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DRAFT

The Politics of Building Regional Multi-racial Political Coalitions

Introduction

This paper argues against a 'one size fits all' economically-focused approach to building multi-racial political coalitions around issues of poverty in cities and surrounding metropolitan areas. Different political structures and disparate histories of racial conflict in cities create distinct problems (some organizational, some ideological, some both) across regions for building multi-racial political coalitions. The paper also suggests that successful political coalitions are likely to be both race/ethnic conscious and class conscious. Lastly, the paper argues that regional political strategies need not only analysis of economic and demographic trends but creative approaches to de– and reconstructing political, organizational, and social identities.

The Argument for Building Regional Political Coalitions

A number of recent works argue that U.S. democracy is vulnerable not only because the nation has the highest income disparities between rich and poor in the industrialized world but because this inequality has become spatialized [Peter Dreier, 2001 #536][Denton, 1993 #538][Wilson, 1996 #537] . Rich people encase themselves in a "privileged environment, especially with respect to local education," that perpetuates social and economic advantage. The poor are concentrated in inner-cities and inner-ring suburbs with poor schools, inadequate access to jobs, and negative stereotypes that "tilts the political terrain" [Peter Dreier, 2001 #536]. The literal separation between poor and middle class areas hampers the formation of political coalitions and election of members of Congress committed to policies that could reduce growing income inequality. Some argue that the structure of metropolitan fragmentation and jurisdictional competition for wealthy residents with few social needs (high tax revenues, low expenditures) is leading to a disruption of the American Dream not only for the poor but increasingly for the middle class. This may create a political danger for the state. The middle class living on the outer fringes of the suburbs are working more hours, commuting longer distances to work, and spending less time with their families. They shared less in rising corporate profits during the 1990s. Those living in the inner suburbs are experiencing increasing poverty, crime, and neighborhood decline that was once characteristic only of inner-cities.

Some also argue that racial segregation is a major factor in economic segregation. A black person in 1990 was five times more likely to live in an area of concentrated poverty than a white person. Blacks comprised about half the population of high-poverty census tracts in 1990, while constituting only 12.6 percent of the population. Because of housing segregation, middle class blacks are more likely to live close to poor blacks than middle class whites are likely to live near poor whites. However, some authors find signs of increasing economic (or class) segregation independent of racial segregation [Peter Dreier, 2001 #536, p. 50]. The white poor are living in more concentrated areas, and while black residential concentration has declined slightly, the concentration of the black poor has also continued to increase.

Suburbanization was caused by federal transportation policies favoring the automobile, the military's location of facilities and selection of defense contractors in the suburbs, and federal housing policies that benefitted suburbs by subsidizing homeownership–suburban householders are more likely to own their homes than city residents. Federal housing policies were also deeply racially biased historically, at times encouraging banks to undervalue black neighborhoods and limit loans to them. There was also discrimination against black homebuyers in the real estate industry and resistence by white residents, some of it violent, to keeping blacks out of all-white suburbs. Meanwhile federally subsidized low-income housing and public housing construction generally reinforced segregation by allowing local municipalities to keep out subsidized housing or by allowing local officials to locate low-income housing in segregated, and often isolated, areas. Long term disinvestment and neglect in urban ghettos led to frustration among the urban poor, then riots, which in turn led to increased federal spending in poor neighborhoods. Increased federal investment was soon followed by the election of black mayors in Gary, Indiana and Cleveland in 1967. The riots also accelerated white flight to the suburbs, and in other cities helped elect conservative politicians such as Frank Rizzo in Philadelphia. These conservatives used racial appeals to promote "get tough" anti-crime policies and limited aid to poor neighborhoods [Peter Dreier, 2001 #536].

Place Matters, by Peter Dreier, John Mollenkopf, and Todd Swanstrom, argues that the trends noted above can only be reversed through the construction of new metropolitan-wide political coalitions. They maintain that the key to Democratic control of Congress is two-fold: (a) increasing political turnout in central cities, and (b) defeating Republican strategies aimed at splitting off suburban from central city voters. In regard to urban turnout, they note that, "[i]n 1944, thirty-two major central cities cast 27 percent of the national vote in presidential elections. By 1992, their share had declined to only 14 percent" [Peter Dreier, 2001 #536, p. 234-240]. "Based on a drop in the cities' share of the national electorate, they should have dropped only 8 points...." Because a majority of voters now live in the suburbs and urban turnout is relatively low, the battleground for control of Congress and the Presidency has shifted to the suburbs. The authors are dismayed that, "Republicans gained a good deal of political ground since 1968 by activating suburban sentiments founded on the class and racial divide between suburbs and central cities." "To win more support in these suburban House districts, Republican congressional leaders sought to capitalize on suburban resentment over paying federal taxes for programs that benefitted urban constituencies." The authors believe that Clinton showed new political possibilities, because he, like the Republicans, also, "got the bulk of his votes in predominantly suburban congressional districts, winning 800,000 more votes than Bush in 1992 and extending his margin to 2.7 million over Dole in 1996." Their advice to the Democrats is, "Whatever the obstacles, only when the party creates synergies between central-city and inner-suburban constituencies will it be able to build a durable electoral majority."

The authors argue that the reason suburban voters are amenable to central-city coalitions is that they share many of the same problems. Seventy percent of white adults in suburban House districts lack a college degree, 33 percent worked in the central city, 10 percent belonged to unions, and 25 percent of the households relied on Social Security [Peter Dreier, 2001 #536, p. 245-246]. Since most white suburbanites are working and middle-class, they suggest that metropolitan coalition builders make, "clear, effective substantive policy appeals to white, Catholic, blue-collar suburbanites, whose once strong familial attachment to progressive positions has weakened, by addressing their actual needs, which revolve around the reality that they are working harder but not gaining a higher standard of living or achieving a more family-friendly workplace." They say, "Communicate with and mobilize emerging black and Hispanic suburban populations with nonracial appeals that speak to the same kinds of needs [as those of white suburbanites]."

This argument for regional coalitions assumes that all will unite around a politics of economic needs, as if there is a commonly understood order of issues with economic needs always at the top. However, while economic issues may be compelling, there is no reason to think they are more fundamental than other *political* issues affecting coalition formation, such as whether other groups can be trusted as coalition partners. The answers to such fundamental political questions will vary from city to city. Sweeping "structural" arguments such as the above highlight similar economic, housing, and educational trends across cities and regions. But, when thinking about how to organize political coalitions in particular cities and regions, the local political differences are as important as the economic similarities. A political strategy for building multi-racial political coalitions should identify key impediments, resources, potential allies, and viable rhetoric for building such coalitions in *particular* cities and regions. Different cities will require different political strategies because their political contexts are significantly different. The next sections will describe major differences in the political structure, civic organization, and multi-racial cultural solidarity in different cities. The affect of these factors on electoral strategies will then be discussed.

Differences in City Political Structures

City political structures differ along the following dimensions (among others): governance structure (strong vs. weak mayor); partisan or non-partisan elections; service delivery structure (city, county, or state administered); and neo-corporatist labor collective bargaining or non-union. These individual devices, or mechanisms, inter-relate in practice, however, they also can be thought of as having particular effects.

In a weak mayoral system, the city council appoints a city manager who manages city agencies and prepares city budgets for council approval. The mayor has a vote on the city council, but does not directly manage city affairs on a daily basis. In a strong mayoral system, the mayor manages city agencies and prepares the city budget. In the latter case, the mayor’s office tends to be a major object of concern for civic organizations, unions, and voters across the city. For the simple reason that diverse civic groups are focused on the same election, mayoral elections in strong mayor cities provide opportunities for forging citywide coalitions across neighborhood and organizational cleavages in such cities. In weak mayoral systems, by contrast, power in the city hangs more on the cumulative results of individual council elections. Council elections tend to focus more on local neighborhood issues than on the welfare of the city as a whole. While a strong political organization (or party) may be able to organize slates of candidates to run on a common program of citywide issues, absent such strong organization city elections are highly localized events that seldom engage citizens in broad coalition-building.

Non-partisan elections allow candidates to cross-file with either party, leaving no single organization for a party to control. If elections are non-partisan, the candidate's party affiliation does not appear on the ballot. California, for example, has no legally defined party organizations below county committees. There is not an equivalent of New York's district leaders, whose job it is to collect petitions for club-endorsed candidates and to distribute patronage (however limited) to club members [Ware, 1985 #428, p. 38]. Party organizations, as a consequence, are extremely weak. The combination of weak mayoral systems and non-partisan elections in much of California makes it unlikely that parties will effectively organize slates of candidates on a citywide basis in that state.

Local city politics are also affected by the organization of service delivery in the city. City services may be mostly run by the city, mostly run by a larger County government, or run by the State government directly. Services may in turn be directly provided by government agencies or contractedout to private vendors. Services may also be parceled out to quasi-public authorities, who may in turn generate independent revenues through fees charged for services (such as tolls on bridges). Not uncommonly, city services are provided by a dizzying combinations of such entities. The organization of city services can have a unifying or fragmenting effect on unions, community non-profit organizations, and civic organizations. Where schools are managed by independently elected schools boards, social and health services provided by the County, land-use dominated by special authorities and the state; and fire, police, and sanitation by the city and private vendors, individual unions and civic organizations are likely to focus on different elections and different public procedures–and they will tend to be single-issue oriented. However, in a city where these functions are combined under the control of a single executive, unions and civic organizations may still pursue particular interests, but they will be more likely to regularly engage in coalition building and negotiation with other organizations so as to influence mayoral elections and decision-making. It follows that a city having a weak mayor, non-partisan elections, and a balkanized service delivery structure, is a difficult place to advance any particular issue-agenda without a substantial investment in building city-wide organizational capacity and developing an ethos of cross-organization cooperation.

Organization

A city is also likely to have a distinct level of organizational capacity within low-income neighborhoods and a unique organizational legacy that, "both informs collective identity and orients groups toward other actors and institutions" [Clemens, 1996 #539, p. 205]. These organizational traits can be traced both to political government decisions in past political eras, and to local social movement history. One of the most important organizations in low-income areas are unions. Public sectors unions are among the most active organizations in local and state politics. Union density, and particularly unionization among public sector unions, varies considerably across cities and regions. The South, for example, has generally low rates of public sector unionization. The Northeast and Mid-West have much higher rates, particularly in cities. The roots of these differences can be traced all the way back to the New Deal/Jim Crow era: while unions became a major part of winning local and state electoral coalitions in the North, they were largely suppressed in the South [Honey, 1993 #468]. Similarly, cities also differ in the history and character of community-based organizations. Many cities having strong black power protests in the 1960s were able to use federal anti-poverty funds to “coop” militant activists into more manageable social service advocacy and service delivery positions [O'Connor, 2001 #540] [Mollenkopf, 1983 #211]. However, not all cities had such movements or had mayors interested in steering black activists into community-based service organizations. Some black communities therefore have more activist oriented community based organizations than others.

The political structure of a city is not defined by any one of the above factors taken alone. Rather, the structure is determined by the relation of these factors to one another, or their ratios. For example, while high levels of public sector union organization may appear to strengthen organization capacity of the working poor, it is less significant in a city where unions’ political focus is fragmented across five different levels of government. The approach outlined above takes political structure into account, but not as an overarching one-dimensional function that orders events and outcomes predictably across cities, or lends itself to a uniform political strategy.

The Role of Social-Cultural Context

With the end of legal racial segregation in the 1960s, race became less of a legally recognized distinction yet it remained an active political verb. Racial discrimination is no longer a legal category for the distribution of public resources, but rather the outcome of relatively loose processes of social distinction and racial group competition [Bobo, 1998 #69]. While African Americans are linked by being the ostracized Other in civic discourses as well as by spatial isolation and common moral grievances, these are not the only signifiers of black racial identity. Within these general parameters are major differences in the attitude of black activists towards building coalitions with whites (and other groups). I will argue below that these differences vary significantly across cities because cities have different histories of racial conflict and cooperation. More specifically, cities can be categorized as having experienced different critical junctures or “moral passages” on race [Wolfe, 1992 #541, p. 321]. I suggest that moral passages have the following characteristics: they are moments when racial intentions are exceptionally apparent, and they change social boundaries (political struggles either deepen or lessen old boundaries) defining who are friends and who are enemies, and who can or cannot be trusted. Moral passages are bridges between old and new political identities.

As in the earlier discussion of political structure, the racial context of U.S. cities is not one thing but a dynamic resulting from the interaction of groups holding different conceptions of racial boundaries based on dissimilar histories of racial struggle and differing moral ontologies concerning African Americans and other groups. Within one city, there will be different combinations of black nationalist and pro-integration black liberals, and different combinations of white racial conservatives and liberals. However, the ideological mix across cities varies significantly, balancing either toward or against multi-racial cooperation.

Electoral Strategies in Large Cities

Electoral strategists usually consider both political structure and social context, or more precisely, they calculate the ratios involved in each. The strategies discussed below are drawn from case studies of black mayoral regimes that cannot be elaborated in this paper. Because cities are complex, it is virtually impossible to find even two cities with the same parameters of political structure, organizational character, and racial culture–or even cities with two out of the three parameters in common. Therefore, there may be no scientific way to weigh the discrete impact of any one of these factors on local politics. However, it is possible to trace the role of these factors in individual cities, and it is possible to compare the role of individual factors (such as political structure or ideology) across cities to better clarify their role within a particular city. I will provide illustrations of these factors at work in city politics in the next section.

For purposes of discussion, we may call a *weak political structure* a city that combines a weak mayor, non-partisan elections, and fragmented service delivery. A *strong political structure* would have a strong mayor, functioning party organizations across the city, and centralized service delivery. We may call a polarized racial climate one in which past moral passages have solidified racial boundaries, and a progressive racial climate one in which moral passages have reduced racial boundaries.

A black mayor, in a city with a weak political structure, is not in a position to mobilize many voters through patronage. If the city has a polarized racial climate, however, a black mayor may be able to mobilize some black support by using the symbolic threat of a white takeover of the city. The mayor may also be able to forestall other black challengers by declaring black opposition as destructive of needed black political solidarity, e.g., the city already has a black mayor and needs to defend its gain rather than undermine it. If, on the contrary, the city has a progressive racial climate, the mayor may be able to forge ideological alliances with racially progressive and moderate middle class white voters without provoking serious black opposition.

A black mayor in a city with a strong political structure has different options. If the city is strongly racially polarized, the mayor may be able to use patronage to win over black allies, as well as use the symbolic threat of a white takeover to forestall challenges from blacks left out of the patronage loop. Given its double line of defense–patronage and popular black solidarity–such a regime would be hard to challenge politically, particularly if blacks are an electoral majority. Even if black socio-economic conditions are horrendous, a black mayor in such a city may easily blame the condition of the black poor on white indifference. In this situation, black urban poverty does not lead to a search for white allies and revenue sources in suburbs. It reminds us that the search for allies requires a prior belief that such allies can be found or cultivated–that searching is not a waste of energy. In the case of a black regime in a racially-polarized city with a strong political structure, as we will see in Atlanta, the potential for regional coalition-building hinges significantly on the strength and character of union and civic organizations within the black community–yet outside of the mayor's circle of patronage. To be effective, organizations promoting multi-racial regional coalitions will need to find ways to overcome mayoral appeals to black solidarity in a climate of deep racial distrust.

If a city has a strong political structure and a progressive racial climate, it does not automatically follow that the needs of the black (and other) poor will be addressed (even rhetorically). A black regime may use patronage to win over some white and black allies, and enjoy enough ideological support among middle class voters of all races to ignore demands of the city's poor. Here again, much depends on the strength and character of union and civic organization of low-income communities. Unlike a mayor in a racially polarized city, a mayor in this situation does not have the potent ideological benefit of black racial solidarity. Such mayors are more likely to defend their regimes in terms of defending progressive inter-racial alliances. However, in this case a black mayor could be legitimately challenged (from within the mayor's own rhetorical stance) by a white, Latino, or any candidate that rhetorically espouses multi-racial progressivism. Given usually greater political resources in white communities, the possibility for a well-financed white opponent tends to be worrisome. A black regime in this case is quite vulnerable to challengers.

Because of their double line of defense, black mayors in strong cities with high levels of racial polarization are resilient. Progressive multi-racial black-led regimes in strong cities are more susceptible to challenge because excluded white groups are more likely to have resources to challenge black incumbents, and they do not have to confront ideological obstacles in doing so–ethnic rotation in leadership is a well-established principle in multi-ethnic/racial city coalitions. It is possible that a black mayor in this latter situation may seek to mobilize the poor to overcome challengers. However, appeals to racial solidarity are unlikely to be effective, as this would generate ideological opposition, and city patronage is never enough to make a dent in poverty. A mayor might instead initiate major policy reforms in programs directed towards the poor as a means of mobilizing the poor against political challengers. This is more or less what David Dinkins attempted to do in New York City. However, New York City also had strong minority-led municipal trade unions and politically active community-based organizations that precluded Dinkins from moving to the political right--to acquire more moderate white support. Moving to the right is the more frequent tactic black mayors adopt to offset challenges from well-financed white opponents. It is rare that cities have the major ingredients that together push black mayors to mobilize the black poor: a strong local political structure that focuses civic organizations on the same elections, a progressive racial climate that limits narrow appeals for racial solidarity, and capacious organizations among the poor that credibly threaten black mayors considering moving to the right--forcing them to consider alternative strategies of mobilizing the poor.

Illustrations: Atlanta and Oakland

The dynamics discussed above can be illustrated through examples of black politics in Atlanta and Oakland. Below I will discuss politics in terms of the three dimensions: political structure, organizational legacies, and racial climate. I will then discuss the implications for building regional political coalitions.

Atlanta

Atlanta has a strong mayor system, partisan elections, and a service-delivery system that allocates some functions to county governments but retains substantial mayoral control. The political structure of Atlanta until the later part of the 20th century was Jim Crow, African Americans were mostly excluded from the political process until the 1960s. Until then, local black organizations of every type focused on fighting white supremacy. Jim Crow was overcome by the united efforts of the black community–students, churches, community residents, and businesses. While black mayors have consistently won elections in Atlanta for thirty years, and share leadership of the city with a traditional white business elite, the patronage they have produced for black organizations and enterprises are paltry and trickle down in meager doses to the broader black community [Stone, 1989 #504].

The legacy of Jim Crow casts a deep shadow over civic organizations in contemporary Atlanta. African Americans in Atlanta, as in much of the South, experienced less of the benefits of labor union protections and civil liberties blacks acquired in the North and West. African Americans were mostly prohibited from voting during Atlanta's brief machine era (pre-1950). As a result, they were never able to establish strong political organizations through patronage. Without unions or political machines, African Americans were not able to significantly influence city politics until the civil rights movements of the 1960s. At that time, Atlanta's business-led white regime had cultivated a "Southern liberal" image because of its willingness to allocate limited patronage for black businesses (such as real estate companies) and professionals (such as social workers and police) working in the strictly segregated black communities of the city. Many elements of the black middle class (centered in the church and business communities) had also developed a strong paternalistic "uplift" ideology during this period that justified their role as intermediaries between the more "civilized" and advanced white community and the more backward destitute black population [Higgenbotham, 1993 #464]. Without strong black unions or other community organizations to challenge black "uplifters" during Jim Crow, the latter became the accepted leaders of the black community writ large.

Atlanta's moral passage was undoubtedly the civil rights movement for racial desegregation. Atlanta began limited school integration in 1961, starting with nine black students in four previously all-white schools. The police operated in a nearly combat-ready mode, and this first stage of integration ultimately was peaceful. These limited steps frustrated students at the historically black Atlanta University complex. The students ignited a broad-based black campaign for an immediate end to all forms of racial segregation and for full civil rights. Their use of sit-ins, boycotts, and protest demonstrations was strongly opposed by the city government, by most local white liberals (centered in churches), and by some older black business leaders and preachers who all feared that vigorous civil rights advocacy would increase racial violence. While city institutions reluctantly ended their resistence to racial integration, it was not done in a spirit of inter-racial cooperation with progressive white support for black demands.[1] The moral lesson for local black activists was that whites, including liberals, could not be trusted to support righteous black demands in a time of crisis. In sum, Atlanta's black activists have attached importance to winning control of the mayor's office first of all because it is a powerful office. Second, black leadership in Atlanta has traditionally been middle-class, socially conservative (except in civil rights), and unaccustomed to sharing power with black low-income community or labor organizations. Last, black activists in Atlanta are generally distrustful of alliances with whites–liberal or conservative. While black regimes have developed stable working relationships with Atlanta's business community, it is a strictly instrumental relationship. The dynamics presented above are critical for understanding key subsequent political developments in Atlanta.

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[1] Reflecting on the role of the white church--the bastion of Southern liberalism--in the fight against racial segregation, M.L. King said, "I was confident that white ministers, priests and rabbis of the South would prove strong allies in our just cause. But some became open adversaries, some cautiously shrank from the issue, and others hid in silence. My optimism about help from the white church was shattered...." [Martin Luther King, 1986 #542, p. 346]

By the early 1970s many African Americans in Atlanta were angry over movement repression–many saw the assassination of M.L. King, Jr., the police killing of Black Panthers, the killing of students at Jackson State, and the shooting of rebellious inmates at Attica prison, as a continuum of orchestrated state violence–and they were determined to win political power independent of Atlanta's paternalistic white elite. For example, on May 31, 1970 Atlanta University President Thomas D. Jarrett called a press conference calling the recent killings of black students at Jackson State and the murders of Black Panther leaders Mark Clark and Fred Hampton in Chicago, a "reign of terror by white governments and individuals...[as well as] organized coercion to suppress the Black community," and "genocide" [Grady-Willis, #460, p. 226]. It was in this social context that black community leaders and white political leaders devised a plan to avoid metropolitan school busing in what was called the "Atlanta Compromise."

In 1971, in a race discrimination law suit against Atlanta's school system by black parents, the federal court found that given the city school system's, "close relationship to housing, planning, finances, rapid transit and all the other external factors which vitally affect its role in the community," the city should consider consolidating its schools with surrounding suburbs. It was clear, however, that moving to a metropolitan busing plan would dramatically escalate racial conflict with surrounding white suburbs and provoke an all-out conflict with white business leaders–one of the most important white groups that had not fled the city [Orfield, 1991 #486, p. 111]. Black leaders jettisoned their hopes for meaningful racial integration on a broad scale, and settled instead on a pragmatic–and what many considered transitional--course of solidifying political power and limited economic power in Atlanta. Political scientists Gary Orfield and Carol Ashkinaze wrote,

> The purpose of this Atlanta Compromise was to achieve educational equity without panicking whites. This could be done without busing, its architects decided, by putting the white-run city school system under black control. The school board promised to hire a black superintendent and other black administrators in exchange for a plan that left many schools segregated [Orfield, 1991 #486, p. 106–107].

The Atlanta Compromise was, as mentioned above, made during a time of significant black activist resentment over government repression of black activists. While the decision has subsequently been criticized by some as a cynical ploy by Atlanta's black middle class to win power and job security at the expense of Atlanta's children, this retrospective view is separated from the emotions and perceived risks at the moment of the decision. The Atlanta Compromise was a way of avoiding heightened racial violence at a point when many black activists had lost confidence (to say the least) in the willingness of the government to protect black advocates confronting militant white resistence. Nor does the critique of the black middle class explain why there has not been significant opposition from Atlanta's proportionately large poor and working class black population.

The Atlanta Compromise was not a resolution to racial inequity but a bitter truce that has subsequently been extended with the rejection of metropolitan integration schemes by the Supreme Court and a turning away from metropolitan governance by Atlanta's black mayoral regimes intent on maintaining their hold on political power. Why has it not subsequently been opposed by Atlanta's low-income black working families? It is because Atlanta has a low level of organization in low-income black communities stemming from Jim Crow, and the long absence of strong organizations among the poor in Atlanta has worked its way into the ‘common-sense’ of black politics in Atlanta. Unlike New York, black mayors in Atlanta do not face the prospect of strong labor-backed political insurgencies against their regimes. Anti-poverty policies such as living-wage ordinances and union expansion have therefore not emerged from the city’s black mayors, although fierce efforts were initiated to incorporate black businesses through affirmative action requirements in city contracts. Black officeholders–many having won office in majority black electoral districts with little opposition--lack electoral incentives to politically mobilize poor blacks in pursuit of an equity agenda *within* the city, much less in pursuit of metropolitan governance schemes that would further threaten black political officeholders. Lastly, Atlanta’s regimes are politically successful despite their poor performance on improving conditions for most blacks in the city because many black activists are wary of coalitions with whites–based on their moral narrative of the civil rights experience in Atlanta–and they are thus susceptible to the nationalist appeals of black regimes.

What are the implications of these factors for building multi-racial regional political coalitions in Atlanta? I will first recount an argument for a regional approach to addressing poverty in Atlanta. Eighty-five percent of metropolitan Atlanta’s population lives in the suburbs. In 1968, 38 percent of Atlanta’s public school enrollment was white, by 1974, when the NAACP brought a lawsuit against metropolitan school segregation, white enrollment in Atlanta schools had declined to 15 percent. By the late 1980s, 98 percent of Atlanta’s black students were in majority black and poor schools and 91 percent were in schools that were between 90 and 100 percent black and poor (insert Orfield, 24).

Jobs in the Atlanta region are most concentrated on the city’s northern fringe stretching further north to Roswell, northwest to Marietta, and northeast to Norcross. These mostly white, job rich districts are expected to increase their share of the region's employment by 33 percent by the year 2020. Central and southern Atlanta, areas of black concentration, are expected to lose jobs (Orfield, 1998a, 36-37). As white residents and businesses have moved into the suburbs, poverty has concentrated in the central cities. "Extreme" poverty has been defined as census tracts where 40 percent or more of households have incomes below the federal poverty line. In 1970 there were 19 such tracts in Atlanta, by 1980 this number grew to 35 (an 84 percent increase). Between 1980 and 1990, the number remained the same, however, Atlanta housed the only extreme poverty tracts in the entire ten-county metropolitan region (Orfield, 1998a, 4). However, a study of the region by Myron Orfield found that the losers in the metropolitan scramble for jobs and tax revenue extend beyond the city of Atlanta. Suburbs surrounding the central city host increasing numbers of poor people and are not favored by businesses (usually they are far from major transportation arteries) (Orfield, 1998a).

The uneven dispersion of jobs and fiscal resources in suburban areas surrounding Atlanta makes a strong economic case for a regional approach to uniting with similarly distressed suburbs to improve conditions of the black poor. However, the double defense of black rule in Atlanta–patronage and racial distrust--makes it unlikely that mayors will willingly pursue such a course. White flight made Atlanta a heavily majority black city by the 1980s, and since then mayoral elections have been racially uncontested. Black mayors in Atlanta are not compelled to appeal for the votes of the demobilized black poor and they have therefore been unaccountable to the black poor in their public policy decisions. For example, despite significant criticism, black mayors in Atlanta have promoted retrogressive tax policies that keep taxes low for business by raising sales taxes for needed city services.

Atlanta's political culture is in many ways still caught within the civil rights era. Except for cooperation between a small black political and white business elite, and occasional community alliances between small black and white progressive neighborhood improvement groups, inter-racial civic cooperation in Atlanta is low. Extensive suburbanization and sprawl has generated serious regional environmental and job-access problems, but regional cooperation between the mostly Republican white periphery and central black Atlanta government is also very low. Not only do black mayors not build political bridges to the suburbs, in 1997 a black mayoral candidate and City Council President Marvin Arrington was ostracized by Mayor Bill Campbell just for meeting with suburban officials to discuss regional cooperation. Arrington, who began developing a low-income black grassroots constituency during the Young administration in the 1980s, pushed the idea of establishing a regional governance body to oversee water and sewer projects and discussed merging some services with Fulton County leaders. Arrington's initiative attracted some campaign support from affluent North side and suburban businessmen, and was endorsed by the Atlanta Journal and Constitution. Mayor Campbell denounced Arrington's support as, "a play from the right wing of the Republican Party" (Alexander, 1997). Campbell's campaign portrayed Arrington as a stalking horse for white suburban business's ambition to regain control of the city. Maynard Jackson, campaigning for Campbell, race-baited Arrington's suburban supporters as "Lester Maddox types."[2]

To summarize, an unbroken history of racial distrust, a low level of organization among low-income black Atlantans and legacy of deference to the black middle class, and patronage based support from the black middle class and downtown white business sector all make it difficult to build regional multi-racial coalitions in Atlanta. This does not mean that a regional movement attending to the needs of poor children and others is not possible, but it is not possible without strong grassroots organizing among the poor and it cannot be accomplished by avoiding the popular presence of deeply felt racial distrust.

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[2] Lester Maddox was an Atlanta restauranteur who led anti-integrationist movement in the 1960s and eventually became governor of Georgia.

Oakland

Until the recent passage of a referendum to strengthen the powers of the mayor's office, Oakland had an extremely weak mayoral office. The mayor directly controlled fewer than a dozen jobs. Government services continue to be fragmented between the larger eight-city County government, autonomous authorities, and the City of Oakland. City Hall has consequently not been considered an especially valuable prize for local mobilization. A non-partisan electoral system and the general absence of party patronage has historically contributed to personality-centered election campaigns and to a near total lack of citywide political organization.

Oakland has extensive community organization and high union density and activism--including leadership from many veterans of the Black Panther movement--but their energies are dispersed along narrow government jurisdictional lines, reflecting the fragmentation of authority over service delivery in the city. This has led to extremely low levels of citywide political coalition-building. In the most recent mayoral election, for example, eleven candidates--all lacking grassroots support and poorly financed--ran for mayor. Less than 15 percent of black voters in the mostly poor and black East Oakland Flatlands voted [Oden, 1999 #416, p. 238].

Oakland does not have a history of racial conflict between blacks and whites comparable to Southern Jim Crow. African Americans came to Oakland in large numbers during and after W.W. II. The major policies shaping racial conflict historically in Oakland were government financed white suburbanization, which undermined the local tax base and isolated black neighborhoods in Oakland, and urban renewal projects sponsored by an elite business Republican-led mayoral regime that displaced thousands of black families, and police brutality from a nearly all-white police force. These conditions served as a breeding ground for black radicalism. The Black Panther Party (BPP) was the major organizational force in electing the first black mayor, and it profoundly influenced all classes of the black community in Oakland.

In Atlanta, the black community experienced broad and direct confrontations not only with white elites but with nearly all elements of the white community. In stark contrast, the Black Panther Party (BPP) led black political mobilization in Oakland in the 1960s and won strong support from white students and anti-war activists centered in the North Oakland and Berkeley. Given this progressive moral passage, the BPP characterized problems in Oakland as structural more than cultural (racism). For example, the BPP called not only for Black Power but for 'White Power' as part of its populist rhetoric. Calling for White Power would have been an absolute anathema for blacks in racially conservative Atlanta, and incomprehensible coming from a black organization. Because the BPP viewed problems in the black community as fundamentally structural in origin, they also placed a much greater emphasis on political economic analysis and popular education around policy issues than did black activists in Atlanta. Much of this perspective remains among black community and labor union leaders in Oakland.

Oakland had a roughly fifty percent black population during the mayoral terms of black mayors Wilson and Harris. Both mayors enjoyed white moderate voter support and did not need to organize Oakland's politically fragmented black poor to stay in office. As in Atlanta, Oakland's black mayors followed traditional economic development policies favored by the City's business leadership. They opposed policies targeted to low-income communities, such as a First Source program advocated in Oakland that would require contractors to hire qualified local residents before hiring non-residents on city funded projects. Neither mayor was especially popular. Upon leaving the mayoral office, for example, Elihu Harris was defeated by an unknown Green Party candidate in the race for his old State Assembly seat. The ability of Wilson and Harris to stay in office was mainly a product of extreme disorganization on the part of insurgents to the left of both mayors, and on the related disconnection of trade unions from local Oakland politics (they are focused more on County and State politics).[3]

We can now discuss the implications of the above for building multi-racial regional coalitions in Oakland. Racial disparities were not as severe in Oakland as in Atlanta, but the trends are similar. In 1990, 64 percent of the residents in the nine counties and 100 municipalities comprising the Bay Area lived in the suburbs. In 1990, blacks comprised nine percent of the Bay Area population and 43 percent of Oakland's population. There were 80 schools in the Bay Area in 1996 with 80 percent or more of their students qualified to receive free or reduced-cost meals. Seventy two of these schools were in Oakland or San Francisco. In 1990, 12.5 percent of children under five in the region but 32.1 percent of Oakland's children lived under the poverty line (with an income of less than $8,420 for a mother and child) (Orfield, 1998b). Job growth in the Bay Area has been concentrated in the Silicon Valley and in the industrial areas of Colma, Burlingame, Brisbane, and Emeryville (outside of Oakland) (Orfield, 1998b, 44).

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[3] With a recent provision allowing the mayor effective control of the School Board, the teacher's union can be expected to take an increased interest in mayoral politics.

As white residents and businesses have moved into the suburbs, poverty has concentrated in the central cities. In 1970 there were 19 extreme poverty tracts in Atlanta, by 1980 this number grew to 35 (an 84 percent increase). Oakland's poverty concentration was again similar to Atlanta but not as extreme, half of the severe poverty tracts in the Bay Area in 1990 were in Oakland or San Francisco.

The cost of providing services for the poor is generally higher than providing for other parts of the population, and the poor pay relatively fewer taxes. Many argue that wealthy suburbs have become expert in "skimming" wealthy homeowners and businesses that increase the local tax base but require relatively little funding for social needs [Orfield, 1998 #544, p. 16][Peter Dreier, 2001 #536, p. 135]. Competition for taxpayers between cities and suburbs, and between suburbs themselves, leads localities to solicit businesses through lowering taxes and it leads suburbs to initiate restrictive zoning policies to keep out the poor. Aggressive marketing of its central business district has maintained a significant business presence in Atlanta and Oakland, however, efforts to keep taxes low have limited city revenue needed for infrastructure and services for the poor. Similarly, a number of small cities and suburbs in the Bay Area are experiencing sharp increases in poverty and minority concentration [Orfield, 1998 #543].

As in Atlanta, building a multi-racial regional approach towards reducing poverty makes economic sense. Oakland has progressive a orientation toward multi-racial coalitions and a dense array of civic organizations (including unions) in low-income communities. However, the fragmentation of services among various political jurisdictions has fragmented civic organizations. While the ideological task of building broad coalitions in Oakland is easier than in Atlanta, convincing civic organizations to change their single-issue oriented go-it-alone traditions would be a challenging task.

The lessons from Oakland and Atlanta suggest that a general logic for political strategy across divierse cities will not work. The proposal to build coalitions based on non-racial appeals, as the authors of *Place Matters* suggest, would likely be received quite differently by activists in Atlanta. In Oakland there is greater confidence that activists from different racial constituencies will cooperate with each other. In Atlanta, a "non-racial" economically focused approach sounds like an evasion of the city's central problem since the Civil War. Here more creative thinking is needed to link the sentiments of whites and blacks against regional injustice. For example, a longstanding multi-racial alliance was built in the Bay Area in the 1960s that joined a middle class student anti-war movement and the Black Panthers around a common slogan of 'fighting colonialism'–at home and abroad. Purists may object to combining under a single category the obvious incongruities between a peasant population in Southeast Asia and ghetto residents of Oakland. But political analysis for scientific purposes of categorization, measurement, and comparison is quite distinct from political rhetoric intended to inspire political action. The anti-colonialism rhetoric very effective in Oakland during the 1960s in *joining the sentiments* of white middle-class students and black youth without minimizing the concerns of either. This does not mean that anti-colonialism would have a similar affect today, but similar creativity is needed in forming policy and rhetorical approaches to building regional coalitions. To be political effective, such approaches should not minimize or exclude the concerns of either race or class advocates, or counterpose them in abstract analytic categories, but instead join their efforts in a mutually supportive way. Below I will discuss two examples of such creativity–the Texas Ten Percent Plan and David Dinkins focus on children during his mayoralty in New York.

Creative Approaches to Building Multi-racial Coalitions

The Texas Ten Percent Plan

In 1992, four white law students, including Cheryl Hopwood, filed a lawsuit against the University of Texas, claiming that they had been denied admission to the law school on the basis of their race. The 'Hopwood' case worked its way up to the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Fifth Circuit, and in March of 1996 the appeals court ruled in favor of the plaintiffs, rejecting the use of race-based affirmative action for admission to the law school. A year later, Texas Attorney General Dan Morales extended the court's decision to all institutions of higher learning in Texas.

In response to the decision, a group of Latino and African American state legislators, civil rights groups and attorneys, students and community activists debated how to respond. The activists eventually agreed upon a plan to automatically admit to the flagship Austin campus of the University of Texas the top ten percent of graduates from all high schools in the state, regardless of SAT scores. The activists cited research showing that high school grades were better predictors of college performance than SATs, and that SATs were more closely correlated with attendance at affluent suburban and private high schools than with college performance. Moreover, the activists discovered that 75 percent of all freshman seats in the university went to students from only 10 percent of the state's high schools. Not only were Latinos and African Americans disadvantaged by SAT-based admissions criteria, low-income whites were as well. The Law School had an additional policy of including the median LSAT score of all those who took the LSAT from the applicant's college. This was based on the notion that students with all A's from a low-LSAT college should receive less credit for the grades than a student from a presumably more competitive higher LSAT college. As Lani Guinier and Gerald Torres point out in their new book, The Miner's Canary, Cheryl Hopwood was a single mother raising a child with a disability and attended a community college and a state school. She could not afford an elite college with higher LSAT scores. When her grades were discounted in the application process because of the low LSAT average at her college, her application moved from the presumptive admit category to a discretionary category and was later rejected. Guinier and Torres note that Hopwood could have questioned why 100 white students with lower composite LSAT scores and grades were admitted to law school ahead of her, but this issue was buried during the affirmative action debates. That is, she could have made a class claim rather than a racial claim.

The strategy the activists agreed upon incorporated a remedy for the class exclusion of low-income whites, especially from rural Western Texas, who had very limited access to the flagship state universities. At the same time, their proposal gave full weight to the demands of Latino and African American communities that had historically been segregated out of the University of Texas. The activists were able to build an unusual political coalition between Black, Latino, and white state legislators from rural West Texas. The bill passed the legislature and was signed into law by then Gov. George W. Bush, who had previously been mute on the issue. Implementation of the plan has not only expanded the numbers of blacks, Latinos, and poor whites enrolled in the University of Texas, "the freshman GPA of those admitted under the 10 Percent Plan exceeded that of students admitted in previous years under test-based criteria, and this occurred across all racial groups–white, black, and Mexican-American"

[Torres, 2002 #545, p. 103].

Several lessons can be drawn from the Texas Ten Percent Plan. One is that the plan emerged from discussions among a diverse body activists and legislators who were explicitly attempting to marry issues of race and class in a way that would strongly appeal to white working families, blacks, and Latinos. The initiative was led by Latino and black activists who lifted up the moral claims of poor whites to demonstrate solidarity with them. The leadership issue is a crucial one and worth dwelling upon. It mattered that the coalition leadership was Latino and black, but it is worth exploring why.

Ruy Teixeira and Joel Rogers make an argument that seems on the surface similar to the arguments of advocates for the Texas Ten Percent Plan:

> A better approach [than race based affirmative action] is *class-based* affirmative action, whereby the poor of all races get a break in consideration for college admissions, reflecting the obstacles they have all overcome in their struggles to better themselves–again, ideally coupled with greater equity across lower levels of public education. This approach still yields considerable racial diversity, since minorities tend to be disproportionately poor and therefore benefit disproportionately from economic preferences. And, in contrast to race-based affirmative action, it brings the interests of the forgotten majority and their minority counterparts together instead of crisply dividing them. Such an approach would help the Democrats underscore the universal nature of their appeals. (162)

Teixeira and Rogers argue that class-based affirmative action is better than race-based affirmative action because, “It is very difficult intellectually to justify giving a break of hundreds of points on SAT scores to the daughter of upper-middle-class, highly educated blacks and giving nothing remotely similar to the daughter of poor white high school dropouts.” (162) Certainly, if social status and privilege is solely the result of income and education, as Teixeira and Rogers suggest above, then race-based affirmative action *is* particularly unfair to poor whites just as the Hopwood plaintiffs maintained. However, Teixeira and Rogers argue from a particular liberal social democratic view of society, not from a "universal" perspective as they claim. The liberal view maintains that status is allocated in society in accordance with the acquisition of private goods, eg., education and income, *not* by membership in politically powerful social groups. The social democratic view argues for the existence of economic classes based on the unequal distribution of private goods in society. Liberal social democrats argue that people are positioned into various classes based on their unequal ability to acquire private goods. There are other ways of looking at social status and privilege in society. The sociologist Ralf Dahrendorf argued for the separation of economic power and political power. Classes, according to Dahrendorf, "are social conflict groups the determinant (or *differentia specifica*) of which can be found in the participation in or exclusion from the exercise of authority within any imperatively coordinated association. [emphasis added by this author]." (64) For Dahrendorf, economic status and political power, or economic class and political class, are often conflated because those who wield political power and those who wield economic power often overlap. But this is not always the case, and parallelism should not be assumed.

Dahrendorf's view is helpful in underlining what has been a frequently articulated critique of society by African American leaders and scholars. The critique is that while low-income whites have lower economic status than the black upper middle class, they nonetheless have as much political power as any other group in society by virtue of their numbers and universal suffrage in the U.S.. Certainly state and national politicians are much more fearful of offending low-income whites than there are of offending the numerically minute black upper-middle class. This is a reason why support for race-based affirmative action in higher education has suffered politically across the country, despite disproportionately low numbers of minorities in the upper echelons of U.S. institutions and disproportionately low professional services in minority communities. African Americans, of all classes, have had much to *fear* from the attitudes and movements of low-income whites historically, and they still do today. The reverse is not true.

From the standpoint of political power, low-income whites have always had the voting power to change the admissions criteria at the University of Texas. If they have not done so--to favor the admission of their own daughters and sons--it is not because race-based affirmative action has prevented them from doing so. It is their own lack of social democratic consciousness that is to blame, not minorities. It is the political power and ideological susceptibility to blaming minorities, not their education or income, that makes low-income white mobilization potentially dangerous for African Americans and Latinos. If the leaders of low-income whites decide to oppose minorities, the latter are in political trouble. This is why it is important that the leadership of the Texas Ten Percent Plan was Latino and black–a point repeatedly emphasized by Torres and Guinier. Minority leaders did not confine the Texas Ten Percent Plan to the moral limits of low-income whites, but instead has fought to expand white's understanding of minority demands for affirmative action. Race issues were intentionally discussed and included in debates around the plan. Without such leadership, there is no security for minorities that their interests will not be abandoned in future policy struggles over the direction of higher education in Texas. What is missing from Teixeira and Rogers is a discussion of power, the dangers of racial hatred, and the legacies of racial hatred that destroy confidence in economic class strategies. Latino and black activists in Texas had to construct a 'moral passage' *before* the Texas Ten Percent plan coalition could be solidified.

The Texas Ten Percent Plan does not resolve problems of unfair exclusion from the University of Texas. Some upper middle-class students in high-performance schools may legitimately complain that they are penalized for attending exceptionally competitive high schools.[4] Short of universal access to higher education, claims of unfairness in college selection are likely to continue, but what the Texas Ten Percent Plan achieved is the inclusion, for the time being, of previously unmobilized groups in educational debates and a realignment of traditional racial group divisions into more complicated cross-race and multi-class alignments. The next time the upper middle class rises to defend its interests in the name of individual meritocracy, it is unlikely that they can succeed politically without taking into account the interests of mobilized minority and low-income white communities. The upshot of the latter mobilization might be stronger coalitions for equity in school finance and social support--to move Texas public elementary and secondary schools closer to substantive equality and more genuine tests of individual merit.

Dinkins's and Kids Advocacy

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[4] An unintentional outcome of the plan might be to encourage middle class families to move into low-income neighborhoods where their children may have better changes of being in the top ten percent of their class.

David Dinkins’s campaign for Manhattan Borough President in late 1984 focused much of its energy on building Dinkins’s support within the liberal white “Reform” wing of Manhattan Democrats. Relations between Harlem elected officials and white Reformers had been deeply strained since former African American Manhattan Borough President Percy Sutton’s failed run for Mayor in 1977. There were also persistent ideological strains between black and white liberal political leaders in Manhattan. The more social-democratic liberal white Reformers, principally led by then City Councilwoman Ruth Messinger of Manhattan’s Upper West Side, refused to support Dinkins during his first two runs for Manhattan Borough President. Messinger opted to support a politically moderate and wealthy publishing heir, Andrew Stein, who had made a name for himself as an advocate for clean government. Reformers such as Messinger argued that Dinkins and other Harlem officials were clubhouse politicians who held power too close among themselves and refused to advocate progressive policy agendas in-line with the needs of their mostly poor core constituents.[5]

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[5] The author participated in dozens of informal discussions with Messinger and other reformers on this issue.

Harlem politicians deeply resented Messinger's opposition in the earlier Dinkins races and Messinger's presumption to know what was in the best interests of Harlem residents. Nonetheless, when Dinkins solicited Messinger's support in 1984, Messinger insisted that he run an issues-oriented campaign as a condition of her support. Dinkins agreed, realizing that he had little alternative in what would likely be a close race. Messinger, widely recognized as an authority on many city policy issues, supervised the drafting of a series of policy memos on a variety of issues that Dinkins agreed to study and consider.[6] Dinkins and Messinger then met repeatedly to discuss the documents. While Dinkins chaffed at Messinger's teacher-like presentation style during some of the sessions, he took the process very seriously and rapidly mastered policy details. The interaction between Messinger and Dinkins literally transformed Dinkins's approach to politics. Dinkins quickly recognized that Messinger's emphasis on early prevention and children's services (daycare, early education, health, etc.) was focused on urgent needs of poor families in minority neighborhoods. An "early prevention" approach was a way of arguing for racial equity in resource distribution without dwelling on the polarizing issue of racial injustice during an election. The early prevention approach, Messinger insisted, was fiscally prudent: it was more effective and rational to provide a good start in life for the city's poor rather than to pay for more expensive crisis management services later in life (police, jails, drug treatment, homeless housing, AFDC). Through this policy logic Dinkins was able to communicate a sensitivity to tax and fiscal issues appealing to moderate liberal Democrats without sacrificing his core minority poor constituent's concerns. When espoused by Dinkins, this was not perceived as simply bargaining, or compromising with West Side liberals, it was seen as progressive synthesis of substantive black demands with traditional liberal concerns for government efficiency. In this way, Dinkins began to build an issues--approach to government policy that was worlds apart from the tradition Harlem style of elite deal-making for government patronage positions.

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[6] This author drafted the memos under Messinger's close supervision.

Although innovative, the "non-racial" fiscally prudent issues approach was not wildly popular in many black communities. It excluded patronage issues important to the black middle-class such as demands for more managerial posts in city government and more city contracts for minority businesses. It was silent as well about how to change what many characterized as a "colonial" system of bureaucratic white management of the minority poor through the public (federally funded) housing authority, city housing, the police, social service agencies (including non-profit intermediaries), and the schools. Dinkins was nonetheless able to win broad black support despite these criticisms. Many believed that David Dinkins, himself historically an advocate of black middle-class demands and a critic of city agency behavior in minority communities, would not forget these issues after taking office. He did not. As mayor, Dinkins linked bureaucratic reform--such as community policing and a strong police Civilian Complaint Review Board–as component parts of a racially sensitive strategy of crime prevention through positive government support for minority youth development. These latter initiatives were strongly resisted by the police union and became highly controversial–much more controversial than Dinkins's earlier advocacy for the maintenance of children's services during tight fiscal budgets.

Because of Dinkins's personal history, black communities had confidence that he understood racial issues and that he would not abandon racial issues even as he advocated non-racial approaches to supporting poor children. That confidence may or may not have been justifiable. What is more clear is that without a *history* of strong advocacy on race issues, Dinkins's non-racial rhetoric would have alienated many African Americans and it is unlikely he would have been elected mayor. Groups not only weigh proposals to calculate their self-interests, they use the past history of groups and individuals to discern the intent behind the proposals. Thus, the local history of social struggle is critical to how proposals are interpreted.

During his mayoralty, Dinkins's regime probably underestimated the resistence that policy change would engender as it moved beyond fiscal advocacy to maintain prevention-oriented social service programs to contest more fundamental issues of city agencys' mission and bureaucratic identity, eg., are police officers quasi-military crime stoppers or 'social workers'? In the case of the police, the debate included the issue of whether children, often called "squeegee-*men*," were simply criminals lowering the quality-of-life for others (and should be arrested), or whether they represented government's failure to provide for needy and vulnerable youth who should be steered into supportive social programs. As we all know, Dinkins was followed by a mayor that instituted a strong quasi-military approach. However, the lines of this debate illustrate the kinds of political struggles that are likely to accompany proposals to fundamentally change policies and perspectives related to poverty–including those relating to poor children. A notable point in the Dinkins case is that a simple focus on enlightened economic self-interest, as in most arguments for building regional coalitions, underestimates how deeply race-related identities and characterizations are rooted in the mission and identities of some agencies–such as the New York Police Department. Changing policies related to race and poverty requires more than appeals to economic interests, it requires confrontations with powerful organizational identities and common ways of life. Building coalitions for regional equity is thus an enormous challenge that will require compelling arguments for motivating powerful organizations and constituencies to fundamentally change the way they think and act. Below I will engage in some “magical realism” to hopefully demonstrate that such arguments can be made within the realm of practical feasibility and reasonableness.

Alternative Possibilities

Environmentalism

To an increasing extent, the inner sections of some metropolitan areas are repopulating. Real estate values have been rising, sometimes rapidly, in traditionally poor neighborhoods in Atlanta, Chicago, New York City, San Francisco, Boston, Oakland, and in many other cities. The increased real estate values in inner urban areas, much of which is currently occupied by low-income minorities and immigrants, threatens to uproot and displace existing low income inner-city residents. In some cases, such as in San Francisco and Atlanta, it is already apparent that some of the poor are being pushed out of the central city into surrounding edges. Thus the re-urbanization of booming cities does not end the pressure to grow metropolitan areas outward. The inability of these booming cities to design, construct, and maintain affordable housing may simply change the pattern of expanding rich suburbs and concentrated poor inner cities to an opposite sprawl pattern–more typical in Europe and Latin America. From the standpoint of a growing number of environmental groups, the prevention of urban sprawl, whether populated by wealthy or poor families is unsustainable [F. Kaid Benfield, 1999 #547]. Environmentalism, according to this logic of reversing sprawl, requires concentrating poor and rich families, black and white families, non-citizen immigrant and immigrant families, into dense urban environments. The implications of the environmental movement's concern for eliminating urban sprawl are far-reaching and fundamental to the American way of life. Densely integrating Americans across race and class puts great urgency on solving problems of racial hostility, crime, educational failure, and poor housing that many suburbanites hoped to flee. The environmental movement–mainly white and middle class in composition and motivated largely by non-economic value commitments–could be an unexpected strong ally in developing coalitions for regional equity and poverty alleviation.

Trade Unionism

The export of large numbers of manufacturing and service jobs overseas and south of the U.S. border, and the expansion of non-union high wage professional jobs, sparked increased demand for low-skill, low-pay services in restaurants, hotels, daycare, entertainment and other personal services here in the U.S.. Many of these jobs, as well as garment sweatshop and seasonal agricultural jobs, are filled by illegal immigrant workers. The loss of manufacturing jobs in the country has significantly decreased the size of the unionized labor force, but the expansion of the service sector (which now employs four out of five workers) provides a needed opportunity for unions to organize service workers.

The new economy has produced a working class concentrated in the healthcare professions, educational institutions, office building maintenance, food processing, food services and retail establishments [Kelley, July 1998 #548]. Service workers are low-paid and much more likely to be female, minority or immigrant, than are industrial workers. Unions wanting to recruit such workers encounter difficulties using the old industrial organizing model. Service workers, such as homecare workers, are not concentrated in industrial plants, but in communities where they live. The urgent needs of service workers (and their families) include the same issues facing low-income women with families more generally: daycare, education, and community safety. Unions wanting to organize these workers are increasingly interested in solving problems for families low-income minority communities. Unions also encounter difficulties organizing immigrant workers who enter the country illegally. Workers lacking legal status or the right to vote have been more reluctant than others to join unions and to confront employers. Without these immigrant workers, unions are certain lose even more political and economic clout.

For the above reasons, service worker unions are another potentially strong ally of regional equity movements. As in the case with environmentalists, service unions are confronting major challenges to their traditional labor identity: workplace centered, contract focused, non-immigrant, mostly white, and male-led. They are under strong pressure to demonstrate their value to poor urban minority families. Unions can bring substantial financial resources, political muscle, and credibility with white workers to movements for regional equity.

Immigrants

Non-citizen immigrants in New York State pay $16 billion a year in taxes, yet immigrants non-citizens have lack voting rights and hence have little ability to demand services or to fund them through government [Clark, 1998 #549]. Moreover, cities with large non-citizen immigrant populations–such as New York and Los Angeles–provide schooling and other public services for non-citizen immigrants, but these cities are systematically shortchanged in state elections deciding tax and spending policies because large proportions of their populations have no right to participate in the elections. The disenfranchisement of non-citizen immigrant taxpayers contributes to the financial hardships and fiscal stress of all residents of cities in which they are concentrated. Helping to incorporate immigrants into the voting polity and civic life of the city, cities (and many inner-ring suburbs) could a long way towards increasing the voting power of urban low-income communities, and it would be a blow against fiscal inequities at the heart of the regionalism debate. Latino, Asian, West Indian and other immigrant groups could possibly become important components of coalitions for regional equity, and the demand for immigrant political rights (or less restricted citizenship requirements) may be central to the political success of regional movements in some areas.

Conclusion

The three movements discussed in the magical realism section above do not exhaust the list of potential allies in building coalitions for regional equity and improving the lives of poor children. One can imagine, however, the creative tension that the combination of these movements will generate on discussions of values and goals for a movement focused on children and poverty. Whatever coalitions that emerge will not only have to tackle known problems of organizational capacity and fragmentation, racial distrust, and opposition from political elites protecting turf. They will also need to find creative means of linking together new and old political movements, grievances, and aspirations without a restriction of issues to the moral universe of any single group. In short, coalition politics will need to be about grassroots organizing and understanding differing voices and perspectives on injustice rather than asserting a pre-defined agenda with mechanical political strategies postulating a symmetry of group economic status and political response.