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Questioning 'Supply and Demand': Unions, Labor Market Processes, and Interracial Inequality[1]

L. Frank Weyher and Maurice Zeitlin

In 1948, W. E. B. Dubois declared, 'Probably the greatest and most effective effort toward interracial understanding among the working masses has come about through. . .the organization of the CIO (Congress of Industrial Organizations) in 1935.' Yet the CIO's role in shaping race relations and patterns of interracial inequality has been largely overlooked by contemporary scholars of race. Drawing from an ongoing research program on the relative effects of the CIO versus the AFL (American Federation of Labor) on interracial inequality during the 1940s, we discuss implications for the role of unions today and into the future. Findings for the CIO era challenge widespread notions about the connection between the 'demand for labor' and interracial inequality. Comparing recent developments in the economy and labor movement with those of the CIO era, we argue that a new form of interracial working-class movement may be emerging, a movement that, if positively linked to continued struggles for racial justice and equality, could make a profound difference for race relations and 'color lines' in the twenty-first century.

Since the 1995 electoral victory of John Sweeney and the 'New Voice' slate, the leaders of the AFL-CIO have made a renewed commitment to 'organizing the unorganized,' particularly among workers of ethnic or 'racial' identities that have long been under-represented in its ranks. The representation of women and people of color in the top levels of the AFL-CIO leadership has expanded, and some of the most significant union organizing victories in recent years have been in unions of largely non-white immigrants, in sectors of the economy that haven't been among the past mainstays of American unionism.

The indifference if not hostility of AFL-CIO officials to the social movements of the 1960s cost organized labor an important 'opportunity for revitalization'—and

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perhaps also contributed to the unions' 'long-term decline and decay.'[2] If the unions are to once again stand for the interests of all workers, rather than only the parochial interests of their present (and declining) membership, they must join in creating a new 'social movement unionism,' reminiscent of the 'people's movement' led by the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO),[3] that is committed to deepening democracy and enhancing social justice and social equality.[4]

The CIO—conceived in late October 1935 as the 'Committee for Industrial Organization' and 'suspended' a year later by the AFL for 'fomenting insurrection'—ripped itself from the AFL's womb in November 1938 and baptized itself anew as the 'Congress of Industrial Organizations.' In the years to follow, until it foundered on the shoals of the early Cold War and split apart at the end of the 1940s, the CIO was to be, as its organizers declared, 'a people's movement for security, for jobs, for civil rights and freedom. It speaks for all the working men and women of America, Negro and white . . . [and] fights to bring the benefits of industrial organization to all working people . . . in the only way it can be done—by organizing all the workers, excluding none, discriminating against none.'[5] The CIO 'sought just the right balance between acknowledging ethnic difference and articulating worker unity.'[6] Its early organizing drives even included a pledge which workers had to sign before they could join a CIO union: 'I do sincerely promise, of my own free will . . . never to discriminate against a fellow worker on account of creed, color, or nationality.'[7] At the time of the CIO's establishment, 'barely 100,000 blacks were members of American unions; by 1940, there were roughly 500,000. Before the rise of the CIO, the presence of a black union official at union events was a rare occurrence; in 1939–40, it was commonplace.'[8] In 1938, the Labor Research Association reported that 'more than a quarter of a million Negroes have been enrolled by the CIO since 1936.'[9]

The CIO opened its doors to black workers on an equal basis with whites, and fought battles to win them greater employment and workplace equality. Its local and regional 'industrial union councils' (IUCs) and, from mid-1943 on, its state and national 'political action committees' (CIO-PACs) fused class and community issues together, through battles for racial justice and civil rights.[10] '[T]he C.I.O.'s Political Action Committee denounced all forms of discrimination,' James Olson observes, 'and its cooperation with black leadership to achieve that goal convinced prominent Negroes that [the CIO's] industrial unionism was the black man's most powerful ally in America.'[11] The CIO's 'interracialism,' it should be emphasized, was not a form of 'de-racialization.' Rather, interracial solidarity 'served as the initial pivot for a transformation—a re-articulation—of race and class.'[12]

So, in the major industrial cities from east to west, cadres of militant black CIO unionists revivified local NAACP (National Association for the Advancement of Colored People) and Urban League branches, and pushed them into more militant stands.[13] The tremendous gains in membership that came with the CIO's mobilizing influence made the NAACP 'representative of the Negro masses for the first time in its history.'[14] Illustrative of the broader community efforts of CIO unions was the United Auto Workers' (UAW's) opposition to racial segregation at the new federal

Sojourner Truth Housing Project in Detroit in 1942. The UAW demanded 'integration of all the facilities'[15] and led the fight for 'a housing policy of first come, first served, regardless of color.'[16] When both local and federal authorities declared that integration was 'out of the question,' the UAW organized mass demonstrations in Detroit in April of 1943 to defend the right of blacks to live in the new housing project *instead* of whites. This struggle in turn spurred the vast growth of Detroit's NAACP, which gained almost 20,000 members at the time.[17]

The CIO also worked closely with the Fair Employment Practices Committee (FEPC). The FEPC, created by Roosevelt in June of 1941, was the culmination of the all-black March on Washington Movement (MOWM) led by A. Philip Randolph. (Roosevelt's Executive Order 8802 prohibited discrimination in government and defense employment and established the FEPC to investigate and try to eliminate discriminatory practices.) 'CIO leaders faced with the resistance of white workers found the committee [FEPC] an important ally in their efforts to upgrade and promote black workers.'[18] When black workers repeatedly struck to protest employment discrimination in defense industries, the CIO supported them; 22 protest strikes occurred between July 1943 and December 1944 alone, according to the FEPC.[19] At FEPC field hearings, CIO union officials testified to help document discriminatory hiring practices and treatment of railroad, smelter, shipyard, and other workers—'many of whom were held captive in collusive and openly discriminatory AFL closed shop agreements.'[20]

The national CIO also established its own Committee to Abolish Racial Discrimination (CARD), and by 1945 at least 100 such committees had been formed and were active at the state and local level.[21] Individual CIO unions, in turn, often formed their own fair employment practices committees. The CIO's constitution prohibited discrimination on the basis of 'race, creed, color, or national origin;' and a number of CIO unions made nondiscrimination clauses basic contractual demands in their negotiations with employers (e.g. the Packinghouse Workers, the Rubber Workers, and the Marine and Shipbuilding Workers).[22] When conservatives in Congress threatened to cut funding to the FEPC or eliminate it altogether, the 'C.I.O. and its Committee to Abolish Racial Discrimination throughout the war joined black leadership in opposing these cutbacks and in demanding the maintenance of the F.E.P.C.'[23] Thus the CIO worked to enforce and extend regulations against employment discrimination through an alliance that reached from the national FEPC (and the War Labor Board), to a dozen regional FEPC offices, to active 'metropolitan councils for fair employment practices' in cities such as New York, Cleveland, Detroit, Chicago, Los Angeles, and San Francisco.[24] So, 'while the AF of L annually proclaimed education the only way to eliminate racism among white members of the federation, and annually did nothing to educate its members,' as Philip Foner remarks, 'the CIO conducted a vast educational program to meet the issue. The literature distributed by the CIO's Committee to Abolish [Racial] Discrimination was a milestone.'[25] Individual CIO unions also conducted educational campaigns to combat racism within their membership (e.g. United Auto Workers, International Longshoremen's and Warehousemen's

Union [ILWU], National Maritime Union [NMU]). Some CIO international unions 'suspended' or 'expelled members who were openly racist and engaged in stirring up racial prejudice'—for instance, respectively, the Industrial Union of Marine and Shipbuilders of America (IUMSWA) and the NMU.[26]

At the time, black leaders and the black press recognized and lauded the CIO's efforts. As early as July 1937, in the midst of the steel workers' initial organizing battles, the NAACP stated in *The Crisis* that black steel workers had 'nothing to lose and everything to gain by affiliation with the CIO.'[27] In late 1942, a column in *Opportunity*, the organ of the National Urban League, reported, 'the coming of the CIO has been the most important experience in 75 years of struggle.'[28] Similarly, in 1943, the *NAACP Bulletin* declared, 'The CIO has proved that it stands for our people within the union *and outside the unions*.'[29] That same year, Ralph Bunche wrote in the *NAACP Bulletin*, 'The black and white masses, once united, could employ the terrifying power of their numbers to wring concessions from the employers and from the government itself.'[30] By the end of World War II, as Olson puts it, black leaders 'looked upon the C.I.O. as the black man's greatest hope for social and economic progress in the post-war world.' Crucially, they had come to understand 'that the concept of [interracial] labor solidarity would benefit not only black workers *but the black man generally*.'[31] In 1948, no less a voice than W. E. B. DuBois declared, 'Probably the greatest and most effective effort toward interracial understanding among the working masses has come about through. . .the organization of the CIO in 1935.'[32]

In the light of such praise for the CIO's black–white unity by leading black intellectuals and the national black organizations of the day, and their eventual alliance with the CIO, it is puzzling—and certainly troubling—that these working-class struggles for interracial solidarity, equality, and civil rights waged by the CIO have been all but ignored in recent scholarly work on the origins of the civil rights movement, the emergence of post-war patterns of interracial inequality, or even the gains made by black workers during the 1940s. None of the following works, which are diverse in theoretical construction and political orientation, even mentions the CIO or industrial unions: Baran and Sweezy, 'Monopoly Capitalism and Race Relations;' Auletta, *The Underclass*; Kasarda, 'Urban Change and Minority Opportunities' and 'Urban Industrial Transition and the Underclass;' Lemann, 'The Origins of the Underclass;' Wilson, *The Truly Disadvantaged* and 'Studying Inner City Social Dislocations;' Johnson and Oliver, 'Structural Changes in the U.S. Economy and Black Male Joblessness;' Vedder and Gallaway, 'Racial Differences in Unemployment in the United States' and 'Who Bears the Burden of Unemployment?;' Fairlie and Sundstrom, 'The Racial Unemployment Gap in Long-Run Perspective.' However, some analysts of racial economic inequality at least allude, though without any elaboration, to the possible implications of the CIO's racial egalitarianism (e.g. Lieberson, *A Piece of the Pie*, 353–54; Marable, *How Capitalism Underdeveloped Black America*, 35–36; Farley and Allen, *The Color Line and the Quality of Life in America*, 116; Thernstrom and Thernstrom, *America in Black and White*, 90–91).

Labor Demand during World War II and Black Gains, 1940–50

That black workers made considerable economic gains during the 1940s is widely recognized by scholars. However, most accounts attribute these gains simply to the 'tight labor markets' of a war-time economy operating at 'full tilt.'[33] Often mentioned, as they deserve to be, are A. Philip Randolph's MOWM and Roosevelt's FEPC. But the CIO is typically left out of the story. Yet, as our previously published findings[34] as well as preliminary findings from our ongoing collaborative research have shown, the CIO's policies and practices resulted in increased black–white equality in employment, income, and labor force participation, regardless of the level of long-term labor demand. In fact, such equality was greater in the states where the CIO was strong even when labor demand was low, than in the states where the AFL was strong and labor demand was high.[35]

In our study of how the intraclass balance of power between the CIO and AFL unions affected black–white employment inequality, we found that in the 15 highly unionized states outside the Old South (i.e. excluding the 11 former Confederate States), the average ratio of percent reductions in *white* male unemployment to the percent reductions in *black* male unemployment, 1940–50, decreased consistently as the balance of power shifted from the AFL to the CIO. In the highly unionized states where the CIO was strongest, the ratio was very close to 1 to 1—representing virtual black–white equality. What's more, this was true regardless of the level of long-term labor demand. So, for instance, where the balance of power most favored the CIO, but labor demand was low, the ratio was a remarkable 1.02 to 1.00 (slightly lower, in fact, than in the CIO's strongest states under high labor demand, where the ratio was 1.05 to 1.00). In contrast, where the balance of power most favored the AFL and labor demand was high, the ratio was 2.61 to 1.00, indicating that in these AFL-dominated states white unemployment fell, between 1940 and 1950, over two-and-one-half times as much as black unemployment fell.[36]

Preliminary analyses of the effects of the intraclass balance of power on black–white income inequality, reveal a similar—although not as strong—relationship.[37] In highly unionized states where labor demand was also high, the ratio of the percent increase in black male median annual income to the percent increase in white male median annual income[38] was considerably less where the AFL was strongest (1.24) than where the CIO was strongest (1.50). Furthermore, the CIO-dominated states had essentially the same ratio regardless of the level of labor demand: that ratio hardly differed where demand was high (1.51) from where demand was low (1.48).[39] Thus, the stronger the CIO, the greater the increase in black worker's income, 1940–50, relative to whites.

Finally, our analyses of the effects of the intraclass balance of power on relative black labor force participation indicate that the more the balance of power favored the CIO (as opposed to the AFL), the higher black labor force participation rates were in 1950, and the less they fell between 1940 and 1950. Furthermore, the stronger the CIO relative to the AFL, the smaller was the gap between the white and black labor force participation rates in 1950, and the less this gap grew between

1940 and 1950. Again, this pattern holds irrespective of the level of long-term labor demand.[40]

The cumulative findings of our analyses provide convincing evidence that the strength of the CIO during this decade was absolutely crucial in determining the gains made by black workers, while the tight labor markets resulting from a war-time economy had little to do with it. Of course, the 'CIO hardly created a racially integrated society, but [for all the ways it fell short] *it went further*,' as Liz Cohen observes, '*in promoting racial harmony than any other institution in existence at the time*.'[41]

What, then, can we learn from the CIO's record of interracial unity which is relevant to the struggles and changing role of unions today?

Most attempts to explain the poor and deteriorating economic situation of so-called inner-city black Americans today employ a negative form of 'labor demand' as a conceptual hinge in their theoretical arguments. The 'spatial mismatch' hypothesis asserts that local qualifications are not well adjusted to the sort of jobs available—that supply is out of sync with demand;[42] 'deconcentration' explanations emphasize the movement of jobs away from the inner cities to the suburbs or—in broader forms of argument focusing on 'de-industrialization' or 'globalization'—to other regions or countries, resulting in a general decline in labor demand.[43]

Certainly, labor demand is important. To find employment or increase one's income, jobs have to be available. But that doesn't mean that these jobs will be available to workers of an oppressed racial or ethnic identity. As is well known, during the early stages of defense mobilization for World War II, the American economy was rife with labor 'bottlenecks' where the demand for labor was high; yet job openings in defense production went unfilled even though large pools of qualified black workers were available to fill them. The refusal of major employers to hire qualified black workers was, after all, what provoked Randolph's MOWM and constituted the rationale for establishing the FEPC.

Despite the recurring emphasis on 'tight labor markets' in purported explanations of black gains during the World War II period, that tight labor markets during the Korean War failed to result in further gains is ignored. Indeed, according to an Urban League report of 4 February 1952, 'a uniform pattern' of discrimination resulted, in which employers were hiring inexperienced white workers but passing over even those black workers who had been employed in defense industries during World War II.[44] According to Arthur Ross, the gap in unemployment between black and white rates actually widened during the Korean War.[45]

So, accounts of the relative decline in black employment and labor force participation that focus on structural changes in the American economy from the 1970s on, such as de-industrialization, have three main flaws. First, they don't ask, at least not in a systematic way, the crucial sociohistorical question: How, in the first place, did black workers get those good jobs that are now gone? Instead, it is silently assumed that blacks got those jobs because the economy, and particularly manufacturing, was growing and labor demand tightening.

But, second, this assumption is as deceptive as it is plausible. It's what Robert K. Merton has aptly termed a 'pseudofact' and, as Merton incisively remarks,

'pseudofacts have a way of inducing pseudoproblems, which cannot be solved because matters are not as they purport to be.'[46] For our analysis has revealed that high labor demand per se had a negligible effect, while the CIO's interracial unionism had a decisive effect, in the determination of increased black employment and labor force participation during the decade of the 1940s. So, such accounts, by mistaking a fundamental *assumption* of neoclassical economic theory for an empirical reality—namely, that if labor demand goes up, wages will increase as will supply (higher labor force participation rates)—and then extending this logic still further to argue that interracial or interethnic inequality will therefore go down, lead to policies that emphasize economic stimulus and expansion, with the goal of boosting overall labor demand, as the corrective measure for the present situation. Absent in the corpus of relevant work on racial and ethnic 'economic' inequality are systematic investigations of the mechanisms through which an increase in demand translates into employment, and for whom, and what difference it makes.[47]

Third, trends in black–white inequality often attributed to post-1970 changes actually began much earlier, during periods of general economic prosperity; so, for instance, according to Ross, as we've already noted, the black–white gap in unemployment actually widened during the Korean War.[48] Once this is recognized, it becomes difficult to sustain an account of these trends that simply emphasizes changes in demand.

Thus, during the CIO era, what in fact made the difference in whether or not employers hired black men to fill job vacancies were the constraints that the unions were ready, willing, and able to impose, in accordance with the unions' specific—racially egalitarian or exclusionary—principles, policies, and practices. The question, therefore, is whether the prevailing attempts to explain why black men slipped behind white men in labor force participation are 'misplaced in time.'[49] For it was with the demise of the CIO, as the leading, organized core of a militant, integrated, working-class civil rights movement in America, that the annual 2 to 1 black–white male unemployment gap and, soon thereafter, a parallel labor force participation gap emerged.

Current Transformations of American Labor: Comparisons to the CIO Era

After this long, but necessary, historical sojourn, we now return to the labor movement today. The central question posed to us by the Color Lines conference was: 'What concrete strategies and tactics might unions today employ to regain their dynamism through active cultivation of a sense of common struggle across ethnic and racial barriers?' While we cannot presume to have the answer, we can, by outlining some of the similarities as well as differences between the current era and that of the CIO, make some suggestions about what it might take for labor unions to 'regain their dynamism' and 'cultivate a sense of common struggle' across 'color lines.'

Some notable parallels exist between the economic context and recent changes in the labor movement and that of the CIO era. Such similarities warrant the link

made by some writers between a renewed 'social movement unionism' today and that of the CIO in the 1930s. However, much has also changed. In what follows, we will try to draw out these similarities and differences—often, as will be seen, the same aspect involves elements of both.

Union membership has fallen consistently since the mid twentieth century, leaving the vast majority of working people today outside of the nation's unions—as was also true on the eve of the mass workers' insurgency and the wave of unionization that flowed through America's industries from the mid-1930s on. In 2003, unions enrolled barely one out of every eight, or 12.9 percent, of all employed wage and salary workers—14.9 percent among men versus 11.4 percent among women.[50] Thus, 'perhaps the most persistent theme of the new AFL-CIO leadership,' Bruce Nissen remarks, 'is the need to increase massively the size of the labor movement. Organizing the unorganized is the top priority.'[51] This was the same priority that impelled John L. Lewis to form the CIO and then split with the AFL. But the service-dominated economy and occupational structure of today is also a far cry from the mass industrial employment of the 1930s and 1940s.

In contrast to the crisis years of the Great Depression, the 1990s were boom years of relative prosperity, but even so a sense of crisis has been pervasive: inequality has risen steeply, job tenure and security have eroded, job creation is stagnant or worse, and yet Congress has swept away much of the social safety net won in that earlier crisis. So far, though, this sense of crisis has not generated anything remotely resembling the massive workers' insurgency and eruptions of self-organization witnessed during the 1930s. Lewis, after all, was responding to 'thousands who were already organizing . . . [The CIO] could build on years of base-building work done by unknown organizers and activists.'[52] The question is whether organized labor, given the general quiescence of the working class and the hostile political climate it faces today, can devise and act on a strategy that expands its ranks and, equipped with the 'power of numbers,' again win legislation and policies that protect and advance the interests and enhance the well-being of working men and women and their families.

Much as at the dawn of the CIO era, a sharp shift in leadership *at the top* of the labor hierarchy has occurred. John Sweeney, previously head of the dynamic Service Employees International Union (SEIU), and the New Voice slate won power in the AFL-CIO in 1995, through 'the first [and only] contested election for the leadership of the federation in the twentieth century.'[53] But, despite all the emphasis on change, Sweeney's victory represented a changing of the guard within the existing AFL-CIO, in contrast with the CIO's split with the AFL's officialdom and its secession to become a rival labor federation. The latter ushered in a period unique in labor history—from the CIO's birth in 1935 until its return to the AFL's womb in 1955—during which these two rival labor federations, of comparable size and extent but having opposed social principles and political commitments, competed against each other for the allegiance of the American working class.

The inter-union rivalry between the CIO and the AFL likely strengthened their differences, particularly on potentially divisive issues such as race.[54] It is clear that

such competition led the AFL to shift its organizing efforts from craft to industrial organizing strategies by the early 1940s;[55] without, however adopting the commitments to racial solidarity and equality that were typically part and parcel of the industrial strategy for the CIO unions and organizers. At a minimum, inter-union competition gave an added impetus to 'organizing the unorganized,' hence the tremendous upsurge in union membership witnessed during these years. Heightened competition within organized labor today might also spur unionization (though, given the absence of workers' uprisings that impel a competitive struggle between the small number of vibrant and combative unions and the dormant majority, taking this path would run the risk of further fragmentation and weakening of organized labor's power).

The SEIU today, much like Lewis's United Mine Workers (UMW) in the 1930s, is among the most militant and *growing* unions in America; and, like the UMW, it is geared toward meeting the demands of the rapidly changing economic context. By the 1930s, mass industrial production was firmly established and expanding. At the helm of the UMW, one of the nation's oldest industrial unions, Lewis wanted to extend industrial unionism to the other, still largely non-unionized, mass production industries. Today's workers have to confront capital on a terrain that's far different from that on which the production workers of the 1930s and 1940s fought. The SEIU has devised an effective strategy and innovative, and combative, tactics to organize workers in the largely union-free environment—which was long considered 'unorganizable'—of the burgeoning service-providing post-industrial economy.

The SEIU strategy parallels and draws explicitly on the CIO's strategy in crucial ways, and it is the strategy that the unions must adopt to bring about 'the next upsurge' in American unionism.[56] It is a strategy that calls—in the words of Stephen Lerner, SEIU's building services organizing director, who ran the national Justice for Janitors campaign—for unions to 'move beyond wages and working conditions to lead a broad-based movement for economic and social justice, and against the spiritual and moral poverty that tolerates racism and sexism and scapegoats society's most vulnerable members.' To pursue that goal, the unions will have to make two important strategic decisions—the same ones that the CIO's leading organizers made: First, to organize on an industry-wide basis, which will give workers 'the sense that they [are] building real power'—power that they can wield against their employers, and at the bargaining table. Second, using that power, the workers and the unions have to 'create problems for employers,' through tactics of direct action—concerted collective action—including nonviolent civil disobedience, that can force concessions both from employers and local, state, and federal governments. These tactics, Lerner emphasizes, are 'ways to counteract the practice of fighting narrow individual fights and isolated workplaces. Instead of confining disagreements to the smallest arena, the idea is to escalate the scale of the conflict until . . . a whole area can't function . . . Concerted, militant action puts unions on a moral high ground. It says to workers and the country that [the unions] . . . are assuming leadership in the battle not just for the future of the unions but for the whole country . . . *as agents of a more just society*.'[57]

This is a strategy that can only succeed if the men and women who carry it out break free of the prevailing anti-labor legal straitjacket, and are ready and willing to use tactics to hurt employers which are now, and have long been, illegal but which were among the most effective weapons in the CIO's arsenal, from the sit-downs to mass picketing, common situs picketing, and secondary boycotts. Even when striking workers find legal ways to take effective direct action, the courts, almost always, quickly enjoin them.[58] A strategy aiming not only to organize workers but to build a people's movement cannot be carried out by narrowing down the union's aim to winning an NLRB (National Labor Relations Board) certification election with 50 percent plus one vote.[59]

This is a strategy that demands of today's union organizers the same qualities—of 'devotion, heroism, and selflessness' and 'the willingness to work night and day and courage to face threats of physical violence'—that characterized the men and women, most conspicuously the Reds and left-wing radicals among them, who forged black–white unity in the Unemployed Councils and who brought forth the CIO's interracial industrial unions.[60] Under Sweeney's leadership, the AFL-CIO has been willing to deploy New Left organizers—men and women who are veterans of the mass struggles for civil rights, campus free speech, and a halt to the US war on Vietnam which merged to become the insurgent movement of the long decade of 'the 1960s.' At the SEIU and other unions such as AFSCME (American Federation of State, County, and Municipal Employees), ACTWU (Amalgamated Clothing and Textile Workers Union), and CWA (Communications Workers of America), veterans of these struggles played major roles in the organizing drives of the 1980s and early 1990s which 'laid the groundwork,' according to Lowell Turner and Richard Hurd, 'for a broad ''changing to organize'' campaign by the mid-1990s.' Remarkably, 'most AFL-CIO departments are now [that is, following the New Voice slate's victory] headed by former social movement activists.'[61] The presence of labor activists with a coherent philosophical and political commitment to building broad, solidaristic, interracial and inter-ethnic unions again can make the difference between success or failure in organizing—and in what kinds of organizations the unions become, in terms of the breadth of their social vision, commitments, and objectives and the extent of rank-and-file participation in running them.

It was during the 1930s that organized labor's alliance with the Democratic Party was firmly established; the CIO invented the 'political action committee' and made getting its political message out to all workers a major goal. Today, signs are appearing of electoral realignment and an increasingly independent voice for labor—particularly in the dramatic increase in spending and the shift to a strategy of reaching and educating workers (and not just union members) about public issues and state and Congressional candidates for public office. Working-class politics and the 'sense of possibilities' that exists may be one arena in which a semblance of 'social movement unionism' has appeared. Many workers have become disillusioned with the unions' alignment with the Democratic Party, but a viable alternative has yet to emerge. So, 'organizing the unorganized' and cultivating alliances and coalitions with other social movements have to go hand in hand. This, combined with the shift

in the AFL-CIO's political strategy toward more independence, may restore a sense of political voice to working people—male and female, immigrant and native born, of all colors and ethnicities.

The CIO's 'industrial union councils' were vital and active political forces in America's working-class throughout most of the CIO era, but they became quiescent if not entirely dormant once the Cold War dawned. Under Sweeney, however, the AFL-CIO's 'central labor councils' have displayed signs of awakening and revitalization. They have, as others have also emphasized, an important role to play in bringing workers back on to the political stage, in collective, and independent, political action.[62] The councils, acting as an intermediary level of administration between the regional or national AFL-CIO offices and the individual local unions, can help coordinate the struggles of the different unions within their domain.

For the central question addressed in this paper, perhaps the most important parallel between today's more aggressive top leadership of organized labor and the CIO is the recognition—and renewed sense of urgency—of the necessity of bridging 'color lines' (as well as ethnic and gender lines), and so of bringing about greater inclusiveness and representation, not only within the existing union ranks and at all levels of labor leadership, but also in selecting the segments of workers—especially immigrants, women, and people of color—to focus on in the unions' organizing campaigns. The new AFL-CIO leadership has, as we noted at the outset, increased diversity within the AFL-CIO's executive council, and has taken a more conscious stance toward building interracial and inter-ethnic solidarity and inclusive representation throughout the union world—emphasizing that a union's leadership and major union committees should strive to match the social composition of the union's rank and file. 'In an era of rising racial tension and polarization,' as May Chen and Kent Wong put it, 'the labor movement is one of the few social forces with the capacity to advance an agenda of multiracial unity and progressive social change.'[63]

Today, in our post-civil-rights society, in which significant advances in the law, in social practices, and in popular culture have been made, 'race' operates in ways more subtle and, at the same time, more blatantly political than it did during the CIO era. The social meanings of race (and ethnicity) are now more openly politicized—self-consciously and intentionally—by all groups.

Crucially, as we have already discussed, the CIO strived to *broaden out* to become a leading participant in a 'people's movement.' The CIO not only built inclusive, class-based industrial unions, but also formed alliances and coalitions with other organizations, such as the NAACP and the Urban League, or—to their left—the National Negro Congress and Southern Negro Youth Congress, which sought to change the world they lived in. Today, organizers and activists are again advocating both organizational and political coalition building by the unions[64]—or the cultivation of 'social movement unionism' that takes on a wide array of social issues and interests, in addition to the unions' activities aimed at bettering their members' wages and working conditions.[65] Only in this way can the old phrase 'labor movement'—so inapt for describing the AFL-CIO during its nearly half-century of dormancy preceding the victory of the New Voice slate—once again take on real meaning in America.

Conclusion

While the economic context has certainly changed, and the types of jobs at which workers now typically work are quite different from those which the CIO sought to organize, a revitalized labor movement, taking the CIO as its inspiration, is not only necessary but possible. Under the old radical banner, 'Black and White, Unite and Fight,' the CIO embraced the aspirations of black workers and fought for black–white equality 'as had no previous sustained American labor organization.'[66] The CIO did so, not by 'engaging in absolute and utopian breaks with [race]' in a chimerical search for ' "colorblindness" or the simplistic subsuming of "race" into "class," ' but, rather, by 'engaging in progressive transformations of race' that necessarily recognized but also rearticulated it.[67] For most of the CIO's twenty years of independent existence and its intraclass rivalry with the AFL, it 'was a potent, organized expression of interracial working class solidarity.'[68]

The CIO's 'people's movement' was—if only for an ephemeral historical moment—exemplary of what unions must now do to become part of a revivified labor *movement*: they, like the CIO, must engage in 'active cultivation of a sense of common struggle across ethnic and racial barriers'[69] and—regardless of 'race, creed, color, or national origin'—'Unite and Fight!'

Notes

[1] Paper originally written for and presented at the 'Color Lines Conference,' Harvard University, 30 August to 1 September 2003.
[2] Turner and Hurd, 'Building Social Movement Unionism,' 12.
[3] CIO, *The CIO and the Negro Worker*.
[4] C.f. Green, 'On Becoming a Movement Again.'
[5] CIO, *The CIO and the Negro Worker*, 4, 10.
[6] Cohen, *Making a New Deal*, 339.
[7] Levinson, *Labor on the March*, 299.
[8] Foner, *Organized Labor and the Black Worker*, 231.
[9] Labor Research Association, *Labor Fact Book*, 165.
[10] Zieger, *The CIO*; Foner, *Organized Labor and the Black Worker*; Halpern, ' "Black and White Unite and Fight;" ' Kelley, *Hammer and Hoe*; Gilpin, 'Left by Themselves;' Goldfield, *The Color of Politics*.
[11] Olson, 'Organized Black Leadership and Industrial Unionism,' 484.
[12] Jung, 'Interracialism,' 392.
[13] Korstad and Lichtenstein, 'Opportunities Found and Lost,' 787; Winn, 'Labor Tackles the Race Question,' 357; also see Sugrue, *The Origins of the Urban Crisis*, 26–7.
[14] Dalfiume, 'The "Forgotten Years" of the Negro Revolution,' 99.
[15] Olson, 'Organized Black Leadership and Industrial Unionism,' 484.
[16] Winn, 'Labor Tackles the Race Question,' 357.
[17] Korstad and Lichtenstein, 'Opportunities Found and Lost,' 797.
[18] Zieger, *The CIO*, 158.
[19] FEPC, *First Report*, 80.
[20] Zieger, *The CIO*, 158; Reed, *Seedtime for the Modern Civil Rights Movement*, 10.
[21] Zieger, *The CIO*, 157; see also Rosen, 'The CIO Era,' 189.
[22] Zieger, *The CIO*, 157.

[23] Olson, 'Organized Black Leadership and Industrial Unionism,' 484.
[24] Dickerson, *Out of the Crucible*, 173; Zieger, *The CIO*, 158; Reed, *Seedtime for the Modern Civil Rights Movement*, 85.
[25] Foner, *Organized Labor and the Black Worker*, 257.
[26] Ibid., 264, 227.
[27] Quoted in Olson, 'Organized Black Leadership and Industrial Unionism,' 477.
[28] Foner, *Organized Labor and the Black Worker*, 237.
[29] Ibid., 268, emphasis added.
[30] Cited in Olson, 'Organized Black Leadership and Industrial Unionism,' 485–86.
[31] Ibid., 486, 485, emphasis added.
[32] Dubois, 'Race Relations in the United States,' 236.
[33] Miller, 'Testimony,' 375; see also, among others, Baran and Sweezy, 'Monopoly Capitalism and Race Relations,' 259; Bernstein, *Towards a Dissenting Past*, 297–98; Polenberg, *War and Society*; Brody, 'The New Deal and World War II,' 275; Wynn, *The Afro-American and the Second World War*, 48–49, 55, 57–59; Fredrickson, 'America's Caste System,' 71–72; Thernstrom and Thernstrom, *America in Black and White*, 72; Hacker, *Two Nations*, 24.
[34] Zeitlin and Weyher, ' "Black and White, Unite and Fight." '
[35] The analyses for the following discussion are all based on state-level US Census data for 1940 and 1950, and Leo Troy's state-level union membership and affiliation data for 1939 and 1953; US Bureau of the Census, *U.S. Census of the Population: 1950, Vol. II: Characteristics of the Population, Parts 2–8, 10–50* and *U.S. Census of the Population: 1950, Vol. II: Characteristics of the Population, Part 1*; Troy, *Membership of American Trade Unions*; *Distribution of Union Membership among the States*; and *Trade Union Membership*. The results on income inequality also utilize micro-level Census data; Ruggles and Sobek, *Integrated Public Use Microdata Series*.
[36] Zeitlin and Weyher, ' "Black and White, Unite and Fight." '
[37] Weyher and Zeitlin, 'Rival Unionism and Racial Inequality in America.'
[38] The ratio here is reversed from the white–black ratio in our employment study. For income, the percentage increase for blacks was typically greater than for whites, so rather than looking for 'equality' we look for where it increased the most (higher values in the ratio) relative to whites.
[39] There were no AFL-dominated, highly unionized states where long-term labor demand was *low*; however, the ratio for CIO-dominated states with low labor demand was also considerably higher than in states with a more ambiguous balance of power and low labor demand.
[40] Weyher and Zeitlin, 'Interracial Working-Class Solidarity, Labor Demand, and Relative Black Labor Force Participation in the United States.'
[41] Cohen, *Making a New Deal*, 337, emphasis added.
[42] E.g. Wilson, *The Truly Disadvantaged*; Kain, 'Housing Segregation, Negro Employment, and Metropolitan Decentralization' and 'The Spatial Mismatch Hypothesis;' Kasarda 'The Urban Industrial Transition and the Underclass.'
[43] E.g. Bluestone and Harrison, *The Deindustrialization of America*; Wilson, *The Truly Disadvantaged* and *When Work Disappears*; but cf. Jargowsky, *Poverty and Place* (Jargowsky argues that the often cited role of 'de-industrialization' in creating northern black ghettos 'may actually be measuring the decline of union jobs . . . [rather] than deindustrialization [per se]' (121). He does not, however, comment any further on the types of unions that mattered).
[44] Zeitlin and Weyher, ' "Black and White, Unite and Fight," ' 458.
[45] Ross, 'The Negro in the American Economy,' Table 6; also see Farley, 'Trends in Racial Inequalities,' 196; Kessler, 'Economic Status of Nonwhite Workers.'
[46] Merton, 'Notes on Problem-Finding in Sociology,' xiii–xv.

[47] For important theoretical contributions that questions standard neoclassical assumptions about the operation of labor markets, see Rubery, 'Structured Labour Markets, Worker Organization and Low Pay;' Peck, *Work*-Place.

[48] Ross, 'The Negro in the American Economy,' Table 6; see also Vedder and Gallaway, 'Who Bears the Burden of Unemployment?' 281; Cotton, 'Opening the Gap.'

[49] Ross, 'The Negro in the American Economy,' 30.

[50] US Bureau of Labor Statistics, 'Union Membership of Wage and Salary Workers by Demographic Group;' see also ibid, 'Household Data, Annual Averages.'

[51] Nissen, Introduction to *Which Direction for Organized Labor?*, 14.

[52] Miller, 'What Labor Movement?'

[53] Nissen, Introduction to *Which Direction for Organized Labor?*, 12.

[54] Special thanks to Jonathan Cutler for his insightful comments on the relatively autonomous effects of 'inter-union rivalry' itself as a force shaping the particular policies and practices unions pursue (conversation with Weyher at the American Sociological Association's Annual Conference, 16–19 August 2003, Atlanta).

[55] Bernstein, *The Turbulent Years*, 685.

[56] See Clawson, *The Next Upsurge*.

[57] Lerner, 'Reviving Unions,' 2–4, emphasis added.

[58] Ibid., 1.

[59] The successful Justice for Janitors campaign in Los Angeles in the early 1990s deliberately abandoned the standard NLRB certification election approach. Instead, the organizers—who had been dispatched by the SEIU International to conduct the campaign because the Los Angeles local was all but moribund—sought to build a local movement by mobilizing thousands of the city's janitors, most of whom were Mexican and Central American immigrants and many of them women, along with many of their relatives, friends, and neighbors, and used an assortment of 'guerrilla legal tactics' (e.g. filing complaints of unfair labor practices with the NLRB and of violations of health and safety rules with Cal-OSHA [California Occupational Safety and Health Administration]) and in-your face direct actions, including civil disobedience, in alliance with local churches, students from the University of California at Los Angeles, and organizations in the immigrant community (see Waldinger et al., 'Helots No More').

[60] See Stepan-Norris and Zeitlin, *Left out*, 28–29, 248–49.

[61] Turner and Hurd, 'Building Social Movement Unionism,' 17, 20. A major difference here, of course, is that these activists are 'movement' activists, not 'party' activists. In the CIO era, Communist organizers and unionists were much maligned for their adherence to 'the party line;' but what they often did in practice was to ignore that line if it went against what they thought was right and necessary to wage and win their unions' battles with employers so as to better their members' daily working lives (see Stepan-Norris and Zeitlin, *Left out*).

[62] Gapasin and Wial, 'The Role of Central Labor Councils in Union Organizing in the 1990s;' Acuff, 'Expanded Roles for the Central Labor Council;' McLewin, 'The Concerted Voice of Labor and the Suburbanization of Capital;' Ness and Eimer, *Central Labor Councils and the Revival of American Unionism*; Kriesky, 'Structural Change in the AFL-CIO.'

[63] Chen and Wong, 'The Challenge of Diversity and Inclusion in the AFL-CIO,' 201.

[64] Note: William Julius Wilson, in his recent book *The Bridge over the Racial Divide*, also calls for building a 'national multiracial coalition with a mass-based economic agenda' (82). Given this agenda, it is astounding that Wilson only makes a brief mention of the 'interracial unionism during the Great Depression' (83) and fails to discuss the CIO explicitly. Wilson even cites the UAW, the Steel Workers Organizing Committee, and the UMW as examples of individual interracial unions to illustrate that a broader, interracial movement or coalition is possible; apparently without recognizing that these unions *were*, in fact, part of such a broader social movement as *CIO* unions. Recognizing the CIO would have constituted much stronger support for his call for coalition building than simply citing a few individual

unions in local contexts. While the CIO era has been forgotten in much of the relevant literature on race in America, Wilson's silence here is all the more remarkable, since, in his *The Declining Significance of Race*, he did acknowledge—though again only in passing—the CIO's positive impact on the economic position of black workers (76–78). However, in his subsequent work, *The Truly Disadvantaged* (1987), *When Work Disappears* (1996), and *The Bridge over the Racial Divide* (1999), the CIO falls out of the picture.

[65] E.g. Green, 'On Becoming a Movement Again,' 255–80; Lerner, 'Reviving Unions' and 'Taking the Offensive, Turning the Tide;' Turner and Hurd, 'Building Social Movement Unionism;' Clawson, *The Next Upsurge*.

[66] Zieger, *The CIO*, 153, 372.

[67] Jung, 'Interracialism,' 395.

[68] Weyher and Zeitlin, 'Rival Unionism and Racial Inequality in America.'

[69] Jung, 'Interracialism,' 395.

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