to combat tensions between African American and Latino workers and build unity across racial/ethnic differences.

Background

Black Workers for Justice was founded in 1981, the outgrowth of a labor struggle at a K-Mart store in Rocky Mount, North Carolina in which three black women were fired for challenging race discrimination. The organization emphasizes the importance of black workers' leadership in creating a southern labor movement and, more generally, a movement for social transformation in the U.S. BWFJ combines workplace organizing

and support for workers' rights with attention to issues, such as voting rights, which affect the broader African American community. It was instrumental in the creation of the North Carolina Public Service Workers Union-United Electrical Workers Local 150, for which a key BWFJ leader, Saladin Muhammad, is now an organizer. BWFJ also educates about and advocates for workers' issues in community contexts such as churches and civil rights groups.

Similarly, the Farm Labor Organizing Committee focuses at both the workplace and community levels in organizing and building support for farm workers. FLOC was founded in 1967 by farm worker Baldemar Velasquez, who led its initial organizing efforts among workers on tomato farms in Ohio. Recognizing that large corporate processors of agricultural products were key to growers' earnings and labor policies, FLOC targeted farmers who held contracts with Campbell Soup. A seven-year strike finally brought FLOC success in gaining contracts covering numerous tomato and pickle farms in Michigan and Ohio, after which it turned to North Carolina. FLOC's combination of consumer boycotts, broader services to the Latino community (ESL classes, legal clinics, etc.) and workplace organizing is similar to the strategy of BWFJ.

The two organizations have joined to promote unity among black and Latino workers in the face of tremendous Latino population growth in North Carolina and the prospects of racial/ethnic division. Tensions have been particularly evident in the poultry processing industry, where both African Americans and Latinos are employed. Recognizing that the primary beneficiaries of such divisions are employers, FLOC and BWFJ have organized "Black-Brown Freedom Schools" at which participants build relationships by sharing their histories and their struggles as individuals and as families. They have also joined in rallies, demonstrations and other actions that promote a common agenda of demands, such as amnesty for undocumented workers, an end to racial profiling, and the living wage for all workers.

Lessons Learned

This collaboration has been successful in part because of the two organizations' similar strategies and constituencies (social or community unionism among workers) as well as the serious commitment by their leaders to multi-racial/ethnic solidarity. Their chief obstacles have included language barriers and the constant need for translation/interpretation, the difficulty in sustaining participation among seasonal workers who are often confined to the grower's property, and the great diversity (in nationality, ethnic identity, class background, etc.) among Latinos themselves. African Americans, by contrast, share a lengthy history in the U.S. South and a common racial identity. However, both organizations remain dedicated to collaboration. "It is a lifetime commitment," commented Velasquez.

El Centro Hispánico and Cooperativa Comunitaria Latina de Crédito Durham, North Carolina

By Ricardo Parra and the Southern Regional Council

Overview

El Centro Hispánico is a community-based organization dedicated to strengthening the Latino community and improving the quality of life of Latino residents in Durham, North Carolina and the surrounding area. Part of the famed Research Triangle, a center of higher education and high tech industry, Durham is also home to many lower-wage

service and manufacturing employers. During the 1990s it became a magnet for immigrants, and Latinos now represent over eight percent of the city's total population. El Centro developed to serve and advocate for this burgeoning community, and to create alliances with other racial/ethnic groups, particularly African Americans. Among its more significant accomplishments is the creation of a Latino Community Credit Union (Cooperativa Comunitaria Latina de Credito), which was fostered in part through collaboration with African American financial institutions.

Background

El Centro developed out of the Hispanic Resource Center, an initiative spearheaded by Catholic and Episcopal churches in the Durham area that sought to serve the growing population of low-income Latino immigrants. In 1996, El Centro was founded as an independent entity, and began to offer such services as ESL classes, HIV/AIDS outreach and education, legal consultation, youth leadership training, and job referrals. Improving relations between African Americans and Latinos has been a key component of several programs, including Jóvenes Líderes en Acción (Youth Leaders in Action), a leadership development and community organizing training program for young Latinos ages 13 to 21. Participants in Youth Leaders in Action worked with young people in an African American group called Youth for Social Change to learn about each other's culture, history and important leaders, such as Martin Luther King, Jr. and Cesar Chavez. The young people completed photography and video projects, and documented crime in the Latino community. The program incorporated training and dialogue about dealing with stereotypes, racism, racial inequalities and understanding social justice.

Cooperativa Comunitaria Latina de Crédito/Latino Community Credit Union is another El Centro initiative that depended from its inception on cooperation with African American (and white) financial organizations. The credit union and its bilingual staff offer a safe place for personal savings, loans, independence in handling one's own finances, and financial education—all of which are particularly important to Latino immigrants, many of whom were previously unable to open accounts at other banks in the area. Representatives from El Centro Hispano, the North Carolina State Employees' Credit Union, the Self-Help Credit Union and the North Carolina Minority Support Center all collaborated in forming la Cooperativa. These organizations were motivated to work together because of their existing relationships and their shared commitment to the mission of extending financial services to underserved communities.

Mutual support and collaboration among these financial organizations have continued beyond the initial creation of la Cooperativa. For example, when the Latino Community Credit Union opened its Raleigh branch, staff sought assistance from the Minority Support Center in securing funds from the state legislature. The Minority Support Center combined the funding sought for la Cooperativa with a request for an African-American credit union in Sampson County. Together, both organizations lobbied for both appropriations and in the end, both won. As an added benefit, the Support Center built its own reputation for working across racial/ethnic lines at the legislature.

Lessons Learned

Common organizational missions and personal relationships among leaders contributed to the successful launch of the Latino Community Credit Union. Leaders of the three primary organizations supporting El Centro's efforts to start the credit union—the North Carolina Minority Support Center, Self-Help Credit Union and State

Employees' Credit Union—had all worked together for more than 15 years on various projects. Their relationships fostered an atmosphere within and between organizations that validated the purpose of la Cooperativa and the extension of their support for its success. In addition, many other organizations, including other credit unions, contributed deposits to assist in the start-up of la Cooperativa.

An important element in El Centro's outreach to African American allies in particular has been the conviction that Latinos can better address their needs and create long-term systemic change by learning from African American experiences and taking joint action. "Latinos must learn lessons gained from the African American experience in order for their community to progress," El Centro director, Ivan Parra, stressed. Working together on common needs—run-down schools in neighborhoods of color, lack of access to quality medical services, absence of after-school programs for children—also allows people to learn about each other across the racial/ethnic divide and develop the personal relationships that provide the cement for organizational collaboration.

HOLA and the Carpetbag Theater Knoxville, Tennessee

Overview

HOLA, formed in 1992, is a mutual support and advocacy organization for Latino women in the Knoxville area. The Carpetbag Theater dates back to 1970, and is an African American community-based theater company that seeks to give artistic voice to the underserved. They work together in Knoxville, the largest city in Appalachian East Tennessee and home of the University of Tennessee. Although the proportion of Latinos in the local population is still not large (1.6 percent), especially compared to African Americans who compose more than 16 percent of the city, the Latino population has increased rapidly. Together, these two organizations have developed cultural programs that seek to reach both racial/ethnic groups, including a Hispanic Festival and a play that illustrates the migration experiences of Latino women who have recently arrived in the area.

Background

Throughout its history, the Carpetbag Theater has supported the professional development of young artists and the involvement of diverse segments of the community in its work. It collaborates with other groups to transform people's stories into performance art that addresses the issues and dreams of those who have been silenced because of race, class, gender and age. Over the past decade, Carpetbag's performances have focused on issues such as the death penalty's impact on the African American community, economic barriers facing people of color, domestic violence and environmental racism. Carpetbag has also participated in the American Festival Project (AFP), a national popular education initiative that projects the voices of economically disadvantaged, rural and minority communities through artistic activities. After working on AFP projects in other parts of the country, Carpetbag in 1999 decided to focus part of its AFP work on the city of Knoxville.

HOLA was founded in 1992 by a group of women affiliated with the University of Tennessee who sought to create opportunities for Latinas to gather and connect across their diverse Latin American cultures. The early members of HOLA – some professional women and some homemakers – had moved to Knoxville fifteen to twenty years earlier,

when there were few Latinos in the area. HOLA has helped these and other women overcome the sense of isolation that they felt as Latinos in east Tennessee. The organization has also promoted leadership development so that Latinas might assume a more vocal presence in the area, and has advocated for the needs of Latinas with local government. Members hold a monthly discussion group, sponsor community service and political projects, and network with other groups in Knoxville.

The cultural collaboration between HOLA and Carpetbag is one of several connections that each has established across racial/ethnic lines. Carpetbag, which performs nationally, works with a diverse array of communities and issues. The more local HOLA seeks to establish solidarity with and learn from the experiences of African Americans in Knoxville, while also gaining unity and recognition as a racial/ethnic group in its own right.

Lessons Learned

The relationship between HOLA and the Carpetbag Theater represents a proactive approach to racial/ethnic collaboration: building relationships and mutual understanding early on (in this case when the Latino population is relatively small and new), so that when tensions inevitably arise, leaders in each community can assist in their resolution. The relationship has been especially fruitful and educational for those directly involved in the collaborative creation of performance art.

However, both groups argue that their challenge is to broaden the audience for their message—for example, for Carpetbag to perform Latino-oriented work in African American contexts, and for HOLA to develop relationships with additional individuals and organizations in the African American community. HOLA's leader, Loida Velasquez, perceives an inherent tension between her and other Latinos' desire to learn from and collaborate with African Americans and their commitment to establish themselves as a distinct racial/ethnic group that could be seen as competitive. "We are very much aware of how sensitive this can be, and most of the time we don't press the issue [of our participation and recognition], but wait to be included. But including other groups does not come easily to the local African American leadership. So, it's a matter of establishing a balance between waiting and pushing forward."

The Newtown Florist Club and El Puente/The Bridge Gainesville, Georgia

Overview

This alliance draws together the longstanding Newtown Florist Club, a community-based organization of African Americans with a rich history of environmental justice activism, with the newer Latino organization, El Puente. Both are based in the north Georgia town of Gainesville, which is a major center of poultry processing in the U.S. South. Drawn by the availability of jobs in the poultry plants, the official Latino population of Hall County, where Gainesville is located, ballooned to more than 25,000 people (20 percent of the population) by 2000. Through collaborative initiatives around specific issues, e.g., racial profiling, and intentional bridge-building activities that draw together young people and other targeted constituencies, the Newtown Florist Club and El Puente work to end racism in their community.

Background

Founded in the late 1950s by a group of African American women in the Newtown neighborhood of Gainesville, the Newtown Florist Club (NFC) began as a service effort that provided flowers, food and other support to families during bereavement. The group gradually expanded its role to include social justice issues affecting the community, and by the 1990s became a formidable force in the local environmental justice and civil rights movements. Women affiliated with NFC conducted a survey in the Newtown neighborhood to document the high rates of throat, lung and colon cancers, lupus and respiratory disease. In concert with ECO-Action, they also uncovered the extent of local industrial pollution, the existence of two Superfund sites in the community, and the fact that Newtown was built on an old landfill. Since then, the NFC has worked to address not only environmental racism but also community/youth development, economic development, and grassroots leadership training.

El Puente/The Bridge is a much younger organization, formed in 1998 as a project of the Georgia Campaign for Adolescent Pregnancy Prevention. Its health focus complements that of the NFC, as does its broader strategic emphasis on advocacy, bridge-building and leadership development in communities of color. Among El Puente's recent achievements are educating and advocating around teen pregnancy, campaigning successfully to promote Latino participation in the 2000 census, organizing an annual March for Peace, and teaching political activism skills to young people. El Puente combines direct service provision, particularly in the area of health, with advocacy around public education, electoral participation, and other issues.

The Newtown Florist Club and El Puente have joined together on several projects involving racial justice. These include a local health survey, which Latino and African American community members were hired to conduct, and an annual Peace March, designed to illuminate and combat school violence and other community problems. They also jointly and successfully pressured local law enforcement to curtail racial profiling, and have brought together African American and Latino youth for cultural projects designed to build bridges across race/ethnicity. The relationship between the Newtown Florist Club and El Puente has grown over time, and they now consider themselves partners in efforts to end racism in Gainesville.

Lessons Learned

The success of this collaboration is due in part to the strength of each separate organization and its leadership. Faye Bush, leader of the Newtown Florist Club, is also one of its founding members. Greg Bautista, leader of El Puente, has deep roots in the local Latino community, but he grew up in the States and has knowledge of its racial history that many recent immigrants do not necessarily possess. The capacity of these two individuals to work together is clearly part of the success of their organizations' collaborative efforts.

Bush and Bautista both argue that Latinos and African Americans share many of the same problems and issues, and that these can be most effectively addressed through their combined strength. "They [Latinos] are exposed to the same kind of things [in the environment] because they live in the same area [as African Americans]," Bush said. "We have the same problems they do in schools – race plays a part in that, too." Bautista goes further to assert that multi-racial/ethnic collaboration is not just "a little project....[but] a major collaboration of our missions. You must commit yourself to truly and sincerely working together and joining forces." This model of collaboration goes

well beyond the conventional strategy of building temporary coalitions when different organizations' goals happen to coincide. It suggests a deeper political understanding and relationship, in which each group should be able to articulate and advocate for its partner's mission and goals, not just its own.

This expansive understanding of collaboration extends to interpersonal relationships. Bautista argues that it is important to get to know people from different cultures on a personal basis, "because we are people first and foremost." This means sharing dreams and personal histories and doing things together, such as going to worship and taking trips, he said. Bush believes mutual understanding also "kind of happens as we work together" closely on joint projects. Both acknowledge that the most active members of their organizations have been able to build strong relationships with each other, but that the challenge is to extend that depth of interaction to their broader communities. Bautista commented, "We can only succeed if we work together. We need to continue teaching other African Americans and Hispanics the importance of shared, common goals and our shared, common mission to end racism."

North Carolina Center for International Understanding – Latino Initiative
University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill
by Susan Williams

Overview

The North Carolina Center for International Understanding's (NCCIU) Latino Initiative was developed in response to the rapidly growing Latino immigrant population in the state. This educational program aims to teach educators and community leaders about the factors driving immigration and its many effects on communities in both the U.S. and Mexico. The experience of participation has transformed the attitudes and actions of policymakers in certain locations, most notably Siler City, where Latino immigration had become a flashpoint for controversy and tension. The host organization, NCCIU, is a public service program, sponsored by the University of North Carolina, which educates residents of the state about international issues and other countries.

Background

Aware of tensions occasioned by the large and rapid increase in Latino immigration, staff at the NCCIU developed the Latino Initiative in 1998. They focus on the 20 counties most impacted by Latino immigration, where they recruit teams of either educators or policymakers to participate in the program. Participants undergo two days of orientation, then spend seven days in Mexico and a final day in follow-up evaluation and planning. They must commit to the entire process, and to share their experiences with others upon their return. The overall strategy is to educate "opinion-makers," be they teachers or prominent community leaders, who are in a position to influence others' attitudes toward Latinos and immigration.

The educational process includes numerous presentations by Latinos themselves, both in Mexico and the U.S. For example, the orientation not only provides information about changing racial/ethnic demographics in North Carolina but also includes presentations by Latino leaders regarding new immigrants and their experiences in specific communities. The trip to Mexico involves several days in Mexico City, followed by a visit to a more rural area, ideally one that is sending migrants to North Carolina.

Latino leaders from these communities accompany participants, helping to make local linkages and serving as cultural interpreters for the group.

One of the program's most dramatic success stories occurred in Siler City (Chatham County), North Carolina. A magnet for Latino immigrants, Siler City had also become a focal point for anti-immigrant rhetoric. In 1999, the chair of the county commission (Rick Givens) had petitioned the Immigration and Naturalization Service either to deport undocumented immigrants or grant them legal status (which was not feasible, given current immigration policy). The controversy that ensued eventually persuaded certain local leaders, including Givens, another county commissioner, the chief of police, sheriff, vice-chair of the county school system and a Latino educator in a local nonprofit organization to participate in NCCIU's Latino Initiative. Following their return from Mexico, Givens and other members of the Chatham County delegation evinced far more sympathy and support for the local Latino population, and actively discouraged the racist organizing that had begun to develop (partly in response to their earlier actions). They encouraged a boycott of a local anti-immigrant rally by David Duke, and managed to ease tensions by virtue of their own statements in support of Latino immigrants.

Lessons Learned

The impact of the Latino Initiative varies widely. The factors that contribute to its relatively dramatic success in certain areas like Siler City are not entirely clear, but are no doubt related to the careful recruitment and preparation before the trips, and the power of face-to-face educational experiences with counterparts in Mexico. The structure of the program, with its emphasis on county-level teams, linkages to Latino leaders and local follow-up activities, also clearly contributes to favorable outcomes. The other follow-up activities documented by staff include talks and articles by participants regarding Latino immigration, increased bilingual service provision for Spanish speakers, and traveling educational exhibits about Mexico.

North Carolina Occupational Safety and Health Project (NCOSH)
Association of Latino Workers of North Carolina
Job Information Center
Durham, North Carolina
by Ricardo Parra

Overview

The North Carolina Occupational Safety and Health Project (NCOSH) is a non-profit membership organization of workers, attorneys, health professionals and unions, which seeks to improve workplace health and safety in the state. Aware that language barriers and cultural differences were limiting its capacity to reach the burgeoning Latino population, many of whom worked in particularly hazardous circumstances, NCOSH hired bilingual staff and in 1998 launched the Association of Latino Workers of North Carolina (ASTLANC). This effort led in turn to the creation of a Job Information Center (JIC), targeted to immigrant workers. Although the majority of these immigrant workers are Latino, the JIC serves diverse ethnic and national groups.

Background

Founded in 1976, NCOSH provides training and technical assistance on job safety and health to workers in all industries throughout the state. NCOSH is not a government agency, but works to change state and federal laws to improve workplace health and safety. The organization's strategy reaches beyond the provision of technical information

and reform of government regulations regarding hazards, as NCOSH is dedicated to workers' rights as the fundamental means to create safe jobs and healthy communities.

Through the Association of Latino Workers of North Carolina, NCOSH's bilingual staff offers workshops on what to do about common problems in the workplace. Topics include rights in the workplace, what to do when a contractor does not pay employees, and other common situations. Through this work, NCOSH and ASTLANC found that a major problem facing immigrants was limited information about available jobs and how to access them. In response, NCOSH started the Job Information Center (JIC) in August of 2000.

The Job Information Center is a membership-based immigrant program whose goals are to satisfy the needs of immigrant job seekers by connecting them with employers who respect workers' rights, offer a decent work environment, and ensure good health and safety conditions. The center helps with cases of abuse or injury on the job, making referrals to lawyers and providing other assistance to injured workers. With support from local labor unions, the JIC also provides education to the membership about workers' and immigrants' rights under federal and state law.

Although affiliated with NCOSH, the JIC has its own membership of some 2,000 individuals. All members are required to pay a one-time joining fee of \$10.00; they also attend an orientation about their responsibilities as workers, labor rights, and the differences between the law in other countries and the U.S. The majority of members are Latinos from México, Central America and South America. The next largest population is East Africans, from Kenya and other East African nations, and the remainder originates from other countries such as Russia and Italy.

Lessons Learned

The majority of the job seekers that JIC serves are only able to secure entry-level jobs, where working conditions may be harsh and opportunities slim. JIC is therefore working to help job seekers develop new skills, e.g., in computers, so that they may qualify for more job opportunities. In other instances, immigrant job seekers have the requisite skills, but are not hired because of limited English proficiency. Since September 11, many companies have been less willing to hire foreign applicants, and undocumented workers have lost their jobs. This has created more demand for the services of JIC, but simultaneously has narrowed the pool of desirable jobs available to the immigrant population that it serves.

Project Change Valdosta, Georgia

Overview

Project Change works to address racial prejudice and institutional racism through the efforts of influential community leaders in Valdosta, Ga. This town of 44,000 people is located in the southwest portion of the state, and is home to Moody Air Force Base. Initially, Project Change dealt mainly with issues of racism between African Americans and whites, who are represented in almost equal numbers in the town. Recently, a committee addressing Latino concerns was added to the group. Project Change's approach is of interest as a strategy that seeks to influence racial/ethnic relations in a specific locale by mobilizing action at the top, among community leaders.

Background

Levi Strauss & Co. and the Levi Strauss Foundation initiated Project Change in 1991 as a multi-city initiative designed to address racial prejudice and institutional racism in Levi Strauss communities. The company and foundation financed Project Change initiatives in Albuquerque, NM, El Paso, TX, Knoxville, TN and Valdosta, GA with the same four broad goals:

- Dismantle institutional policies and practices that promote or encourage racial discrimination
- Ease tension between majority and minority groups, as well as inter-ethnic conflicts
- Promote fair representation of community diversity in the leadership of important community institutions
- Stop or prevent overt acts of racial and cultural prejudice

Project Change's model invests leadership in a board of influential community leaders, a majority of whom are people of color. Most of the members are business and institutional leaders who have access to and relationships with decision makers, as well as academics and activists who are knowledgeable about institutional racism. The strategy is for board members to leverage their long-standing ties in the community to bring together coalitions and pressure local institutions to rectify injustices and improve racial equity. In addition, all members of the Project Change staff and board in Valdosta have been required to attend training workshops on Undoing Racism provided by the People's Institute for Survival and Beyond in New Orleans.

In Valdosta, Project Change worked with the local newspaper in 1992 and 1993 to improve coverage of people of color. It also developed programs and activities in two major areas of institutional inequality – bank lending and education. As a result, local banks agreed to increase lending to under-served communities by pledging \$50,000 each toward a loan program. Project Change also organized workshops that taught participants about the home-buying process. In addition, Project Change identified inequities in performance by children of color in public schools, and implemented a program called Parents Assuring Student Success (PASS) that worked to increase the involvement of parents in their children's education. Project Change also helped the school board identify a new school superintendent who was sensitive to the issues affecting children of color.

In 2000, Amigos, a group composed primarily of Latinos and whites seeking to improve services to the Latino community, affiliated with Project Change. Amigos has addressed such needs as translation/interpretation, migrant workers' health, housing, and U.S. Census and English as a Second Language (ESL) classes. Amigos has functioned as a distinct committee under the Project Change umbrella, bringing the needs of Latinos to the organization's board and staff and increasing Latino participation in its programming.

Lessons Learned

Project Change's ability to build coalitions and to bring race forward as an important issue for discussion are among the organization's chief accomplishments. Frank Morman, who served as Executive Director from 1996 to 2000, commented, "We became sort of the brokers for race issues. People would call us for advice." Morman believes the organization's internal and external education work on Undoing Racism, which was extended to local bankers and other community leaders, contributed to that success.

However, the group did encounter difficulty implementing some of its specific programs, such as the home loan initiative: banks moved slowly to set up the program; the initial loan review system was flawed; most applicants needed down payment assistance; and many needed time to improve their credit before applying. These problems may have resulted in part from the middle class base of experience of most Project Change staff and board members.

Indeed, even as Project Change's ability to leverage influence through ties to community leaders resulted in certain local reforms, it also tended to estrange the group from activists and leaders of lower-income constituents. As the national director of Project Change observed, "The challenge for [Valdosta] is to be more inclusive among African Americans. For the long term, the black on black issue has to be dealt with before the black on white issue can be dealt with." Nonetheless, Project Change's non-confrontational, top-down approach allowed individuals in the business community to work behind the scenes to change racist institutions, even or perhaps especially when they could not be out front in their actions. As one leader commented, "In a small town where everyone knows everyone else, you have to be very careful about how you [go about change]."

Southeast Regional Economic Justice Network
Durham, North Carolina
by Barbara Ellen Smith

Overview

The Southeast Regional Economic Justice Network (REJN) brings together some 50 organizations that serve the working poor, women and youth, primarily in the U.S. South. Organizations affiliated with REJN have diverse constituencies in terms of age, gender, race/ethnicity and sexual identity; as a result, multi-racial/ethnic alliances are built into the network's structure. However, REJN has also initiated a special project, focused in North Carolina, to address the tensions and perceived rivalry between African Americans and Latinos. Resisting Rivalry works with community- and workplace-based organizations to bridge this particular racial/ethnic divide and build sustainable relationships to challenge racism and pursue social change.

Background

REJN was founded in 1989, at a time of deepening economic crisis in the U.S. South. Plant closings, the growth of contingent labor practices, declining wages, and an anti-union offensive by many employers converged with privatization and other political trends to produce impoverishment and economic hardship. The organizations that joined REJN sought to support local organizing for economic justice as well as a larger movement-building strategy for social change throughout the region. Among the network's key activities are an annual gathering focused around a specific theme (in 2003, Youth Perspectives in Organizing), sponsorship of popular education workshops and development of related materials on topics such as globalization and racism, and promotion of activists' wellbeing through a Wellness Program. Although the focus is primarily on the region, REJN also sponsors transnational exchanges and networking, particularly with people in Latin America, the Caribbean and Canada.

As Latino immigration to the U.S. South escalated during the mid-1990s, many of the organizations affiliated with REJN began to witness tensions between these new

arrivals and African American Southerners. REJN therefore launched a pilot effort in North Carolina, Resisting Rivalry, which seeks to develop effective strategies for addressing this division. Among the initial organizational participants were the Durham City Workers Union, the Piedmont Peace Project, and the Hombres Y Mujeres Unidos Comunidad. The heart of the project is the effort to build intentional relationships among African American and Latino low-wage workers and youth, and to model relationship-building as an essential but often neglected ingredient in the creation of lasting solidarity. Activities include collaborative information exchange, training, and assistance in integrating cross-cultural relationship building into each organization's agenda.

The initial organizational participants in Resisting Rivalry assessed their communities' or constituencies' needs related to the project, and then developed work plans accordingly. The goal was for each organization to frame a strategic plan for incorporating Latino-African American collaborations into its ongoing work. In addition, participants jointly organized several public events, such as a "Liberation Breakfast" at which people not only shared food but also discussed their distinct histories.

Lessons Learned

The capacity to take advantage of this initiative and truly foster collaborative relationships between African Americans and Latinos varied widely across organizations and contexts. Obstacles to collaboration were not necessarily a function of racial/ethnic identity or tensions directly related to African American/Latino interactions. Organizations of low-wage workers by definition serve people who are often in crisis, and whose capacity to engage in external relationship-building and other long-range activities tends to be compromised by the unpredictable demands of the moment. In a related vein, many such organizations are consumed by service delivery, or at most individual advocacy, rather than direct organizing. As a result, the capacity of many organizations to take advantage of what individual leaders might recognize as important is sometimes limited. In addition, the arrival of many Latino immigrants is quite recent and their organizations are therefore quite young; understandably, they may be preoccupied with building a base and infrastructure, not with outreach to other groups.

Differences in the national contexts of race and ethnicity are also a barrier, argues REJN director Leah Wise. "The U.S. system of racism is quite unfamiliar to many Latino immigrants, even though there may be discrimination against indigenous people in their own countries." African Americans in the U.S. South, by contrast, tend to have clearly analyzed experiences and perspectives regarding race. Immigrants' lack of historical experience with U.S. racism can compromise their capacity to appreciate the racist dynamics of job competition and employer hiring practices. For example, at one meeting in an economically depressed rural area, all of the African American participants were unemployed, and many were former farm workers, while most of the Latino participants were recent arrivals who were hired to work on local crops. Fortunately, it was possible to engage in dialogue about the reasons for this discrepancy, but the meeting was not without tension. In response to the wide need for public education about the historical interactions between Latinos and people of African descent, REJN is sponsoring a traveling exhibit of 24 pieces of photo-journalism on Afro-Mexicans, which illuminates the confluence of African heritage and Mexican history.

The events of September 11 rendered the goals of Resisting Rivalry even more difficult, but the project has nonetheless achieved instructive successes. Among them were workshops directed specifically at African American constituencies, which

addressed the racism embedded in U.S. immigration policies and thereby illuminated the inter-connections between immigrant rights and racial justice. Young people in particular seemed receptive to the message and activities of Resisting Rivalry. Out of the experiences of this project, REJN has developed information sheets that address communication, ethics, leadership, starting points for successful dialogue and other aspects of multi-racial/ethnic collaboration.

Tennessee Driver's License Campaign by Susan Williams and David Lubell

Overview

Access to drivers' licenses is an issue of concern to immigrants and their allies all over the United States. Most of the rules that control access to drivers' licenses, above all the documents and other evidence required to prove identity and residency, are set at the state level. Social security numbers, which immigrants do not necessarily possess and cannot obtain without legal entry to the country, are a common requirement. In Tennessee and Georgia, as well as other states, struggles over the documentation required to become a licensed driver have become important arenas for the creation of multi-racial/ethnic alliances in support of immigrant rights.

Background

In the late 1990's, many states began requiring social security numbers from drivers' license applicants. This new regulation came about as the indirect result of a federal law designed to improve tracking of parents who failed to pay child support. Immigrants without social security numbers were unable to become licensed drivers, yet still needed transportation, above all to and from work. The lack of comprehensive public transportation in most cities, and its total absence in rural areas, made this alternative unfeasible. Unlicensed drivers were also unable to obtain automobile insurance. As a result, any minor traffic violation generated a much larger legal problem for the unlicensed driver and for the legal system, as such cases began filling up court dockets in areas with large new immigrant populations.

In Tennessee, a rather unlikely alliance of individuals and organizations gradually came together to reform the rules governing access to drivers' licenses. This included the AFL-CIO (an umbrella organization of labor unions), Tennessee Farm Bureau, police chiefs of Knoxville and Memphis, several community-based organizations, the Black Legislative Caucus, Nashville Chamber of Commerce, Catholic diocese of Knoxville and Nashville, and the Tennessee Department of Safety. Employer groups sought to ensure reliable transportation for their workers, while law enforcement officials viewed the issue as a matter of public safety. Various politicians supported the reform in order to court Latino voters, while community and religious groups did so in the name of immigrant rights. The successful state-wide campaign drew on the broad appeal of public safety (rather than immigrant rights) in order to secure passage of a law in 2001 that allowed applicants to obtain drivers' licenses without social security numbers if they had other proof of identity and residency in Tennessee.

Several developments in rapid succession converged to undermine this reform. Immediate implementation of the new regulation led to long lines at certain licensing centers, where staff were unprepared to deal with the volume and in some cases limited English proficiency of applicants. Far more important, the events of September 11, 2001,

soon transformed the national climate regarding immigration. During the 2002 legislative session, conservative Republican Sen. Marsha Blackburn and other politicians sought to repeal the earlier reform, but the original alliance was able to forestall their efforts. However, the governor eventually decided to alter the licensing process via an executive order, which required that applicants' failure to provide a social security number be noted on their drivers' licenses.

Despite this setback, the state-wide effort to increase immigrant access to drivers' licenses yielded a permanent organization, the Tennessee Immigrant and Refugee Rights Coalition, headed by chief organizer David Lubell. The coalition is currently working to bring together a wide range of immigrant and refugee groups, both documented and undocumented, to build unity and leverage across nationality and immigration status. Beyond Tennessee, the coalition seeks to serve as a model for grass-roots, immigrant-led organizing around immigrant rights, particularly in the South.

Lessons Learned

The success of the initial campaign to reform the rules governing access to drivers' licenses and the emergence of a permanent coalition out of that effort offer a number of lessons. Fundamental to both have been the organizing skills and dedicated leadership of David Lubell and a small cohort of immigrants and allies around the state. Key resources came from allies like Fran Ansley, professor of law at the University of Tennessee Law School, who provided legal analysis of licensing regulations, and the Catholic diocese, whose lobbyist shared information about and helped garner support from the legislature. Creation of a state-wide list-serve and its strategic use to share information about the drivers' license campaign and other immigrant rights issues helped expand and solidify a network that eventually produced the permanent coalition.

In view of the continuing importance of access to drivers' licenses, more specific lessons from this particular campaign may also be useful to others. Framing the issue in terms of broad collective (and self-) interest in public safety facilitated the development of support from diverse constituencies. (In the wake of September 11, "public safety" has an entirely different connotation, which it is now of course necessary to consider in any future campaigns.) Pragmatic interest in the Latino vote also elicited support from both Republican and Democratic legislators. Many immigrants, both documented and undocumented, came to the state capitol and spoke to legislators about the benefits of reform. Although participants in the campaign lobbied intensively at the legislature, they chose not to publicize their cause widely throughout the state, recognizing that to do so might generate opposition from anti-immigrant forces. Finally, the specific timing of the legislation—when the legislature was deadlocked over a revenue crisis and related calls for tax reform—also contributed to the pressure for passage.

The successful transition to a more permanent immigrant and refugee coalition has also been an extremely important outcome of the legislative fight. Relationships and discussions during the drivers' license campaign helped to form the base for the coalition, which now includes Latino, Asian, Middle-Eastern and African refugee and immigrant groups. Unlike many organizations that advocate on behalf of immigrants and/or refugees, the coalition has created a constituency among immigrants and refugees themselves. The provision of interpretation and translation has been a basic but essential element necessary to ensure this broad participation.