Ready to Work
Uprooting Inequity

Black Workers in Los Angeles County
March 2017

UCLA Labor Center
UCLA Institute for Research on Labor and Employment
About the Organizations

UCLA Labor Center
For over fifty years, the UCLA Labor Center has created innovative programs that offer a range of educational, research, and public service activities within the university and in the broader community, especially among low-wage and immigrant workers. The Labor Center is a vital resource for research, education, and policy development to help create jobs that are good for workers and their communities, to improve the quality of existing jobs in the low-wage economy, and to strengthen the process of immigrant integration, especially among students and youth.

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Los Angeles Black Worker Center
The Los Angeles Black Worker Center (LABWC) was established in 2011 as the first Black worker center in California, a new and innovative model for worker centers to organize, advocate for, and provide services to Black community members embattled in the Black job crisis. Our vision is to build a world where Black workers thrive in an equitable economy that sustains vibrant families and community. Through our mission we work to increase access to quality jobs, reduce employment discrimination, and improve industries that employ Black workers through action and unionization.

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UCLA Institute for Research on Labor and Employment (IRLE)
The Institute for Research on Labor and Employment (IRLE) is a multidisciplinary research center dedicated to research, teaching, and service on labor and employment issues. Through the work of its units – UCLA Labor Center, Human Resources Roundtable and the Labor Occupational Safety and Health program – the Institute forms wide-ranging research agendas that carry UCLA into the Los Angeles community and beyond.

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Los Angeles County is a vibrant and highly diverse region, comprised of people from a variety of ethnicities and backgrounds. Throughout the twentieth century, Los Angeles experienced waves of migration that significantly enlarged the region’s Black community. As Black workers gradually joined the industrial workforce, they inflated union rolls and generally benefitted from the region’s burgeoning economic prosperity. L.A.’s Black community, through organization and struggle, fought western variations of Jim Crow laws to win access to quality jobs, housing, and opportunities.

While the Black community was once a thriving part of L.A.’s landscape and remains integral to the county’s cultural and economic life, it has long been in critical decline. Industries departed Black neighborhoods that once housed well-paying jobs. Manufacturing industries that employed a large share of Black workers moved offshore,
depleting the number of stable and available union jobs. Those that remained declined in quality, and as Black employment cratered, these communities—especially their men—were increasingly criminalized and ensnared in California’s historic expansion of incarceration. Despite the enactment of anti-discrimination laws, racist hiring practices demonstrably continue to limit Black employment. As a result of widening inequality, rising housing costs, and a glaring lack of economic opportunities, Los Angeles is in the throes of a *Black jobs crisis*.

This report looks at the experience of the Black community in Los Angeles through a labor and employment lens, and details how the lack of access to quality jobs is adversely impacting the community. Centered on an extensive literature review, an analysis of government data, and the collection of worker’s stories and case studies, this report draws a portrait of the challenges that Black workers in Los Angeles face and this community’s present employment crisis. The following are key findings.

**The Black community has a long and vibrant presence in Los Angeles but economic and social hardships are pushing residents out of the area.**

- The percentage of Black workers in manufacturing jobs since 1980 has shrunk 19% to 5%.
- Employer efforts to deunionize industries negatively impacted Black workers and jobs.
- Since the 1980s, the Black population in Los Angeles has declined by over 100,000 residents from 13% to 8% while the Inland Empire has gained over 250,000 Black residents.
- Nonetheless, Black Angelenos still make up over one-third of the state’s Black population and are a critical part of the region.

**Black people in Los Angeles are significantly more educated than previous generations, yet experience a lower labor participation rate and a significantly higher unemployment rate than white workers.**

- Since 1980, the number of those with less than a high school degree has shrunk by one-third to 10% and the number of those with a bachelor’s degree or higher has doubled.
- Black workers with a high school or less education experience unemployment at almost double the rate as white workers at the same education level.
• And even with a higher degree, more than 1 in 10 Black workers is unemployed.

• Black youth are almost twice as likely as white youth to be disconnected—neither employed nor in school.

**Black workers are underrepresented in professional jobs and have lower rates in manager and supervisory positions.**

• Around half of the Black workers in sectors with low union density, such as retail, janitorial, and security jobs, earn low wages.

• Black workers are underrepresented in professional jobs as well as in manufacturing, construction and food service.

• Over half of Black workers are employed in frontline, entry-level jobs such as floor positions and non-supervisory positions, and office work, administrative or clerical positions, which is a higher rate than white workers, and additionally are in senior positions at lower rates than white workers.
Many Black workers are in low-wage jobs and earn less than white workers in similar positions.

- Whether working full or part time, Black workers earn only three-quarters of what white workers earn. For Black women, the wage gap is even more severe.

- Further, as Black workers are promoted, the wage gap actually widens. Managers earned 76% of white worker wages and those in professional positions earn 78%.

- One third of Black workers earn low wages (defined as two-thirds of the median hourly wage) and at a higher rate than white workers.

- The wage gap between Black and white workers decreases, to an extent, as education levels rises. Nonetheless, almost 2 in 10 Black workers with higher degrees are still earning low wages.

- Black households have the lowest household income and build less wealth over time compared to their white counterparts.

Black workers experience a myriad of negative health outcomes due to racial discrimination in employment.

- A key social determinant of health is access to a safe and well-paying job.

- People who live in communities with high unemployment, pronounced poverty, and a generally low socioeconomic status are more likely to experience mental distress, crime, child maltreatment, childhood obesity, and higher levels of biological wear and tear from chronic stress.

The convergence of the Black jobs crisis, spiraling housing costs, state violence and mass incarceration has resulted in a perfect storm of discontent in the Black community. The response has been an unprecedented display of Black working-class activism and mobilization in Los Angeles County. As we enter the era of a new administration, however, concern for Black workers has intensified. President Trump’s “business-friendly” posture, his personal history of labor and housing discrimination, and his hostile indifference to the particular vulnerabilities of Black workers means that the few remaining equal opportunity gains of the Civil Rights movement may be rolled back and compound the precarious situation Black workers already face.

This report argues for the need to stabilize Black families and communities by creating good-paying, quality jobs accessible to Black workers. The purpose of this report is to educate policy makers, union representatives, and organizations working for economic
justice about the needs of Black workers in Los Angeles. Based on our research, we make these recommendations:

1. **Support worker movements that improve working conditions**
   a. Prioritize and implement labor organizing campaigns to raise standards in industries that employ Black workers.
   b. Reject “Right to Work” laws that remove worker protections and eliminate the rights of workers to organize.

2. **Create policies and programs that create access to jobs for underrepresented workers**
   a. Expand hiring benchmarks by establishing underrepresented population goals and amend disadvantaged worker requirements for local and targeted hiring programs to include an underrepresented worker clause with hiring benchmarks.
   b. Prioritize hiring and retention programs in the public sector.

3. **Empower agencies and communities to address discrimination and workplace issues**
   a. Amend state law to empower local governments with the authority to address issues of access and discrimination in areas where they have previously been hindered.
   b. Establish a robust and seamless workplace enforcement entity charged with enforcing local wage and anti-discrimination laws.
   c. Institutionalize and invest in partnerships with credible community organizations to implement targeted outreach, recruitment, and retention programs that focus on underrepresented workers.
   d. Establish worksite monitoring programs to strengthen industry diversity standards by conducting regular audit studies.

4. **Support and ensure high road business practices**
   a. Level the playing field for business by enhancing state penalty remedies that expand liability for employers who do not take steps to address employees who engage in workplace violence and intimidation.
   b. Public agencies should maintain a standard of conduct in the labor market when entering into contracts.
   c. Establish a citywide fair hiring recognition program.
Black Migration to and from Los Angeles

The Black presence in Los Angeles is entwined in the city’s founding; among the eleven families (called pobladores) who founded Los Angeles in 1781, more than half were Black. And during the twentieth century, two massive waves of migration significantly enlarged the region’s Black community. New laws banning discrimination in the defense industry greatly expanded the range of jobs available to Black workers after World War II. As Black workers joined the industrial workforce, they also inflated union rolls and generally benefitted from the region’s burgeoning economic prosperity. In fact, Los Angeles was one of the top ten cities in the U.S. with reasonable employment opportunities for Black workers (Sides, 2003). And in the 1970s, the Black population in the city grew faster than in any other large northern or western city, nearing 763,000. In 2000, the county had the seventh largest Black population amongst U.S. metropolitan areas (Nichols, 2005).
By the mid-1960s, however, manufacturing firms producing goods like steel, automobiles and tires closed and relocated jobs offshore, and a major economic restructuring of the region followed. The disappearance of manufacturing jobs from the Los Angeles area during the latter half of the 20th century devastated its workforce, and deindustrialization had a disproportionately negative effect on Black communities in cities like Los Angeles (Lichter, 1999; Dorman, 2005). Stable, well-paying union jobs vanished, rates of unemployment among Black men rose, and they were frequently forced to search for work far beyond their neighborhoods (Sides, 2003). The movement of jobs out of cities especially disadvantaged Black workers, as their residence of urban spaces began to hinder their access to labor markets. In Los Angeles, Black people sought jobs over a much wider geographic range than white people, and somewhat more than Latinos as well, which burdened Black workers with greater transportation costs and time spent commuting (Stoll, 1999).

The garment, electronics, aerospace, and high-tech finance industries that replaced blue-collar manufacturing work began to flourish in L.A. during the 1970s and 1980s, and were often inaccessible to Black workers. Many of the new industries were dispersed in surrounding suburbs like Orange County and the San Fernando Valley (Valenzuela, 1991). By 1980, one in five Black workers still found employment in the manufacturing industry, more than any other industry. Over the next three decades, that number would dramatically decrease to a quarter of that size.

Deunionization Efforts that Changed Jobs for Black and Immigrant Workers

Manufacturing employment and unionization were the key factors that provided Black workers with higher wages (McCall, 2001). Black workers have the highest rate
of participation in labor unions, and are more likely to desire, and vote for, union representation than white workers (Waldinger, 2000). Successful attacks on unions thus disproportionately affected the Black middle class.

It wasn’t just capital flight from city cores that led to the decline of unions; that decline was also the outcome of strategic corporate offensives to weaken organized labor (Milkman 2006). Even as companies suburbanized, many forms of work remained, such as construction, janitorial, transportation, and in the garment industry, but employers had gradually replaced those unionized positions with low-paid, contingent, and frequently immigrant employment. In fact, the period of industrial reorganization and deunionization occurred alongside an immigration boom to the U.S. (Lichter, 1999). For example, in the 1970s and 1980s, Black workers made up one-third of the Los Angeles region’s janitors, and were the principal beneficiaries of union wages and benefits. But cleaning contractors began to create non-union jobs with low wages, and gradually replaced Black workers with exploitable immigrant workers. In Los Angeles, the increased flow of immigrant labor occurred at the exact moment non-union sectors of a number of industries grew (Waldinger et al., 1996).

Black Push Out from Los Angeles

Decades of economic restructuring, the diminishment of both available jobs and affordable housing, and gradual disinvestment have decimated Los Angeles’ Black workforce and compelled much of the community to leave. Equality indexes explore various social indicators such as economics, health, criminal justice, housing, education, and civic engagement; on such an index, Black Angelenos fare worse than any other racial group in the county (Los Angeles Urban League, 2011).

With greater economic and social insecurity in Los Angeles, Black residents, including some from middle class neighborhoods, have relocated to either nearby cities or outside of the state. Of the latter, most have moved to the South, which offers higher standards of living and better opportunities for families (Johnson & Roseman, 1990; Our Weekly, 2014). In fact, there has been a steady migration of residents from Los Angeles since the late 1980s, and the Black population in Los Angeles County since then has declined by over 100,000 residents from 13% to 8%. In sharp contrast, the overall population of Los Angeles in that period increased by 35%. And while the Black population of the county has decreased since 1980, San Bernardino County and Riverside County have gained over 250,000 Black residents. The number of Black residents in Orange County and Kern County also increased, albeit to a much smaller extent, during this period.
Black Angelenos Today

Nonetheless, Black people are integral to Los Angeles County and to the state as a whole. Even though the county’s Black population has been decreasing, it is still one of the largest Black communities in both the state and the nation. Over one-third of Black people in California live in Los Angeles, which comprises a higher concentration than that of other ethnic groups.

The county must develop a strong strategy to reverse the trend of Black outmigration from the region. This includes decent employment opportunities, livable wages, and fair workplace practices that are essential to develop an adequate and dignified standard of living.
Black Workers Access to Jobs

Black people in Los Angeles are presently significantly more educated than previous generations. From 1980 to 2014, the number of those with less than a high school degree has shrunk by one-third to 10%. The number of those with a bachelor’s degree or higher has doubled.
Labor Force Participation

Even with the highest education attainment in the past 30 years, Black workers still experience barriers to good wages and employment. (Being in the labor force means that a person is either currently working or unemployed but actively looking for work. They may be out of the labor force for various reasons such as being a non-working student, not being in the paid workforce, or being a discouraged worker who has stopped actively seeking employment.) Based on our data, 60% of Black residents in Los Angeles are in the labor force, which is a lower rate than white residents.

Yet, when working, Black workers have a slightly higher full time rate—at over two-thirds—than white workers.

Nonetheless, far too many Black workers are out of work. Remarkably, job losses in the Black community during the recession were nearly double those of white workers, and this trend has continued through the beginning of 2016 (Allegretto & Pitts, 2010). Many states, including California, Illinois, Michigan, Louisiana, Pennsylvania, Arkansas, and Alabama, are estimated to have Black unemployment rates over 10%, twice that of the national
17% of Black workers in Los Angeles County are unemployed—almost double the rate of white workers.

Across all levels of education, Black workers also experience the highest rates of unemployment. Black workers with less education experience unemployment at almost double the rate as white workers at the same education level.

Black college-educated workers around the country also experience unemployment and underemployment at above-average rates (Jones & Schmitt, 2014). Even with a higher degree, 1 in 10 Black workers is unemployed.

Disconnected Young People

The disconnected rate measures those over the age of 18 who are neither in school or working. The issue of disconnected youth is particularly pressing in the Black community. Black youth between the ages of 18 and 24 experience by far the highest rates of disconnectedness across all races. Nearly 3 in 10 Black youth are neither in school nor working. The rate is significantly higher for Black youth than other youth.
Employer Practices that Create Employment Barriers for Black Workers

The fact that Black workers possess a higher rate of full time work demonstrates a strong willingness to work, but the lower rate of labor force participation and higher rate of unemployment convey a lack of opportunity. There remain substantial challenges to workforce integration, and a pressing need to address employer discourses and practices that exclude Black workers and simultaneously lower labor standards for all workers. Discrimination in hiring remains a persistent challenge for Black workers. It has been demonstrated, for instance, that resumes with white sounding names are almost 50% more likely to receive callbacks from employers than equally qualified resumes with “Black-sounding” names (Bertrand & Mullainathan, 2004; Pager, Bonikowski, & Western, 2009).

“Jobless discrimination,” a hiring practice in which the unemployed are discouraged from applying, also impacts Black people, who have higher rates of unemployment (Nittle, 2011). In addition, employers often save money by finding and hiring workers through family and social networks, a practice that can erect barriers for Black workers that may not possess the required connections, and can be at a disadvantage in finding and acquiring work (Waldinger, 1997; Parks, 2004).

Many employers falsely perceive immigrants as more hardworking and productive than Black workers (Waldinger, 1997). Employers also rank Black men especially low in “soft skills,” which include abilities and personality traits that relate to how well workers interact with customers, coworkers, and supervisors, and how motivated they are on the job (Moss & Tilly, 1996). These perceptions, however, are rooted both in a living legacy of racist hiring practices and in employers who prefer an exploitable workforce without access to basic labor rights.

“There’s been many, many situations where I’ve been discriminated against... just recently, they found a noose on the roof of this job that I’m on now, which really blew my mind. I mean, somebody took the time to make this perfect noose. I’ve never seen a noose in person. I’ve been called racial slurs a few times. I’ve been called “boy,” the “n” word. But I can’t do nothing about it because I know if I say something, I’m gonna have my [last] check, I’m gonna be on my way. So I have to deal with it... It’s just something, a part of the trade that comes with the territory. You grow a thick skin. You gotta push through it.”

—Gerry
Any discussion of the crisis in Black employment must necessarily include the effects of racism on health. Because race is a social construct rather than a biological category, the broad consensus is that racism – rather than “race” – accounts for inequities in health. For this reason, in order to understand and address different health outcomes between racial/ethnic groups, it is vital to consider the health impact of racism. The social constructedness of race—or the way one is perceived by others as occupying a racial group—has been clearly demonstrated: being classified by others as white comes with statistically significant health advantages, regardless of self-identification (Jones et al., 2008). The ways in which racism affects health is an intimate, biological expression of the inequalities that frame race relations in the U.S. (Krieger N., 2003).

“A lot of times I’ve been on jobs where it’s just me as a black construction worker. Then sometimes there may be two, three others there. The atmosphere is always, you could tell, it’s so thick you could slice it.”

—Willie
To understand how and why racial discrimination in the labor market is a public health issue, it is helpful to define key terms. First, we define health as “a state of complete physical, mental, and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease and infirmity” (WHO, 2016). Thinking about health in this way makes it clear that health impacts are far more complex than germs, genetics, and behavior. By some estimates, more than 50% of an individual’s health status is attributable to social and environmental conditions (Booske, Athens, Kindig, Park, & Remington, 2010). The relationship between racism and public health turns on the social determinants of health: the dynamics of the way the social body functions, how economies shape physiological well-being, and how politics and power are projected on the screens of individual lives.

For instance, one key social determinant of health is access to a safe and well-paying job. Employment alone can have numerous physical and mental health benefits, as well as social rewards, aside from access to income. Jobs can endow people with a sense of meaning and purpose, and when people are paid well, they also feel a sense of appreciation and value (Jahoda, 1981; Warr, 1994). Further, employment helps us structure our time, provides us with social contacts, guides collective purpose and activity, and confers status (Jahoda, 1981). Leading theories of work and health suggest that meeting these needs is essential for a healthy and contented life, and in modern societies it is difficult to adequately meet these needs without employment (Warr, 1994). This is particularly true in a capitalist society like the United States.

People who live in communities with high unemployment, pronounced poverty, and a generally low socioeconomic status are more likely to experience mental distress (Paul & Moser, 2009), crime (Hay, Fortson, Hollist, Altheimer, & Schaible, 2006), child maltreatment (Coulton, Korbin, & Su, 1999), childhood obesity (Shih, Dumke, Goran, & Simon, 2012), and higher levels of biological wear and tear from chronic stress (Bird et al., 2009). They are also more likely to forego oral health care (Quinn, Catalano, & Felber, 2009), less likely to abstain from smoking (Kendzor et al., 2012), more likely to recidivate (Kubrin & Stewart, 2006), and more likely to earn less income and spend more of their lives unemployed (Mendenhall, DeLuca, & Duncan, 2006).

When people have stable employment and income from well-paying jobs, they can accrue wealth, afford nutritious food, quality childcare and educational opportunities. They are more likely to have the capacity to create and sustain neighborhoods with safe parks and other basic resources. They are more likely to have...
medical insurance and utilize preventive health services like cholesterol monitoring and cancer screenings. And when they fall ill or become injured, they can afford medicine and doctor’s bills (Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, 2013).

Finally, the connections between racism and health carry across generations; the racial wealth gap is caused, in part, from unequal intergenerational transfers of wealth (Gee, Angeles, Ford, & California, 2011). And in Los Angeles County, the Black population has the highest mortality rate of any other group.

Worker Story: Castro

“There was a Black doll, they hung it up by the neck on the switch pole. I reported it. They did nothing about that. I went to the compliance officer, made a complaint.

When that happened with the doll, I thought about my great grandmother who used to tell me stories about the lynchings, because she was in that era when she used to pick cotton and stuff... that doll brought me back to those stories that my grandmother used to say and things that used to happen when she was growing up. It made me feel as if it was okay for that person to do that because [the company] never put out a memo saying this kind of behavior won’t be tolerated. That it was okay for that to happen. It was reported the same day. The next day I went to see a counselor for therapy, and he said, ‘Well, that’s considered a hate crime.’ I went back to [the company] and asked them for the report that they filed; ‘Can I have the report number?’ Because all hate crimes in the state of California, by law, is supposed to be filed with the feds. Never filed it. So how am I supposed to feel safe and secure at a job when something happens to me, and I report it? I didn’t wait, I reported it the same day. [Company] police knew about it, management knew about it, the compliance officer, they all knew about it, that day. Nothing ever happened.

I got to the point where I said, well, maybe it was me. Maybe it’s me. I reported it, nothing happened, so I guess it has to be me. Can’t be. And then anger starts coming in, then I start getting rage, I wanted to be destructive toward myself, toward anybody. Then I started isolating myself. Then I ended up going to group therapy. It took me years to really open up to him, because I didn’t know who to trust. And I also have a therapy dog. That helped a lot. I don’t feel suicidal with the dog. So the suicidal thoughts kind of went away. But health-wise, it was tearing me apart. I just so happened to come out of it with the dog and with the group therapy, because I usually don’t talk to anybody or say nothing to anybody, so I didn’t think group therapy was going to work. I would have never thought that being in a group would ever work, but it helped.”
Black Employment in Key Industries and Job Positions

Employment by Industry in L.A. County

Since the decline of manufacturing jobs, healthcare and social assistance has become the largest industry employing Black workers. One in five Black workers are employed in this industry, followed by education. Black workers are also employed in retail, transportation, administrative and support, that include jobs in janitorial and security and public sector.

Black workers are underrepresented in professional, manufacturing, construction and food service jobs.
Relative to their share of the overall labor force, Black workers are underrepresented in professional, construction, manufacturing, and food service jobs. Low representation in key blue-collar industries reflects a lack of specific, actionable guidance to employers that holds them accountable to designing relevant onboarding strategies needed to dramatically increase and retain Black worker participation.

Table 1: Employment in Industries in Los Angeles County

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Industry</th>
<th>All Workers</th>
<th>Black Workers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Health Care and Social Assistance</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Educational Services</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Retail Trade</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transportation and Warehousing</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public Administration incl military (government jobs)</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Administrative and Support and Waste Management and Remediation Services (travel agencies, security, telemarketers, janitors, waste collectors, etc.)</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional, Scientific, and Technical Services (lawyers, accounting, architects, etc.)</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Services (domestic work, drycleaning, salon work, repair, civic groups, etc.)</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manufacturing</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finance and Insurance</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accommodation and Food Services</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arts, Entertainment, and Recreation</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Construction</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Real Estate and Rental and Leasing</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wholesale Trade</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Utilities</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agriculture, Forestry, Fishing and Hunting</td>
<td>&lt;1%</td>
<td>&lt;1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mining, Quarrying, and Oil and Gas Extraction</td>
<td>&lt;1%</td>
<td>&lt;1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Management of Companies and Enterprises</td>
<td>&lt;1%</td>
<td>&lt;1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: American Community Survey (ACS) 5 year sample 2010-2014

1. For more information about industry definitions, see: https://www.census.gov/cgi-bin/sssd/naics/naicsrch?chart=2012
Worker Story: Robert

My name is Robert. I’m a security officer at an office building in Downtown Los Angeles. When I started in security about 10 years ago, it was a very low-paying job. Most of the officers that I knew were only making between $8.50 and $9.00 per hour.

Our pay did not reflect what we were facing every day. We put our lives on the line protecting some of the most profitable companies in the world, and we are the first responders when emergencies threaten the people in those buildings. One of the scarier moments of my life came on the job when a huge man broke open our locked security doors and entered the lobby during business hours. He was much bigger than me and appeared to be high on drugs. I was able to safely get him out of the building before he was able to hurt any tenants.

I got involved with the union because I didn’t think it was fair that officers that were facing those situations were being paid poverty wages. As a union, we have accomplished a lot for officers. We have increased pay, gotten sick days, more time off, and affordable health insurance. We have also improved working conditions and job security.

I’ve noticed that there are fewer Blacks in security since I started 10 years ago. When we started organizing the union, it seemed as though 70% of the officers were Black. That number has declined as the job has gotten better.

It is also harder for black officers to advance in the industry. Officers that aren’t Black move more quickly into Supervisor and Post Commander positions. Those are the positions that deal directly with the property managers and clients.

I’m really proud for the gains that we have fought so hard for. Unfortunately, those gains have meant a decline in the number of Black officers.

Public Sector Jobs for Black Workers

The reliance of the Black workforce on government jobs dates to the 19th century, when the United States Postal Service hired former slaves. Black workers often accessed public sector jobs when racist hiring practices locked them out of the private sector. In the 1960s, the expansion of government services such as bus lines, public hospitals, and schools opened further employment possibilities (Williams, 2011). The public sector is the most important source of employment for Black workers, and a sector in which the wage differential between Black and white workers is less than in the general economy (Pitts, 2011). Throughout the latter half of the 20th century, Black workers, and Black women in particular, were able to acquire a proportionally high number of public sector jobs. These jobs provided workers with fair pay, pensions, job security, and a career ladder (Liard,
In the 1970s and 1980s, Los Angeles’ first Black mayor, Tom Bradley, expanded opportunities for Black Angelenos by increasing the number of locals in the municipal workforce, in professional and official positions, and on key commissions (Gottlieb, Freer, Vallianatos & Dreier, 2006).

But due to a series of reductions in budgets, many public agencies and municipalities have cut public sector jobs. This, coupled with the emerging strategy of the Trump administration to reduce the federal workforce or eliminate federal pass-through funds that support local and regional programs, will have a catastrophic impact on the last sustaining industry sector for the Black middle class. Simultaneously, California has announced cuts to the state’s most needy populations, and by extension, public sector jobs. Employment contractions and budget cuts following the 2007-2009 recession hurt Black workers, and especially Black women, much more than their white counterparts. During this time, of all demographic groups, Black women who were in the public sector became the most likely to enter unemployment and least likely to find employment in the private sector, while Black men were most likely to remain long-term unemployed (Liard, 2015).

**Job Positions**

Frontline jobs are entry-level jobs such as floor positions and non-supervisory positions that are generally low wage, whereas office work generally indicates administrative or clerical positions in an office (see methodology for occupation categories). Black workers have a higher rate of occupying frontline positions and office work than white workers; these are job positions with lower pay and less stability. Over half of Black workers are employed in these jobs.
Though 30% of Black workers are in professional positions, it is a lower rate than white workers. These positions offer much better pay and stability than frontline and office positions. Black workers are also underrepresented in management and supervisor positions.

Underemployment can also include those that have higher degrees, but are working in positions that do not require a college degree. 10% of Black workers with a degree are working in a frontline position.

1 in 10 Black workers with a higher degree is employed in a frontline job.
Job Positions by Top Industries

In six of the top industries in which Black workers are concentrated, the majority are in frontline positions. But across these industries, Black workers generally have higher rates in frontline positions than white workers. The top three industries with the widest gap are administrative and support, which includes janitorial and security jobs, construction and the arts and entertainment sector.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Industry</th>
<th>White</th>
<th>Black</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Health Care and Social Assistance</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Educational Services</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Retail Trade</td>
<td>55%</td>
<td>66%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transportation and Warehousing</td>
<td>56%</td>
<td>60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public Administration incl military</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Administrative and Support and Waste Management and Remediation Services</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>64%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional, Scientific, and Technical Services</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Services</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>51%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manufacturing</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>44%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finance and Insurance</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>26%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accommodation and Food Services</td>
<td>69%</td>
<td>68%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arts, Entertainment, and Recreation</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>48%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Construction</td>
<td>51%</td>
<td>69%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Real Estate and Rental and Leasing</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>39%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: American Community Survey (ACS) 5 year sample 2010-2014

On the other hand, almost every industry has lower rates of Black workers in managerial positions than white workers. In some industries, such as manufacturing, construction, administrative and support, finance and real estate, this gap is especially stark.
In the retail sector, now one of the key sectors of Black employment nationally, Black workers tend to be concentrated in low-wage positions and are underrepresented in supervisory positions like managers and frontline supervisors (Pitts, 2008). Most Black workers in retail throughout the country are adults, and one-third are working parents. Yet both nationally and in L.A. County, they earn 75% of what their white peers earn, and are more likely to be involuntarily employed part-time and living below the poverty line (Ruetschlin & Asante-Muhammad, 2015). This trend is also apparent in the restaurant industry, where workers of color, and particularly women of color, are often kept in positions that pay the least and are the least visible, i.e. “back of the house” jobs (Restaurant Opportunities Center, 2015). White workers, on the other hand, have a disproportionate share of jobs in management and fine dining restaurants. And similar trends can be found in the racial division of job positions throughout the food chain (Yen Liu, 2012).
The nexus of an opportunity divide, an employment divide, and a wage divide at every level of the economy results in what labor economist Steven Pitts (2008) has termed a “two-dimensional crisis” in which both the problem of low wages persists, and Black unemployment remains at a high rate, even during periods of sound economic growth (Sullivan et al., 2015).

Even with unprecedented education attainment levels, Black workers are still earning considerably less than white workers. Whether working full or part time, Black workers earn only three-quarters of what white workers earn. It is important to find ways to make jobs more accessible to Black workers while also diminishing the wage gap within them.

Figure 14: Hourly Wages for Full and Part Time Workers in Los Angeles County

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Part Time</th>
<th>Full Time</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>13.69</td>
<td>21.27</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19.41</td>
<td>28.61</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: American Community Survey (ACS) 5 year sample 2010-2014
Income inequality between Black and white workers eclipses even the gendered pay gap among white workers. While white women earn less than white men, the median wage of Black women is only 67% of what white men earn and about 83% of what white women earn.

![Figure 15: Full Time Workers Hourly Wage Earned as Percent of White Male Wages](image)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Black Women</th>
<th>Black Men</th>
<th>White Women</th>
<th>White Men</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>67%</td>
<td>69%</td>
<td>83%</td>
<td></td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: American Community Survey (ACS) 5 year sample 2010-2014

**Low Wages and Underemployment**

Low wage is defined as two-thirds of the median hourly wage of an area. Almost one-third of Black workers are low-wage workers, as opposed to 21% of white workers. For part-time Black workers, 49% are in low-wage jobs compared to one third of white workers.

![Figure 16: Black Workers and Low Wages](image)

3 in 10 Black workers earn low wages.

Source: American Community Survey (ACS) 5 year sample 2010-2014

The wage gap between Black and white workers decreases, to an extent, as education levels rise. Black college graduates, however, especially those who have recently graduated, disproportionately experience underemployment. Almost 2 in 10 Black workers with higher degrees still earn low wages. College graduates in low-paying jobs are described as *underemployed*, because these jobs rarely require a four year degree.
As evidenced above, Black workers are less likely to be in managerial positions. They also earn significantly less than white workers while in these positions. The wage gap between Black and white workers is the most minute in office positions, and is followed by that within supervisor and front positions. But as Black workers are promoted, the wage gap is actually elevated. Taking into account the higher education attainment of Black workers, this wage disparity is problematic and clearly illustrates workplace racial inequity.
Worker Story: Brigitte

“My name is Brigitte and I was born and partially raised in Louisiana. I moved to Los Angeles over three decades ago and have been working in the entertainment industry as an administrative specialist. I have over 20 years of experience providing administrative support to some of the industry’s top executives. I worked with [a major film company], who employed me for 7 years. Now this is what many of us would consider a good job. A living wage, benefits, and the chance to do high capacity work in a growing industry. Needless to say, I appreciated this job, and I did whatever I could to excel at it. I was one of the first people to arrive in the morning and almost always one of the last to leave.

After six years there, I trained a young white woman to provide admin support to an executive that answered to my boss. I learned that the woman I trained was classified at the same level as I was although I should have been classified higher due to the higher level executive I supported. She was getting paid the same or more than I did for doing significantly less work.

After doing some research on our company pay scales and classifications, I found that I was under-classified for nearly three years and therefore most likely getting paid well below what I was due. And after bringing it to management, there was no follow-up to correct the disparity. So naturally, I began to ask questions. Since I was not in a union, I decided to approach my management for support, only to be met with hostility. My boss, who I had provided immense support to for over six years at this point, rudely told me to my face that my claims were ridiculous and that I would have no support in pursuing any recourse.

For months, I watched management and my co-workers grow more hostile to the point where they were purposely disrupting and sabotaging my work. Management began “forgetting” to inform me about meetings, my boss began to exclude me from critical trainings and briefings. No matter how strong you are, when people intentionally hurt you and cut you down, it impacts you. I began to fall into depression. This hostility made me physically sick, to where I had to take leave for disability. I couldn’t get up. The pain was paralyzing.

I’d already lost so much in wages, in support, and in health, but the greatest blow came to me when I was illegally terminated while on disability. What hurt most was that I was not weeded out for a poor work ethic or incompetence. It was a personal attack. I was willing to stand up and risk the consequences, but I should not have had to fight alone. There were other sisters in the company that went through the same thing during that period, and sadly, we all seemed to be fighting our battles alone. There was no support for us.”

Wages by Industry

The industries with higher union density, such as public administration, education and transportation, (BLS, 2016) have lower rates of workers earning low wages. Other industries, mostly service ones such as retail and administrative and support that include jobs like janitors, security and waste collectors and food and hotel service have much higher rates of low-wage earners. Clearly, these jobs do not offer the same type of middle class mobility that manufacturing work once did.
Table 4: Low-Wage Earnings by Top Industries for Black Workers in Los Angeles County

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Industry</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Health Care and Social Assistance</td>
<td>32%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Educational Services</td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Retail Trade</td>
<td>54%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transportation and Warehousing</td>
<td>29%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public Administration incl military</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Administrative and Support and Waste Management and Remediation Services</td>
<td>46%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional, Scientific, and Technical Services</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Services</td>
<td>43%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manufacturing</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finance and Insurance</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accommodation and Food Services</td>
<td>62%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arts, Entertainment, and Recreation</td>
<td>42%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Construction</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Real Estate and Rental and Leasing</td>
<td>29%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: American Community Survey (ACS) 5 year sample 2010-2014
Worker Story: Cornell

“My name is Cornell. I am a proud Marine, and a member of the Los Angeles Black Worker Center; I am also on the Worker Justice Organizing Committee. I am a resident of South Central Los Angeles. Since 2003, I have invested time and accumulated various training certificates, from fiber optics to construction. I applied to many positions for three years without getting hired; I had to rely on side handy jobs just to get by. I just got hired two months ago. On that job, I am one of the only Black workers. My wife and I both still earn less than $15 an hour, and she has been working in the same job for over 12 years. With low-wage work, it’s hard to do the things I want to do. I have to work two jobs if I want to keep my car, pay rent, and have electricity. You know, enjoy life. Until I can find something where I can work one job, I will continue to work two. I need $15 or $20 per hour to get by, but I just can’t seem to get it.

The impact this has had on my family is that we can’t save money or go on vacation. I am rarely able to send extra money to my grandson. I found out, in looking for work, it’s not what you know, but who you know, and that results in hiring discrimination and [the] exclusion of Black workers. I am a member of the Black Worker Center because there is a need. I want to be a part of the change that needs to happen in order for Black workers to have a fair shot at getting access to work.”

Criminal Enforcement and the Wage Penalty for Black Workers

Since 1970, the U.S. has incarcerated more people than any other country, and Black men experience incarceration at a disproportionately higher rate than any other demographic group. They are 6.5 times more likely to face jail than white males, and 2.5 times than Latino males. Since World War II, cities in the U.S. have experienced what has been termed “a criminalization of urban space” that expanded the legal structure for incarceration and extended prison sentences. In the 1980s, the share of drug crimes for Black people nearly doubled, and they were typically given longer sentences than incarcerated white people. Black youth were one-third more likely to be tried as an adult and thus face harsher penalties. Further, overpolicing in schools, such as arrests for non-criminal violations, pulled young people into the orbit of the criminal justice system at younger ages (Thompson, 2010).

“I have a felony record, so I’m continuously being discriminated against because of something I did 25 years ago, and I’m unable to find a job.”

–Trina
The warehousing of what can be described as surplus Black labor—not to mention the increased role of free prison labor—has removed resources and opportunities from Black families and communities (Alexander, 2012). And the economic impact of this dynamic on the Black community has been devastating. Firstly, criminal records have negative effects on employment access. For instance, a study of over 600 employers in Los Angeles found that a majority would not hire someone who was formerly incarcerated (Holzer, Raphael & Stoll, 2003). Audit studies, in which two candidates with similar profiles apply for a job but one has a criminal conviction, have shown that employers are less likely to call back someone with a felony record (Pager and Quillian, 2005). The negative effect on employment outcomes is substantially larger for Black workers (Pager, Western & Sugie 2009).

Secondly, formerly incarcerated individuals experience a wage penalty. It is estimated that they earn 10-20% less than someone who has not been incarcerated, and their earnings will experience a 30% lower growth rate than an equally qualified person who has not been incarcerated (Western, 2002). Researchers estimate that a formerly incarcerated man will lose $179,000 of what he would otherwise earn by age 48 (Western & Pettit, 2010). Black workers who were incarcerated earn less, or experience slower wage growth, than formerly incarcerated white people (Johnson & Johnson, 2012). Further, youth who were once detained have higher unemployment rates and receive lower wages for a decade or more after incarceration (Freeman, 1991).
Vincent has over ten years of experience in building, repairing, and hardwiring computers. But when he went to look for work, one section of the application always froze him in his tracks – the checkbox inquiring about whether he had a criminal record. Employers often called him in for interviews and seemed to like him, but once the conversation turned to the felony on his record, they suddenly lost interest.

Vincent’s story is not uncommon in South Los Angeles, where policing is intensified, quality jobs have disappeared, and many have a friend or family member in prison. Finding work after leaving prison is a major challenge. Employers repeatedly reject qualified workers without allowing them to tell their stories or demonstrate their skill set or work ethic. Community groups have tried to respond to this issue by promoting policies such as a “Ban the Box” initiative and Proposition 47, which reduces some drug possession felonies to misdemeanors.

When Vincent was invited to an LA Black Worker Center (LA BWC) event, he was encouraged to attend Ready to Work, its social justice job readiness program. Ready to Work is a holistic approach to asset building and workforce readiness tailored specifically to the needs of Black families. With a curriculum that combines Know Your Rights education, leadership development, community-building, occupational skills training, and the cultivation of community-based industry networks, the program helps workers win quality, career-track jobs. The Ready to Work program is a rigorous readiness program that addresses gaps in diversity compliance by assessing, preparing, and referring Black workers.

Through the Ready to Work program, which provides ongoing leadership development, mentorship and readiness trainings, the LA BWC partners with agencies and employers so they can directly recruit qualified workers from the center. Workers then undergo a multi-day day training to sharpen job readiness skills, learn about the industry, understand qualifications, and become leaders in the workplace. This training includes workshops such as resume writing, mock interviewing, and knowing your rights on the job. Workers learn how to answer questions about their professional experiences and/or criminal records. Math tutoring is also available. Ready to Work also provides ongoing support to workers after they have found a job.

The program has led Black Worker Center members to find employment. For Vincent, being in the Ready to Work program enabled him to land a full-time job with Kinkisharyo in the city of Palmdale. The Japanese-based firm won a contested bid to manufacture railcars for the Los Angeles Metropolitan Transit Authority (MTA), and Vincent worked on a wide range of work within that process, including floor panels, insulation, electrical wiring, and chair placement. Vincent led the organizing of the Kinkisharyo plant, has served as the co-chair of the IBEW bargaining committee, and is currently working as a wire technician. Nearly 90% of LA BWC’s Ready to Work graduates referred to Kinkisharyo were offered positions. To-date, 150 job seekers have been trained through Ready to Work and prepared for quality, career-track jobs.

“If you have an open mind about someone who has a background and you give them a chance because you truly feel like they have done their time,” said Vincent, “they take full responsibility for their actions and are straightforward, they are worth hiring.”
The Economic and Social Impact of Being Black and Immigrant

Nationally, the Black immigrant community has quadrupled since 1980. There are 3.8 million Black immigrants from the Caribbean, Africa, Europe, and Latin America, and they now make up almost 10% of the foreign-born population (Anderson, 2015). Though heavily concentrated in New York and Florida, 6% of the Black population in California is foreign-born (Mason & Austin, 2011). Of all the Black residents in Los Angeles, 7% are immigrants.

Figure 19: Black Immigrants in Los Angeles County

7% of all Black residents are foreign born.

Source: American Community Survey (ACS) 5 year sample 2010-2014

The Black immigrant community experiences challenges that lie at the crossroads of issues impacting both U.S.-born Black communities and immigrant communities. Black immigrants, like U.S.-born Blacks, have higher poverty and unemployment rates than U.S.-born whites (Mason & Austin, 2011), and many are overqualified and underpaid (Kent, 2007). They are also more likely to work in service and sales jobs than other immigrants (Morgan-Trostle, Zheng & Lipscombe, 2016a).

It is estimated that over half a million Black immigrants are undocumented (Anderson, 2015). In addition, black immigrants accounted for one-quarter of the refugees that arrived in 2014 (Morgan-Trostle, Zheng & Lipscombe, 2016a). Black immigrants face demonstrable racial profiling and are disproportionately detained in immigration facilities (Tometi, 2016). More than one in five noncitizens facing deportation are Black (Morgan-Trostle, Zheng & Lipscombe, 2016b). As in the effects of mass incarceration in the U.S.-born Black community, the high rates of Black immigrant deportations destabilize communities and has negative social and economic impacts on families.
Beyond wage inequality, Black families nationally have significantly less wealth in assets than white families with similarly educated heads of household. The disparity is so stark that Black families whose household head earned a graduate or professional degree have, on average, less wealth than white families with a head who only completed some college but did not attain a four-year degree.

Nationally, the wealth gap between Black and white families has increased since the 2007-2009 recession. Before the recession, a Black family had less than a dime for every dollar of a white family; after the recession, they have only a nickel (Hamilton, Darity, Price, Sridharan, & Tippett, 2015). Black families, along with Latino families, also see much less of
a “wealth return” on their earnings than white families, in part because Black workers are less likely to have jobs that include employer benefits like health coverage, retirement, and paid time off (Sullivan et al., 2015). The median Black two parent household has little more than half of the wealth of a white single parent, and has only a tenth of the wealth of a white two-parent household. Wealth also frequently determines who can afford an education, which creates a “wealth feedback loop” wherein a parent’s wealth determines the level of education their children will complete (Traub et al., 2017). This economic disparity means that most Black families have little, if any, wealth to draw on in historical instances of financial crisis, rendering them particularly vulnerable. It also makes them less able to invest in essentials like education, a house, or a small business.

Figure 20: Median Wealth of Households with Children by Partnership Status

The median household income for Black families in L.A. County is almost half of that of white households and three-quarters of all households in the area.

Figure 21: Median Income for Los Angeles County Households

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>All Households</th>
<th>White</th>
<th>Black</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>$55,000</td>
<td>$72,500</td>
<td>$40,000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: American Community Survey (ACS) 5 year sample 2010-2014
Case Study: An Employer Recognition Program Model that Works

In seeking to address the Black jobs crisis, it is useful to take lessons from successful organizing efforts by other groups. In the case of the Coalition of Immokalee Workers (CIW), a worker-based human rights organization internationally recognized for its achievements in the fields of social responsibility, we see an example of how organized workers can engage the market to raise wages and workplace standards.

In 1995, the CIW held a strike of more than 3,000 workers because one of the growers wanted to pay workers less than the minimum wage. In the years following, the workers would hold several actions to address the deplorable conditions and low pay. The growers claimed they did not have the money to pay workers because they were being squeezed by the buyers. The CIW realized that the buyers were using their buying power to dictate the prices, and therefore, the workers’ wages. They decided to push the buyers to use the market to have a positive impact economically for workers. If the market could help create poverty among farm workers in the supply chains, then the market could be used as the tool to solve the problem and to transform the way the industry behaves.

Producers were convinced to buy into a recognition program that highlighted their commitment to fair hiring and trade practices. Companies that paid workers a fair wage and guaranteed human rights were rewarded with a special status designated by a logo. The public could (and did) choose to patronize producers that provided good conditions for workers. This engaged producers in competition with each other to raise standards. By incentivizing good behavior, producers were more likely to uphold healthy and safe working conditions for workers.

Taking lessons from the CIW, we can envision an environment where contractors are incentivized to provide safe and healthy working conditions. Just as producers who ensured their workers a living wage in safe conditions were designated with a logo, the City of Los Angeles should establish a citywide “Fair Hiring” designation to reward good contractors. Such a label would let city officials and the public know which companies engage in fair workplace practices and reward those practices accordingly. Companies, in turn, could use the designation to market themselves as good actors. This would create a climate of positive competition between contractors that would improve conditions for Black workers. If we are serious about addressing the Black jobs crisis, eliminating workplace discrimination, and improving worksite standards we must prioritize these issues. Proven models and practices that level the playing field and support contractors and employers that work to treat employers fairly must be implemented.
Recommendations

Black workers have families to support and work hard to keep a roof over their head, put food on the table, and make ends meet. They need access to work that pays a living wage, provides the opportunity for upward mobility, and transpires in a safe and healthy environment.

These recommendations are centered in practices that would concretely remedy the Black jobs crisis in Los Angeles. From policy proposals to reforms in corporate practices, these measures would expand targeted access to Black workers, a population historically underrepresented in the economy. Further, they would ensure enforcement protocols that bring community, workers, employers, and enforcement agencies together to protect workers’ civil and labor rights, increase access to work, and create an environment of inclusion and success. To promote healthy and economically viable Black communities, the Los Angeles Black Worker Center recommends:
Support worker movements that improve working conditions

Prioritize and implement labor organizing campaigns to raise standards in industries that employ Black workers. Organizing is critical to addressing the Black jobs crisis. Black workers represent a significant percentage of workers employed in key unregulated low-wage industries. Centering organizing campaigns on Black workers in these industries is critical to lifting industry standards and improving the quality of jobs more broadly. This also entails rejecting “Right to Work” laws that remove worker protections and eliminate the rights of workers to organize.

Create policies and programs that create access to jobs for underrepresented workers.

Expand hiring benchmarks by establishing underrepresented population goals. Amend disadvantaged worker requirements for local and targeted hiring programs to include an underrepresented worker clause with hiring benchmarks. An underrepresented worker goal should be developed to reflect underrepresented groups relevant to the potential pool of qualified people who work in construction and other targeted industries. These goals should include data benchmarks that reflect the diversity of populations enrolled in credible training programs, including community college certification programs, community-based pre-apprenticeship training programs, and state-accredited apprenticeship programs.

Prioritize hiring and retention programs in the public sector. It is imperative that the county resists cuts to programs and services critical to the community and maintain equitable employment of Black workers. This includes expanding and monitoring programs such as Mayor Garcetti’s Equitable Workforce and Restoration Executive Directive through institutionalized partnerships with worker organizations that hold relationships with underrepresented workers.

Empower agencies and communities to address discrimination and workplace issues together

Amend state law to empower local governments with authority to address issues of access and discrimination in which they have previously been hindered. Local agencies are currently unable to address employment discrimination due to state preemption. Removing state preemption
will further empower Black workers to more easily access civil rights protection and advance solutions that empower workers. This would strengthen “Ban the Box,” as well as other policies aimed at improving access to workers historically excluded from, and underrepresented in, the economy.

**Transition the city of L.A.’s Office of Wage Standards to the Office of Labor Standards and Enforcement (OLSE).** Establish a robust and seamless workplace enforcement entity charged with enforcing local wage and anti-discrimination laws. By establishing and supporting OLSE and training minimum wage investigators to address anti-discrimination violations, the city would promote equal workplace access and opportunities for workers. The OLSE would be housed within the Bureau of Contract Administration, and work in collaboration with the Los Angeles City Attorney’s office to vigorously enforce workplace protections.

**Institutionalize and invest in partnerships with credible community organizations to implement targeted outreach, recruitment, and retention programs that focus on underrepresented workers.** Set administrative, training, and workforce development earmarks that institutionalize underrepresented worker recruitment and retention strategies particularly associated with public infrastructure, transit investments, and public sector employment initiatives.

**Establish worksite monitoring programs to strengthen industry diversity standards by conducting regular audit studies.** Audit studies should be performed in problematic industries to assess the prevalence of discrimination, measure progress in enforcement efforts, and make recommendations for reform.

**Support and ensure high road business practices**

**Level the playing field for business.** Enhance state penalty remedies that expand liability for employers who do not take steps to address employees who engage in workplace violence and intimidation.

**Enact zero tolerance policies for hate speech and symbols on publicly-contracted and private worksites.** Partner with credible unions and community organizations to conduct routine inspections and establish S.A.F.E. (Safe and Fair Environment) Worksite Committees to build awareness and monitor worksite compliance.

**Both the city and county should maintain a standard of conduct in the labor market when entering contracts.** The city should establish a non-discrimination clause that prevents it from doing business with unlawful contractors, and tracks unlawful contractors through a published registry. The clause would deem contractors who have been named in a specified number of employment discrimination complaints, or found guilty of violating anti-discrimination laws, ineligible for city contracts or in breach of contracts and thus subject to penalties.
Establish a citywide fair hiring recognition program. The city should adopt a “Fair Hiring” recognition program[1]. Businesses that agree to “Fair Hiring” practices, such as meeting a diversity goal in their workplaces and completing equal opportunity education and worker rights training, would receive a special designation by the city. Such a designation would alert potential customers of the company’s fair hiring practices and could be used by city agencies to evaluate potential contracts[2]. This includes regular follow-up of past violators.[3]

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[1] Models for such a program include “Fair Trade” labels and, more recently, the “Fair Food” label developed by the Coalition of Immokalee Workers in Florida, which brands tomatoes harvested by workers paid a fair wage and guaranteed human rights in the field with a special logo.

[2] Offering incentives for fair and equitable hiring practices and a commitment to a diverse workforce will increase access to employment for Black Workers and improve overall working conditions.

[3] The city should ensure that non-compliant employers cannot benefit from city recognition programs or tax incentives until they remedy past discrimination and demonstrate they are currently complying with equal employment opportunity requirements.
Works Cited


Methodology

This report is based on our analysis of current and historical census data and a comprehensive literature review. We used the American Community Survey 5-year estimate 2010 - 2014 and 1-year sample 1980, 1990, 2000, 2010, and 2014 retrieved from IPUMS-USA, University of Minnesota (www.ipums.org). All data is based on place of residence in Los Angeles County. For workers, we included those that are currently working and over 18 years of age.

Defining Low Wages

In computing the hourly variable for the ACS, we followed standard practice. We calculated the median wage for full time workers in LA County at $20.24 using the ACS 5-year sample. Using a widely used metric, we define a worker as low-wage if they earn less than two-thirds the full-time median wage. For Los Angeles County this low-wage cut off is $13.49.

Occupational Classification

Occupational classifications are coded with a six digit number. We divided all 800 occupations using the 2010 SOC coding structure. This structure already places occupations into major groups based on similar job duties and functions. We separated the occupations into five groups: Managers, Professionals, First Line Supervisors, Office workers, and Frontline workers.

Management: 11-0000 Management Occupations. Does not include Chief Executive Officers SOC code 11-1011


**First line Supervisors:** Each occupation area has a first line supervisor such as a crew supervisor. We pulled out first line supervisors from each occupation area. SOC Codes are 33-1011, 33-1012, 33-1021, 33-1099, 35-1011, 35-1012, 37-1011, 37-1012, 39-1011, 39-1021, 41-1011, 41-1012, 43-1011, 45-1011, 45-1012, 47-1011, 49-1011, 51-1011, 53-1011, 53-1021, 53-1031

**Frontline Workers:** Includes SOC codes below with exception of first line supervisory occupations above. 33-0000 Protective Service Occupations, 35-0000 Food Preparation and Serving Related Occupations, 37-0000 Building and Grounds Cleaning and Maintenance Occupations, 39-0000 Personal Care and Service Occupations, 41-0000 Sales and Related Occupations, 45-0000 Farming, Fishing, and Forestry Occupations, 47-0000 Construction and Extraction Occupations, 49-0000 Installation, Maintenance, and Repair Occupations, 51-0000 Production Occupations, 53-0000 Transportation and Material Moving Occupations

**Office Workers:** 43-0000 Office and Administrative Support Occupations

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