The issue of rising inequality in the United States has become hotly debated and deeply politicized. Many conservative and some liberal thinkers have rationalized inequality as a positive force for—or at least an inevitable by-product of—successful capitalist development, especially during a period of rapid economic change. Others recognize rising inequalities as a problem but explain it as (1) an unavoidable by-product of globalization and the relocation of jobs to areas of cheaper labor; (2) an effect of skill-based technological change, with the benefits of innovation going to the most highly educated and appropriately skilled; or (3) an enormous increase in income for successful CEOs and entertainment and sports celebrities in what some call a new casino or tournament economy. Much of popular opinion and some academic writings simply attribute the widening gap and increasing poverty statistics to the accelerated immigration of poor and uneducated people from Third World countries, feeding the extremist ideas that the rising income inequalities would disappear if immigration were stopped or the poor returned to their original homelands.

None of these arguments presents adequate explanations for the rising economic polarization and the squeeze on the middle class. What we do know is that when globalization, economic restructuring, and the impact of new technologies are allowed to expand without significant national control and constraint—the central objective of what has come to be called neoliberalism—tendencies to increasing disparities between rich and poor are intensified. This becomes especially evident when the United States is compared to the still-robust welfare states of continental Europe (the UK is much closer to the U.S. case).

Another way of expressing the particularity of the U.S. experience is to describe the problem in terms of the breakup (or breakdown) of the social contract that was the foundation for much of U.S. postwar economic expansion. The problem of rising inequalities (and the seeds of the economic crash of 2008) can be connected here with the neoliberal ideology of deregulation, privatization, and promoting the intrinsic values of small government versus big government; the reorganization of the welfare system and efforts to dismantle the legislative framework of the New Deal; the reassertion of trickle-down notions to rationalize growing tax breaks for the rich; the increasing acceptance if not encouragement of corporate greed; and the massive decline in industrial unionism.

Seeking Spatial Justice Ed Soja
University of Minnesota Press 2010



Associated with rising inequality and urban poverty over the past thirty years and the attack on industrial unions has been a major change in the U.S. labor movement, one that has special relevance to more recent developments in Los Angeles. Developing at different rates in different parts of the country have been two major responses to the decline in industrial unionism. One has been the rise of what some call social movement unionism, an expansion in the scope of union struggles to involve other major social forces linked to gender, race, ethnicity, and, more recently, immigrants' rights, the environment, and sexual preferences. The second has involved an increasing localization of the labor movement, with increasing ties to and coalition building with a wide variety of community-based organizations focused on the particular conditions of local urban and regional contexts. Accompanying these changes in the scope of union activities has been a shift away from narrowly defined equity-oriented and wage-related struggles at the workplace to a broader politics focused more on such concepts as local democracy, community development, and *justice* in its growing multiplicity of forms.

The key point being made here is that the new labor movement and the expanding focus on justice are closely related to urban restructuring and the changing income distribution that have been driven by unconstrained globalization and the formation of the New Economy. Also important to recognize, the income disparities between the rich and the poor, along with the squeeze on the middle class and blue-collar workers, differ in their intensity from country to country, and in the United States from one city or region to another. Putting these two arguments together, we turn next to the particular context of Los Angeles and an attempt to explain why Los Angeles rather than New York, Chicago, or San Francisco has become the most innovative center of the new labor movement and for labor–community coalition building.

## Transforming Los Angeles

The changes that have taken place in Los Angeles since the Watts Riots of 1965 have been as extensive and far-reaching as in any other modern metropolis. Between 1970 and the present, the total population of the five-county Greater Los Angeles area grew from about eleven to more

than seventeen million, one of very few metropolitan regions in the advanced industrial world to have experienced such substantial growth. Even more dramatic has been the changing ethnic, racial, and religious composition of the population. In 1965, the year of the Watts Riots, the population was overwhelmingly (more than 80 percent) "Anglo" or non-Hispanic white, and decidedly more Protestant than that of any other large U.S. city. African Americans were the largest minority and were highly concentrated in an area to the south and west of the downtown, what would come to be known first under the collective name of Watts and later as South Central. Today, Los Angeles is one of the most culturally heterogeneous urban regions in the world, with the Anglo population now less than 40 percent in L.A. county and Asian Pacific Islanders outnumbering African Americans. It is also reputed to contain one of the world's largest Catholic archdioceses.

The new majority population is defined as Latino, a term that developed early on in Los Angeles to represent a new form of transhemispheric cultural and political identity. Although Latinos include Portuguese and English speakers and others from Latin American and Caribbean countries, Spanish predominates and has once again become the everyday language of Los Angeles, as it was more than 150 years earlier. Mexicans and Mexican Americans (Chicana/os) are by far the largest group in this Latino metropolis, but there are also significant numbers of residents from El Salvador, Nicaragua, Guatemala, and almost every other Spanish-speaking country in the Western Hemisphere. Asian and Pacific Islanders, especially those from Korea, Vietnam, the Philippines, Thailand, Samoa, and Taiwan, as well as people from Iran, Armenia, and the Indian subcontinent, also form major population clusters.

Thirty years ago, the clear division between black and white populations made Los Angeles one of the most segregated cities in the country, according to widely used statistical measures. Today, the ethnic geography has become much more complex. New and old barrios, especially in East Los Angeles and a large wedge of municipalities southeast of downtown, are more than 90 percent Latino, and many new ethnic enclaves have formed, such as Koreatown, Little Saigon, and Thai Town. But there have also emerged large zones of extraordinary cultural heterogeneity, with some municipalities such as Carson and Gardena having nearly equal percentages of black, white, Latino, and Asian populations



(Soja 2000). This complexity has made it difficult to say whether residential segregation has been increasing or decreasing over the past three decades. What is much clearer is that the urban labor force is now among the most heterogeneous in the world.

Accompanying these demographic and cultural changes has been an equally dramatic shift in the geographical distribution of the population and in the relations between city and suburb. Once the model of the low-density sprawling suburban metropolis, not inaccurately described in the 1960s as "sixty suburbs in search of a city," Los Angeles has become the densest urbanized region in the United States, having passed metropolitan New York in 1990. This stunning reversal deserves some further comment, for it challenges nearly all public and academic images of Los Angeles and is a key feature of what can be called the region's new labor geography.

Like many other metropolitan regions in the United States, the central core, or inner city, of Los Angeles experienced a significant loss of population after the urban uprisings of the 1960s, as large numbers of Anglo and black workers moved in waves into the inner and outer suburban rings and beyond. This was not a simple process of sprawling suburban growth, for in certain metropolitan regions such as Los Angeles, Washington, D.C., and the Bay Area, it took on the features of what some have called the "urbanization of suburbia." At least three large "outer cities," with high concentrations of residents, offices, industrial parks, jobs, entertainment centers, shopping malls, as well as museums, crime, drug problems, and other activities once considered distinctively urban, have emerged in what was once seen as classical American suburbia.

The largest and perhaps also the oldest of these new kinds of cities, or urbanized suburbs, is located in Orange County, a prototype for many local studies of urban and regional restructuring. Lacking a clearly identifiable urban core or traditional downtown, but no longer simply a stretch of traditional commuting suburbs, the Orange County metropolis is comprised of a clustering of municipalities that has been described as a postsuburban county-city, with more than 2.5 million residents and no city containing more than 400,000 people. The only exception today may be Santa Ana, the county seat and largest municipality, and reputedly the largest predominantly Latino city in the United States. Indicative of the county's urban status, there are probably now more jobs than

bedrooms in many municipalities, and more commuters flow from Los Angeles County across the border into Orange than in the reverse direction.

A second outer city now exists in the San Fernando Valley and nearby areas of Los Angeles and Ventura counties, and another in what is called the Inland Empire, including part of San Bernardino and Riverside counties, consistently ranked among the fastest-growing counties in the United States for the past four decades. Vast areas of traditional suburbia still remain, but even they are no longer what they used to be and cannot be understood and studied as if they were. In a sense, the entire metropolitan region is being densely urbanized as a new regional urbanization process is replacing suburbanization as the prevailing form of urban expansion.

Decentralization from the old inner city and the partial urbanization of suburbia were more than matched, however, by a recentralization of extraordinary proportions. More than five million immigrants have poured into the region over the past forty years, the vast majority concentrating in a ring around the downtown Central City. In this collar of diverse immigrant populations, densities are now at levels comparable to Manhattan. Indeed, the hundred densest census tracts in Los Angeles are now more densely populated than the hundred densest in New York, or, for that matter any other urbanized area in the United States. Also notable is that these densities have arisen without significant expansion in the housing stock, creating a degree of residential overcrowding as well as homelessness that is almost surely unmatched in any other large U.S. city.

This remarkable refilling of the Los Angeles urban core has resulted in an unusually large geographical concentration or agglomeration of the working poor, a term that has arisen to distinguish workers, many with multiple jobs, who remain at or below poverty levels, from those (domestic and immigrant) without jobs and almost entirely dependent on welfare. Some estimates show that the percentage of the total population of Los Angeles County that can be classified as working poor has hovered around 40 percent in recent years. This concentration of the working poor, a vital feature of the new labor geography, has emerged as the product of a larger-scale transformation of the urban and regional political economy.



The economic restructuring of Los Angeles can be described as a complex combination of deindustrialization and reindustrialization, terms that are similar and related to the combination of geographical decentralization and recentralization just discussed as part of the regional urbanization process. Although it was not well known, Los Angeles in 1970 was already the leading industrial metropolis in the country, measured in terms of the numbers of people employed in manufacturing. More than any other metropolis outside the American manufacturing belt in the Northeast, it typified Fordist industrialization, with concentrations of factories mass-producing automobiles, tires, glass, steel, and related transportation machinery, including aircraft, mainly located in a large industrial zone between downtown Los Angeles and the growing twin ports of Los Angeles–Long Beach.

The deindustrialization of Los Angeles took place in two main phases. The first, peaking between 1978 and 1982, resulted in the loss of 75,000 to 100,000 manufacturing jobs, emptying Los Angeles almost entirely of its automobile assembly and related tire, glass, and steel industries, where unionization rates and wages were relatively high. The job losses and factory closures were particularly devastating in residential communities such as South Gate, once a nationally well-known magnet for (white) workers seeking the American suburban dream. This triggered an unusually rapid urban residential transformation, as the primarily southern white working class abandoned most of the cluster of municipalities southeast of downtown, with Anglo populations greater than 80 percent, to be rapidly replaced in less than two decades by a new population that in some cases is today more than 95 percent Latino.

The African American population, although close by the main nucleus of Fordist manufacturing jobs, never benefited greatly from this proximity, as they were separated by one of the most formidable racial divides in any U.S. city, located along Alameda Avenue and locally described as the Cotton Curtain. This first phase of deindustrialization did have the effect of eradicating this racial divide and setting in motion a westward drift of the main African American concentrations in Los Angeles toward Los Angeles International Airport (LAX) and what was then a major area for the aerospace, missile, and electronics industry. Many African Americans settled in Inglewood, which would become the

battleground for local struggles against Wal-Mart in the early 2000s (see chapter 6).

Significant numbers of African Americans also began moving out of South Central to the growing outer cities of the San Fernando Valley and the Inland Empire, as well as back to the southern states from which their families originated, mainly Texas and Louisiana. Overall, however, the economic conditions in predominantly black Los Angeles did not improve, and in many areas significantly worsened, from what they were in 1965, the time of the Watts rebellion against poverty, racism, and police brutality.

The second phase of deindustrialization occurred in the late 1980s and early 1990s, a time of national recession. The greatest job losses here were concentrated in the aerospace industry, which had been the leading sector in the continuous expansion of manufacturing employment in Los Angeles since before World War II. Aircraft manufacturing had expanded rapidly, along with related weapons and electronics production, after 1970, especially through billions of dollars worth of defense contracts from the federal government. Rather than reflecting a decline of Fordist industry, as did the first phase of deindustrialization, the second round of job losses, with some estimates as high as 300,000, signaled the beginnings of what might be described as a crisis of post-Fordism, a breakdown in the globalized New Economy of flexible capitalism in the place, Los Angeles, where it had achieved one of its most notable successes.

Here we arrive at a significant turning point in the transformations of Los Angeles in the forty-year period since 1965, the shift from a long period of crisis-generated restructuring to a time of multiplying restructuring-generated crises, marked by increasing expressions of social unrest and economic frustration arising from the problems associated with the uneven effects of globalization, the restructured post-Fordist economy, and the IT revolution. In 1992, the new Los Angeles exploded in one of the most destructive urban uprisings in U.S. history. While there were earlier stirrings, the Justice Riots of 1992, as many now call these events, became a crucial moment in redefining not just the local but the national labor movement and the connections that would develop between labor, community, and other organizations.

Before moving on to discuss these developments, a few words need to be added concerning the extraordinary agglomeration of the working



poor in the inner city of Los Angeles, for it is here where the most important of the new movements were generated and empowered. The coalitions that emerged in the 1990s have focused in particular on the rights of the immigrant working poor not just in the workplace, the traditional sphere of labor organizing, but also at the place of residence and more widely in the larger urban and regional context. Not only has this focus markedly increased union membership, it has expanded the social and spatial scope of the labor movement in innovative ways.

The core agglomeration of the working poor in Los Angeles has become a generative force in linking unions to various urban social movements, ethnic and community-based organizations, and struggles that extend well beyond the place of work and the specific place of residence to the larger regional economy and geography. In this sense, it provokes comparison to Manchester, the iconic industrial capitalist city, in the second half of the nineteenth century, when its huge agglomeration of workers generated innovative developments in the British labor movement. It can be argued that something similar has been happening in the core agglomeration of workers in Los Angeles today, through the innovative struggles for worker justice and more specifically for spatial justice and the right to the city.

## A History of Social Activism in Los Angeles

The labor movement and coalition building between unions, community-based organizations, and the university have developed over the past forty years through a series of phases punctuated by three violent and destructive explosions of urban unrest: the Watts Riots of 1965, the Justice Riots of 1992, and the attacks on the World Trade Center in New York City on September 11, 2001. Each of these events marks a moment of crisis, transition, and redevelopment in the history of social activism in Los Angeles.

Labor and community organizing in the postwar era in most large North American cities developed along many different pathways. Always present were traditional labor union struggles over workers' rights and conditions at the workplace. In the decades of expansive Fordism that followed World War II, workplace and wage negotiations usually involved basic agreements between powerful national unions, large corporate

interests, and supportive government agencies. Alliances with political parties in the American version of the welfare state were of crucial importance in maintaining this mode of Fordist industrial unionism.

As union power became increasingly challenged under the impact of economic restructuring and unsupportive federal governments, the labor movement branched out in new directions. The earliest and perhaps most widespread strategy was to make strategic connections to the workers' place of residence in what came to be called community unionism. Community-based organizations focused for the most part on local issues such as housing and basic public services. Union ties expanded their scope and to some extent modified their tactics. Links to the community had a localizing effect on unions and the labor movement, bringing about a greater awareness of the importance of location and embedding labor activism more deeply in the urban geographical context.

Labor–community coalitions expanded in many other directions, linking up with the social movement politics developing during this period, especially around struggles for civil rights. These links reduced the dependency of unions on party politics and forged greater ties to local communities and to wider networks of urban social activism. To varying degrees, labor–community coalitions linked up with the environmental justice movement, the women's movement, and efforts to fight against racial and ethnocultural discrimination.

Particularly important in Los Angeles, with its unusually large concentration of often-undocumented immigrant working poor, was the issue of immigrants' rights. There were major tensions in this connection since immigrant workers tended to be seen by many labor organizers as a tool used by employers to discipline, if not displace, unionized employees, especially when the immigrants were undocumented and more vulnerable to such abuse. Immigrants, by their very nature, were also seen as almost inherently difficult to organize. If there were to be serious alliances between unions and local communities, however, the organization of immigrant workers was essential.

Building on the innovative community-linked unionism of the United Farm Workers, organizing immigrant workers became the fulcrum around which labor–community coalition building took place in Los Angeles. It brought with it closer ties to local communities, attracted academic activists and researchers into the coalitions, and led to the



development of new action strategies involving a wider range of objectives, from housing and public health to quality education and renters' rights. Workplace conditions also became central, as sweatshops multiplied in both growing industries, such as apparel, and those that were declining, such as automobile parts production.

The explosive events of spring 1992 brought these streams of activism together to produce some of the most innovative and successful grassroots urban and regional social movements in the United States. The story of these developments is presented in three time periods: 1965–79, 1979–92, and 1992–2001.

## The Birth of Community Unionism, 1965–79

By 1965, the labor movement in Los Angeles was divided into three distinct and largely ethno-racial streams. By far the largest and most prominent was based on localized extensions of national industrial labor unions. This leading edge of the regional labor movement was overwhelmingly white or Anglo, and unusually content with its economic position at the crest of the postwar boom. From the 1940s to the 1970s, the metropolitan region of Los Angeles led all others in the net addition of manufacturing employment, and this industrial boom combined with national organizing efforts by industrial unions helped to create what many considered to be the most prosperous and attractive blue-collar urban and suburban communities in the country. Cities such as South Gate and Lakewood were not just western extensions of Fordist or mass-produced Levittowns, they were the epitome of the blue-collar American Dream, attracting families from all over the United States to their palm tree–lined streets, green gardens, efficient freeway system, superb climate, and expansive economy. Perhaps more than any other metropolitan area, Southern California represented the peak achievements of the postwar social contract between big government, big business, and big labor for the white working class.

A second and much smaller stream of labor activism focused on African American workers. They too shared some of the benefits of the postwar industrial boom but were much less connected to and dependent on national labor unions. The prevailing trends of industrial unionism in the United States focused on organizing at the workplace and directly

around work-related issues to bargain collectively for expanding real incomes for union members. Black workers, to the extent they were accepted into the large unions, benefited somewhat from these efforts, but had little autonomous power in bargaining with corporate management. This led to a different organizing focus, still rooted in unions but aimed at federal, state, and local government, the courts, and the promotion of race-based civil rights, especially after the passing of the Civil Rights Act of 1964.

The African American population had grown rapidly just before and after the war, with the majority of migrants coming from Texas and the states of the lower Mississippi Delta, the poorest region in the United States since at least the mid-nineteenth century. Two job sectors became the major focus of the black labor movement: local government and the aerospace and related defense industries. In these sectors, continued racist practices in hiring and union recruitment (as well as in housing) were blunted both by federal government legislation and the effects of local community organizations empowered by the early civil rights movement.

In some ways, Los Angeles also epitomized the peak achievements of African American workers in the United States, with a small but growing middle class living in low-density suburban housing areas even in the heart of the so-called ghetto. But the separation and economic polarization of the white and black working class in Los Angeles also reached unusually high levels. Housing segregation and related indicators of school segregation were worse than in any other major metropolitan area. A 1963 lawsuit by the American Civil Liberties Union, for example, focused attention on two high schools located 1.5 miles from each other, one (South Gate) all white and the other (Jordan) all black. These efforts helped to generate vigorous countywide school desegregation and busing programs but also heightened interracial tensions and further divided the labor movement.

A third stream in the local labor movement as it existed in 1965 was Latino and based primarily on the organizational efforts and strategies of the United Farm Workers (UFW) throughout California. The UFW was headquartered in Southern California and helped to define a distinctive form of union activism that would significantly shape the local (and national) labor movement over the next forty years. While the



African American labor movement was absorbed into the civil rights movement and white union workers remained relatively content with their conditions, the emerging Latino/a and Chicano/a labor movement was beginning to open new and innovative strategies of labor organizing with respect to immigrants' rights, linkages with community issues such as housing and education, and the empowerment of women of color.

It was this third stream that was most responsible for the birth of what labor historians call community-based unionism. The ideas and strategies advanced by the UFW, such as the boycott, the fast, clergy–labor partnerships, and door-to-door voter outreach, strongly influenced some national unions, such as the UAW, and stimulated a rethinking of organizational strategies that recognized the need to go beyond immediate workplace issues to address wider community interests. Ever since, the ties between local unions and community-based organizations have been especially intense and productive in Los Angeles. Community-based unionism also opened up new possibilities for university-based activism, as the strict boundaries of union membership became more porous.

### *The Watts Riots*

In 1965, Watts, the symbolic heart of black Los Angeles, exploded. In the following year, the Latino barrio in East Los Angeles became unsettled through a series of protests over school segregation and educational quality, and then in 1970, in what came to be called the Chicano Moratorium, 30,000 antiwar demonstrators took to the streets in the largest Latino protest movement in the United States up to that time. It seemed to many that the Los Angeles economy was in deep crisis. What followed, however, was not an amelioration of the problems of racism, poverty, and segregation but an even greater intensification. Significant in these developments were another event that occurred in 1965, the passage of the Immigration Reform Act, and the beginnings of rapid expansion of Asian and Latino migration to Southern California.

The Anglo labor movement continued to prosper in the post-Watts period. The Los Angeles County Federation of Labor, then as today a powerful force in local government and politics, reached its early peak membership of 300,000 in 1970, when the regional economy was still expanding at a fever pitch. In the 1970s, when much of the rest of the United States was experiencing huge job losses and the early phases of

deindustrialization, the Los Angeles region added 1,315,000 new jobs, more than the net regional population growth of around 1,300,000. During the same period, while the New York regional economy lost about 300,000 manufacturing jobs, Los Angeles added nearly a quarter of a million. Economic conditions changed significantly at the end of the decade, but for most of the post-Watts period, the Anglo labor movement remained tranquil about workplace issues. For the nonwhite minorities, however, organizing around the place of residence and community issues began to occupy social activism and local politics.

For the most part, the Anglo and black working-class populations became even more polarized after Watts. This division was most visibly manifested around the issue of school busing programs, initiated as a last-ditch effort to deal with some of the highest levels of housing and school segregation in urban America. Although some achievements were made, the Los Angeles County school district remained the most segregated in the country. In 1970, long after the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision, more than 25 percent of Mississippi schoolchildren and 45 percent of those in South Carolina had integrated, while the figure for Los Angeles was 6 percent.

Part of this slow pace of desegregation was caused by white families withdrawing their children from the public school system in reaction to busing and related programs. Another factor was the physical migration of the white working class from its high concentration in southeast Los Angeles County into more predominantly white areas of the county as well as to other counties. This initiated what became, with the full impact of deindustrialization, one of the most pronounced examples in metropolitan America of what has been called racially motivated "white flight."

With some irony, these residential strategies of the white middle and working class contributed to a resurgence of interest in locality and to a much wider and more dramatic change in what might be called the geographical consciousness of the Los Angeles population. Los Angeles as a sprawling metropolis had been popularly described as sixty suburbs searching for a city. Within the more academic literature, it epitomized the "non-place urban realm," where propinquitous community or neighborhood identity was almost entirely absent (Webber 1964). What began to happen after 1965, although not necessarily caused entirely by the



Watts Riots, was a dramatic reversal of these trends, marked by a growing sensitivity to place of residence, location within the larger urban fabric, and the importance of local community. With the labor movement playing a minor role, Los Angeles began to become an important center for what can be called the community development movement.

### *Community Development Corporations (CDCs)*

Grassroots organizing in low-income neighborhoods, primarily black or Latino, expanded rapidly after 1965, especially through the formation of community development corporations (CDCs). CDCs concentrated on localized issues of housing, education, job training, and social services provision. Although some CDCs expanded their efforts beyond their core neighborhood, there was relatively little interorganizational connection or networking. Regional or even countywide coalition building was virtually nonexistent, but many of the most successful community-based organizations developed spheres of influence that extended beyond their immediate local boundaries.

The first of the major CDCs to emerge after the riots was the Watts Labor Community Action Center (WLCAC). The inclusion of "labor action" in the title reflected the fact that among the founding group of activists were fourteen union members with organizing experience in the civil rights movement. Early ties were also established with the UCLA Institute of Industrial Relations and later with the Urban Planning program, making the WLCAC one of the earliest major labor–community–university coalitions in the region. Although it began operating before the riots, the organization grew as perhaps the most important and effective agency assisting in the redevelopment of the area most heavily impacted by the massive destruction that was caused in the heart of black Los Angeles.

Although called Watts, the name of an area that was part of the City of Los Angeles, the "Watts Community" also included areas closer to downtown, parts of L.A. County such as Willowbrook, and the independent municipality of Compton. Other predominantly black areas located elsewhere in the county were also, at least implicitly, included, and some ties were also created with the local Latino community. Indicative of this expanding scope was the creation in 1969 of the Greater Watts Development Corporation and the initiation of major new campaigns

for community economic development. One of the earliest of these campaigns involved the creation of a coalition of eighty organizations to promote the construction of the Martin Luther King/Drew Medical Center, what today would be called a "flagship project" for the Greater Watts area. Such efforts at local economic development were the main focus throughout this period.

As early as 1966, the WLCAC joined with the United Farm Workers to deal with the growing problems of immigrant workers and to encourage the formation of more "community unions." The best known of these community unions and today probably the largest in terms of monetary involvement is The East Los Angeles Community Union (TELACU), founded in 1968 in the heart of the Mexican American barrio of unincorporated East Los Angeles. TELACU took local economic development very seriously. It started, as others did, as a social services agency (in cooperation with a local of the UAW) but became a pioneer of public–private partnerships and the attraction of venture capital for industrial development and job generation (Chavez 1998). TELACU was never a major actor in the Chicano movement in Los Angeles, and although "Community Union" remained in the title, it was quite innovatively a community development corporation.

Another major Latino CDC, CHARO Community Development Corporation, was founded in 1967 and is today one of the largest Latino nonprofits in the country. Additional community service centers, later CDCs, were created to serve the growing Asian population. The Korean Youth Center was established in 1975, incorporated in 1982, added "Community" to its name in 1992 (KYCC) as well as created an Alliance for Neighborhood Economic Development Unit, and recently was renamed the Koreatown Youth and Community Center. Also developing later in the Korean community was KIWA, the Korean Immigrant Workers Association. KIWA became one of the most active networking community-based organizations in the region. In 1979, the last of the major community organizations that were founded in this period, the Little Tokyo Service Center, was created and became a full CDC in 1993.

Quietly in the background during these developments, at least with respect to the strategies of labor unions, were two other local social movements that would also foster greater attention to locality and geography, the renters' or tenants' rights movement and the environmental justice movement. These two movements encouraged increased sensitivity to locality and neighborhood community and played important roles in the emergence of new and expanded labor–community coalitions in the 1980s. As both had particularly close connections with UCLA Urban Planning, they are discussed in more detail in chapter 5.



## The Beginnings of Justice-Based Coalitions: 1979–92

The Los Angeles economy began to feel the full brunt of the deindustrialization of America in the early 1980s, following a decade of extraordinary job and population growth. The impact of this deindustrialization, however, was very selective geographically and socially. The worst-hit area in terms of job losses and closed factories was the huge industrial zone stretching south from downtown Los Angeles to the twin ports of Los Angeles–Long Beach, although other communities in the Inland Empire to the east and in the San Fernando Valley were also badly hurt. In terms of the labor market, the most negatively affected groups were skilled unionized workers in the manufacturing sector, including many women and minorities, who together formed the core of the thriving blue-collar middle class.

The Los Angeles economy had always been shaped heavily by the federal government in one way or another, and it continued throughout this period to be fed by billions of dollars of Defense Department and related contracts, especially in the aerospace and missiles sector. Los Angeles had become the world's arsenal, capital of the warfare state, the largest concentration of the so-called military-industrial complex. This special role sustained continued expansion of the regional economy and diverted attention away from the increasing community devastation that was occurring in Fordist Los Angeles. This pathway of "creative destruction" was also paved from Washington, D.C., in this case related to the rise of Reaganomics and its associated emphasis on deregulation, privatization, and increasingly vigorous attacks on unions, welfare legislation, and nearly all major social movements.

What began to emerge in the communities of Los Angeles feeling the full force of the neoliberal package of deindustrialization, globalization, and Reaganomics was a closer and more balanced interrelationship between unions and community organizations and between the

labor and community development movements. This revitalized labor–community linkage also formed the core of more expansive coalitions that cut across the boundaries of race, ethnicity, class, and gender and attracted other progressive activists from the universities, religious organizations, groups involved with tenants' rights, environmentalists, the peace movement, and even a few higher-income homeowners associations. It became clear to many that fragmentation of progressive forces into separate movements would not be effective in trying to ameliorate the devastation taking place, nor would the federal government, now dominated by conservative forces, be a reliable source for welfare-based financial assistance.

### *The Coalition to Stop Plant Closings*

One of the best examples of these new coalitions was the very explicitly named Coalition to Stop Plant Closings (CSPC), or, as it was later called, the Los Angeles Coalition Against Plant Shutdowns (LACAPS). The primary aim of the coalition was to organize workers to fight against factory closures that were taking place throughout this period from the late 1970s to the mid-1980s in what was the largest Fordist industrial concentration west of the Mississippi. Before deindustrialization, Los Angeles was the second-largest automobile assembly center after Detroit, the largest tire producer after Akron, Ohio, one of the largest producers of glass for automobiles, and a major center for the production of steel and many different consumer durables, the lead industries of the postwar economic boom and the definitive industries of Fordism in the United States. By the end of this period, all of the automobile and tire factories and most of those producing steel and glass had closed permanently.

Seen from the vantage point of the present, the efforts of the CSPC were almost surely doomed to fail. The forces of globalization and economic restructuring were creating a New Economy all over the world, and this post-Fordist, globalized, more flexible economy and geography was literally "replacing" the old, Fordist, mass production–, mass consumption–based national economy and geography. Driving the formation of the New Economy were footloose forms of capital able to kill two birds with one stone, that is, able to find new sources of profit as well as escape from urban social unrest by seeking places with cheaper labor



supplies and less well-organized (i.e., less unionized) labor and community movements. The labor–management relation in the United States was always more unequal than in most of the welfare states of Western Europe. With the deep restructuring of national economies that accelerated after the turnaround year of 1973, the relative power of capital over labor was amplified significantly.

An early expression of the intranational relocation of capital in the United States was the great Frostbelt-to-Sunbelt regional shift in economic and political power, a shift that in itself meant a decided decline in the role of industrial trade unions. At a more local scale, as in Los Angeles and throughout the American manufacturing belt, it was expressed in a rash of factory closures, huge job losses, and the destruction of once-thriving blue-collar communities. In Los Angeles, however, there was also an exceptionally vigorous reindustrialization, unusually intense job generation (although most were low paying), and a massive in-migration that further fed the regional economy with cheap and, at least initially, malleable and nonunionized labor supplies. As with the Frostbelt-Sunbelt shift, this reorganization of the labor geography of Los Angeles was also associated with a steep decline of industrial trade unionism and, for at least the mid- to late 1980s, a significant weakening of even the most powerful service sectors unions, such as the Service Employees International Union (SEIU).

Although the CSPC failed to achieve its principal objectives, the struggle against plant closures was the seedbed for many developments that would significantly shape the future revitalization of the Los Angeles labor and community movements. The most prominent example was the pioneering work of Eric Mann. After moving to Los Angeles in the early 1980s to work at the General Motors plant in Van Nuys, he faced a threatened closure in 1982 and began organizing what became the Van Nuys Labor/Community Coalition. While every other automobile assembly factory in the region closed, the Van Nuys plant stayed open until 1992, an achievement detailed in Mann's book *Taking on General Motors* (1987). A veteran of the civil rights movement and longtime activist for the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE), Mann has continued to contribute significantly to radicalizing and redefining the union movement in the United States. Particularly noteworthy was the cofounding in 1989, with his wife Lian Hurst Mann, of the Labor/Community

Strategy Center, the think tank/act tank that was the major force behind the Bus Riders Union decision in 1996.

Actively participating in the CSPC was the Reverend Richard Gillett, founder of the religion-based organization Clergy and Laity United for Economic Justice, or CLUE. His commitment was crucial in bringing the power of progressive religious organizations into labor–community coalition building, first in the efforts to stop plant closures and community decline and more recently in the development of the living wage campaign and the activities of the Los Angeles Alliance for a New Economy (LAANE), one of the most prominent of contemporary coalitions. Gillett has not just contributed significantly to local struggles for social and economic justice but has also become internationally recognized for his religion-based urban activism (Davey 2002).

Several activists affiliated with Urban Planning at UCLA participated in the CSPC. Gilda Haas, who received her MA in Urban Planning in 1977, has been a major force in connecting the labor and community movements in Los Angeles. Described as an "insurgent planner," Haas began her urban activism with a focus on housing and community development. She was an organizer for the Coalition for Economic Survival and played an important role in the rent control movement in Santa Monica, West Hollywood, and the City of Los Angeles, as well as in the formation of community development corporations specialized in providing affordable housing. After her participation in the CSPC (see Haas 1985), she was cofounder of the South Central Federal Credit Union, a pathbreaking community bank for low-income residents; founder of Communities for Accountable Reinvestment, an organization aimed at fighting redlining and promoting new forms of community economic development; a cofounder and director (1991–99) of the Community Scholars Program in Urban Planning at UCLA; and since 1994 the director of one of the most influential and effective labor–community–popular education organizations in Los Angeles, Strategic Actions for a Just Economy (SAJE). She and SAJE are today spearheading the national organization the Right to the City Alliance.

Also involved in the CSPC were Goetz Wolff, then a doctoral student in Urban Planning, and two professors, Rebecca Morales and myself. Working with the coalition stimulated a number of publications, perhaps the most relevant being Soja, Morales, and Wolff (1983), one of the earliest articles on urban restructuring and spatial change (see also Mahdesian et al. 1981). More on this connection is presented in chapter 5.



What was happening through the 1980s with the CSPC and other coalitions was not just a significant cementing together of labor–community–university linkages and solidarity but also a major shift in strategy and objectives. Whereas at first the struggles were defensive ones against the deindustrialization processes affecting local communities, the emerging new wave of efforts aimed at achieving greater justice and equality for all workers in the New Economy. This generated a more provocative activist agenda in which the concept of and struggle for justice in all its various meanings, but especially with regard to jobs, education, public services, and immigrants' rights, became central.

The failed efforts to stop plant closures clearly demonstrated that traditional forms of labor and community organizing were unlikely to be successful. It was also fairly evident that what was emerging as social movement unionism was not simply a matter of moving from workplace to place of residence as primary sites of mobilization and social action. Coalition building had to be both broadened and more specifically focused, especially with regard to the needs and demands for justice emanating from the extraordinary agglomeration in Los Angeles of five million immigrant working poor. Perhaps more than anything else, the creative synergies coming out of this agglomeration provided the driving force behind the emergence in Los Angeles of not just an innovative local and regional movement but one that would become nationally and internationally recognized.

### *Justice for Janitors*

The leading edge of these new developments was the Justice for Janitors (J4J) movement. Founded in Denver in 1985, J4J began its organizing efforts in Los Angeles in 1988, led by Local 399 of the Service Employees International Union (SEIU) but allied with many other local activist organizations. The SEIU had successfully organized earlier janitors' strikes in Pittsburgh and Denver, but the background conditions in Los Angeles were unusually ripe for a much larger confrontation. Research had shown that janitors in downtown Los Angeles, in comparison to downtowns in other major U.S. cities, were experiencing increasingly lower wages and declining unionization rates. What this probably reflected, at least in

part, was the unusually large supply of low-wage, nonunionized, and undemanding workers who were also undocumented and able to survive on subpoverty incomes.

In the early 1980s, janitorial workers in Los Angeles were predominantly African American, unionized, and earning a relatively high wage, over $7 an hour in 1981. By the end of the decade, the vast majority were nonunionized, Latino, and working for far less wages than janitors in New York, Chicago, or San Francisco. The often undocumented immigrant janitorial worker effectively symbolized the New Economy in Los Angeles. Like the expanding army of gardeners, housecleaners, day laborers, and others swelling the ranks of the working poor, the janitors served multiple purposes. They were a vital part of the massive infusion of cheap and manipulable labor into the regional economy, certainly one of the major factors behind the economic expansion and the unusually rapid growth in jobs and office space of the 1980s and 1990s. This enlarged labor pool was used as an effective tool to weaken union power not just in the service sector but in manufacturing as well. Immigrant workers provided an important lubricant for the deep restructuring of the regional economy.

Up to 1990, the prevailing wisdom in the American labor movement was that immigrant workers were almost impossible to organize. They were seen as integral parts of the "informal economy" and beyond the reach of regulatory systems as well as formal union organization. In Los Angeles, however, the immigrant working poor had several distinctive features that made them more open to effective organizing efforts. First was their sheer numbers and, especially, their extraordinary concentration in the core of the metropolitan region. The density of social interaction and the consciousness of their special position in the regional economy were unusually high for the clustered immigrant working poor in the inner city.

Another factor was labor-organizing experience. The community-based unionism of the United Farm Workers was infused throughout the large Mexican immigrant population, as well as among Chicano/a residents. Traditions of militant labor organizing were particularly intense in the Korean community and among the nearly one million immigrants from El Salvador, Nicaragua, and other Central American countries. And in comparison with New York, Chicago, and other large cities outside



the southwestern United States, there was also a sense of cultural redemption among the Latino population. Los Angeles was once part of Spanish-speaking Mexican territory and was now becoming predominantly Spanish-speaking again.

Adding further to the successful drive to organize immigrant workers was what might be called media savvy, an awareness of the significant role the mass media play in obtaining public support as well as the knowledge of how best to attract useful media attention. This factor may be difficult to measure, but it can fairly surely be said that Los Angeles is one of the world's mass media centers and that media attention figures as deeply in daily life in Los Angeles as in New York, probably its closest rival. Whatever the comparative situation may be, however, there is no doubt that the Justice for Janitors movement used the media with great effectiveness throughout its existence and perhaps never more so than in the event that most triggered its initial public empowerment, the Century City demonstrations of June 15, 1990.

Century City was built on the property of the movie giant Twentieth Century Fox as one of the earliest and largest edge cities in Los Angeles. The movie lot remains reduced in size but still famously visible from its entranceway on Pico Boulevard. The largest cluster of high-rise buildings outside downtown Los Angeles, occasionally used as a Manhattan setting for films, now marks the new Century City and includes, in addition to the headquarters of the Fox Corporation, theaters, a shopping mall, L.A.'s largest cluster of law offices, and the staid and iconic Century Plaza hotel. In 1967, while President Lyndon Johnson was barricaded inside, one of the largest local antiwar demonstrations took place in front of the hotel and was forcibly and violently put down by the Los Angeles Police Department (LAPD). In 1990, Justice for Janitors brought their struggles to a head at the same site but with very different methods and results.

What occurred in 1990 represented a new mode of labor activism, more like a Situationist happening than a conventional nonviolent sit-in or strike. Four hundred or more janitors with their signature red T-shirts and strike caps danced and sang as they moved carefully along the streets and sidewalks, always aware of the LAPD presence on foot and horseback. The demonstrators also were aware of the location of the media and of the invisible lines of public/private transgression on the streets

and sidewalks, at least as far as expected police reaction was concerned. Eventually, lines were crossed, the police reacted, two dozen janitors were injured, and everything was videotaped. The tape would later be used in a lawsuit that resulted in the LAPD being blamed for starting the riot as well as forced the city to pay SEIU Local 399 $3.5 million for damages. The formal victory was a new contract raising wages 25 percent and providing much-needed health benefits, but there was an even larger aftereffect.

The event galvanized community and government support, and despite some later setbacks, spread its impact regionally and to some extent nationally and internationally. The globalization of J4J began in 1990. Janitorial services in Los Angeles and major cities throughout the world were at that time, and today, dominated by a multinational corporation, Integrated Services Solutions (ISS), based in Copenhagen, Denmark. With local landlords able to pass the buck in terms of contract negotiations, the J4J organizers went to the source in Copenhagen to lobby directly against ISS, which today in its present version employs more than 400,000 janitors in fifty countries.

Commemorating the J4J movement, June 15 is now recognized around the world as International Justice Day. Further spreading the word internationally was Ken Loach's award-winning 2000 film *Bread and Roses,* named as a reminder of the 1912 textile strike in Lawrence, Massachusetts, led by women and immigrants and organized by International Workers of the World. Similar J4J strikes began to take place in other large U.S. cities, and a national workers justice movement, extending beyond janitors, gained momentum. More recently, a small movement called Justice for Cleaners, spurred on by experienced California organizers, became active in London's financial district, considered to be the richest and most wealth-generating square mile on earth. But we jump ahead of our timeline.

## Coalition Building and the Search for Spatial Justice, 1992 to 9/11/2001

What many now call the Justice Riots of 1992 may have begun with the not-guilty decision of a jury in Simi Valley (with its high density of resident police officers), absolving the policemen responsible for the brutal



beating of Rodney King, but the events that unfolded were much more than an expression of frustration in the African American community over police brutality and continuing racial injustices. Although the images conveyed to the rest of the world made it appear as if the implosion of violence that had characterized the Watts Riots of 1965 was simply being repeated, the uprising of 1992 was very different. It was much more multicultural in its participants, more embedded in the New Economy that had emerged in the preceding twenty years, and more global in terms of both its causes and its potential effects.

The immediate political impact of the Justice Riots was double-edged. In some ways, it had a debilitating effect on local progressive politics. For many on the liberal left, the riots were shockingly violent and exposed the incapability of all levels of government to deal with the enormous social and economic problems facing Los Angeles. Traditional urban and party politics seemed more hopeless than ever before, leading many former activists to abandon their political commitments, a choice made all the more attractive given the multitudinous diversions Southern California had to offer to those who could afford them.

For the massive agglomeration of the immigrant working poor that had grown around the core of downtown Los Angeles, there was a similar feeling that government (and public–private partnerships such as the ineffective Rebuild LA program) had not just failed them, but that government would never be able to deliver appropriate solutions to their problems. Rather than leading to hopelessness, however, the resilient working poor and their most persistent supporters increasingly realized that organizing from below, from the grassroots, was now more vitally necessary than ever before. There were similar feelings among the poor throughout urban America, but perhaps nowhere was both the abandonment of hope and confidence in local, state, and federal governments and the awareness of the critical need for grassroots organizing and coalition building as intensely felt as it was in post-1992 Los Angeles.

The failure of government and its institutional extensions through the urban and regional planning processes was made even more blatant in the early 1990s by fiscal crises and one of the deepest economic downturns in the history of what for the previous hundred years had been an almost continuously booming Los Angeles. Rather later than most major U.S. cities, Los Angeles felt the heavy pressures to get lean and mean, to

restructure existing welfare systems and public benefits at a time when some would say the need for them was becoming greater than at any time since the Great Depression.

Amid all this, what was certainly a terrible localized explosion of violence and destruction was also one of the earliest major grassroots protests against the injustices associated with globalization and the New Economy. With the multiplication of antiglobalization protests in Seattle, Genoa, and other cities, there emerged a growing justice movement, which spread eventually to a global scale. In Los Angeles, however, the mobilizing metaphor of justice would take on extra meaning. To the majority of the population, there was a failure in the administration of legal justice in the Rodney King trial. Boosted by the Justice for Janitors efforts, the major demonstrations that took place in 1992 reverberated with the wider demands of "No Justice—No Peace," expanding the scope of the uprising beyond the African American community to all of the multicultural and transnational working poor who had suffered most from economic restructuring. Justice as a specific target for mobilization and action, more so than cries for freedom or equality or democracy, seemed to capture the political spirit of the times.

The governmental response, or lack of response, to the riots of 1992 provided an additional boost to the local justice movement. Perhaps more so than in other major cities, there was a realization among the most disadvantaged populations that appeals to government were not likely to be effective and that any effort to achieve social and economic justice would require a mass movement based on innovative new forms of grassroots organizing. Added to this was an acute awareness that these organizing efforts required the creation of new kinds of inclusive regional coalitions or confederations of activist groups that cut across alliances based on class, ethnicity, gender, and geographical location.

Another feature of the resurgence of coalition building in Los Angeles was its unusually productive relationship with the university. Although I focus in chapter 5 on connections with Urban Planning at UCLA, there were many other productive links made in this period with Occidental College and its Urban and Environmental Policy Institute, the University of Southern California, and several units of the California State University system. This produced expanded channels of information flow between the university and labor unions and community groups that benefited both sides, sharpening empirical and theoretical research on Los Angeles through its potential for direct application while at the same time bringing into practice some of the most advanced ideas about housing and community development, urban design, transportation planning, multiculturalism, environmental policy, geographic information systems, spatial theory, and regional political economy.



In the decade after 1992, this two-way flow of ideas was probably as intense and productive as any that had formed in other major metropolitan regions in the United States. Among its many effects was a filtering in to at least some grassroots community and labor organizations of a strategic spatial perspective and an awareness of the latest ideas about urban restructuring, regionalism, and the practical and political relevance of urban and spatial theory. The Justice for Janitors movement had already begun to be examined from a "labor geography" perspective (Savage 1998, 2006), and a strong antiracist spatial perspective derived from radical architectural theory (Dutton and Hurst Mann 1996) was quite independently part of the activities of the Labor/Community Strategy Center and the Bus Riders Union. Examined next are some of the other innovative coalitions that developed between the Justice Riots of 1992 and the explosive events of September 11, 2001.

### *Organizing for a Living Wage*

Building on the earlier successes of the Justice for Janitors campaign and responding to the urgent problems of a riot-torn economy, a reinvigorated union movement sparked the development of new coalitions that cut across lines of class, race, gender, and ethnicity. In what had become one of the most culturally and economically heterogeneous cities in the world, coalition building was necessarily multicultural, multilingual, and powerfully shaped by the huge agglomeration of the immigrant working poor. It is noteworthy but not very surprising under these conditions that a prominent leadership role in the new coalitions was filled by radical women of color.

One of the first major manifestations of the post-1992 efforts was a vigorous campaign for both immigrant rights and more generally for a living wage, an especially vital issue in a high-cost-of-living urban area with unusually high rates of poverty and where minimum-wage laws were either ignored, especially for undocumented workers, or were entirely

inadequate to meet household needs. The living wage campaign and coalition in Los Angeles, which would become one of the most successful in the country, was led by three unions: Hotel Employees and Restaurant Employees union (HERE), Service Employees International Union (SEIU), and Union of Needletrades, Industrial and Textile Employees (UNITE). Their organizing efforts, advanced by such influential figures as Maria Elena Durazo and Madeline Janis-Aparicio (now Madeline Janis), focused specifically on certain sectors with especially large numbers of low-wage immigrant workers, such as tourism, office development, home care, restaurants and hotels, and the garment industry.

Assisted by the presence on the city council of the veteran activist Jackie Goldberg, a living wage ordinance was passed for employees of the City of Los Angeles in 1997. Two years later it was extended to county employees, and in 2001 an even stronger ordinance, affecting private businesses of a certain size and location receiving grants from the city, was passed in Santa Monica after a campaign led by HERE local 11, whose director was Durazo, and Santa Monicans Allied for Responsible Tourism (SMART). Backing them were SMART's parent organization, the Los Angeles Alliance for a New Economy (LAANE), directed by Janis-Aparicio, and Clergy and Laity United for Economic Justice (CLUE), led by Richard Gillett.

There are continuing efforts to defend these living wage laws against fierce opposition, but the early victories became central to a national living wage movement that has extended similar campaigns to more than one hundred cities. The countywide success of the living wage coalition also helped sustain an expanding regional and multicultural justice movement for workers and communities that, while not explicitly aimed at spatial justice per se, was strategically informed by a new regional consciousness and awareness of the importance of location and the spatial logic of public and corporate job providers.

Footloose private corporations, for example, were not the target, as they were for the earlier Coalition to Stop Plant Closings. Targeted first was the one large source of employment that was less footloose and more unable to shift to another location than any other: local government. After achieving this anchoring foothold in local living wage ordinances, the new coalition began to pressure particular segments of private capital that depended most on both public financial support and subsidies as



well as on what the economic geographers call regionally specific assets, such as the tourist, hotel and restaurant, and entertainment industries. It was almost as if local organizers had read the latest academic debates on urban restructuring and the New Economy.

### *Spreading the Struggle for Jobs with Justice*

Joining in the struggle for jobs with justice and many other related issues were such new collective action groups as the Los Angeles Metropolitan Alliance, an organization aimed specifically at regional coalition building among diverse community and labor organizations. Its core components included Action for Grassroots Empowerment and Neighborhood Development (AGENDA), SEIU Locals 347 and 1877, West L.A. Metro Alliance, Community Coalition for Substance Abuse Prevention and Treatment, and Silverlake/Hollywood/Echo Park Metro Alliance.

In 1999, the Metropolitan Alliance succeeded in creating a jobs training and education program to help workers respond effectively to federal welfare-to-work initiatives through jobs in the public sector. In 2000, these efforts at worker training and education were extended to the entertainment industry through the alliance's Workplace Hollywood campaign and teaching agreements with the Community College District and DreamWorks film studio. The Metropolitan Alliance shifted its attention after 2000 to improvements in regional health care through a campaign for Good Jobs for Healthy Communities, urging creation of a regional comprehensive job training program for health care occupations.

The specific problems of the garment industry spawned other grassroots efforts. Los Angeles had replaced New York City as the largest center of garment production, and by the turn of the century there were around 140,000 workers in five thousand shops, the vast majority working under sweatshop conditions or worse. Almost all garment workers were nonunionized, three-quarters were women, and the total workforce, mostly undocumented, was roughly 80 percent Latino/a immigrants and 20 percent Asian immigrants. Violations of minimum wage laws and even the most basic health regulations were rampant. Even worse than the sweatshops was the growth of a new mode of quasi-slavery, where immigrants stripped of their passports and "imported" by their "owners" were forced to work and live under terrible conditions isolated from surrounding communities and services.

In 1995, more than seventy Thai workers were freed from their trapped labor in a garment sweatshop in El Monte, one of a cluster of poor Latino municipalities in eastern Los Angeles County. The freed workers joined forces with other groups to protest against those who bought and sold their labor and to raise consciousness around the country of the new slavery being created to meet the needs of the neoliberal economy of flexible capitalism. A Garment Worker Center was founded in 2001, and with the support of the Asian Pacific American Legal Center (APALC), Coalition for Humane Immigrant Rights of Los Angeles (CHIRLA), and Korean Immigrant Workers Advocates (KIWA), led the struggle against sweatshop owners and the retail outlets that depended on them. Unionization efforts were relatively successful, but the problems persist.

Adding to the strong organizational infrastructure for regional coalition building were many other grassroots groups. Focusing on the problems facing young people of color were the Student Empowerment Project, Voice of Struggle, Olin ("movement" in Nahuatl), Youth United for Community Action, Youth in Action Coalition, Community Services Organization, and Schools Not Jails. The high schools of Los Angeles became hotbeds of activism (more so than the universities) and would play an important role in nearly every public demonstration and immigrant rights campaign up to the present. In the late 1990s, CHIRLA, KIWA, the Pilipino Workers Center (PWC), and later the Garment Worker Center created a new network that in 2001 became the Multi-Ethnic Immigrant Worker Organizing Network (MIWON). Among its efforts was the Korean Restaurant Justice Campaign in 2000, involving a May Day demonstration of Latino day workers and gardeners as well as Pilipino, Korean, and other workers.

Several organizations emerged to deal with the special problem of day laborers' rights, including the immigrant rights group CHIRLA, mentioned earlier, and the Institute of Popular Education of Southern California (IDEPSCA). Almost always undocumented, without any regular employment, and often homeless new arrivals, day laborers are a common sight around DIY shops and department stores. They are also highly vulnerable to employer abuse and, like the homeless, are frequently removed from their preferred places and spaces by local authorities. CHIRLA and IDEPSCA have focused on creating free meeting centers



for day workers in special job sites around the region to help them organize, present their grievances, and fight against ordinances preventing them from congregating in certain locations looking for work. They have also helped to form a National Day Laborers Organizing Network (NDLON) aimed at influencing national and local policies and advancing an economic justice agenda that has significant spatial components.

Two standout achievements of the workers' justice movement occurred around the turn of the century. In 1999, after more than a decade of struggle, SEIU Local 434B won the right to represent nearly 75,000 home care workers in Los Angeles County. This represented the largest number of new union members mobilized in a single year since 1941, when workers at that definitive symbol of assembly-line mass production, the Ford Motor Company's River Rouge Plant near Dearborn, Michigan, the largest integrated factory in the world at the time, joined the United Auto Workers. That the leadership role in the workers' movement in the United States was taken up by a service employees union, and in Los Angeles, was perhaps the ultimate symbol of the shift from Fordism to a post-Fordist national economy where the largest single employers in the country were no longer General Motors and Ford but Manpower, Inc., and Wal-Mart.

The second major achievement takes us back to the story of Justice for Janitors and the nationwide effort of more than 100,000 janitors to sign a new contract for increased wages and benefits. On April 7, 2000, the janitors of SEIU Local 1877 marched down Wilshire Boulevard from downtown Los Angeles through Beverly Hills to the memory-filled site of Century City as part of a countywide strike. It remains difficult for anyone not living in Los Angeles at the time to conceive of the positive public support the striking marchers received. In one of the most unusual and unexpected public demonstrations in the history of the American labor movement, the marching janitors started out with the Los Angeles city attorney and soon-to-be mayor in front of the parade, along with dozens of elected officials, Jesse Jackson, ministers, priests, and rabbis. As the march moved on, people came out of office buildings or leaned out windows to lend their support. People on the street started cheering. In Beverly Hills, several bystanders ran into the street to offer the janitors cash. Raised fists of support were added everywhere along the route.

Earlier rallies leading up to the march were supported by the Republican mayor Richard Riordan, who had refused to sign the living wage ordinance; Cardinal Roger Mahoney; Rabbi Steven Jacobs, who conducted a labor-oriented seder for Passover; several members of the Los Angeles City Council, who were arrested for civil disobedience in support of the janitors; Senators Edward Kennedy and Dianne Feinstein, and Vice President Al Gore. A few weeks after the march, a new contract was signed boosting wages more than 25 percent over a three-year period. At the celebration of the victory, which the *Los Angeles Times* announced had "galvanized workers across the nation," amid dancing and water spritzing stood county supervisor Zev Yaroslavsky holding a mop; Antonio Villaraigosa, currently mayor of Los Angeles but then state assembly leader, holding a broom; and Robert Maguire, a prominent developer and downtown building owner wearing a strike cap.

### *The Los Angeles Alliance for a New Economy (LAANE)*

In any discussion of the major achievements in labor–community–university coalition building and especially with regard to the development of specifically spatial strategies of social action, the Los Angeles Alliance for a New Economy (LAANE) deserves to take center stage. It played a key role in the living wage campaign and has been a primary force in the networking of grassroots organizations throughout the 1990s and up to the present. More than any of the larger coalitions, it drew strategically on university-based research and researchers and served to bring into the public realm innovative ideas about urban restructuring, the New Economy, the dynamics of regional development, the widening divide between rich and poor, and the spatiality of injustice.

LAANE was founded in 1993 under the leadership of Madeline Janis-Aparicio, a lawyer and former executive director of CARECEN, the Central American Refugee Center. It started out as the Tourist Industry Development Council, an organization that grew directly from the first project organized by the newly established UCLA Community Scholars Program (CSP). The CSP, led by Gilda Haas, Allan Heskin, and Jacqueline Leavitt from Urban Planning and Kent Wong from the Labor Center, brought together experienced activists from various community groups and labor unions to attend classes, meet with students, and work with them in joint projects. The first of these projects, conducted in academic



year 1991–92, was aimed at the local tourist industry at a time when huge investments were planned for expanding the downtown convention center and related facilities.

The CSP team sought strategies to promote greater economic benefits for low-wage workers and their communities in an industry notorious for its weak positive spillover effects and exploitative working conditions. The final report, titled *Accidental Tourism,* developed arguments that were similar to those behind the earlier Justice for Janitors campaign and reminiscent of David Harvey's analyses of the regressive effects of standard urban development practices. In addition to moral appeals to private businesses, it was argued that, without special intervention, the normal workings of public and private decision making tend to lead to results that discriminate against the poor and minorities, an outcome that was highly likely to occur again if downtown tourist development went ahead as originally planned.

Like so many of the campaigns aimed at worker and community justice, one of the primary intentions and effects of the CSP study was to raise public awareness about the location of investment and its positive and negative impacts on surrounding communities. As was the case with MTA plans for a world-class fixed-rail system and early efforts to achieve environmental justice such as the resistance to the LANCER incinerator project (see chapter 5), public officials assumed that the mere addition of jobs and improved social services would be enough to satisfy all urban residents. The particular social and spatial distribution of benefits tended to be out of sight and out of mind. While the language of *Accidental Tourism* was not overtly spatial, its underlying message and the interaction between the community scholars and the Urban Planning students were informed by a sensitivity to the spatiality of justice and injustice, especially for the mass of the working poor trying to survive in the New Economy.

Some important benefits for workers were won in the contract for the convention center, initiating what would develop into LAANE's hallmark achievement, the creation and expanded use of negotiated Community Benefits Agreements (CBAs). LAANE's offshoot, the Coalition for Growth with Justice, would succeed in promoting agreements with local governments and private developers to attach benefits to workers and minority communities to all new development plans in every sector

of the local economy. In another important breakthrough, agreements were also reached to add a requirement to new developments for community impact assessments, examining the potential spillover effects of the plans on jobs, traffic, and local quality of life. Emanating from demands for development with justice, the CBA model has grown in importance in recent years and has spread both locally and to many other cities as one of the most significant contemporary innovations in community economic development planning and public policy. See chapter 6 for more on these recent developments.

Significantly, the landmark CBA was negotiated jointly in 2001 by LAANE and SAJE, Strategic Actions for a Just Economy, teaming Janis-Aparicio and Gilda Haas. The agreement was part of SAJE's Figueroa Corridor Coalition for Economic Justice campaign and was worked out in conjunction with the huge Staples Center development project in the downtown area, near the convention center. It included provisions for living wage jobs, affordable housing, local hiring, and green space. It came as the culmination of a long series of LAANE's accomplishments and struggles, summarized in the notes and references for this chapter.

After the events of September 11, 2001, LAANE won job retention for hundreds of security workers who would have lost their jobs when airport security was taken over by the federal government. LAANE also worked with HERE in a massive worker relief effort providing food and access to government services for union members who lost their jobs in the declining tourist industry after 9/11. In the same year, LAANE helped extend Community Benefits Agreements to several other areas of the county and, in recent years, throughout the state of California, connecting with the Center on Policy Initiatives in San Diego, Working Partnerships in Silicon Valley, and East Bay Alliance for a Sustainable Economy in Oakland.

LAANE and SAJE have as much as any other organizations contributed to the unusually productive interaction between the university and the wider community and to the filtering into local activism of strategic spatial and regional thinking. Justice for Janitors, the Living Wage Coalition, the LANCER project and subsequent environmental justice efforts, the Metropolitan Alliance, MIWON, and many other organizations aided in stimulating a notable sense of locational and geographical awareness in what was formerly one of the most footloose and



unneighborly urban populations in the country, but hard evidence of consciously spatial strategies for all these organizations is not easy to find. Informal interviews with several leaders of the workers' justice movement outside LAANE and SAJE indicated little explicit awareness of the importance of specifically spatial strategies and actions, although nearly everyone agreed on the necessity for regional coalition building and the importance of understanding the dynamics of the regional economy and private-sector location strategies, lessons learned at least in part from the earlier Coalition to Stop Plant Closings.

LAANE's work, however, from the living wage campaign to the breakthrough Community Benefits Agreements, has shown an acute awareness of the geography of worker injustices as well as the necessity to organize on a regional scale. Avoiding the mistakes and failed strategies of the CSPC in the early 1980s, LAANE focused its attention on employers who were rooted in the region and could not easily relocate when being pressured by community or labor groups. As noted for the living wage campaign, local government was the obvious starting point, especially where past organizing experiences such as the rent control movement had created openings for progressives on city councils, such as in Santa Monica, the City of Los Angeles, and West Hollywood. Only when the white male monopoly on the board of supervisors was broken, in part a result of innovative GIS redistricting strategies, was the campaign extended to the county level.

Selecting strategic sites for protest and demonstration was vital. With the local government base assured, strategic action was extended to the major industrial clusters of Los Angeles, such as entertainment and the garment industry, and to the essential infrastructure of the regional tourist economy, another sector that almost by definition had to remain locally rooted. Little Tokyo and the major office blocks of downtown and Century City, the international airport, the Hollywood Redevelopment Project, drywall construction workers and tortilla makers, large hotel chains especially nearby the coastal beaches, the booming new developments in Playa Vista and Universal Studios, home care workers and day laborers, nannies and gardeners became major targets. At all times and places, serving the needs of the immigrant working poor was central. Probably more than anywhere else in the country, the notion that all businesses receiving any public subsidy have an obligation to

the communities its activities affect entered into public awareness and public policy.

LAANE'S projects made no attempt to stop new development but rather worked to guarantee development with justice for workers and communities, with day care and local hiring, parks and worker centers, health benefits and living wages, in short, with democratic rights to the city and to the resources generated by and in the city and region. While not evident in all LAANE's projects, a critical spatial awareness informed many of its practices and was promoted and sustained by an extraordinary flow of hired student researchers and activists from Urban Planning at UCLA, at least thirty over the past fifteen years, with several entering into executive and managerial roles.

Another indication of the spread of spatial thinking into local political practice appeared in an article published in 2002 in the journal *Social Problems*. The authors, Robert D. Wilton and Cynthia Cranford, were two student activists who had participated in labor struggles between predominantly Latino service workers and the private University of Southern California. They wrote not only about the revival of the American labor movement spurred by the labor–community alliances they saw arising around them, including LAANE, but also about their sensing of a tangible spatial turn in what was happening. In "Toward an Understanding of the Spatiality of Social Movements: Labor Organizing at a Private University in Los Angeles," the authors argued that an understanding of these developments in Los Angeles and elsewhere in the world requires "recognition of their inherently spatial nature." Referring specifically to the recent spatial turn in social theory, they focused attention on "space as an active dimension of movement organizing" and on the usefulness of "spatial tactics of transgression" on the campus, in surrounding communities, and within regional movements for a living wage and job security.

With just a touch of optimistic exaggeration, it can be said that the spatiality of justice was in the urban air in Los Angeles in the 1990s. Coalitions organized "geographic target groups" for particular tasks, and geographic scales of organizing were widely discussed. Los Angeles became the center for the development of what came to be called community-based regionalism, a determined call for all coalitions, alliances, and networks to reach to the regional scale not just to create larger



organizations but also because of an awareness that the regional economy and geography were powerful forces shaping local events and community economic development. Local knowledge and regional awareness also encouraged larger-scale perspectives, linking local movements not only to state and federal levels but to the global justice movement and the revival of struggles over the right to the city.